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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. MANN: Before we begin, I have an important announcement to make. We've actually decided to suspend this panel. All of us are going to work on trying to reach an agreement on the financial package and we'll catch up with you in a week or two.

Welcome back to Brookings for the second of our series on the election. It is a series, the second quadrennial series co-sponsored by Brookings and Princeton, and in this case, Brookings Opportunity 08 project and Princeton's Woodrow Wilson School, Center for the Study of Democratic Politics.

Larry Bartels, who directs that Center at Princeton, and I, have, as in -- with the series four years ago, put a series of five panels together, the purpose of which is to see if we can't get away from the daily events and melodrama of the campaign and the normal punditing and step back, see if there's some perspectives to be gained by drawing on the scholarship that's been done on American elections in recent years.

Two weeks ago we began by focusing on political parties and partisanship. And I'm happy to say, Larry, that one of the things we indicated is that, at that session, is that parties are, and party ID and partisanship is a bit more stable than might be suggested by some of the polling results that suggest that a disappearance of the Democratic advantage in party ID, a disappearance of the generic advantage in the

vote for Congress, and the presidency and the aftermath of the Republican convention.

Alas, we seem now to be back to a position we were in before that, and there are some fundamental forces associated with party that remain at work today. The session today will focus on the fundamentals of the economy, the war, and the incumbent President's political standing.

Two weeks hence, on October 17, we'll be discussing the issues of ideology, gender, and race. I mentioned the latter because I think for many of us, it is the one great uncertainty in this contest, and we'll see what evidence we have from the scholarly community to bring to bear on that.

Then the final seminar before the election will be on October 31, money, advertising, and mobilization. We will have a post-election seminar to explain why we were misled by that scholarship, and then look forward to the implications of the election for governance that follows. Larry and I are delighted to welcome three of our colleagues to participate in this session today. Down on my right is John Mueller. And let me warn you in advance, don't mess with him, because he is the Woody Hayes Chair of National Security Studies at the Mershon Center, and a Professor of Political Science at Ohio State University, whose early book, *War, Presidents and Public Opinion*, was an award winning and absolutely path

breaking study of war and public opinion, a subject to which he has returned in more recent times, and we're delighted to have him with us.

Robert Erikson, on my right, is a Professor of Political Science at Columbia University. Two of his books, *The Macro Polity* and *American Public Opinion*, which is now in its seventh edition, are particularly relevant to the topic at hand, and he's going to be exploring the economic dimensions of this election.

And then I will turn to our colleague, Ron Elving, Senior Washington Editor for National Public Radio News, where he directs coverage of the Capital and national politics. I've known Ron for many years. He came to Washington, then a journalist who became a congressional fellow, and then developed a Washington career at *Congressional Quarterly*, and for some years now at National Public Radio. The real question that many of us are continually asking is, how much is this election basically set pretty much in place by broad fundamental forces that define the environment for this campaign season? And alternatively, how much and in what way do campaigns matter, or are they not alternatives, but somehow compliments of one another?

It's seldom that we have an election in which all of the fundamentals appear to be working against the party of the White House. One probably has to go back to 1920 to find as decisive a set of negative conditions facing the incumbent party. Although, for those hopeful of a Republican victory, you might want to return to the election of 1876 for an

example of a discredited president, economic hard times, and some guerilla war activities in the Reconstruction south for a more optimistic take.

In any case, it's unusual to have forces like this operating so consistently and decisively. The question is, in that environment, how much can the campaign make a difference, is the campaign of the party disadvantaged by those forces? Other questions that occur, are incumbent party candidates and open seat contests less vulnerable to change, that is, since the incumbent president isn't on the ballot, but a party successor, is he really in a position to basically disassociate himself from a record of that incumbent party, which is very unpopular, and offer himself as a credible choice for change?

We are now in the midst of precisely that campaign possibly developing. As McCain appears, after calling for a solution that the country and the world's economy well-being is at stake, may well be maneuvering himself into a position with House Republicans to be an opponent of the Bush Administration, Hank Paulson, Democratic congressional leadership bailout of Wall Street. Fascinating.

What do we know from history that would indicate whether this is likely to work or not? How do we measure the fundamentals? Are there objective indicators that tell us exactly how the economy, the war, you know, the president standing will work, or are subjective measures more fundamental?

Some political scientists use second quarter change in GDP as the most useful indicator of the economy. Well, the second quarter was rather unusual. The last reading before this morning was 3.3 percent growth, which in almost all models would make the economy a plus for the incumbent party this year, but it's a little hard to believe that's true given the subjective assessments of where things stand in the financial meltdown. But I should report this morning's news that that has now been revised downward to 2.8 percent.

We run into perhaps the same problem when we look at real income growth, which tends -- which, in the shorter term, is a measure of the average, or mean, which tends to diminish any great distortions due to economic inequality, where the most wealthy segment enjoys the fruits of that economic growth.

Well, those are some of the issues we're going to deal with, the fundamentals and how they relate to the campaign now underway. Larry is going to get us started, then we're going to turn to John, to Bob, and to Ron, we'll have a little chat amongst ourselves, and then we will turn to your questions. Larry.

MR. BARTELS: Thanks, Tom. It's a pleasure, as always, to be here. I think maybe the most important difference between the journalistic world view about electoral politics and campaigns, on one hand, and the political scientist's view, on the other, has to do with a kind of discrepancy in our professional skills and interests. On one hand, the

journalist's primary interest is to convince you that you have to pay attention every day to what's happening, get up in the morning and listen to NPR in order to have an idea of how things are going and how the election is going to turn out.

On the other hand, the political scientist's interest is to convince you that the stuff that's really important is the more fundamental, long term patterns, the kinds of things that we can get out through historical comparisons and statistical analyses and analogies more or less exact with what's happened in the past.

So there's a whole industry of political scientists who have studied presidential election outcomes by looking for patterns in history, mostly in history of the post-World War II period, which is the period for which we tend to have better data on many of the kinds of factors that we think are likely to be important.

Now, some political scientists look at these patterns and try and make judgments about the relative importance of different kinds of issues and how they might work in the current campaign context. Others are more systematic and rigorous in developing statistical analyses based on past data and extrapolating or projecting the implications of those analyses for the current year. So you've probably seen forecasts of the election outcome by political scientists based on these historical patterns. The people who do these kinds of things often will point out that they are

more accurate than the current polls in terms of trying to predict the outcome of the election.

I think, by and large, that's true, but I think the extent to which it's true is often over stated. One way to think about that is to think about the range of the forecasts. There are lots of different political scientists that are doing this, they have different precise recipes about what factors matter and how they get accumulated in order to come up with a prediction.

There was a panel at the American Political Science Association meeting last night where there were several of these forecasters presenting their predictions for what would happen in the 2008 election, and they ran from more or less a 50/50 split of the popular vote at one end up to a pretty sizeable victory for Obama in the popular vote on the other hand.

Now, obviously, not all of those predictions can be right. Each of them has some uncertainty associated with it based on the statistical analysis and the past historical patterns. But it's also the case that the variation among the predictions provides additional uncertainty about what we ought to believe. Nevertheless, it seems pretty clear from the range of those analyses and the data on which they're based that this is a year in which we would expect the Democratic party to do well at the presidential level.

And so I think most political scientists, even when McCain was ahead in the polls, would have been unlikely to tell you that they thought McCain was actually likely to win the election, although certainly most political scientists have thought and still think that there's a real possibility that he will. Most would not suggest that he was the favorite at any point in the campaign.

Of the various factors that are included in these analyses, the two that turn up most regularly and I think are probably most important, they're cast in slightly different ways by different people, but one of them has to do with the economy, I'll come back to that in a moment, that's a hugely important factor in all these analyses, and probably will be this year. The other is something about the incumbent party's time in office, and it's measured in slightly different ways by different people and given different language by different people. In the context of observing what happens to the incumbent president's popularity over the course of an administration, John Mueller, in work that he did so long ago that he probably doesn't remember it, referred to a coalition of minorities effect, the fact that as presidents make policy, popular policy proposals, go off the agenda, and the president's popularity, on average, decreases substantially over the course of his administration.

There's a kind of analog if you look at incumbent parties rather than individual presidents, which is to say that the longer the

incumbent party has been in power, the harder it is for them to manage to get re-elected for another term.

In the immediate wake of the 2004 election, people were wringing their hands about whether the Democratic party was over, whether they would ever come back. I was on a radio interview right after the election and somebody asked me about this, and I said, kind of flippily, well, I thought the only thing the Democratic party needed to regain its majority status was four more years of George W. Bush. And I think people interpreted that as a partisan knock on the President, but I didn't really mean it as that so much as a reference to this pretty strong historical pattern, that the longer a party has been in power, the harder it is for them to keep together a majority coalition given all the things that are out there in the world to fracture the coalition.

Popular policies get enacted and go off the agenda; unpopular policies fail and renown to the disadvantage of the President in terms of his standing. The 18 people who are running the government tend to get burned out and leave and get replaced by the B Team people, who, on average, are probably not as good.

There are scandals that kind of accumulate the longer a party has been in power. And on the other hand, the out party gets increasingly desperate to get back in and increasingly likely to do what they think is necessary in order to appeal to the public in order to get back in.

