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ELECTIONS, MANDATES, AND GOVERNANCE

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MANN: Good morning. We've got to stop meeting like this—and in fact, we will. This is fifth and final in a series of election seminars that Brookings has cosponsored with Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School. Larry Bartels, who you've come to know well over the course of these seminars, is the inspiration behind this joint enterprise. Our goal, as those of you who have been here before know, is to see if we can't provide a little added value to the discussion of American elections, if we can't rise a little bit above daily punditry and cross-fire and try to use some of the research that scholars have done and bring it to bear on this particular election cycle, and in the course of doing that, to make sure we're kept honest by including in our panel a first-rate journalist. That has worked exceedingly well over the first four seminars, and I'm delighted John Harris of the Washington Post is with us to fill that role today.

We have, over the course of previous weeks, focused on partisanship, on campaigns, on issues, and on mobilization and turnout. Now our final session looks, of course, at the aftermath of the election. We've entitled it "Elections, Mandates, and Governance." What we're really talking about now is: how do elections matter? How do they matter in policy terms and in longer-term fortunes of the political parties? How does who wins the White House, whether we have unified or divided party government, the size of the congressional majorities, the content of the platform of the winning candidate, along with, of course, the policy inheritance of the team coming into power, all shape the policymaking process?

Now, part of that involves the whole nature of mandates, which, as we will discuss, are not objective realities but subjective interpretations of outcomes. They're social constructions. We need to know something about how those stories are

constructed and accepted or not accepted in the broader political community, and then what impact that has on policymaking.

In terms of longer-term party fortunes—the possibilities of an election setting the stage for the building of a larger and perhaps more enduring majority—an election victory is only the first stage. Then comes, hopefully, the enactment of policies that set up connections with constituents in ways that advantage that majority party. And then, of course, come outcomes and real-world conditions that shape the way in which the public responds to the efforts of that majority party.

It's an interesting set of questions, and we have a terrific group of people to discuss them. Let me begin from the far end. I mentioned already John Harris, who is a national political correspondent with the *Washington Post*, who has covered a range of subjects for the *Post*, including the Clinton presidency, for which he won several honors. John was a visitor with us while he was working on his book on the Clinton presidency, which is done and will be published early next year. Delighted that's done and delighted to welcome John here.

Then we have my colleague Sarah Binder, who's a senior fellow in Governance Studies here at Brookings as well as an associate professor of political science at George Washington University. She's the author of *Stalemate: Causes and Consequences of Legislative Gridlock*. She has written a book on filibusters in the Senate. Her current project is on the politics of judicial confirmations. Sarah and her scholarship are in the middle of all of the major questions that are being raised about what will follow this particular election.

You know, then, Larry Bartels as the director of the Center for the Study of Democratic Politics and the Stokes Professor of Politics and Public Affairs at the

Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University, who has in the past, and will at this session, set the plate for us initially with a presentation.

Our final participant, closest to me, is Jim Stimson, who is the Raymond Dawson Distinguished Bicentennial Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Jim has been a careful and acute analyst of American politics, the Congress, public opinion, and policymaking for a good long time. His most recent book is called *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. But he has most recently finished a book on mandates and policymaking and therefore is primed to help us understand what has been going on in this town since the election, that is, the struggle to define the mandate and what difference it is likely to make in the policy arena.

There we have it. Again, thank you for coming. Welcome to all of our participants. We will begin with Larry Bartels.

MR. BARTELS: Thanks, Tom. Thank you all for coming out on this rainy morning. I think you're the last people in Washington who aren't exhausted thinking about the election--at least, for another hour and a half.

We want to talk a little bit today about mandates and the notion of mandates and what they might mean, and then some about governance and the future of the government in the wake of the election.

One way to think about a mandate is that it's whatever the winners succeed in making of it. They have an interest in framing the outcome of the election in a way that contributes to whatever they want to do in the way of policy change after the election, and to the extent they're successful in doing that, it has implications for how well they can govern. On the other hand, one thinks that there should be some

connection between the interpretation of the election as it carries forward in Washington and what voters actually had in mind, if they had anything in mind at the time they were casting their votes.

So that brings us to talk a little bit about the outcome of the election itself. I think it's striking the extent to which this election has solidified, in at least the mind of elites and people in Washington, as an election that was about moral issues and in which value voters were the important components of change and basis of whatever mandate it is Bush has to carry forward in the wake of the election.

That's not my own interpretation of the election. The best way that I can summarize what I think happened in 2004 is with this picture that's not quite the picture that you have in your handout. This one--for the benefit of those of you who actually live in D.C., I made the picture big enough to include D.C., which is way down there in the left-hand corner of the picture. But what this is is a picture of the relationship between Bush's vote in each of the 50 states in 2000 and his vote in 2004. So if nothing had changed at all between 2000 and 2004, each of these dots would line up exactly along the diagonal line.

As you can see, they're pretty close to lining up along the diagonal line. They're a little bit above the line, which means that in most states Bush gained some votes by comparison with where he was in 2000. And that's obviously enormously consequential by comparison with a world in which all the dots were just a little bit below the line. That's something that we're going to be talking about a lot today.

But if you think about this picture, it's really quite remarkable that the pattern of votes is almost entirely identical to what it was before 9/11, before the disputed election outcome of 2000, before the war in Iraq, before trillions of dollars in

tax cuts, before the contest to choose a Democratic nominee, before hundreds of millions of dollars of campaign advertising to convince people about the state of the country and the qualities of the candidates. All of those things produced an outcome that looks amazingly like the outcome in 2000, except, as I say, that it's shifted up a little bit. So the story to me is really one of remarkable stasis rather than a story of big changes that ought to be interpreted as policy mandates of one kind or another.

Here's the picture that you have in your handout, which is just a blowup of the previous one, with identifying marks for the states that were big Bush gainers by comparison with the rest of the country, and then a couple that were relative losers. So the states where Bush did especially well by comparison with 2000 are Oklahoma, Alabama, Tennessee, New Jersey, Hawaii, and Rhode Island. If anyone can tell me what those states have in common and what they imply about shifts in the American voters' views about government and policy, come up and talk to me afterward, because I certainly do not see a pattern there.

Here's a similar kind of picture based on the exit poll, looking at the continuity and voting patterns of different demographic groups. Each of these dots refers to a particular categorization of demographic group in one of the exit polls. So the one up at the top right there is Republican identifiers who were very consistently pro-Bush in 2000 and very consistently pro-Bush in 2004--exactly on the line. And similarly, down in the bottom you have Democrats and liberals who are not surprisingly very much consistent in their behavior as well.

There's a little bit more scatter in this picture, I think, that may have to do in part just with sampling variability in the exit polls. But what I've done here is to show

you along the right the groups that have shifted most by comparison with the way they reported their votes in the 2000 exit poll.

Again, it's hard to see much pattern here. Bush picked up a lot among Hispanics. That's something that's been talked about a lot and I think is potentially quite important. He picked up considerably among people over the age of 60, which again is a pretty large group and a pretty important change. Rather oddly--I mean, these changes are so big and so counter-intuitive that they may actually reflect some glitch in the exit polls that will get straightened out once we figure out exactly how to weight them. But Bush made his largest gains among people who live in urban areas and lost a good deal of ground among people who live in small towns. Those results are exactly the opposite of what you would expect, given all the talk about values-voters and Bush's appeal to kind of traditional mainstream America.

So if these numbers are right, it suggests that the pattern of votes is diametrically opposed to what I think has become a kind of conventional interpretation of the meaning of the election.

There are a fair number of other anomalies of that sort among other groups as well, and I just want to show you some of them here. This is, again, looking at Bush's vote gain by comparison with 2000, based on the 2004 exit polls. There's been a lot of talk about the role of religion and people who are regular churchgoers. Bush did gain among those people, but you can see he actually gained a good deal more among people who go to church less frequently than among people who go to church regularly. That seems contradictory to the conventional wisdom.

I looked at states where gay marriage was on the ballot. By comparison with other states, you see that there's really no difference there. Bush's gains were not any greater in states that had gay marriage issues to draw people to the polls.

