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Semetko, H.A.

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6. Only the 'elective principle' is not involved here directly, but since the case dealt with the election of the President, one could argue that it was at least involved indirectly.

7. Bush v. Gore, 531 U.S. ____ (2000), per curiam opinion, pp. 5-6.

8. However, Justice Breyer referred to this as "the CHIEF JUSTICE's unusual review of state law." Bush v. Gore, Breyer dissent, p. 4.

9. Ibid., p. 4-5.

10. Ibid., p. 2.

11. Ibid., Ginsburg dissent, p. 1.

12. Ibid., per curiam opinion, p. 12.

13. Ibid., Breyer dissent, pp. 1 and 15.

14. 'Election could make 2002 vote tougher for Supreme Court justice', Cnn.com.law center news, December 14, 2000, www.cnn.com; Dexter Filkins, 'Republican Group Seeks to Unseat Three Justices', *The New York Times on the Web*, December 20, 2000, www.nytimes.com.

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'Strategy,' 'Dignitude' and Election 2000: Citizens, Media and the Crisis of Legitimacy

Holli A. Semetko

University of Amsterdam

Abstract

This article argues that the 2000 US presidential election has raised questions about the legitimacy of the electoral process that has cast a long shadow over the nation's most cherished principles and institutions. This article is informed by interviews with voters and first-hand observation of news and information in the aftermath of the election campaign from mid-December 2000 to mid-January 2001, and summarizes the information from various research projects on the election that published their results in real time during the campaign and its aftermath, to identify the main characteristics of the news and public responses to events. The candidates themselves were the subject of much political comedy throughout the campaign and there was only a small window for campaign news in the networks' evening programs. Voters were more attentive to and involved in the campaign after Election Day than before, driven primarily by their own partisan viewpoints.

1 Introduction

If, as they say, visuals are what we remember most from election campaigns, then for many Election 2000 will be remembered by the expressions on the faces of the two actors impersonating Texas Governor George W. Bush and Vice President Al Gore on NBC's Saturday Night Live (SNL) during the campaign and its incredible aftermath.¹ If you had not stayed up late enough to catch the program when it was broadcast live in October 2000, no problem. Between Christmas and New Year's Day, MSNBC ran a series of short clips in between programs featuring some of the funniest SNL moments on the election, as well as longer sketches in special programs on what had happened in campaign 2000. Watching these comedians at work, and then later tuning into actual news on the latest developments in the post-election drama, it became almost impossible for me to see the Vice President or the President-elect without smiling and thinking immediately of how much they appeared to be like their comic doubles. Laughter made it possible, if only for a moment, to forget about the sorry state in which American democracy had found itself.

The skit on the first debate emphasized moments from the real first debate in which Al Gore was seen to be too serious and heavy handed in interrupting George Bush, and the real Al Gore team was so seriously impressed by the SNL version that the Vice President was said to actually have studied it on videotape in preparation for the second debate. At the end of the SNL skit on the debate, when each of the candidates was asked to sum up in one word what his campaign had to offer in this election, George W. Bush wrinkled his brow, squinted and pursed his lips, and paused to think for a moment before saying confidently “**strategy**”. The camera then shifted immediately to the perplexed expression of the reporter chairing the SNL debate and the ‘oh Gawd, not again’- look on the face of Al Gore.

This debate skit was positively mild compared to the SNL soap opera skit called ‘Palm Beach’, set in the well-furnished study of a Florida home, in which a nervous boy-like George W. Bush sought reassurance that someone would be able to tell him what to do as President, that it would all be over quickly so that he could get back to ‘hunting and killing in Texas’. The ambitious, evil-looking Katherine Harris seductively said she would be right by his side for the next four years, while the unlikely couple Jeb Bush and Al Gore sat on the couch lamenting the sad state of the likely President-elect and looked stunned when NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw walked in to announce he had just heard that Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor was “pregnant with James Baker’s baby”. The actors playing these roles were made up to look like funnier versions of the political characters themselves, and this brief description hardly does justice to the amusement of these scenes.

The power of this live comedy program was evident in the decision by both candidates to appear on the same night on SNL only weeks before Election Day, reading scripted text that made fun of themselves. Lots of laughs from the studio audience were heard when the real George W. Bush offered up another non-existent word in his opening sentences, and the real Al Gore, sorry Gore, in response, sighed and looked resigned at his opponent’s continued ability to demonstrate poor public speaking skills. SNL wasn’t the only show to provide a laugh, the popular late night talk shows on the networks, especially David Letterman and Jay Leno, and Conan O’Brien, also did their bit. There was also *Politically Incorrect* with Bill Maher on ABC, shown after the popular news show *Nightline*, and *The Daily Show* on Comedy Central (a cable channel) with Jon Stewart, who is known for his pointed political humor. In his alternative coverage of election night, as the results were coming in and all the red areas (southern states) were going to Bush, posing as an anchorman he said: “South Carolina, North Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Texas... Hmm, seems to me all those states got together for something before.” MSNBC masterfully edited some of the funniest bits from the campaign jokes on the late night talk shows and SNL into segways between their programs over the weeks surrounding

Christmas and the New Year. This followed a period in late November and early December in which the news media was often broadcasting live on the latest developments in the Florida courts and in the recounts, a period when, as you will see below, there were more Americans closely following the events than at any previous time in the 2000 campaign.