So all of those factors tend to produce a decline in the incumbent party's support the longer it's been in office. And now, having been in office for eight years, the Republicans are faced with that problem. That I think helps to account, in part, for McCain's strategy of trying to burnish his maverick brand and try to disassociate himself from the President and use his standing as an independent and a maverick to try to down play the extent to which the McCain Administration would be a continuation of the current Republican regime.

The other factor that appears in all of these statistical analyses that political scientists do is the economy. And there are various precise ways of measuring economic forces; some focus on overall economic growth, GDP growth, some focus more specifically on income growth, some focus on subjective assessments on the part of citizens about how the economy is going. But they all agree that the state of the economy is really an important factor and that it's very hard for the incumbent party to get re-elected when economic conditions are bad, and on the other hand, that it's very hard for the out party to get in if the economy seems to be flourishing.

That's certainly another big drag for the Republicans in 2008, although, again, the extent to which McCain succeeds in disassociating himself from the Bush Administration on that score will be an interesting factor in accounting for what happens in November. I agree with Tom that the temptation for McCain to disassociate himself in a very

dramatic way from the Bush Administration on the bail out plan will be important in trying to think about what happens between now and election day. But there's one other thing that I want to say about these economic effects.

If you step back and think about what the implications of these broad patterns are for the way we think about elections and how they work to enforce Democratic accountability, the political scientists who have been doing these analyses often think of them as evidence that the system of accountability works pretty well. If the country is in good shape, the incumbent party is likely to be re-elected; if the country is in bad shape, the incumbent party is likely to get booted out and replaced with the opposition party.

And so there's a real incentive there for the incumbents to do whatever they can to make the economy flourish and to make sure the country is in good shape.

But what these analysts often overlook is the time frame in which voters seem to be assessing the state of the economy, particularly and probably the state of the country more generally. All of these analyses focus on economic conditions in the election year, even some fraction of the election year. Tom referred to analyses that focus on the second quarter of the election year and how things look at that particular moment in time. None of these analyses focus on the incumbent party's economic performance over its entire term in office, because it turns out

that voters are much less sensitive to that than they are to how things are going now. They seem to be very myopic and present focused in their assessment of the economy.

And it seems to me that that has some potentially troubling implications for this relationship of political accountability. For one thing, it creates incentives for the incumbents to produce economic success in the short term, even if it has longer term negative implications. But for another thing, it suggests that a party that is successful at producing economic growth at election time is likely to be rewarded for that even if they're not so good at producing economic growth over the long haul.

And as it turns out, if you look over the course of the last 60 years at the relative performance of the two political parties on the economic front, there's a pretty significant advantage for Democratic presidents over Republican presidents in terms of overall economic growth and particularly for income growth for middle income and poor people, except in presidential election years. If you look at presidential election years, actually Republican presidents have done substantially better than Democratic presidents have.

And so the fact that voters focus on what happens in the election year rather than on the incumbent administration's entire record, it turns out to produce a very substantial partisan bias in economic accountability and a substantial advantage specifically for Republicans.

Over this entire period, the average Republican vote has been about three percentage points greater than it would have been if voters were applying the same kinds of economic judgments to the entire record of each administration rather than to what they see around them at the time they go to the polls in November.

But that's an instance in which this year is uncharacteristic, as well, whereas the usual pattern is that Republicans preside over relatively low economic growth through most of their terms, but then the economy picks up at election time. This year there doesn't seem to be any election year boom on the horizon, and so that's going to be a considerable drag on Republican prospects in November, and unlike in many years, when the short term evaluation is politically quite different from the long term evaluation. In this case we have a situation where Republicans are going to be held accountable for the entire record of the administration in a way that's relatively atypical in our electoral history. Thanks.

MR. MANN: Thank you, Larry. John, the beginning of this election season featured a public and candidate focus on the war in Iraq, but that seems to have changed; does it remain an important factor in 2008?

MR. MUELLER: It seems less, to me. You talked about broad fundamental factors, and it seems to me that, in many respects, the

war, wars in general, in fact, foreign policy, in general, tend not to be broad fundamental factors, unlike the economy.

There's sort of two aspects of this; one is that Americans have sort of an attention deficit disorder with respect to foreign policy, including wars. Gable Omen once referred to this in the '50's as a rubber band effect. What Americans want to talk about and think about is domestic things, you know, racial problems or the economy in particular, unemployment, labor, strife, and so forth. And then from time to time you have something that pulls that attention away, a foreign policy dispute of some sort, like World War II. And then when the war is over, it snaps back to where it was, so that in 1946, no one was talking about foreign policy. And for most of the period since World War II for which you have polls, you get this sort of effect. Vietnam pulled attention away as soon as it was over, which is the bases in 1973, when John McCain came back with 500 other people from the -- the war was still going on in some respect, but the United States was out of it, it snapped back down.

And also, between 1973 and 2001, there's almost no attention anywhere to foreign policy, with three exceptions. One was the hostage crisis in Iran, which is very spike like; another was, in the early '80's, with Reagan and the concern about nuclear war might happen; and the third was the first Gulf War in 1990/'91, otherwise, it's been very low. Now, obviously, it came back after 911 and also with the war in Iraq. But I

think there's a tendency, once it happens, once that is over, people tend to forget about it, and there are several consequences of this.

Let me add a second plan, one is the attention deficit disorder issue. The other is how I think they evaluate wars. The way I find most useful is that Americans basically look at wars or military ventures in general with a sort of rough cost benefit analysis. There's some benefit to the war, and then there's a cost, and the costs they're most concerned about is American deaths, American casualties.

And some causes, like getting back after the Japanese, after World War -- after Pearl Harbor, were worth a lot of casualties, bringing peace and tranquility to Somalia wasn't worth many.

So let me just give you an example of sort of a comparison of that sort. And a question was asked before the Iraq war, in 2002, people were asked, do you favor or oppose, are you in favor -- do you approve or disapprove going to war against Iraq.

In that, 58 percent of -- in that poll, in that question, 58 percent of the people said yes, they approved. When it was suggested there come be any casualties at all, the percentage in favor of going to war dropped to 49. So what you have is basically, you have fair weather supporters who are turned off very quickly by casualties. Then it was said, not any, but 100 to be killed, it dropped off another three percent; if you change it from 100 to 500, it dropped off another three percent. In other words, what's happening is, the decline is slowing. Interestingly, they

asked would you approve or disapprove the war if 5,000 Americans died, and in that poll, it came out to be 32 percent of the people approved. We are now at 4,000 Americans dead, and the comparable question is registering at 33 percent, so it's basically right on in that respect.

A different comparison is with Bosnia, which people didn't think was very important. They hardly ever paid any attention to what's going on in Bosnia, except when American troops are being sent in 1995. And the question was, would you favor sending troops to -- American troops to Bosnia if none were killed, and the question said, yeah, 67 percent said yes.

Then they said, would you approve it if 25 were killed, and the percentage in favor dropped to 31. In other words, they're willing to do it, but not if it actually cost any kind of lives really.

So what you get is these two effects; one is forgetting about it when it's over, and the other is this decline of support as things go on. So from a president's standpoint, he doesn't really need public opinion support to go into wars, but when he goes into the wars, he has to be able to accomplish the goal of the war, it seems to me, at a cost which is acceptable to the American people. So what happens at the beginning of a war, there's a rally around the flag effect as the troops are sent in, and then there's decline and erosion.

If the war goes on too badly, then basically the effect happens at the polls, so that in the case of Korea, basically it destroyed

Truman, Vietnam destroyed Johnson, Iraq basically destroyed Bush, he barely won in 2004; obviously, he would have been much better if the war hadn't been on, because this foreign policy stuff would be entirely about terrorism, which is doing extremely well, and Afghanistan, which looked fantastically good at that time, it's changed since.

And in another arena, the war in Iraq destroyed probably the most effective politician Britain has ever had, Tony Blair. So eventually, if you just continue it on and you reach the point where people don't think it's worth the cost anymore, you get that kind of reaction.

Interestingly, though, what you can do is, people talk about Americans being casualty phobic or defeat phobic, and that doesn't seem to be the case. I think Americans, because they don't care that much about foreign policy, are perfectly willing to accept defeat, even ignominious defeat, if you get out at a time when the casualties are still low. So Ronald Reagan sent troops into Lebanon in 1982; 280 or so were killed in a terrorist bomb, 1983, in 1984, he pulled them out, a humiliating fiasco, the election in 1984 came by and no one could even remember Lebanon. And when you ask people, they said, well, it was a good idea, it didn't work, and so too bad those guys died, but they basically took it in stride.

Similarly, a thing happened with Somalia. No one really wanted to spend lives to save even hundreds of thousands of people in Somalia. Clinton had this thing in October, 1993, where about 19

Americans were killed, six months later he pulled the troops out, another sort of humiliating failure. But when the election in 1996 comes up, it doesn't even register.

And the most impressive achievement of this is in Vietnam. Gerald Ford presided over total debacle in Vietnam in 1975. The next year he's running for re-election in 1976, and he brought it up, he said, when I came into office, we were still involved in a war in Vietnam, now no American is fighting anywhere in the world, vote for me. In other words, he's taking credit for a total debacle. I don't think that necessarily helped him in the election, but the fact that he's willing to say — that was in a prepared statement in one of the debates. And it's also the case that because of this attention deficit disorder, there's not much gained from political — there's not much political gain from success in wars.