If you look at households where somebody owns a gun, which is about 40, 45 percent of the exit poll respondents, Bush picked up a couple of points among those people but, more than that, among people where there is no gun in the household.

And then looking at the comparison between working class--by which I'm meaning here people with family incomes below $50,000, which is about 45 percent of the population--by comparison with people who are better off economically, you see that Bush made very small gains among the working class and much larger gains among people at higher income levels. And indeed, if you look in more detail at the report of the exit-poll respondents' income and their voting behavior, you see a very consistent pattern which goes back to something that we talked about earlier, that the class differentiation of political support has actually increased over time. And contrary to the idea that there are all of these working class Republicans based on moral issues--you know, what's the matter with Kansas?--the working class has consistently been much more loyal to the Democratic Party and, by comparison with the rest of the country, increasingly loyal to the Democratic Party, whereas people at higher income levels have become increasingly Republican.

So all of those comparisons seem to me to cast a good deal of doubt on what I take to be the currently predominating explanation of the election outcome, that Bush succeeded in mobilizing kind of traditional-values, small-town, working-class people to support the Republican Party in a way that they hadn't before.

Just in passing, I will note that it also seems from the exit polls and the election result that the Democratic advantage in terms of party affiliation, psychological party attachment, has not really disappeared. In spite of the fact that the Republicans got more votes, remember, they got more votes in lots of other presidential elections over the whole period of time in which the Democrats were a dominant party in terms of party affiliations. In the 1996 and 2000 exit polls, the Democratic identifiers outnumbered the Republican identifiers, in terms of actual voters, by something like 3 percentage points. In the most recent exit poll, the number, I think, was 37-37. So we really have a tie in terms of the party affiliations of people who actually turned out to vote. And if you include non-voters, there's still some small Democratic plurality in terms of party identification.

So to the extent that Democrats conclude from this election that they're now an entrenched minority party and have to do something radical in order to change their prospects, I think that's a misreading of the evidence.

But as I said, the outcome of the election itself matters in an important way. This is an issue on which I think political scientists have a good deal to contribute, in contradiction to what I think is a kind of conventional wisdom--probably not among the kinds of people who are in the room, but among the American public in general--that it really doesn't matter all that much how the election turns out. There's this kind of consistent story that people don't see much difference between the parties, they think they're all either corrupt or ineffective and so things are going to go on more or less the way they are regardless of which side wins. Political scientists have produced a great deal of evidence suggesting that it does matter in very important ways which party controls the White House, which party controls Congress, what the candidates' platforms

are, the connection between what candidates promise to do and what they actually turn out to do. It turns out to be quite consistent.

And so although the popular perception that there aren't important differences between the parties, I think, has reduced some in this election cycle, I think we still have a way to go in terms of making it clear to ordinary citizens how much elections matter and how they matter.

What I'm showing you here is one indication of that. This is an analysis based on the patterns of roll call votes cast by U.S. senators in the late 1980s and 1990s. I picked that period just as a matter of convenience because it happens that, for those years, we have good data on the ideological preferences of constituents in each of the 50 states.

So along the bottom here, I have Liberal-Conservative Constituency Opinion running from Massachusetts, which in that period was the most liberal state in the country, through Alabama, which was the most conservative state in the country. So you can just imagine all the states arrayed along the horizontal dimension here. These lines represent the expected voting behavior of senators, who are themselves either Republicans or Democrats, as a function of their constituents' ideological preferences.

There are three lines in each little batch here corresponding to the three congresses in the six-year period that I'm looking at. There's a little bit of difference between the lines, but you see the pattern is generally quite consistent across those three different congresses. There is an upward slope in each case, which you'd expect if senators are responding to the views of their constituents and representing their constituents' views.

But the most striking thing is the gap between the two lines. So if you think about the difference between a Democrat representing Massachusetts and a Republican representing Massachusetts, you see that difference corresponds to almost half of the entire range of the scale that differentiates senators' voting behavior over these periods of time. Similarly at the other end, a Democrat representing Alabama doesn't look very much like a Republican representing Alabama, in spite of the fact that they have exactly the same constituents. One of the reasons this is a convenient time to do the analysis is that there are still in this period a fair number of instances where there are actually a Democrat and a Republican representing exactly the same constituents, because of having two senators in each state.

But the Democratic senator in Alabama looks much more like a Democratic senator in Massachusetts than like a Republican senator in Alabama. So contrary to the notion that there are only modest differences between the two parties, you see that in any given instance which one you choose makes a huge difference in terms of what you get in the way of policy.

There are also important differences in policy outcomes. I'm just going to show you one of those that happens to be related to my own interest in income inequality and the connection between politics and economic inequality.

This is a calculation over more than half a century of the economic fortunes of people at different points of the income distribution. So here, I've arrayed along the horizontal dimension all of the families in the U.S. at a given point in time--from the poorest, at the very left, to the richest, at the very right--and calculated at various intervals along that scale the average real-income growth of families at that point

in the income distribution. So this point, for example, is the average income growth for families at the 20 percentile. These are working poor people.

Under Republican presidents in this half-century period, that number averages a little more than half a percentage point. Under Democratic presidents, it averages more than 2 and a half percentage points. And similarly for people in the middle class, you see big differences in their economic fortunes under Republicans and Democrats; up until near the top of the income distribution, where the two numbers turn out to look pretty much identical.

So these numbers suggest that, especially for people in the middle class and poor people, there are huge effects of partisan control of the reins of government, not only on particular policy choices, but also on how those policies translate into real changes in their own life circumstances. How does that happen? Well, Democrats typically prefer policies that are more expansionary. They tend to have lower levels of unemployment, higher levels of real growth, and those are more important to people at the bottom of the income distribution. They're also more likely to favor increases in the minimum wage; in the case of Clinton, a big increase in the earned income tax credit; and so on. All those are policies that add up to a pretty substantial difference.

If you think that this is a coincidence that has to do with the particular timing of when we've had Republican and Democratic presidents over this period, I can tell you that the level of economic inequality, as measured by the ratio of incomes of people at the 80th percentile to people at the 20th percentile--which is a kind of standard measure of inequality--that measure of inequality increased under every Republican president of this half-century period and decreased under every Democratic president--except for one, Jimmy Carter, who happened to preside over a recession which was, as

most recessions are, especially bad for people near the bottom of the income distribution.

But these changes seem to be changes that reflect in important ways systematic policy differences between the two parties that are sufficiently consistent that we can expect them to carry on in the future as a function of whether we happen to have Republicans or Democrats at the reins of government. So that's just one example, I think, of what you can expect in the way of policy implications from this or any other election.

Thanks.

MR. MANN: The lights go on, the screen rises, and we resume our conversation. Thanks, Larry, very much. All kinds of questions arose in my mind as I listened to your presentation—not that I disagree with any of it.but the questions in his election of continuity, which is really quite striking.

The outcome, of course, is to be explained at the margin. What's politically important is what happens at the margin. Even the argument about party parity remaining is absolutely true. Democrats shouldn't imagine they are suddenly cast into the minority. But that 3 point gain for Republicans in the 2004 electorate could, by itself alone, account for the outcome of the election. Trying to figure out how that happened, whether this is a consequence of relative mobilization success or whether there was some actual change in party identification, is a really interesting question.

There are two other questions that we can come to at some point. First, Larry's evidence on the relationship between income (as a surrogate for class) and vote is powerful, but it is interesting to note contrary findings by education levels. And that's

one of the curious things that we find, thatBush made his greatest gains among non-college-educated people, and Kerry again increased what was already a Democratic advantage among post-graduate-educated people. So there is some interaction here between different measures of class, income, and education that are worth exploring and plumbing.

A final point about values, morality, and the religious right. Partly we're frustrated by the measures we have. We have to rely on frequency of church attendance because the other measures were not consistent in 2000 and 2004, so we're struggling to figure out what went on here. It may well be that frequency of church attendance is not such a good measure, if our president is any guide. He's a man for whom faith is exceedingly important, but as is reported by the staff and others, he doesn't go to church very often. It may be we're not capturing the impact of faith communities by relying on this particular measure.