What role did the media play in engaging citizens in the 2000 campaign and the events that followed? In the following pages, I report some of the preliminary findings from a major research project on public reactions to the election campaign and its aftermath, based predominantly on surveys that are part of the public information issued by the *Vanishing Voter Project* and discussions with one of the co-investigators. As the data are not yet available for analysis, I report here only the information that can be found on-line. Because the status of any on-line information is temporary, some of the most important information is reprinted in an appendix. This article is intended to summarize some of the information currently available on public responses to the campaign and its aftermath, during which time there were some rather extraordinary moments.² I do not attempt to discuss theory or review the considerable array of relevant research on earlier elections here, but instead offer an account of how the media reported some of the developments in the post-election/pre-inauguration period, based on what is available via key websites and my own personal observations while in the US for several weeks during that time.³

2 The centrality of the media for voter involvement in the campaign, and the post-campaign developments

From early November 1999, weekly national surveys were conducted by the Joan Shorenstein Center on the Press Politics and Public Policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government. More than 1,000 respondents were questioned as part of the *Vanishing Voter Project*, which was funded by a grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts (www.vanishingvoter.org) and co-directed by Marvin Kalb and Thomas Patterson. Each weekly poll included questions designed to measure the level of citizens’ campaign involvement: (1) are citizens currently following the campaign, (2) can they recall a recent campaign news story, and have they recently (3) thought about or (4) talked about the campaign. The four questions together form the ‘Voter Involvement Index’ – a measure of how interested and involved Americans are in the campaign. The main point that emerges from the project’s findings published to date on the Web concerns the centrality of the news for voter involvement in the election campaign. This is evident at all stages of the election campaign as well as in the post-election period leading up to the inauguration. Let’s look

at how the public responded at some of the key moments in election 2000. All references below mentioning dates are to the project's website, unless otherwise indicated.

2.1 The primaries

With respect to the primary season and the 40,000 interviews that were completed in the eight-month period between November 1999 and June 2000, the study found that:

the presidential nominating campaigns varied considerably from state to state: Residents in some states paid relatively close attention to the election while those in other states took much less notice. These differences were closely associated with the time and attention a state's nominating contest received from the presidential candidates and the national press (13 July 2000, Patterson 2000a).

In addition to the sheer competitiveness of the race in each state, the study found that "national news coverage also served to engage states' residents" and "differences in involvement levels were related to residents' awareness of election issues" (ibid). According to the state-by-state results, New Hampshire residents rated highest on the voter involvement scale, residents of Arizona and Massachusetts came second and third, and residents of Wyoming were at the bottom of the list. Involvement during the primary season was "closely related to whether its primaries or caucuses were actively contested" and in competitive races "residents of these states continued to think and talk about the campaign at a heightened level even weeks after the campaign had moved on to other states" (ibid).

2.2 The nominating conventions

During the summer, the party nominating conventions attracted large audiences though these were not as large as in previous years: "The broadcast television rating for the 2000 GOP convention was 11.9 points on average. Four years earlier, the Republican convention averaged 16.9 rating points, which was down from 21.3 rating points in 1992" (Patterson 2000b). During the week of the GOP nominating convention, the *Vanishing Voter Project* went beyond most studies of audiences to obtain information on the length of time an individual tuned into the convention, why they tuned in, and how they reacted to what they were watching: "Our survey tells a tale of three television audiences: those viewers who sought out convention coverage (deliberate viewers), those who happened across it while watching television and decided

to watch some of it (inadvertent viewers), and those who chose to not to watch the convention at all (non-viewers)" (ibid).

The conventions were available on the Web from start to finish, whereas the networks covered only certain portions of these major events. Since the average internet user is above average in terms of education and income, much like the average Republican voter, the GOP convention should have been a natural target for users of the Web. But the *Vanishing Voter Project* concluded that the Internet played almost no role in engaging citizens in the GOP convention (Patterson 2000b):

The vast majority of Internet contacts were inadvertent. When those who had been on the Internet during the past 24 hours were asked whether they had deliberately set out to find material on the GOP convention, only 16% said they had done so. The great majority of them went to a news site. Not a single respondent in our survey claimed to have participated in a convention-dedicated chat group. Only two respondents claimed to have visited a web site dedicated to continuous convention coverage.