We have an incredibly spectacular example, which is the first Bush war, the first Gulf War with George Bush, the first. It was a spectacular success. And he was, you know, he was the driver in it, in March, 1991, and his popularity ratings went, you know, astronomical.

In fact, all his ratings went up at the end of the war, not only how's he doing in foreign policy, how's he doing in the war in Iraq, how's he doing on the economy, how's he doing on the drug problem, how's he doing in foreign policy in Latin America, how's he doing in keeping taxes down, everybody said, great. There's even a question that said how's he doing at keeping us out of war, and people said terrific.

But what happened was, literally within days of the end of the war, his ratings for handling the economy dropped to where they had been before the war, and that, of course, ultimately doomed him, and he kept trying to remind people of the war, and it didn't work, people said we know about the war, that's all history, tell us about the economy, so there's that effect. Let me just add a few sort of specific things about particularly the current war.

What's happened in Iraq over the last year is that there's been, of course, an erosion of support for the war, but over the last year there's been a considerable increase in the number of people who think the war is going well.

For example, the surge is making things better, in the last year it's gone from 30 percent to 46 percent, U.S. is winning the war, it's gone from 21 percent to 37 percent, the United States is making significant progress, it went from 36 to 46 percent.

Nonetheless, the evaluations of the war haven't changed, so that those favoring the war, those who say that the war has been worth it, war was the right decision, war was a mistake or not a mistake, the approving of Bush handling of the war haven't changed much at all.

So what you can have is, increased support for the war in the sense that, not necessarily support, but increased belief that the war is going well, but it fits this casualty thing. Basically, if you've already decided the war isn't worth the number of casualties that have been

suffered, then the fact that the war starts to go better still means it's a bad deal. In other words, if you buy a car for twice as much as it's worth, you may come eventually to like the car, but you still think it was a bad deal. And so I think that's basically the phenomenon that goes on.

Now, what's also happening currently, however, and it fits in some of the things that I've been saying, is that casualties are going down to the point where they're almost zero, American casualties.

And so you get in kind of a peculiar situation, because if you're talking about the war in Iraq, you can't bring those guys, those people who have died back to life, obviously, but to stay in Iraq, it looks like it won't cost very many American lives, in which case it becomes -- I don't know if people approve the war or support the war, but they basically tolerate the war.

And so it may very well be right that John McCain is right when he says we can stay there 100 years as long as the Americans aren't being killed. Basically, if Americans aren't being killed, no one cares in the least where they are. Are they at Ft. Dix, are they in Iraq, are they in Korea, are they in Europe? If they're not being killed, they won't even pay any attention. Are they in Bosnia? Who knows. Are they still there? Who knows.

So consequently, you may have a situation where there's a sort of tolerance for continuing the war because the Americans aren't

being killed, or if they have to be in Iraq, you know, so what. Let me make -- do I have time for two final points, Tom?

MR. MANN: Yes, please.

MR. MUELLER: Okay. Let me make a point about the anti-war movement and then also about Afghanistan, which is interesting and obviously a growing issue, though presumably not particular with the election. People argue there hasn't been much of an anti-war movement in Iraq and I think that's just not true.

I looked at lot at the anti-war movement during Vietnam and it was mostly -- what the anti-war movement in Vietnam was trying to do is change public opinion, and it didn't do that, I don't think it needed to, because basically the facts of the war, namely increasingly casualties, were enough to cause a decline of support for the war, so it didn't need additional aspect. And furthermore, the anti-war movement may have been almost counterproductive in the sense it got associated with alienation of American values and so forth. For example, during the police riots at the Democratic convention in 1968, in which it was covered by the press very favorable to the protestors, and you saw the Chicago police bashing the protestors, and the polls were asked about the protestors, and the question was, put anti-war protestors on a scale somewhere between zero and 100, 35 percent of the American population put them at zero.

Hitler would have done probably worse, but not a whole lot worse, and only 16 percent put them any place in the top half, so they had that --

so basically that's -- I think that sort of encapsulates the situation. Huge numbers of people thought that the Chicago police should have hit them harder. That was a very common reaction.

In this war, basically there's been an anti-war movement that it hasn't been that kind of anti-war movement, instead it's been a smart one, in my view, from their own perspective. Namely, it's worked within the Democratic party, playing the game, finding out where there were seats in the House and in the Senate where you could get say an anti-war candidate, preferably one who is an Iraq veteran that could speak well and so forth, and you pump money into that, and you don't play around with, you know, seats, they're solidly Republican, all that kind of stuff. And the 2006 election was a triumph in that respect. The democrats did extremely well, both in the House, and they actually took the Senate, which was very questionable.

Now, the anti-war people are not totally happy because they didn't get enough votes basically to change the situation, but nonetheless, the progress, the real effect is really quite extensive.

Okay. Finally let me say a bit about Afghanistan. That's tied in. I mean Afghanistan is not very important in its own sense from the standpoint of the American people, I don't think, it's a, you know, far away country about whom we know nothing, to use a famous phrase from the 1930's, but it is tied into the war on terror, and that seems to be very

highly supported even though people are not paying that much attention to it.

In many respects, 911 was a lot like Pearl Harbor. There's a lot of huge, obvious differences. But in many respects, from a public opinion standpoint, the sense of outrage and fury, anger at that was very similar to after Pearl Harbor. And so there was -- when the United States went into Afghanistan, which was tied into that, there was a fantastic amount of support for that. For example, I can give you precise numbers on this, using exactly the same question, the percent -- at the beginning of the wars in Vietnam, Korea, and Iraq, the percentage -- as the troops were being sent in, the support levels were about 65 percent -- 75 percent, sorry, 75 percent, and then it came down from that.

For the war in Afghanistan, it was over 90 percent. And also, people were asked at the time -- unfortunately, there hasn't been very much polling on Afghanistan because it got engulfed in terms of attention, obviously, by the Iraq war, but polls in the early days indicated -- when you asked people, it might cost 10 -- 20,000 lives to win this war, is it worth it, people said yes, almost certainly the kind of numbers you'd get after Pearl Harbor. If we get the Japanese, it's going to cost tens of thousands of lives, do you still support it, people would say, almost certainly would have said yes. And so it's a special kind of category.

Now, whether that's going to decline, it's still -- the support for the war in Afghanistan is still substantially higher than the war in Iraq.

But also, of course, there have been far fewer casualties, American casualties, in the war in Afghanistan. And there's some — they finally re-asked some of those questions, and there's something of a decline in support, a noticeable decline, though, not massive, within the last six months or so, so that may fit that. Okay. Let me end on that. There's a few other things I want to say, but we can get them in the discussion.

MR. MANN: Thank you very much, John, that was fascinating. Now this minor topic of the economy, Bob.

MR. ERIKSON: Okay. The economy; before I do that, let me just raise the question in the first place of, what do we mean by the electoral fundamentals here, and, of course, we mean the kinds of things going into the campaign that — without considering the candidates that should pay one party over the other, and the residue will say that's the campaign itself.

And so another way of thinking about it would be that the fundamentals represent the cards that the candidates are dealt and the campaign represents how they play those cards. And obviously the economy is an important part of it. Let me just list all the things that seemingly favor the democrats. Maybe I'll suggest one that favors the Republicans. Of course, we can start with the fact that's already been mentioned, that after two or more terms in office, a party is generally kicked out of power, and that's — we should look at recent history and see how frequently that has been the case.

It happened in -- going back in the post-war period, it happened in 19 -- well, starting with 1952, it's a good place to start, when the democrats were kicked out, Eisenhower, the Republican, took over. 1960, after two terms, a democrat; 1968, after two terms, a Republican, Nixon; 1976, Carter; 1992, of course, when Clinton defeated Bush; 2000, when the second Bush beat Gore.

The one exception was when the first Bush beat the caucus. So it's six out of seven times when a party has been in power, two or more times when it lost. And it's not just a coincidence, there's reasons why that's true and we should take that into account.

And the second reason, of course, is, we can take into account the unpopular war which just was mentioned. At least earlier in the year, that was -- we thought that was going to be a big issue which could doom the Republicans. And we have an unpopular President, who would be lucky, in a given poll, to reach 30 percent approval. And whether or not the President is running for re-election, a 30 percent approval rate is a very poor sign for the party getting re-elected. And then we turn to the economy, of course, which we'll talk about, and the economy, of course, was looking poor from the perspective even earlier in this year, and, of course, potentially dire from today's perspective.

And there are a couple other indicators which rarely favor the democrats going in. One is party identification, where for a decade or

two, the democrats have been well below the historic average in terms of strength, in terms of party identification.

And clearly during the Bush years, they've been gaining — finally gaining in party identification, so they're back near their historic average in terms of strength versus the Republicans.