It may also be the case that it's the old argument about swing proportional to prior party strength, that when you have a skewed distribution with, say, overwhelming Republican support from one group, when you get movement, you're more likely to see it in the other groups that were less skewed than you are in the one that was most skewed.

All of which is to say that when you're trying to explain the outcome of an election where you're really explaining 2 or 3 percent of the electorate, then it becomes really tricky to say what mattered at the margin as opposed to what kind of larger movements or stability is occurring for voters as a whole.

Well, I hope those are topics we can return to. But now I'd like to turn to Jim Stimson and ask him how we ought to think about mandates.

MR. STIMSON: Thank you, Tom.

Let me begin with a quotation from David Brooks in an op ed column in the Times a few days ago. He says, "Every election year, we in the commentariat come up with a story line to explain the result, and the story line has to have two features. First, it has to be completely wrong. Second, it has to reassure liberals that they are morally superior to the people who just defeated them.

"In past years, the story line has involved Angry White Males, or Willie Horton-bashing racists. This year, the official story is that throngs of homophobic, Red America values-voters surged to the polls to put George Bush over the top."

The first of those assertions, that election interpretations are completely wrong, is something like the official position of everyone who makes a living studying elections. I have the feeling that David Brooks might have been sneaking a look at Larry's data when he said that, because it's certainly consistent. If you had taken almost everything that's been said in the last 10 days about what the election meant and turned it into a hypothesis to be tested--which Larry has done--they all turned out to be wrong. So the "completely wrong" part is certainly on point.

This is a dangerous time for election analyses. Since no one very much listens to us at any other time, we have to go ahead and do it anyhow. In the classroom, I tell students don't believe anything that's written about the election in the first month after it. But now here I'm in the position of spewing wisdom about what the election meant in that first month, so I guess you shouldn't believe me, either.

I've written a book recently with two colleagues--Larry Grossback of West Virginia University and David Peterson of Texas A&M--and the book is called "Mandate Politics." It's about all of the elections in modern American history up

through 2002--not including 2004, of course. And we're interested in that book in a number of things, but in one particular analysis, that's relevant to what I'm going to do today, we asked the question, How does a consensus arise in the Washington community that a particular election has signaled a mandate? What we've observed is that there's always a commentary after elections and sometimes that commentary leads to a consensus that an election was a mandate; more often, it does not. So we're trying to explain the occasions on which it does.

What we know is that when such a consensus does arise, it drives behavior in American politics, that politicians of all stripes respond as if that consensus were true when they experience it. And so even though it might be a consensus about a will o' the wisp in people's heads, it has real consequences for American politics.

The three occasions where we've observed it are 1964, which produced Lyndon Johnson's Great Society; 1980, which produced the Reagan Revolution; and 1994, which produced the Contract with America. The first two of those are just large and lasting changes in American politics, and the third one produced important movements in Congress, which didn't produce much cumulative legislation because of lack of control of the White House. But these are all cases where something really happened as a result of that consensus.

So what I want to do today is ask the question where that consensus comes from in these historical elections, use some data to see what we can learn from it, and then turn to the results of 2004 and reflect on how that fits in the scheme of things.

We've developed some criteria for what constitutes a consensus on mandates. The first of those is the consensus itself--and it's too early to address that question. Consensus arises in the several weeks between election night and when

Congress comes to town in January, and that process is going on. It's not finished, and we can't know today how it's going to end. But from historical elections, what we can know is what objective facts of the election-night experience signal the consensus that arises later.

The good news from this analysis is that, in this era of full-time spin about everything in American politics, it seems to be the case that consensus on mandate is driven by the hard, objective facts of an election outcome, that all the spinners on both sides can't create something that didn't exist on election night. So the cases that we can examine that do explain when a consensus arises look like cases where it should have.

So what are these criteria and, then, how do they play for 2004, is what I want to address. We see two things in the election results that matter for the eventual consensus. One is that the victory has to be sweeping. We aren't impressed merely with a presidential win, however big it is--such as, say, 1984. When commentators see one party winning all of the elections on an election night, then they're inclined to look for explanations of how a party can be uniformly successful.

The second thing that we see is that it matters how expected or unexpected that outcome is. When we see it coming, we discount it on election night. We don't get engaged in talk about mandates. When we don't see one coming--1980 is the classic case, where everyone's just blindsided by the size of the Reagan win in 1980--then people begin to scratch their heads and say we need an explanation for this phenomenon, how could we have been so wrong as we were?

So those are the two things I want to address with data: how sweeping it is, and putting 2004 in comparison; and how unexpected it was.

What we do to look at how sweeping a win is is simply quantify the standard numbers that we all know--how many governorships are won, how many seats in the House, how many seats in the Senate, what the percent of the presidential vote is--on a standard scale so that we can put them side-by-side and compare it, because we want to look at the degree to which a party is winning everything as an important criterion of this mandate called.

We've done that for all the contests, 1960 through 2002. I have some handouts, which I hope are widely distributed, that show what those numbers look like. I'm going to address this question, then, of how sweeping 2004 is, and then I'll go on to talk about expectations.

First of all, let me say a little bit about the standard facts of 2004--and we all know these pretty well, so I'll be brief. The presidential election, 51-48.1, by the most recent numbers I can get. In historical comparison, that's unusually close. Senate election, a four-seat gain by the Republicans. On a scale from small to moderate to large, I'd say that's a moderate. It's not as impressive as something like 1980, but it's not trivial, either. House win, four seats. That's unusually small by modern standards. We usually swap more seats than that. And if you add an asterisk to that that says they're all in Texas and for causes that are probably unrelated to anything that happened on election day, it seems like a small win. And in governors races, the net was zero, although there's a recount going on in Washington State, and the Republicans might, when all is said and done, pick up a seat.

So those are the numbers. We then kind of transform them into these standard scales so that we can compare them to other elections, because the elections are all different--you're always winning something and losing something. And those

comparisons begin with a set of historical elections, in the first figure, which covers the period of 1960 to 1980.

I'm not going to spend to much time, because I want to bring us up to date, but if you take a hard look at that, you can see evidence of an election sweep in 1964, when Democrats were winning big and winning almost everything. You can see that again in 1980, when Republicans were winning absolutely everything and winning big at a lot of things.

You see a couple of congressional elections where you could make a case--this tells you something about the role of expectations--the congressional elections weren't a case for mandates, and partly that's because they were both pretty expected. 1966, the Democratic Party essentially lost all of the seats that it had gained in 1964 and went back to dominating government, all branches of government. 1974, we saw it coming months ahead of time as a response to the Watergate scandal. No one needed to talk about mandates to explain that.

Then if we move on to the modern period, 1982 through now 2004, I have the one new data point in these, the rest of the stuff that we did for the book. 2004, out there out on the right, you can see in context. What it looks like to, I think, anyone's eyes is a pretty normal election. If you look at it in context of the 23 elections in the span we have, the overall size of it, it comes out something like 12th out of 23. So you really can't be much more in the middle than that is.

Just to close that analysis, after we show the four different kinds of races, then we feel free to put them all together because we don't want people to think we're cheating when we produce just a single number. But after you've seen it broken out, you can see them all together. That summary is in the third figure, where just the total size

and direction of the win exists. Up is a Democratic win, down is Republican win--I should have said that in advance--and the size is the magnitude of the bar. Again, the interpretation is pretty clear here. This is just a normal election. It looks pretty much like any other.

Let me turn, then, to expectations, to finish the question of our two criteria. By the first criterion, sweeping win, no.

What did we expect? Well, we have five different bases for expectations, and I'll probably have to hurry through them a little bit so that folks will have time to talk here. We start, for example, with forecasts--forecasts done mainly by political scientists, but political scientists and the occasional economist. And I well remember when these forecasts were coming out getting e-mails from friends who weren't professional political scientists saying things like why are all your colleagues Republicans? Because all of the forecasts this year said George W. Bush was going to win and some of them said George W. Bush was going to win really big. The range of those forecasts is from Mike Lewis-Beck and Charles Tien. Pretty close to the actual outcome--51.2 on the low end to Ray Fair's 57.5 historic landslide victory for Bush. The median is pretty close to 54 percent.