When these findings are expressed in terms of all adults - whether they have Internet access or not and whether they were actually on the Internet on a given day or not - the picture is as follows: only 1 in 10 Americans on the typical day saw anything at all on the Internet about the GOP convention; only 1 in 30 spent more than a few seconds looking at Internet-based convention material; only 1 in 63 sought out convention information, and only about 1 in 500 participated in a convention-dedicated site.

2.3 The debates

By early September, the *Vanishing Voter Project* reported:

Throughout the 2000 presidential race, the factor most closely associated with Americans' involvement in the campaign has been news coverage. When coverage increases, public involvement also rises. When it declines, so too does public involvement [...]. Of course, news coverage at some points in the campaign is a response to key events, such as an important presidential primary or a national party convention. These events trigger a heightened level of both news coverage and election interest. It is during other periods of the campaign when the independent influence of news coverage on interest is most evident. After the Super Tuesday primaries in early March, for example, news coverage of the campaign declined sharply and remained low until the summer conventions, as did election interest. After the conventions, news coverage declined less steeply, and has risen again in recent weeks. Americans' attention to the campaign has followed a similar pattern since the convention (20 September 2000).

The presidential and vice-presidential debates were among the list of these major events. The Center for Media and Public Affairs reported that network news coverage was more optimistic about Gore and more pessimistic about Bush in the period leading up to the debates. Based on 141 stories (amounting to 247 minutes) broadcast from Labor Day to October 1 2000, the study found:

Since Labor Day, 86 percent of comments on Gore's prospects have been positive, while comments on Bush's prospects have been 83 percent negative. (Example: "After a series of blows, many self-inflicted, [Bush] aides acknowledge their message has been muffled..." -Bill Whitaker, CBS, 9/17)

The gap was greatest for the first two weeks in September when Gore's poll ratings were climbing. But even after the polls tightened, a substantial gap remained in the coverage of the candidates. During the past two weeks, 3 out of 4 comments about Gore's prospects (75%) were hopeful, while 4 out of 5 comments about Bush (81%) were gloomy.

The gap in the portrayal of candidates was greatest on NBC, where 96 percent of comments have been pessimistic about Bush's chances and 90 percent optimistic about Gore's prospects. (Example: "Gore is surging, Bush is struggling." -Tom Brokaw, NBC, 9/7)

Apart from evaluations of the campaign horserace, Gore continues to lead in the race for positive press. (This includes evaluations of candidates' policies, records, personal character, campaign conduct, etc.) Since Labor Day, 48 percent of evaluations about Gore were positive, while 67 percent about Bush were negative (5 October 2000).

The findings from the *Vanishing Voter Project* point up the importance of the debates as a unifying force in the campaign, and how they sparked discussion in the days that followed (Patterson 2000c):

On a typical day in the 2000 election, 22% of adults reported having a campaign-related conversation. During the past week, the level jumped to 44% and rose above 50% on the days immediately following both the first presidential and the vice-presidential debates. "Not only did the American people in very large numbers - 40 to 50 million television sets were tuned in - watch the debates," says Marvin Kalb, co-director of the *Vanishing Voter Project* and the Executive Director of the Shorenstein Center's Washington Office. "They also found them interesting enough to be discussed thereafter."

The pattern of election-related discussion also changed with the debates. During routine periods of the campaign, a majority of these conversations took place between spouses. After last week's presidential and vice-presidential debates, a majority of the conversations involved other family members, friends, or co-workers. "Debates meet the water-cooler test," says Thomas Patterson, director of the Shorenstein Center polls and Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press at Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government. "The day after a debate, millions of Americans in homes and at work discuss with others their impressions of what they saw the night before in the debate."

Viewers of the presidential and vice-presidential debates generally liked what they saw. In both cases, approximately 25% said that they were more interested in following the presidential campaign based on what they had seen and heard during the debate. This increase in interest was particularly pronounced among younger viewers. Although 18 to 29 year olds were less than half as likely to watch the debate as those 30 and above (28% to 53%), just over one-third of those who did said they were more interested in the campaign as a result, compared to one-quarter of viewers aged 30 and above.