So clearly, most people and most voters would be democrats going into the 2008 election, whereas even the 2004 election, according to exit polls, the parties were even. But the democrats have that advantage in terms of party identification today. And finally, another advantage to the democrats is that the electorates, let's call it policy mood, to use a term of my colleague, Jim Stinson, policy mood is in the liberal direction these days. In other words, if we follow public opinion polls over time, sometimes the electorates seems more conservative, sometimes more liberal, well, it's been tilting more liberal recently, and maybe we'll get a chance to explain why that would be the case.

If there's one thing that sort of works in the fundamental to favor the Republicans, and not everybody agree, maybe I'll just throw this out, it is the fact that the Congress is held by the democrats, so that basically, a certain portion of the electorate would probably prefer a divided government as opposed to a unified government.

And so just consider the mental experiment, what if the Republicans still held Congress, would McCain still be as attractive a choice to voters in the middle? If that were the case, then he might be

now with the democrats almost certain to control Congress during next year. And that's one force that might work in the Republicans favor, but everything else we can think of -- everything else that we can think of works the other way.

And so one way of thinking about it, if you really believe that fundamentals are important, you can look at the election the following way, which is something I said at a public forum in January. I don't know whether this will turn out to be true or not, but this is what I said. I said, if as likely the economy stays in poor shape, and the war is still a drag in Iraq, then Obama should win. And what's going to happen, and how are people going to interpret that, they're going to say, well, Obama ran a great race, McCain ran a terrible race, but it really was the fundamentals.

Alternatively, less likely, the war turns into a political bonus for McCain, and if the economy were to turn around and be in good shape by election day, McCain would win, and we'd say, boy, he ran a good campaign and Obama ran a terrible campaign.

And so if you really believe in the fundamentals, and I tend to, but with some skepticism, then you can say they might really be partially driving the election and not the campaign itself, except for the fact that the campaign also brings the fundamentals to the voters, so we'll see that, at the beginning of the campaign, the voters might not be responding to the fundamentals in terms of public opinion polls, let's say, but maybe by the end of the election season, by November, they are. So the

campaign helps to bring that result about. So let me say a few words about the economy. And hopefully many of you have a set of charts in front of you and might want to refer to that, and I'll try to explain for those who might not have one.

On the front page, there is a graph, which is not mine, but it is a graph by the political scientist, Douglas Hibbs, from the so called Gret and Piece Model. And you see there, you see a scatter plot of a relationship where, on horizontal or XX, this would see a measure of the economic growth as measured by per capita income, which I'll explain.

And on the YX, we have the vote percentage for the incumbent party. And if you look at that labeled figure one, most of the observations fall fairly much in a straight line. I should say something about what that XX represents, it represents the -- it's a weighted average of the economy through the first 15 quarters of the administration, that is, of the per capita income over the first 15 quarters, where each quarter is weighed 1.25 times the previous quarter, so recent quarters count the most, but earlier quarters count somewhat. And so for most of the elections, going back from 1952 through '04, that's 14 cases. For most of those elections, they're pretty close to that line. So you might say, well, the economy is a pretty good predictor, obviously not a perfect predictor, I wouldn't claim that, but a pretty good predictor of the vote.

And we also see two outliers on this graph represented by those two diamonds, which are 1968 and 1952, and, of course, those

represent unpopular wars. So if Iraq were to fit into that category for 2008, the observation for 2008 would be a little bit below the prediction from that solid line, and there would be an extra panel beyond bad economy.

So we could ask where is the electorate in 2008; according to this measure, this Hibbs measure of weighted per capita disposal income. And we're in the third quarter today, so we don't have the third quarter data yet, the third quarter of the election year.

If we go back to the first quarter of the election year, the reading of that table would be about a .6, which you can -- if you have the table in front of you, that would be slightly better than 1992, but not much, which would be the -- when the first Bush lost to Clinton. If you look at the second quarter, however, as Tom mentioned, there is a big growth spurt, including per capita income, which would put the overall indicator just above two, although, as I just learned this morning, that was revised downward, so I don't know really what the number -- what the cumulative number really is.

But the reason for that, why we want to discount that is, that was -- there's general agreement that was almost entirely due to the tax rebate. So we probably want to consider the ultimate number to be closer to the .6 I mentioned earlier, which -- and, of course, it will be interesting to see the third quarter numbers finally.

And so we have -- one impression from this graph that the economy matters certainly, and probably taking into account the war, we

can sort of get a mental picture of how, from that graph, of how these factors might work in 2008.

And another way, maybe a more satisfactory way of looking at the economy is not by some kind of actual measure of the objective economy, which is really out there, but what voters see. And there are surveys of voter satisfaction, particularly the work by, for example, the work at the University of Michigan measuring the index of consumer sentiment, which has many components. And if you turn to the second page with two graphs here, then looking at the top graph, the XX here represents a measure of voters' perception to the past economy over the past year. Basically, people are asked in the consumer sentiment surveys, has the economy gotten better, stayed the same, or gotten worse over the past year. And it's a scale from zero to 200, where 100 being neutral. And so we see the record from the past and how well it predicts the vote.

Now, that graph might not be particularly impressive, except suppose we look -- only to elections from 1980 through 2004, that's seven elections, and almost all of them are exactly on that same line. You can see how it might be a straight line production, where you almost get the impression that the economy is almost like a deterministic force predicting the outcome, or perceptions of the economy in October are almost a deterministic force.

But there's at least one outlier looking at 2000. We see where 2000 does not fit on that line, where everybody was predicting, people like me were predicting that Gore ought to win because the economy is good, but, of course, he did not, and so that's when election forecasters really failed. So these models can fail, but often they give you an impression that there are forces at work where the economy is very much a predictor of the election outcome. And it's interesting to see how the role in the economy evolves over the campaign, because we could also look at perceptions of the economy as early as -- earlier in the year, for example. The earliest we'd want to look at might be April of the election year, because that's, in the past, it's usually not until April where we could guarantee that there were polls about the choice between the eventual to major party candidates for president.

And what you find if you relate the consumer sentiment, or in this case, the perceptions a bit of recent business conditions, in April of the election year, with what the poll said to vote in election year, you look at that second graph on that table, of this page, and you see there's basically no relationship between the economy, as perceived in April of the election year, and the what the polls show the vote to be in April of election year, virtually nothing at all.

And somehow you go from April to October, and then November, and the effects of the economy crystallize over the course of that period. So this is very interesting. Now, to focus on the economy, we

might ask, well, okay, the subsidiary questions we might ask, some have been raised, like, for example, can a president boost the economy in a short term, in an election year, so that my voters would respond and support, and political scientists disagree on the importance of that, so it's still a matter of debate.

One thing that is interesting is that, in terms of subjective indicators, it's my view that perceptions of the economy do not necessarily grow on average over the election year; perceptions of the past economy don't necessarily grow. In other words, people don't necessarily keep thinking that the economy has been getting better, but expectations of the future economy grow during the election year.

And I think the best interpretation of that fact, in other words, that fact being that the more you go on during an election year, the better the people say the economy is going to be; the best reason is that when the economy is going bad, the people expect the incumbents to be thrown out.

So, for example, let's say in -- when Clinton over threw Bush, for example, the expectations about the future economy were improving, in large part through the expectations that the democrats are going to take over and the Republicans are going to be replaced. And so that's one way that the election cycle actually improves peoples outlook about the election in any case. And then you can ask the question, and

it's an interesting question, is that true. In other words, when you change parties, does the economy get better.

So we have one pattern, one part of the equation where the economy — if the economy is good, keep the rascals in, if the economy is bad, you throw them out. When you throw them out, does that work? And the answer would seem to be yes, in the sense that almost always when you change parties, you have four years of prosperity.

Going back in recent history, under Eisenhower, under Kennedy, Johnson, under Nixon, certainly under Clinton, the exceptions would be, or the arguable exceptions would be Carter certainly, where the economy did not turn about, perhaps Carter was the accidental president due to Watergate, and, of course, we can say Bush two was the accidental president due to butterfly ballots or something.

But there is a pattern. One reason perhaps why presidents tend to get re-elected in the first place, and this may not have been Bush's reason, but the economy generally is going fairly well, so that could — presidents tend to get — not only get re-elected, but re-elected by a comfortable margin. Bush's margin, of course, in 2004 was not very comfortable, but through other reasons like perhaps the residue of 911 that allowed him to win despite that.

So maybe the electorate, as a macroeconomist in charge, know what they're doing. On the other hand, it's worth considering the possibility that it's all just an illusion, that — I'm not arguing this, but I'll say

-- throw it out there that maybe things -- when things go bad, they naturally rebound, and just the same way if -- the same argument, let's say if you hurt your back and go to a chiropractor, let's assume the chiropractor doesn't work, but your bad back is going to get better by itself, and you attribute the bounce back to going to the chiropractor, perhaps the same argument, by changing the team in charge, it looks like it created the bounce back, although maybe the economy bounced back on its own.

That's an interesting question for research. And I tend to think that maybe the electorate does, in its wisdom, know what it's doing in terms of playing a role and throwing one party out or keeping it empowered. So let me also mention a few other factors, if I have time to --

MR. MANN: Just a couple minutes.

MR. ERIKSON: A couple minutes, okay. So one is party identification, and I've mentioned that again because I have a graph that shows that, shows party identification over time, and you might want to take a look at that, where partisanship, on an annual basis, from 1944 through the present, so you can see that there's been ups and downs in terms of Democratic strength, in terms of the electorate.