So if you ask what was expected in March, April, May and on through September, when these forecasts get revised, what was expected all along was a big Bush win. And there is in fact a Republican in this group of forecasts, but just one. The others are Democrats who didn't like the forecasts they were making, but trusted the numbers in front of them.

So, our explanatory problem begins on election night. Red states and Blue states. Given that Bush was forecast to get 54 percent, he actually got 51 percent.

The problem is to explain why Bush did less well than he would have done. I might add that these forecasts are a variety of factors, but a common element in most of them is economics and, in particular, growth in the fourth year. And if you take into account growth in the fourth year and an incumbent president seeking reelection, any model that you can imagine is going to have George W. Bush being reelected. Despite the Democratic campaign that constantly emphasized unemployment problems, growth in the final year was quite good, above average.

Secondly, we can talk about expectations as, of course, the polls. As is usually the case in modern elections, the polls bracket the winner, some on each end. So we have estimates all the way from that notably left-wing organization, Fox, which said Kerry was going to win by 2 points, to Newsweek saying that Bush was going to win by 6. The result's right in the middle. If you look at the median, which I tend to do with polls, on the median there's about a point and a half--Bush did about a point and a half better than the median prediction, so there is something of a positive note to be explained there in the Bush victory. But that's a pretty typical error for the polls.

I spent the year combining all this polling information and producing a single daily estimate myself, and my single daily estimate on the last day of the election was 50.9, which, in two-party terms, was off by .6 point. So the expectation on election night is Bush did about what he was expected to do, and maybe a little better, based on the polls.

The third way is the Iowa political stock market. The genius of this political stock market is it reflects the views of informed observers betting their own money, and so it should be very different than the polls. The Iowa political stock market, to summarize it, believed that George W. Bush was going to win from the

beginning, flirted with the possibility of a Kerry win in July and August a little bit, but basically it's been in Bush territory throughout, including a September reading that was something like 73-27 expressing a really strong probability of a Bush win that moved back on election day.

The final election night prediction, a share of Bush sold for 51.2 cents, which predicts the 51.5 percent victory of Bush almost perfectly. And the difference between Bush and Kerry on election night, 2.7 cents, predicts the 2.9 percent Bush victory nearly perfectly. So, as usual, the Iowa stock market did well.

Voter beliefs I can comment on significantly. If you paid attention to the polls during the election years, you would have seen that most American most of the time believed that George W. Bush was going to be reelected. That belief spread heavily into the ranks of Democratic voters who intended to vote against him but still believed he was going to win.

And last on expectation, the mysterious exit polls, a story that probably all of you know--that from the afternoon of election day, exit polls began to appear--a journalist said to me the other day they were a tightly kept secret known only to the handful of people who have access to the Internet. Polls began to appear that suggested that Kerry might win both Florida and Ohio narrowly, and that influenced the tone of election night because all of the people who were commenting on the election night knew about those exit polls and so there was a state of surprise in their commentary as the exit polls turned out to be quite wrong.

Let me state a final conclusion on expectations. This one, as elections go, was pretty well forecast. The way it turned out was pretty much what we expected to see.

And a final conclusion on whether this signals a mandate is a pretty simple one: No. It wasn't sweeping, it wasn't unexpected, it was normal election. What we know about when mandates occur is that they occur when the losing side acquiesces in the interpretation that the message was against them. That seems unlikely to happen, to me, and therefore I suspect that all of the mandate talk will be history by January.

MR. MANN: Oh, exactly. Exactly. Presumably, none of the losers accepted it and were basically pressed into accepting it, but in spite of that he was able to achieve some objectives. Now he's got 55 seats in the Senate. Sarah, what do we know, from your work in the past, about unified and divided government and size of Senate majorities and what to expect, particularly on the domestic agenda revolving around the ownership society and tax reform that got little public discussion during the course of the campaign?

MR. STIMSON: And by the way, claimed a mandate in 2000, having lost the popular vote to--

MR. MANN: Oh, exactly. Exactly. But presumably, none of the losers accepted it and were sort of pressed into accepting it, but in spite of that he was able to achieve some objectives. Now he's got 55 seats in the Senate. Sarah, what do we know, from your work in the past, about unified and divided government and size of Senate majorities and what to expect, particularly on the domestic agenda revolving around the ownership society and tax reform that got little public discussion during the course of the campaign?

MS. BINDER: Sure. Well, if there's anything we've learned over the last decade or so of political science research about unified and divided control, unified government may be important, but it's not all it's cracked up to be. There's a bit of

debate about this, but by and large it seems that in periods of unified control—where a single party has the House, Senate, and White House under control—you'll see some advantage to that majority party in terms of its policymaking. Not as much as you might expect, given our conventional wisdom that a single party can reign unopposed in Washington, but there is some added benefit of being able to control all of the branches.

Now, what that leaves out is the impact of the minority party, particularly in the Senate, to use the rules of the game to its advantage to slow down the majority party in Congress and the White House.

I think what we should think about here is the limits of unified party control. It gets President Bush an advantage here in terms of a mandate and in terms of popular perceptions of what's going to happen, but there are other factors to think about in terms of how they're going to affect Congress's ability to legislate on these big issues Bush has claimed a mandate for, particularly Social Security reform, but also major tax reform.

Those two forces (to boil it down to two that deserve a better look) are ones for which we don't just want to know the election outcomes in terms of party control. We also want to know how the elections shape the makeup of the two political parties. We can think of two stylized versions: One, elections creating two parties with a big bipartisan center. This should recall the days of the 1950s, early 1960s, and probably up to the early '70s when we had conservative Democrats and liberal Democrats, and we had a pretty big base of moderate Republicans as well as emerging conservative Republicans.

That type of distribution, with a big bipartisan center—roughly, by my count, 30 to 40 percent of the chamber in much of those earlier decades—has, as we've

all come to know now, really disappeared. We have, instead, a different stylized version here. Elections have produced very polarized political parties, both in the Democratic Party and in the Republican Party, moving the Democrats far left and the Republicans far right.

What's the consequence for government here? It limits the ability of the majority party to do what it wants. Now, why is that? Largely because of the rules of the game in the Senate, but also for constitutional reasons.

First, if anything attracts controversy in the Senate, you're probably going to need 60 votes to cut off debate. Having fifty-five senators means the Republicans can't do it alone. They need to keep their ranks together, and they have to attract Democrats. Well, if you have a lot of conservative Democrats, that might not be too hard to do, especially on the issues like tax reform or Social Security reform that might in fact be quite popular among conservative constituents, even in the Democratic Party.

But, as we know, there aren't a lot of these conservative Democrats left, and the ones that were left in 2004 are essentially gone with the turnover in Southern Senate seats. We've lost John Breaux who, even in his final days in Congress, was probably further to the left than we typically make him out to be. We've lost Hollings from South Carolina. We lost John Edwards from North Carolina, who was probably at least as liberal as you make him out to be. The net sum is, if you're looking to build a bipartisan coalition as the Republican Party in the Senate, you have to really go way over the ideological spectrum to find a like-minded or willing Democrat to join your coalition.

Now, I don't want to suggest it can't ever be done. We certainly saw it on education reform in 2001, where we had Ted Kennedy being brought into the process—

interestingly, not just by senators, but also by the president. He made it clear that that was the direction that education reform was going to go. Largely from the experience of the last Congress, that's probably the exception to the rule. By the end of Bush's first term, the policy issues really weren't attracting Democratic votes, and I think that's likely to be a problem for the Republicans in the current Congress.

If we think of the House, we've also lost conservative Democrats with the turnover in Texas. One in particular, Charlie Stenholm, who'd been there for many years, was also quite active on Social Security reform. So if Bush wanted to create a bipartisan coalition on that issue and to generate large bipartisan support—or at least some bipartisan support—not having Charlie Stenholm there, I think, will be a big blow for that effort in the House.