Almost always the democrats have more supporters than Republicans, but the amount varies to almost even to a quite lop sided majority. And you can see from that graph what I was saying earlier, how the democrats are regaining strength.

And the second graph here represents what I mentioned earlier, Stinson's measure of the political mood, which is based on all the public opinion polls you could find that deal with questions of public policy, domestic policy, and averaging them out while adjusting for the particular question and question wording a particular item. So it's supposedly a measure about how, on any given opinion item representing public policy, how opinions are going up and down over the year, sort of a composite measure in this. And up in this -- as this graph is measured, it means liberal, and down means conservative. So we can see that the electorate was -- became more -- if you follow this graph carefully, you can see that generally under Republican presidents, the electorate becomes more liberal; under Democratic presidents, the electorate becomes more conservative.

And our interpretation, Jim's and mine, is that the -- is that the electorate is responding to the policy under the given president. So, in other words, there may be a -- let's say there's a demand for more liberal policy, so as a result, the electorate in a liberal mood elects democrats, and the policy -- then once the Democratic or liberal policies are at force, like under the great society, let's say, the demand for further liberalism is lessened, and so the electorate becomes less liberal in that sense, hence, better news for the Republicans.

So there's a trade off in terms of cost for a party, in terms of putting its preferred policies -- for enacting its preferred policies. It gets

the policy benefit, but it loses electorally by doing so. And both mood, as measured here, and the partisanship do matter in terms of predicting elections. We can get very good equations, a very good prediction predicting elections for those two — using those two variables. And it's not obvious that's the case, that partisanship predicts the election outcome, or that mood does, because they're often not in phase, that they're, in fact, negatively correlated over time, which is interesting.

So that typically, more often than not, the electorate is liberal while it's Republican or conservative while it's Democratic, so they're out of phase for a variety of reasons, so you don't get a concrete prediction, but when they are in phase, as they seem to be now, more liberal and more Democratic, that should be a powerful predictor.

MR. MANN: Bob, thank you. Well, Ron, what do you make of all of this?

MR. ELVING: Well, Tom, I should start by thanking you for including me in this, because it's not often that we get an opportunity to sit quietly by, and I'm not sure journalists can learn, but we can listen occasionally, and there's been a great deal to learn in just the last hour, and I appreciate what all three of you have had to say. I would like to begin by saying that, with respect to all the realities that you have been describing and that are described in your papers, I would have to agree that you have a very strong grip on reality. My question is, does it matter, because while political scientists and others who are scholars tend to talk

about elections, in the plural, when it comes down to it, what we're all a bit nervous about today and what brings us into many of these kinds of rooms to talk about these subjects is one election, not elections in general.

We want to understand the science, we want to understand the fundamentals, and we certainly want to know what reality is. But then we find that the instant, immediate concern that brings people to the radio or to the newspaper or to any source of what is hoped to be information is that they want to know what's going to happen in this election.

And often times what appears in retrospect to have been a kind of inevitability or something that was dictated by large forces that we can look back on and measure and quantify and predict from, I think in each case accurately, do not necessarily apply in a given case, in an instant case. And some of the elections that we've been talking about already I think provide examples for that, and I'd like to go back and talk about a couple of those examples in a moment. But I'd like to begin by saying that there is an alternative to looking at elections rationally. There is an alternative to focusing on reality, if you will. And it would be -- I'm reminded of the conversation in the movie, A Thousand Clowns, which it's not that widely viewed these days, but an older film called A Thousand Clowns, where the responsible brother says to the irresponsible brother, you have got to get back to reality, and the prodigal son, Murray, says, I'll only go as a tourist.

In my business, in the media, in the news business, we do visit reality, but usually as a tourist. And what we are interested in is not necessarily always reality, it's the story, we want a story.

Yes, we want the facts, but what really drives the dynamic of what we do in the media is a story, what's the story, have you got a story, did he have a story, what was the story, what was the top story, what was their first story, what was the page one story. That term gets just slightly modified in the world of politics to become, because they don't like the word story, it sounds too much like they're competing with us in our side of the, if you will, divide, they prefer the term narrative, and this has become one of the buzz words of the 2008 campaign. Some of you may have heard right before the — actually, I think it was right at the end of the Republican convention in St. Paul back in September, Rick Davis, the campaign manager for John McCain saying, this campaign is really not going to be about issues, you don't often hear a campaign manager say that on the record.

But he said, this campaign is not really going to be so much about issues, we see it as being more about narratives. And, you know, I sat bolt upright thinking not only that he had said it quite so cleanly, but that he had said it, as I say, on the record.

This is something I think is quite clearly part of the thinking of political consultants in general, certainly those who have their background

primarily in lobbying and PR, as Mr. Davis does. They frame a narrative so as to essentially sell a point of view or sell a product or sell the line.

In this particular instance, you look at what you have to work with, and given all the realities we've just heard described over the past hour, perhaps the issues were not option one, and so we look at narratives, which, given the proclivity of the media to focus on stories, another word in my mind for narratives, you can very easily segue into presenting something which works better in terms of the information that the voters are going to be receiving. Sadly, not all of the electorate is represented here this morning. Many people are getting their information more from the electronic media, broadly defined, and to some degree, still from the print media, but from some kind of media. And I'm certainly not limiting that to just the top five newspapers or the broadcast television networks, all of which, whether you want to measure it economically or in terms of audience, are shrinking and shrinking dramatically.

So people are getting their information from many other sources, including cable television, non-news broadcast television, entertaining television, a major source of information about the campaign, certainly many different kinds of the internet. And almost all of that material is driven very strongly by what I would describe as narrative coverage.

So, in a sense, part of the conflict that's going on now, and you see it played out day by day between the McCain campaign, in

particular, although the Obama campaign is doing much the same more quietly and not quite so dramatically, much of the competition is not just the old antagonism between a politician and the press, it's more a competition of framing the narrative. We're both in the same business, we're all over each other's turf, and that's part of what's making the perception of this campaign maybe a little bit different from anything that I've seen in covering presidential campaigns going back to 1976.

Which are the more compelling narratives for this election; is it McCain/Palin or is it Obama/Biden? Now, of course, to some degree, that's going to depend on your partisan pre-election as to which of these candidates you support, which ones you find more interesting. But if you can, try to pull back just for a moment and consider the effect of the narratives of these four lives that were presented at the two conventions.

And about an equal number of people, by the way, watched the two conventions. That's a little surprising, especially if you actually would have witnessed the two in person and the, if you will, show business quality of each one, with the exception perhaps of the Palin night, the Republican convention was not nearly as mediagenic, but about an equal number of people watched, and I think there's something we learned from that. Which of these two sets of narratives is more compelling to the electorate, broadly defined, and let us remember we are talking about the American electorate, and I will go so far as to say the traditional American electorate. That's to say we may see a November 4th

in which young people vote as much as older people, poor people vote as much as affluent people, and non-white people vote as much as white people. I think that would be a wonderful thing on its face, prima facie, wouldn't that be a great thing, shouldn't everyone agree, but, of course, we know that has enormous political ramifications, enormous political ramifications.

So when I say which would be more appealing to the traditional American electorate, I'm thinking of people who tend to be older, more affluent, and more likely to be white than of color.

Which of these two sets of narratives could be more easily sold from the standpoint that we all understand of sending a candidate forward into the public view? Well, I would suggest that the war hero, the survivor of the Hanoi Hilton, and the small town plucky mayor sold pretty well, pretty strongly. Of course, the story of Barack Obama, in and of itself, is extraordinarily inspiring, you don't have to be African American, you don't have to be bi-racial, you don't have to have had one immigrant parent, you don't have to have had any of the dramatic things about what makes Barack Obama different from every other presidential candidate we've ever had to appreciate the drama of his story.

The Biden story may be not quite so dramatic, but it does have its own narrative appeal. But both of those stories were already pretty well known and had already been very thoroughly, shall we say, vetted by the media over the last year, particularly the Obama story.

So the higher impact was people rediscovering John McCain, particularly people who tune in late, and people discovering, of course, this includes 99 percent of the world, Sarah Palin. So those two effects I think are rather dramatic in their contrast. That can have an effect.

And I would suggest that, in addition to the dramatic, interesting point that Bob made about the democrats being in control of Congress, both House and Senate, due to the 2006 takeover, and we can see the effects that's had in just the last 24 hours and will continue to have in the effort of John McCain to make himself the anti-incumbent party candidate and make the democrats the party of George Bush, that is not necessarily achieved yet, but it is the effort that is very much underway, think about some of the past elections and how they could have turned on slight changes in the narrative. And I'll do this very quickly.

In 1976, what if the Republicans had nominated Ronald Reagan instead of Gerald Ford? It was only a few more than 100 delegates in Kansas City, it was not beyond the pale. Ronald Reagan, very different in the debates with Jimmy Carter in the fall of 1976, and so despite all the factors that clearly favored the out party in 1976, we could have seen a revolution of the populace right a little bit ahead of schedule.