So that's one force to think about—how elections shape the ideological distribution in the two chambers. Another force to think about is simply the bicameral structure of Congress. Granted, it's a well-known constitutional fact here, but I think sometimes we lose sight of the ways in which dividing power into House and Senate limits what majority parties can achieve.

For the Republican Party, we have this image of them as a fairly cohesive lot with just a handful of moderates left, but in reality, if you take a look at some of the issues that ended in stalemate and will come up in the lame duck session next week and the next few weeks, many of those issues—not all of them, but many—ended up in gridlock because of differences between Republicans in the House and Senate. We can think of one of the bigger ones, the reforms in the wake of the 9/11 Commission. The big dispute there really boils down to differences between Senate Republicans and House Republicans over what's to be included in that package and how broad a power

should be given to this new intelligence director. Those are the outcome of disputes between House and Senate Republicans.

Many disputes over spending bills, a number of which are yet to be enacted for the fiscal year that began over a month ago, are due to differences among Republicans. Yes, some of the disputes were caused by Democrats unwilling to go along with what Republicans wanted in the Appropriations Committee; some of those disputes are also House-Senate disputes in conference, particularly for some of the more troublesome bills—Labor, HHS bills, and so forth. Those differences have to be worked out, not strictly across the parties but within the Republican Party. And those challenges—particularly given the budget deficit going into this current Congress—aren't going away. Those problems will still be there for Republicans.

So to step back from that, I think unified party control within a large majority will mean a lot for Republicans, particularly in the Senate. It should make it a little easier to put together 60-vote coalitions. But by and large, I think we still need to take a look at these bicameral differences as well as the problem posed by not having much in the way of a bipartisan center.

MR. MANN: Sarah, thank you.

John, I'd like to get your reaction to what you've heard thus far, as a way of launching a conversation among ourselves.

MR. HARRIS: Sure. I was thinking during the conversation that there was a great column a few years ago by Michael Kinsley--you know, he used to be at Slate; I think he's now at the Los Angeles Times. But he wrote a good column about journalistic election coverage. In the weeks before an election, weeks and months before an election, political journalists operate on the premise that the smallest things are

really what elections are about. Joe Lockhart has joined the Kerry campaign--this is really big; or we notice that Mary Beth Cahill was not on the plane, and this is important. Elections are about small things. And then on election day we immediately pivot. Elections are actually about seismic, inevitable forces, big things. It wasn't really about Joe Lockhart on the plane, it's about what the national electorate has come to in an overwhelming consensus. And, you know, that's probably acknowledging that there is a certain glibness in the way that we approach those things.

That said, during both your presentations I was fidgeting. They gave useful options against facile over-interpretation of the results from an academic point of view. Since I am the journalist here, I think I need to make, just for purposes of debate, an argument on behalf of facile, glib over-interpretation of the results.

[Laughter.]

MR. HARRIS: It is true that the election was decided at the margins. It is true that there was only 3 percent difference in the popular vote, which mirrored in most ways the 2000 result. It is true that Ohio, where I spent most of my time during the election this year, would have switched with 100,000 votes and we'd be here talking about John Kerry and whether, you know, he can govern as a new president even though he had a popular vote minority. I think we all would have concluded it didn't make any difference because it didn't with Bush, what have you. Everything would have been different with some small changes.

That said, a plane can take off from New York to Los Angeles, and if it lands a quarter-mile away from the runway at Los Angeles and crashes, we don't say the pilot did a good job. Everything is different. If it lands on the runway, the plane is safe;

if it crashes, the people are dead. We don't say, well, you know, really, most of the flight was normal.

[Laughter.]

MR. HARRIS: Democrats did everything they possibly could. We never thought that they would have financial parity because of the 527 groups, and they essentially did. It was uncertain whether the Democrats--and again, I'll just use Ohio, the state I'm most familiar with--could increase their votes significantly, by more than a half-million new voters over 2000; they did it. It was impressive. Resolving the nomination contest without an ideological struggle that weakened the party--impressive, impressive, impressive.

They lost. And it seems to me that in our system, the question of mandates, particularly with a system that is so presidency-focused, the question of a mandate answers itself. It does not matter what EJ Dionne writes and whether he thinks that this was really a mandate. It does not matter if Harry Reid, the new minority leader, thinks it's a mandate and whether he should defer to it. I really do believe that the presidency in our system is supreme. It creates its own reality.

George Bush had all the influence he needed. As a president who lost the popular vote and, you know, I think almost objectively won with these circumstances that didn't reflect even the will of voters--I'm not saying [inaudible] of voters, but the will of voters in Florida, his presidency is asterisk presidency. It doesn't matter if he was able to do it. The mandate was by itself. He put so much attention to his presidency, he's got so much agenda-setting power that the mandate is--I don't think it's a matter of interpretation, it's a matter of objective fact. The Bush family lives at 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, the Kerry family does not. He has all the mandate he needs.

President Clinton showed this again and again. He was a 43 percent president and was able to--I mean, events and perceptions of him drove the mandate. When he was seen as not an effective president in his early years, he lost power. In the middle of the Lewinsky scandal, he never really, when there was widespread expectation that he had lost his governing influence, in fact he was able to dominate Congress in budget battles throughout that scandal.

The mandate is there. There is nothing to do for Democrats except get used to that and try to figure out how they would hold a presidency accountable, having failed to do that in this case.

The values question--and I'll wrap up on this--I have agreed with Larry to some extent and don't agree with others. I do think you can over-interpret when you say "values issues"--God, guns, and gays, because that's what we think of as values issues. My own view is that the entire election, almost all the core issues were seen very much through a values prism. It was what was driving the energy on behalf of President Bush. Terrorism, or the war in Iraq, those were values issues. I sensed again and again with voters that they weren't making empirical judgments or, you know, I'm not comfortable with how the occupation's going in Iraq or I wish we had caught bin Laden. Yes, they were to some extent doing that, but Bush succeeded in making the core issues of national security a values issue.

People resonated--what, are we going to fight them over there or fight them here? You know, the way he put it. Well, that's a values issue. Like people were saying, who's tougher? You know, is this a world that operates on force or by persuasion? President Bush was seen as more the candidate of force; Kerry was seen as more the candidate of persuasion. And those are values judgments ultimately, or they

have an ideological character, they have a psychological character. But I really do think that, whatever you call them, there was an emotive factor to these judgments that was really, really important. And I think that also should be seen as a values prism.

By the way, the Kerry vote was driven by values issues as well. The Democratic energy was very much of a sense--it wasn't about Kerry's programmatic agenda or even Bush's programmatic agenda. A powerful sense was that, look, this does not represent American values, how we're operating in the world, that we're -- you know, Bush offends the values of Democratic voters who think he's not a truth-teller. That is a values issue also.

And I do think that the fact that Bush succeeded in putting most of the issues through a values prism that was favorable to his side is important. So not viewing it narrowly through those issues if you think values were preeminent.

And I do think even if you do put it narrowly through those issues, Larry, there is only a handful of--I mean, these elections are decided at the margin. When you've got voters who on policy and empirical grounds should be voting for the Democrat-- are you happy with the economy? No. Do you think Kerry's got a better health care plan? Yes. Do you like the way things are going in Iraq? No. If you have those people who then cast a vote for President Bush because they are more comfortable with him, that is a really something fact. And, you know, even if only 3, 4 percent of voters fit in that category, that's a big problem. If voters that you should be winning are turning you off because they're making sort of intuitive, almost Rorschach-test-like judgments about who you are and your values, if they're turning off your policy-driven argument and not listening, that's a big fact for Democrats.

You can argue whether it was a reflection of Kerry or a reflection of the party's general ideological profile and reputation, but it's a really big deal. And I do think you need to go to Sarah's point, that Republicans came out of this election with ideological confidence. Democrats come out with ideological insecurity. So more than even where they fit on the conservative-liberal spectrum, really, I think that's the key thing. Republicans feel validated in their approach, which was, you know, little stock in bipartisanship, little stock in shaving off ideological edges. Democrats don't know what to do. Should they fight President Bush implacably and find themselves that way, or should they try to find some sort of common ground in the center? That's a big difference. I mean, one position's vastly superior to the other, because there's a consensus in one party and disarray in the other.