In 1980, Jimmy Carter was slightly ahead of Ronald Reagan at Labor Day in 1980. And it was only after the debate, single debate that fall, that the electorate broke decisively for Ronald Reagan. Anything that

happens that late and happens based on one debate is something that could have gone the other way; historically, that's not inevitable.

1984, a 49 state land slide; if you saw the first debate, where Ronald Reagan wandered off on a number of occasions, on a number of different subjects, people were disturbed. Time Magazine's cover after the first debate was two horses neck in neck and said, a real horse race? All because of his performance in that debate. In the second debate, he had a great quip about his age that made people laugh and seemed to diffuse the issue. But at the end of the debate, he wandered off down Highway 1, describing a drive that he had been on with his wife, totally irrelevant to the question to his summary, nobody knew where he was going, and the moderator literally cut him off and said, Mr. President, your time has expired, and he said, okay, thank you, and we did not realize what we were witnessing, but if we had witnessed it a little bit more, perhaps even if the moderator had not cut him off on that evening, the subject of Ronald Reagan's mental health might have come to light somewhat earlier; had it, it didn't, of course, and didn't come close to, but had it, would that not have been a different election.

1988, the numbers were wrong. George W. Bush should not have been elected president, according to all the historical indicators, or most of the historical indicators anyway, but the narratives were more compelling for him than for Dukakis in the end. In 1992, a lot depended on having a three way race with Ross Perot in it. Bill Clinton only won 43

percent of the vote, I believe. That was not a particularly dramatic majority, 43 percent, but it was enough, because of the circumstances of a three way race, and it was enough, again, because of a dramatic debate turn. George W. Bush did himself in, to some degree, in that debate, where he kept checking his watch.

In 2000, the indicators would have pointed to a re-election of the in party, but, of course, there were a lot of contradictory indicators in 2000, a lot of personal narrative stories. God knows, Bill Clinton never lacked for personal narrative. And it was hard to re-elect the incumbent in 2000 without thinking of some of those narratives.

2004, a very close election, as John said. We almost saw the incumbent president thrown out because of an unpopular war. He was saved, some would suggest, by poor campaign tactics on the opponent's part, and also, clearly, in the state of Ohio and a couple of other states, by the imposition, if you will, or the introduction of the gay marriage issue on a referendum that brought out a very strong turnout and turned certain traditional Democratic groups against the Democratic party and won the key state in the electoral college. In 2008, we've got a lot of indicators, but we've also got those narratives I talked about, and we have the X factor that's going to be considered at a whole different program on a subsequent Friday morning of race, and I will leave it there. Thank you.

MR. MANN: Ron, thank you. That was a very effective way of framing the topic. And really, in a sense, as we let it out at the

beginning, you know, you have a set of fundamentals that don't often times, but this time are all moving in the same direction, consistent. But then the question is, what role do campaigns play and can they play in altering those fundamentals.

So I want to put to our panelists, before we go to questions from the audience, their general reaction of whether Ron, sort of looking after the fact, imagines how it could have been different, but are you persuaded that the nomination of a particular candidate or the emergence of a third party candidate or the skill or lack of skill of a particular campaign manage to overcome the sort of powerful drag of or push of the underlying fundamentals.

So I'd like, A, to have you answer that question, and B then, just to put you on the spot, what are the probabilities that these over -- what's the probability that the overwhelming fundamentals pushing on behalf of the democrats this year can be overcome by a change in narrative and by the skill of the respective campaigns and in working with -- and playing the cards they have been dealt, to take Bob's language. So let's begin with Larry, John, Bob, and then I may offer my two cents, as well. Larry.

MR. BARTELS: Sure; I think those factors certainly matter at the margin and in the current political context where our recent presidential elections have invariably been pretty close. Obviously, any one of those or some combination of them can be decisive.

That's not to say that these fundamental factors that political scientists have focused on aren't also quite important, I think they are. And I especially want to say that it's very hard, in retrospect, to be able to assess confidently what the effects of these different debate performances and campaign strategies and so on are.

I was very struck when I learned -- many of you probably have seen, after each recent election, immediately after the election, *Newsweek* comes out with a big cover package on why, fill in the blank, won the election. And in 2004, they actually came out with a book that included a lot of analysis of why it was that Bush won the election. But before the election, they actually sent out an advertisement that had two books side by side; one was why Bush won the election and the other was why Kerry won the election. And given the times of producing these things, they actually had to produce most of the package, explaining to the readers of *Newsweek* the following week why it was that Kerry won the election.

Now, I didn't read that issue, but I'm pretty sure that if I had read that issue, the narrative of how it was that Kerry had won the election would have been about as convincing as the narrative of how it was that Bush won the election.

So after the fact, it's really easy to come up with explanations based on particular events, but to know whether those were the events that actually drove the usually pretty small deviations from the

underlying fundamentals that we observe in a particular campaign is quite difficult.

MR. MANN: John.

MR. MUELLER: Yeah; I basically -- I think I agree with that, the fundamentals are there, but if it's a very close election, a lot of things can tip it one way or the other, if you're interested about who's above or below 50 percent. I mean if you have Vladimir Putin and you've got an approval rating of 80 percent, you can do an awful lot of incompetent things in a campaign and still do it pretty good.

Some place where it almost certainly made some difference on the area I'm supposed to focus on, which is the security issue, would be with Kennedy and Nixon in 1960, something comparable to what's going on now, in some respects at least.

Nixon had a very strong foreign policy record, he had been vice president and he'd gone to a zillion countries and so forth, and what happened in the debates was, Kennedy, I don't think he won the foreign policy debate, whatever that -- winning means, but basically he showed he's on the same game, you know, he could basically handle himself in these issues.

It was very hard to see that there's any tangible difference in policy between the two candidates, but Kennedy looked pretty good, and I think basically cut away or obviated the advantage that Nixon had on that, so it was really beneficial. I suspect that -- but at that time foreign policy

was really important, because the main issue was who could handle Khrushchev and who could handle Castro, and so you really had to score on that. In the current issue, the current campaign, I don't think it's so obvious. I think the foreign policy -- is a foreign debate actually taking place today? I don't know, whatever.

But I think Obama would like to do a Kennedy, and I think he likely would, because he's a good debater, he's smart, and he's, you know, spending obviously a lot of time preparing for the foreign policy debate, and I think when he's put on the same plane as McCain, with McCain's supposed foreign policy advantage, I think he's going to look just generally, you know, he knows what he's doing, and so that will probably wipe out some of the advantage that McCain enjoys in that general area.

On the other hand, the foreign policy is not that important. There's a general thing, we've got to continue the war on terrorism, but that's, you know, if it is a war, and both parties are already in that up to their necks anyway, so it's probably not as significant as it would be, but it's certainly going to help them a little bit at least, I would suspect.

MR. MANN: Bob.

MR. ERIKSON: Ron, I enjoyed your discussion, your comments, they're provocative and interesting, and I think you're right that, obviously, we should emphasize that the fundamentals are not everything, they're just part of the equation.

I'm reminded when I was a little -- to talk about the fundamentals reminds me when I was a little kid, and I would ask my father about why the Red Sox couldn't beat the Yankees, but he explained that they were, on paper, the Red Sox were better. I always knew what he -- instantly knew what he meant by on paper, but in reality, they weren't. And so let's say that on paper, one party should win, but not necessarily always.

And let me comment on a few of those examples. Like going back to 1976, what if Ronald Reagan had been the nominee instead of Ford? I don't know what would have happened, but I don't think we would have had 1980 in advance, because in 1980, when Reagan did beat Carter, the framework was Carter's seemingly failed presidency, and the narrative in 1976 would have been much different, Reagan would have been the -- seen as the right winger, as he was in 1980, but in 1980, the electorate said that's okay, we'll take a shot. In 1976, I'm not sure that Reagan could have, particularly with a fractured party, could have beaten Carter. In 1984, let me argue both ways; you mentioned the debates between Mondale and Reagan. Of course, Reagan won the election, and the first -- you mentioned vividly Reagan's problem in the first debate and how he solved it in the second debate by simply making a crack about his opponent's age and youth and inexperience.

I mean stop and think about it, should that be sufficient? In other words, suppose that were to happen in 2008, suppose that McCain

would give a rambling first debate, if there is one, and the second debate comes back with that line, would that due?

And I think the currents were so much in the Republican direction in 1984 that -- even basically anything that Reagan did in a positive way was sufficient to coast a victory at that point.

On the other hand, to take a different example, a different what if in 1984, and this is really a stretch, but suppose Mondale had not been the candidate, but rather the Gary Hart that people thought they saw at the time, not the Gary Hart of 1988, but the Gary Hart of 1984, who was a youth and new ideas candidate, who probably matched up better against Reagan than Mondale did, and in the early polls, not that they mean that much, but in the early polls in April, Mondale couldn't beat Reagan, but according to the polls, this new guy, Hart, could, or at least some of the time, on some of the polls, and so there's a what if. It probably wouldn't have played out much differently, maybe worse, but there's a what if there anyway that maybe Hart could have done that.

And in 1992, it's common to think that Perot was a factor that hurt Bush, but I thought Perot -- it seemed to me that Perot hurt Clinton more than Bush in the sense that he -- in a couple senses, one was that, you might recall that after the democrats successful convention, Perot dropped out, and immediately there's a big surge toward Clinton in the polls, that bubble burst a little bit, it dissipated, but clearly, much of Perot's support then was going to Clinton, not to Bush at that time.

And, of course, Perot hurt Clinton in another way, it prevented Clinton from getting a true majority of the vote, and basically prevented him from having a true honeymoon, but I think he took more votes from Clinton than he did from Bush, and the outcome would not have been -- would have been more pro-Clinton if Perot had not entered, I think.

MR. MANN: Well, I can't resist weighing in, as well. Ron, you succeeded beyond any expectations in framing this discussion. I agree with my colleagues to the extent that, of course, in otherwise close elections, campaigns can make a difference at the margin.

The question I raise is, why is this assumed to be a close election, other than the fact that the polls have been relatively close at this time? What do we mean by close, do we mean one percent or less, one and a half percent or less, or do we mean five, six percent?

If it's shaping up otherwise to be a five, six percent advantage for one party, then I think the odds of the campaign narrative altering that are really quite modest. And I think, as Bob has done, if you go back, you can argue about the what-ifs and the hypotheticals in these other elections. It's not obvious that when there are strong forces operating in a consistent direction, that they can be overtaken by a different candidate, a more skillful campaign, a particular event.

Now, the reason we think it's likely to be close is, because the parties are so internally unified and polarized that we get very strong

party voting, as Larry has documented, which tends to work against the land slide. We also think that having the first racial minority as a candidate is going to lead to some narrowing of what otherwise would be a Democratic advantage. But given the direction of the fundamentals and the decisiveness of those objective and subjective, I think the presumption remains that this -- there is a clear Democratic advantage, and it would take an extraordinary narrative to alter that.

Ron referred to the McCain/Palin, the personal stories on each front, and now, secondarily, the possibility of a populous campaign against -- by McCain against the Bush Administration having a chance of altering this, but I guess I still believe reality intrudes that elections aren't so irrational, and if you follow the trajectory of Governor Palin, you see that the interest excitement has peaked and now it's coming down and the numbers who believe she is unqualified to serve as president or even vice president have really gotten quite large.

Questions about the relevance of the POW experience and temperament become important. And the ability to change course and become a populous crusader, a conservative crusader, raises questions about judgment and stability and responsibility, all of which is to say it's not just one side that has a campaign, both sides have campaigns, and presumably if Obama works with the advantage he has in the fundamentals, in terms of framing his own narrative and challenging that offered by the opposition, then the opportunities for the media to create its

own narrative that sort of drives against the fundamentals is quite limited, and it raises really the question about the power of the media to alter a natural campaign dynamic on its own. My guess is, it's much more limited than one might otherwise think.

But there you have it. We now turn to you. We have mics, and we'd be delighted to respond to your questions. Right here, please. Here's a mic.

MR. ENOYIC: Thank you. My name Mit Enoyic. I have a question about fundamentals. Why it's no fundamentals, this analogy of -- that's equality. I'll give you a very simple example. Because we elect human beings, not system, not party, it's the most important fundamental. But what does it mean, fundamental of personality to be as president? First of all, his intellect, and how we -- but it is story of this -- it's some test. One of the best tests of intellect, which is absolutely necessary to have for leadership, it's how he spends his years in college, if he was in college. And if you remember, President Bush said that -- you see, student can be president -- mistake. And it's very important, I need to say this, it's number one. What's the role of so called political science? My opinion, it's no political science at all, because political is not the science, it's an act, act to lead people. And -- but what we have, we have political history, and history is important to extract mistakes, not to repeat again, because first time mistake is tragedy, and the second time is -- it's -- in previous --

MR. MANN: We need a question now, not a statement, okay.

MR. ENOYIC: My question is very simple. What is your opinion; is it possible that C student independent -- can be selected as President of the United States?

MR. ERIKSON: The answer is, it's happened.

MR. ENOYIC: I'm sorry?

MR. ERIKSON: The correct answer would probably be that it's happened. Was Bush a C student?

MR. ENOYIC: No; I asked question. You're a scientist. I tried to find out for me.

MR. ERIKSON: Okay. So we don't know the grades of people in college, but many of these people who run for president are not known for great intellects during their college years. McCain was near the bottom of his class. Even, as I understand, even Adlai Stevenson, who, of course, never achieved the presidency, but ran as an intellectual candidate, I understand, was a C student at Princeton the day before grade inflation.

MR. MUELLER: When they had C's.

MR. ERIKSON: So I'm not sure anybody who runs for president runs on the fact that they made the Honor Roll or got A's, and it may not be necessarily a requirement for the job.

MR. MANN: For recent elections, we have a lot of information about voters' perceptions of the candidates personalities and their character. Political scientists tend not to think about those as fundamentals, because one of the things we've noticed is that those assessments of the candidates are themselves pretty sensitive to the political climate, to the partisan bias of the individual voters, but also the things like the state of the economy.

The candidates are viewed much more favorably on a whole range of personality dimensions when the economic climate favors their party. So we don't think of these really as being distinct from those fundamental factors, but as being shaped in really important ways by those fundamental factors. I just wanted to say on the issue of intelligence, if you look at this battery of traits that people are asked to rate candidates on, and look at the statistical relationship between assessments on those traits and peoples actual voting behavior, for most of them there's a pretty substantial positive correlation.

The one exception, where there's a slight negative correlation between peoples assessments of the candidates and their voting behavior is on intelligence. The next question, yeah, thank you.

SPEAKER: Thank you. This is -- with the *Washington Times*. Since we don't know whether --

MR. MANN: Speak up a little bit.

SPEAKER: Okay. -- with the *Washington Times*. Since we don't know whether there will be a debate tonight or not, I just, you know, wonder, what will it mean if we have a debate tonight or if we do not and how it is going to impact American peoples opinion. Thank you.

MR. MANN: Who would like to weigh in; John?

MR. MUELLER: Well, you know, the issue about the foreign policy thing which I mentioned before, it might have some impact. Larry and other people may have more feel for whether debates really make all that much difference. Going back somewhat to the earlier question, I mean George W. Bush seems to be the President of modern times with the least intellect as you sort of look at it. But in the debates, apparently what made a lot of difference with a lot of people is when he was asked what philosopher has influenced you most, and he said Jesus Christ, which is a bizarre answer from the standpoint of a philosopher maybe, but it really turned -- apparently turned a huge number of people on. He's just like me, he understands. So sometimes that can make some pretty important differences, I think.

SPEAKER: I'd like to just interject a moment --

MR. MANN: Yeah, please.

SPEAKER: -- of news here. There is going to be a debate tonight, and both of the candidates are going to attend.

MR. MANN: Well --

SPEAKER: That's what blackberries are for.

MR. MUELLER: What's it on?

MR. MANN: Is it going to be on foreign policy?

SPEAKER: I was just going to explain exactly what the implication would be of not having a debate.

SPEAKER: Listen, the –

SPEAKER: I'm sorry, go ahead.

MR. MANN: -- the reason we think debates are important is because they attract such huge audiences relative to other campaign activities, larger than the party conventions. And when you have 40, 50, 60, 70 million viewers, then the potential exists for those not absolutely committed to a candidate and a party to alter their views.

But remember, what you're going up against is, people who already have pretty well formed views tend to get reinforced as a consequence of it.

I'd say two things, the 1980 analogy of voters, because of the fundamentals, not wanting to return Jimmy Carter to power, but not knowing so much about Ronald Reagan and whether they could be comfortable with him seemed to break toward Reagan after the one late debate in the campaign, when he seemed somewhat reassuring as a potential commander and chief and President of the United States. So this is a case where the debate, in effect, reinforces the fundamentals. If you look for examples where the debate has worked sharply against the fundamentals, it's a little harder to find. You can find close races where

something seemed to have made a difference. You know, a good case in point would be 2000, where I was president of that debate in Boston, the first debate, actually in the front row on the side, I didn't see the two camera views, but I do know that those that were there thought Gore had pretty much wrapped up his victory, that it was a powerful performance, and with the other advantages, he would win, and scholarly studies of that suggested those who watched the debate had the same impression, but that over time, as a story took hold, a narrative took hold about that debate and how annoying Gore was and how it fit with his other tendencies towards impatience and arrogance and exaggeration, that as people got news reports of the debate, those who learned indirectly were much more inclined to see Bush as the winner, and that set in motion a dynamic that was probably quite harmful to Bush, so in that sense, debates can matter.

MR. ELVING: But -- Carter in '76, as well. The initial reaction to the debate was not nearly as negative about Ford's remark about Poland and some of the other things, but it magnified with time.

MR. MANN: Yeah, but although interesting about '76, Ron, is that that -- I mean Carter had a 30 point lead or 20 something and it just kept narrowing and narrowing in spite of the debates that may have halted the movement temporarily, but it was going inexorably toward Ford, in any case.

MR. ELVING: -- debate, I think Ford probably would have won.

MR. MANN: Jeff.

SPEAKER: That's a very rationale narrative, but it's possible that this debate would start out with a very, very different type of narrative. You have one candidate who says it was a mistake to inject presidential politics in an effort to find a solution to the economic problem in Washington, and there are a number of issues that have to be debated.