MR. MANN: John, you played your role brilliantly. That's exactly what we wanted you to do. I'm going to ask Larry and Jim to respond to some of the questions that have been raised, but I just want to toss a couple of other little data points in here.

From what we can tell at this stage—and we haven't done the multivariate analysis that we have to do to really pin this down—to the extent the economy was relevant, it hurt Bush and helped Kerry. That is, every bit of open-ended-response and forced-choices question data, everything we could see from subjective evaluations—was it a factor in your vote?—indicated a slightly negative referendum on the economy. And yet all of the forecasting models, given what they use, built it in as a plus, suggesting that there's less there than meets the eye with the forecasting models even if they got the candidate right.

Also, we did go through this weird experience where we had choices provided in the exit polls and “moral values” was one of them and had the plurality of responses, about 22 percent. So everyone made the interpretation that it was all about moral values. Then we started looking at some of the underlying data, and suddenly it meant nothing. Moral values had nothing to do with the outcome, because the indicators we had were that the religious conservatives were no more loyal to Bush and no more present in the electorate. And then I think we've now entered a third stage, where we've come to see moral values as not limited to people who identify themselves as religious conservatives, but in a broader set of ways; the open-ended responses having to do with doubts about Kerry and reasons for voting for Bush were remarkably focused on both social issues associated with this as well as broader concerns about values, suggesting maybe there's more there than meets the eye.

Larry and Jim, jump in.

MR. BARTELS: On this last point, I interpret the predominance of responses about moral values among people who were voting for Bush as reflecting a kind of parroting of what Bush was saying during the campaign rather than an explanation for voting the way they did. I mean, as my picture should have suggested, and as the more detailed analysis that we'll eventually get of the consistency of voting behavior of individual voters over time, the same people who say they're voting for Bush on the basis of moral values were going to vote for Bush all along. They voted for Bush in 2000, they had views that were consistent with the Republican vote all along. And they mentioned moral values in the end and they mentioned terrorism in the end because that was mostly what Bush was talking about on the campaign trail.

On the other hand, the people who were going to vote for Kerry, for whatever reason, predominantly mentioned the economy, they mentioned the war in Iraq and concerns about how that's going, they mentioned health policy--I think mostly not because those were the things that were necessarily driving their votes, but because those were the things that were at the top of their head because those were the things that their candidate was talking about.

So I think those are rationalizations rather than reasons for people voting the way they do.

MR. STIMSON: I'd like to respond on the economic issues in particular. If we go back to the past, where we're worried about spin, and look at means of predicting a presidential election, one of the best-ever devised simple act of voting is you just find out which candidates people say they like and which ones they dislike--just ignore the reasons--just count them up, and it predicts who wins and who loses. And we've known this for a long time.

What we now know from a more analytical approach to taking a look at the economy is you can completely predict which candidate's going to be liked and disliked by knowing the state of the economy. The conclusion of which is the economy matters more than we think, because people don't articulate it as a basis for a choice even though it underlies their conclusion that this president is a success or a failure.

So I think the forecasting models were right for the right reason, not for the wrong reason. And if you look at the sort of secret--I call it the secret Bush campaign; it was right out in the open--he mentioned the economy in every speech he ever gave. He said the same words: It's strong, it's getting stronger. The American people believed that, on average, despite Kerry's campaign.

MR. MANN: So you think subjective assessments of the economy (not reasons for voting) are completely without meaning or consequence?

MR. STIMSON: Subjective--

MR. MANN: Assessments. How's the economy going? Is that a relevant measure with any meaning at all?

MR. STIMSON: Certainly it is, but what we know about political surveys is--I'm going to slip into jargon here--is that most of what people say in surveys is endogenous. That is to say, they're giving reasons that sound like sensible reasons for their vote, which are in fact determined by something else. And we've known that for a long time. I'm sorry I used the word.

MR. BARTELS: The variations in people's perceptions of how the economy is going are almost entirely due to partisan biases and ideological biases. There are movements from election to election in the average level of optimism which correspond roughly to how the economy's going. I think the economy was a little more complicated this time than usual, because there were kind of contradictory economic indicators. General economic growth was quite robust; on the other hand, income distribution issues made it less likely that middle class and poorer people were feeling the effects of that. There were concerns about unemployment and outsourcing and so on.

The other things to say about these forecasting models, though, is that although they're often described as economic models, they mostly run on the basis of things other than economic conditions. And probably the most important thing which is included either directly or indirectly in all of them is a quite consistent historical tendency for parties to lose ground electorally the longer they're in power.

I was on a radio program the other day, and somebody asked me a question about the future of the Democratic Party. I said there's nothing wrong with the Democratic Party that four more years of Bush won't solve. And I think people interpreted that as a kind of nasty partisan comment, but what I really meant was that the longer the Republican Party is in power, the more ground they're likely to lose just because the popular items of the agenda have been used up.

That effect alone is enough to push that curve that I showed you back below the horizontal diagonal. So I don't know how many predictions there have been so far of the outcome of the 2008 election. My prediction is it's going to be close and the Democrats are likely to win for that reason.

MR. MANN: But now we're--one thing is to sort of explain the election and explain--and there it's complicated to try and explain because there is a question of whether you are explaining the margin or what most voters were feeling and thinking? The next thing is to say: Do the actual elections results—as Jim put it, the sweep or lack or sweep and the expectations versus the outcome in defining a mandate— have an important bearing on what happens next?

Now, the argument, as I listened to Jim, is that it should mean nothing gets done, or relatively little gets done, because there's just no there there in either regard. Yet as we said, no one would accuse this president of being shy about claiming a mandate and acting on it. Take just tax cuts and the war in Iraq. Those are as big a set of policy changes as this country has seen in a long while, and for good or ill, we will be living with their consequences for some time.

Now fast-forward to 2005, Sarah. The linchpin of the Bush domestic agenda is the partial privatization of Social Security or as they prefer to call it, the

voluntary allocation of some portion of one's payroll taxes to private accounts. The idea, in a policy sense, is to help out the long-term fiscal condition of Social Security. But that entails dramatic reductions in the guaranteed benefits in the out years and some way of figuring out how to finance the transition cost in the near term.

But it also has significant political implications, which center on creating a set of new constituents who are linked to the party that created these personal accounts for you. So it seems to me, if successful, it has the potential of creating something bigger over time as majorities are built in part from policies that get enacted and that have consequences that enough people see as positive, reinforced by real-world conditions that create a new political reality.

So the query is, given the lack of mandate as Larry and Jim define it, but given the president's assertion and the Republicans' assertion of a mandate, what are the prospects for success on Social Security reform?

MS. BINDER: Without lapsing into too much procedural mumbo-jumbo—I'll do it anyway. Part of it is going to depend for the Social Security issue on whether or not the Senate needs a majority or a supermajority in the face of Democratic opposition. Now, I'm assuming there would be some pretty strong Democratic opposition, even possibly enough to push it to a filibuster in the Senate.

There are some procedural routes that Republicans possibly could use through the budget process to push through Social Security reform, and that would significantly increase the prospects of getting a bill into conference and presumably then on to the president. But I think even before senators and House members get to that point, there are a few parameters in which they have to get this done.

One, as best I know, a detailed plan has not been presented, as Tom said, for how this would be done and how you do the transition costs and so forth. There's not a lot of time for the president to get that out and to get folks working on it. By about the six-month mark through the year, House members, particularly those who may have a primary challenge, will start thinking about elections coming up. Certainly as we're well into 2006, electoral concerns may or may not—depending on how the issue is playing and how successful Democrats may be in redefining whether this was a good or bad move—pose problems for the president.

So there's an issue of time here, and there's an issue of presidential capital and how well it can be used, if we think it can be claimed or manufactured, whether on a good basis or an objective or subjective basis. Second-term presidents aren't typically quite as successful as first-term presidents. I don't think that's an ironclad rule, but it's been the trend over the past decade or so. Also, presidents seem to have more political capital and more success in spending it the first year of a term before it declines rapidly as they move into the rest of the term. So there's not a lot of time here to do pretty big, complex, and quite historic changes to the bedrock of American social policy.

I think the momentum here is on the Republicans' side. Part of it depends, again as I said, on how Democrats approach the issue and whether they're able to reframe it. Another thing to keep in mind here are these Senate moderates who were in the past Congress. Much of what is encouraging them to slow down their heels has been the economic consequences of Republican policy. That's not going to go away under Social Security reform, given the immense costs. I'm no Social Security expert here, but I see ranges from $1 trillion to $2 trillion.

MR. MANN: It's about $100 to $150 billion a year and would move across several decades. Real money.

MS. BINDER: I don't want to say that Congress always takes full account of all information and does a good analysis of costs and benefits. It's possible they'd push ahead even with a solution that hasn't been vetted well. But it's a pretty big issue to be doing that on.

MR. MANN: John, what's your sense of momentum, dynamic on this particular matter, which seems to be the linchpin of a Bush second-term agenda?

MR. HARRIS: I think everything we know about him means that he is sincere in his ambition, and he will indeed try to pursue it. I think the outcome of it does depend on this question that Democrats--it isn't some kind of backward-looking question like how did we lose this and how do we want to take another swing of the bat next time, in the Democratic Party. Because I think you could say, look, you didn't win by that much, and Social Security, I mean, we've been, you know, running as the party protecting Social Security for years, and you know, so let them try, you know, we'll clobber them over the head. Or--looking at that data--we did the best we could and it still wasn't good enough, and even with older voters we weren't winning those people, and it is in fact a substantive looming problem that's not going away, so let's try to see if he is sincere this time, as he, you know, I think objectively wasn't that sincere last time about truly trying to create some kind of consensus on big issues that does involve authentically working with Democrats.

Even with a loyal House caucus and a 55-vote Senate majority, it seems to me the conventional wisdom that it is crazy for a party to change entitlements on a partisan basis, as opposed to a bipartisan basis, still holds. You know, ask Hillary

Clinton with respect to health care. It would truly be an audacious thing for the Republican Party to try to make major changes to this program on a partisan basis. That said, the conventional wisdom has been defied so frequently over the course of the past four years with respect to President Bush, that, you know, I'm not prepared to say that A, he won't try, and B, that it might not work.

There is a big question about where he wants to take his presidency, and there's also a big question about his skills as president. I think wherever most journalists were, wherever academics were, the public were, about George Bush's skills as a politician and a president, like we now acknowledge, this is a great politician at certain things. He is a great politician at talking to his people, his supporters, and expanding the people who might consider themselves a Bush voter and part of this new Republican base. He is a weak politician at speaking to people outside that circle. You know, he can expand his base, but he's not really very good at winning people who aren't ever going to be identified as part of his base but might be near it on some issues. Bush is simply not skilled at talking to those people. It's not his instinct. It's hard to see him passing Social Security without getting some kind of crossover support. It's a big question for his presidency.

MR. MANN: Thank you, John.

Please, let's take some questions from the audience. Jo?

QUESTION: My name is Jo Freeman. I'm with the National Writers Union.

I'd like to ask you how you would assess the relative contribution of organization versus issues in the incremental increase in the Bush vote in 2004 over 2000.

MR. MANN: Yeah, how much was it the get-out-the-vote operation on the ground, and how much was it, if you will, the broader set of motivations that exist as a consequence of either real-world conditions or positions that candidates and voters take on issues? You know, we discussed this at our last seminar, when we were talking about mobilization and turnout: How much of it is the ground operation, how much of it is the incentives that exist? There clearly is interaction between the two. Some analysts, including Mike McDonald here, have looked at some of the county-level returns, trying to see where we have substantial increases in production of Republican or Democratic votes, and then trying to see if there were particularly strong organizational efforts under way.

We've had some reporting, which I guess is called anecdotes or ad hocery, from some outer-ring suburbs and faith communities where we actually know the efforts under way in these churches to try to turn out the vote. We know a lot of members were active volunteers and participants in it. We also saw some rather substantial jumps in Republican votes in some of these areas. But was that the context influence of the gay marriages in Massachusetts and San Francisco? Was it partly a matter of appeals that Bush was making on moral grounds? Or did it have to do with the economy, with people not realizing it?

I personally think we don't have evidence to sort that out, but I have to say I'm extremely dubious that the economy played any positive role in increasing Republican votes in those outer suburbs. But let my colleagues join in on this.

MR. BARTELS: Well, turnout was up. It wasn't up, I think, in proportion to the increase in mobilizing activities, so that may indicate something about the limitations of the effectiveness of these kinds of activities. They certainly mattered

some. As for the partisan effect, I think, you know, Karl Rove has very sensibly declared victory and gone back to work. But I haven't seen any evidence that suggests that the Republicans had a net advantage from these kinds of activities. If you look at the exit polls, for example, I think it was 24 percent of the respondents said that they'd been contacted by the Republicans, and 26 percent said that they had been contacted by the Democrats. The numbers that I've seen about turnout don't indicate that turnout was generally up more in Republican areas than it was in Democratic areas, although obviously in some specific spots there may have been important effects of that kind.

MR. HARRIS: Can I weigh in on that, just because of my -- experience? And I'm back to the airplane again. I've got it at the runway. And, you know, maybe these are affecting things at the margins, and you can't organize somebody that doesn't agree with you on issues. But, I mean, organization, I believe, made the difference in Ohio. I don't think they would have won Ohio without a superb effort by the Bush-Cheney campaign at identifying voters, increasing registration, and maximizing turnout. And there was a superb effort on the other side, but the Bush effort was, you know, at the end of the day superior. So in that sense--I mean, you can either say, well, it's 2 and 3 percent at the margins or you can say it's 100 percent, because the presidency turned on that organizational question, in my view, in that state.

MR. BARTELS: But then why wasn't turnout more in Ohio than it was in other places?

MR. HARRIS: I mean, he increased his vote in Ohio from what he got last time, and he wouldn't have if that effort wasn't there, I don't believe.

MR. MANN: The turnout overall was up about, I recall, two-and-a-half percentage points. In the battleground states, it was up, I think, about 6.9 on average. I

think in Ohio it was somewhat higher than that; as I recall, it was close to 8 percent. So it was higher than the average battleground states. Florida was—do you recall, Mike, what the increase was--

MR. McDONALD: Yeah, Florida was up, too. And we're still getting votes back from those states as well, so the numbers are inching up even further. So what's remarkable about these states overall is that they were battleground states in 2000. So they already had mobilization efforts under way in 2000. That they increased in turnout so much over 2000 is just stunning when you think about where they were in 2000 versus 2004. And to go to this issue about the counties and where Bush's increased support seemed to come from, we're in these -- counties of Cincinnati and Columbus, where population grew and, commensurate with that population, these were the most Republican counties in the state of Ohio. And the population grew there and they became more Republican. You can put a perfect trend line from 2000-2004 in the vote share for Gore and the vote share for Kerry, except these counties. These are the counties where there was increased vote percentage for the Republicans. So it's maybe worth 60,000 votes--not enough to overcome the 130,000 that Kerry was deficit in the state, but it's a big portion of what happened there.

MR. MANN: The alliance of party and outside groups that worked on behalf of the Democrats to increase turnout, in looking at their results and the Republicans', say they met or exceeded their targets in each of the places they worked but that they were out-performed by the Republicans in areas of mainly Republican strength. That's what they believe, by just looking at the aggregate statistics.

It's interesting, too, that some of the target groups saw their share of the vote increase more in the battleground states, where there were strong registration and

get-out-the-vote efforts. For example, among young voters, there was no change in their share nationally. But if you look at battleground states, in states where there was a particular effort to reach them—like in Pennsylvania, for instance, we saw a jump from 14 percent to 21 percent, a 7 percentage point increase in the percentage of young voters participating in the election there.