You have the other candidate who says quite the contrary. The real presidential action would have been to stay in Washington and find some bipartisan alternative to the bail out of Wall Street, which is currently under debate. Now, that would change the entire tenure of the debate, I suspect.

MR. MANN: I'm guessing what would change the tenure of the debate is if that other candidate named John McCain said what they have put together in Washington is a travesty that will do more harm than good; if everyone would have come to the table and negotiated honestly and fairly with the House Republicans, we could develop something, but this is a -- now, that would change the nature of the debate as opposed to just saying staying in Washington would have helped, I don't think that would --

SPEAKER: No; I mean --

MR. MANN: That's what you're saying.

SPEAKER: -- it would have been -- of you to say.

MR. MANN: Well, we're about to see. I mean what do we know; is there any past research suggesting that a candidate disadvantaged by say a big issue like the economy can reframe that very issue to work to his advantage?

SPEAKER: I think it's very difficult. It's easier to think of situations in which candidates who are disadvantaged by the fundamentals have succeeded in turning peoples attention to other issues where they do have an advantage. But to recast the way people are thinking about the issues where they're disadvantaged directly I think is harder.

MR. MANN: Do you agree with that?

MR. MUELLER: Yeah; that's the issue that is not brought out. What you want to do is, you've got some areas here you're strong at and weak at, and if you can change the debate so that the issue that you're already strong at are helpful, that's good. For example, in 1952, the Republicans were extremely good about making Korea into an issue. People had sort of forgotten about it in many respects, and there's really good data; in 1952, they were able to get Korea back on the agenda, which was an area without any, you know, just from start to get go they had an advantage on, so that's a common issue in politics, of course, campaigning.

MR. MANN: Yes, right here.

SPEAKER: My question is about two changes in recent times and how that might effect the fundamentals. The first is these cell phones in polling and the fact that they're not really used in polling, and also early voting and its effect on how, you know -- economy, because that seems to be the prevailing issue right now, how they view the economy in the middle of October. You know, if something changes, you can't, you know, I'm going to vote by absentee ballot, I can't change my vote if I vote early.

MR. MANN: Two important questions, cell phones and early voting. We now have some interesting work that's been done by Pugh on trying to assess the possible bias of not sampling those whose only phone is a cell phone, and what they have concluded is that the bias -- if everyone were properly represented in this survey, including cell phone only users, Obama would enjoy two to three percent higher support in the trial heats, in the polls being taken, and now a number of the major polls are building in cell phone samples into their surveys. It's worth paying attention to the ones that do and don't. But some of the major media polls are doing that, and certainly Pugh is doing it, as well. I'm not sure if Gallop is doing it.

On the early voting, as best as we can tell, the people who vote early are people who have very strong views about who they're for, and again, suggesting that there's less room for them to be tilted the other direction by developments late in the campaign.

MR. MUELLER: Yeah, I think so. Let me give you the word from Ohio, where this is highly relevant. The last election was a fiasco in terms of standing in line and so forth, and it's my strong impression that a very large number of people are voting early because of that, but it may not make much difference except it obviates the possibility of an October surprise, for example. But I was talking to a local candidate, and so I get my stuff -- he's running for judge, and he has to get all the stuff out right now, because by the time October comes around, he's afraid no one is going to be left who has to vote. That's probably an extreme issue, but in terms of campaigning, this really changes the whole complexion of what you would do. So the ultimate result may not be altered all that much.

MR. MANN: Bob.

MR. MUELLER: But it's likely to be increasing in the future.

MR. ERIKSON: On cell phones, I've seen one informal study on the web which compared surveys this year which do -- the results of polls from survey organizations that do try to get cell phone users versus those who rely on land lines. And the comparison is in the range that Tom was talking about, maybe -- two or three points, but at least a point or so. So in other words, it makes a difference in terms of what the polls report. And this is a major concern to the pollsters, of course. I've been to some of the pollsters conventions, and half of the panels of these conventions are about what to do about cell phones.

That's not my problem, but it's their problem, and I'm glad they're working on it and solving the problem.

MR. MUELLER: And it's going to be an increasing problem, obviously, too, in the future.

MR. MANN: Cell phone surveys are in a death spiral for all kinds of reasons, but that's only one of them. The quality of these samples that they're based on is really bad for all sorts of reasons. Nevertheless, they manage most of the time to produce results that are in the right ballpark, because the sorts of biases, the kinds of people that they miss, usually there isn't a strong correlation with political preferences of the people that they're missing.

On the early voting, I agree that it's unlikely to make much difference in terms of the actual outcome because the people who vote early are mostly people who are strongly committed on one side or the other. What it does do is to complicate the parties, get out the vote efforts, which, after all, are mostly aimed precisely at those people who are very loyal partisan supporters. And so if you have to get them out to vote over a period of three or four weeks rather than on election day, it makes for a much more complicated operation insofar as one party or the other has an advantage in organization in the ground game. It's likely to be reinforced by the additional complexity there.

MR. MUELLER: Well, it may work in the other direction also, that basically, if you know someone -- you call them up and you say I

already voted, then you just click them off, you never call them back, but if there's somebody who you definitely want to vote, and they're only going to vote on November 8th or whatever the hell it is, you have to keep calling, you know, nudging them and nudging them, so in some respects it makes a party issues -- the party organization problem a little bit easier. It's a huge part of the -- just forget about.

MR. MANN: Exactly; one of the priorities for campaigns is to take -- is to try to mobilize to early voting those whose choice of party or candidate is clear, but their reliability in getting to the polls is uncertain. So deliver certain votes of people who might not get there on election day is a high priority. We're way over time, but we're going to take one last question from the gentleman there, yes, please. Grab the mic, thank you.

SPEAKER: Two questions, one is fundamentals, one by -- narrative. The fundamental question -- you spoke earlier about war and the impact of war in the context of human costs -- what about --

In terms of the narrative, I'm curious about the evolution or the importance of the narrative. I suspect the narrative has always been important -- has been a factor. I wonder -- as a vehicle to effect that narrative. But I'm wondering about, now is -- one of the central themes of the election today is trust, trust in the -- coming from Ohio, all my family and friends are very distrustful of the media, totally see a reaction to the use of the media to be able to effect that narrative, and if so -- return back to the importance of fundamental.

MR. MANN: Okay. The first question, fortune, as well as blood as a cost of war, and then do narratives become more important with changes in the media.

MR. MUELLER: On that, as far as I can see, I don't know of any real study that's done, and I think it's a really interesting question. My strong impression is that money doesn't make much difference. The anti-war people in Vietnam constantly talked about how much it was costing and so forth, and as far as I can see, it didn't make much difference overall. The thing is, if people are against the war, use that as an argument, as well. Of course, they'll throw any argument that fits. But it's basically blood that matters, actually being killed. And as I indicated earlier, once people stop dying, people stop paying attention to the war, even though it may still be costing money. So that's my strong impression. But it would be really good to have somebody really study that issue, because it, you know, it might have some impact, but my strong impression, as I say, is that it doesn't have much impact.

MR. MANN: Ron.

MR. ELVING: I would guess that narratives wax and wane to some degree in proportion to party importance and things of that nature. If you're voting one way or the other and you see somebody as your party's candidate, because they're your party's nominee, then the narrative probably means a little less to you and the fundamentals that much more.

As the electorate is more atomized in time, partly because of the atomizing of the media, I think the contest over how to frame these people will become also much more difficult to organize, much more difficult to get your arms around and understand. In some respects it'll become I think more like politics in the early, even colonial, post colonial period, the early democracy of the United States, when you had lots and lots of little printing presses and much more individual personality driven journalism. That's where we're going back to, I think. I mean the great mass media of circulation model, you know, apogee being everybody in the country watching one of three networks at 6:30 every evening to get their news from Uncle Walter are one of the options back in the '60's and '70's, that's gone.

And so I think that there's going to be a much greater contest over defining the narrative, and I think it's going to be probably increasingly important to achieve that as opposed to achieve a party label. I think that's another part of what John McCain is trying to do right now.

MR. BARTELS: I want to put in a brief plug for two ongoing academic projects. One is by John Ladd at Georgetown, who studied peoples' trust in the media, their views about the credibility of the media and the impact of that on their political calculations and voting behavior, and suggest that there is a pretty strong relationship of the kind that you suggest, that people are more likely to focus on fundamental issues insofar as they distrust the media, which is, after all, very much true for the

majority of Americans. The other is a very long, ongoing project by one of the most distinguished political scientists in the country, John Zaler. He has a book that he's been writing for years and years on media politics.

One important piece of this, and I think the reason why the book hasn't really gelled yet is, an analysis of the relationship between the tone of media coverage of the candidates and the election outcome, so he measures pretty carefully the favorable or unfavorable tone of news coverage through the campaign and how that effects the election outcome.

The answer is, it doesn't very much, and so he's stuck now trying to figure out what to say in this book about media politics, when it turns out that this whole business of the narrative and whether the news coverage is favorable or unfavorable to McCain today or next week turns out not to have much impact on the election outcome.

MR. MANN: Larry, I've got a title for him, never mind. Listen, I'd like to thank John and Bob and Ron for joining Larry and me. You guys were terrific. And thank you all for coming. We are adjourned.

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