All of which suggests the ground operation makes some difference. But there's something else going on. I believe it's the case—correct me if I'm wrong—that there was an increase in the vote in Red states—that is, safe Republican states—but not in Blue states, which are safe for the Democrats. And it's the increased turnout where there was no ground operation at all that accounts for Bush's popular-vote victory, or a good part of it. Meanwhile the Blue states, where there's no campaign going on and nothing seemed to matter, didn't have any real increase in turnout. Now, that suggests to me there's something else going on here in a motivational way that has nothing to do with the ground operation.

MR. STIMSON: We know from the Kennedy School studies that the motivational side of it was at an all-time high in 2004, too. So it clearly has to be both.

MR. MANN: Exactly.

QUESTION: Leslie Johnson. I'm a professor of history in Utah. I want to present a very quick anecdotal piece of information and have Mr. Harris perhaps comment on it.

I was stunned last week to be in a church service--I'm a Mormon--and to have a woman get up and say, oh, by the way, a lot of us, you know, went out to Ohio to help out. She said we were recruited to come out and help on the marriage amendment. And so we figured it was going to pass in Utah, but they may have some trouble in Ohio.

But we didn't know, you know, how could we help. Air tickets were sent to us. Eight hundred of us were air-lifted out to Ohio in the final week of the campaign to help out, and we thought we were going to be working on the marriage amendment. But guess what? Once we got there, why they had us work on calling people to get out the vote. That really fit right into the presidential election.

So I just wanted to bring this little bit of anecdotal evidence and have Mr. Harris perhaps comment on it.

MR. HARRIS: I don't have much comment, except it's very interesting.

MR. BARTELS: That plane got to the runway.

MR. HARRIS: Was it some outside group that they were working on behalf of, or the Bush-Cheney campaign?

QUESTION: No, my understanding was that the group that was organizing for the amendment in Ohio contacted these people and flew -- [inaudible] flew them out, and these people participated for a whole week.

QUESTION: Hi. Kenny Green, University of Texas at Austin. Quick question about the Hispanic vote. How important was it? And Larry in particular, do you believe the +12 margin for Bush that you reported from the exit surveys? At least one pollster in Florida thinks that the Hispanic vote for non-Cubans was under-counted in 2000, and therefore the direction of that was reversed, that Kerry picked up more Hispanic votes just because [inaudible]. So I'm wondering overall how important the Hispanic vote is and whether you think this accurately reflects what happened in 2004?

MR. BARTELS: I don't have any very detailed sense of the 12 percent number. The kinds of problems that the exit polls have are certainly problems that would plausibly disproportionately affect the Hispanic vote. On the other hand, this

movement is consistent with the longer-term trend in the Republican direction, although still some ways away from being a Republican plurality among Hispanics, movement in the Republican direction over a period of time. So, you know, it may not be 12 percent, but it certainly is plausible that there was more movement in that direction in this election cycle.

How much difference did that make in terms of the overall, well, I guess something like 8 percent of the electorate now is Hispanic, so if you multiply 8 percent by 12 percent, you're talking about something close to 1 percentage point of Bush's 3 percent vote gain overall.

MR. MANN: It's fascinating. There is a research institute that did its own exclusively Hispanic exit poll in 14 states where the vast majority of Hispanic voters are clustered. And they ended up with a 68 percent vote for Kerry among Hispanics, and that was more consistent with pre-election surveys that hadn't shown this movement. On the other hand, within the exit polls, there was a doubling of the percentage of Hispanics who took the most restrictive position on abortion, which was really fascinating. You don't usually see this kind of movement on an issue like this. But the Hispanic population is increasing, and the people that are new voters are not young voters. There are people who are qualifying for citizenship after a number of years here. It may be they're more religiously and culturally conservative and therefore the change the exit polls picked up is real.

I think this is a major question for research. It has enormous political implications, and we'll be tracking this for some time to come.

Willy? [ph]

QUESTION: [Off microphone, inaudible.]

MR. MANN: Willy, pick that mike up.

QUESTION: --would have had to carry to get 64 percent in the South as a whole. And it turns out to be like over 100 percent. So there are some strange things with this that don't quite add up. And I just--you know, I don't have a position on this myself, but I just sort of thought it was an interesting dimension, is how on earth could those figures be so high.

MR. MANN: Thank you. That's very helpful. Gary.

QUESTION: Thanks. Gary Mitchell from The Mitchell Report. I want to pose a hypothesis about mandate. And it really sort of springs off John Harris's point about Bush being the candidate of force and Kerry being the candidate of persuasion. And I guess the hypothesis is this, which I'd love to get some reactions to, that when Bush says we've got a mandate, what he really means the mandate is not issue-driven or policy-related, it's a way of governing.

That's the first part of the hypothesis. The second part of the hypothesis is that in fact that's what won at the margins, that the people who voted for Bush and who made the difference--as opposed to the ones that were already committed--the people who in the final analysis say I like the way this guy governs. It's not that I like what's going on in Iraq, not that I even like what's going on in the economy.

It's a sort of winner-takes-all approach.

MR. HARRIS: You should write an op ed or Outlook piece. That far better stated what I'm trying to say. That's exactly what I believe.

MR. MANN: Jim or Larry?

MR. STIMSON: I want to say a final word on mandate that's only partially responsive to the question. That is, to add to what Sarah has said, the real issue

on mandate is not what the Republicans are going to do--they're going to vote for the Bush program. The real issue is, if there's a mandate, then Democrats are going to join them. And 55 votes is enough to pass everything in the entire Bush program if Democrats behave the way they did in 1981. When they were terrified that they're on the wrong side of the national message, they're going to join with the Republicans in large numbers. I don't think that's going to happen, but that's where the mandate issue comes down.

MR. MANN: So it really is about the minority party and whether they accept it. Wouldn't you also say it's conditioned in part by whether or not a consensus develops in the press and the broader political community—

MR. STIMSON: Yes, indeed.

MR. MANN: —about whether it's for real or not for real?

MR. STIMSON: Exactly. If there's debate, nothing happens. If there's no debate and Democrats are going to be terrified, start planning your Social Security accounts.

MR. MANN: We're 15 minutes over time. I'm wondering whether any of our panelists would like to make any closing observations? Not required, but I wanted to give you—

MR. BARTELS: Can I make just one?

MR. MANN: Yeah, please.

MR. HARRIS: It's really just a question, that I wish these guys in their writings would answer. It was never clear in the course of this election how many votes were truly up for grabs. There was one analyst who said, you know what, the number of swing voters has shrunk. Maybe it used to be 15 percent in conventional years; this is

not conventional; it's really more like 5 or 8 or something like that. And then at certain points we would see wide swings in the polls--like after Bush's convention in early September, and it was, you know, hey, guess what, this is maybe not so different than normal after all, perhaps there is 10, 15 percent of the people who are actually up for grabs. And I just don't have an answer to that. I don't know the answer to that question, and I wish somebody would clarify that if it's possible to do in the wake of the election.

MR. MANN: Larry?

MR. BARTELS: I don't think there's a precise numerical answer, but it certainly is the case that there's been a gradual polarization over the last 30 years that leaves fewer people in the middle than there used to be. Characteristically, the press has exaggerated that and blown it up into a huge thing this time around specifically, and tried to base an analysis on numbers that I think are wholly fabricated, about people saying that, you know, their minds are surely made up, but if you talk to them two weeks later, they say something else. Those data, I think, are not all that useful for answering this kind of question.

MR. MANN: Well, listen, I need to bring this to a close. I want to thank John and Sarah and Jim, and in particular I want to thank Larry for this collaboration over the recent months. It's been a pleasure to have these events occurring here at Brookings. The transcripts have been put up on our Web site, as this one will be. We will organize the site in a way to make it most useful to you over the longer haul.

I want to thank you all for coming to this and previous seminars.

We are adjourned.

[Whereupon, the briefing was adjourned.]

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