According to the CMPA content analysis of network television news, the first debate led to a dramatic shift in the coverage of Al Gore, it "turned sharply negative" and as Gore's election prospects were seen to be diminishing, Bush's chances were said to have improved considerably (18 October 2000). Based on all stories broadcast from Labor Day through October 15th on the three network news programs, the study found (18 October 2000):

Gore's Press Goes South - Al Gore received about evenly balanced evaluations (48% positive vs. 52% negative) on network news throughout September, while evaluations of George Bush ran 2 to 1 (67%) negative. Since October 2, however, Gore's on-air evaluations have been slightly worse than Bush's - 68% negative for Gore vs. 66% negative for Bush. Example: "On education, experts say Gore is wrong in describing his own plan." (Tom Brokaw, NBC, 10/12)

Horse Race of a Different Color - During September, on-air assessments of Gore's election prospects were positive by a 6 to 1 margin (86% to 14%), while Bush's were negative by a 5 to 1 margin (83% to 17%). Since then a majority of Gore's horse race assessments have been negative, while a majority (59%) of comments on Bush's prospects have been positive. Example: "[Gore has suffered] another stumble in what has become a campaign struggling to regain its stride." (Terry Moran, ABC, 10/12)

What Campaign? - Coverage of fighting and terrorism in the Middle East drove down last week's campaign news to its lowest level since Labor Day - only 48 minutes of airtime, just over 2 minutes per network per night. Overall, coverage is running 9 percent below 1996 levels (385 min. vs. 425 min.).

What Issues? - The policy issues receiving the heaviest coverage this fall are health care (25 stories), the economy (24), energy (16), education (7), and foreign policy (7). But these are far outpaced by coverage of campaign strategy and tactics - 61 stories on Bush's strategy and 59 on Gore's.

If these findings are accurate, then the first debate was the defining moment of the Fall campaign. After that, journalists no longer depicted Gore as the most likely winner of the election, and the campaign came to be framed as 'too close to call'. And what of the audience? Although partisan viewers tend to evaluate their candidate's performance through their own partisan lenses, the central feature of post-debate campaign news reporting was the way in which undecideds thought about the two candidates. The fact that most undecideds remained undecided was particularly disappointing to the Gore campaign.

The pre-debate 'spin' from the Bush camp was that their candidate was less experienced than the Vice President in debating the issues.

The Vice President's 'less than expected' performance in the first debate was not because he fell short on the issues. It was his personal style, his seriousness, and his way of speaking. Another SNL skit comes to mind – the one about the first Oval Office live broadcast from the newly elected President. The first part of that skit shows a nervous George W. Bush crawling out from under the desk in the Oval Office after hearing "Mr President, you're on!" to sit down at his desk and take a big gulp out of a flask disguised as a pair of binoculars, and tell viewers about how he had not expected to be confronted with a war in the first 2 years of his presidency, when an adviser is heard saying "You've only been in 2 weeks, Mr President!" The second part of that SNL skit, shows how it would be if Vice President Gore was to win. Sitting at his desk in the Oval Office holding an enormous economics textbook and surrounded by what appears to be technical engineering equipment, President Gore welcomes the 'American people' and explains how, as President, he plans to keep them informed about the issues, saying in an unusually slow Southern drawl: "That is why I have booked *four hours of prime time* television to talk about the issues, and tonight we'll begin with the principles of economics." Suddenly Gore can no longer be seen because someone has moved in front of the camera. When the camera moves back, we see a pajama-clad, beer-drinking Bill Clinton strolling by smiling at the seriousness of it all, and a disgusted but resigned look on the face of President Gore.

2.4 Election day, election night and...

The CMPA content analysis also concluded that reporters received seven times as much coverage as the presidential candidates on the news during the campaign. The average soundbite length had shrunk to only 7 seconds, 30% down from 1988. Their main findings were (www.cmpa.com 30 October 2000):

On an average night, reporters speak for a total of seven minutes of election news airtime on the three network evening newscasts, compared to only one minute for Al Gore and George Bush combined – just under ten seconds per night for each candidate on each network. All other sources combined for an average of one and a half minutes of airtime per night.

Overall, reporters took three quarters (74 percent) of spoken air time while the candidates had a mere 11 percent, and other sources had 15 percent since Labor Day. The three networks were almost identical in their allotment of air time among candidates, journalists, and other sources.

The two major party candidates have received almost the same amounts of on-air

speaking time this fall – 23 minutes for Gore and 22 minutes for Bush. In addition, Joe Lieberman has spoken for a total of 2 minutes, Dick Cheney 1.5 minutes and Ralph Nader 1 minute.

Not only were candidates elbowed aside by reporters, the average length of candidate sound bites continued to slide. It fell from 10 seconds in 1988 to 8 seconds in 1992 and 1996, to the current low of 7 seconds. Gore's soundbites average one second longer than Bush's.

Voters must bypass the newscasts for the TV talk shows to hear candidates deliver their messages. George Bush spoke for a total of 13 minutes during his appearance last week (10/19) on the David Letterman Show, compared to only nine minutes on all three network news shows so far in the entire month of October. Similarly, Al Gore received more speaking time on his Sept. 14 Letterman appearance than he did during the entire month of September on the evening news shows.

The fact that the candidates got more time on the late night comedy programs than on the network news programs suggests that there was little in terms of time devoted to issues on television, apart from perhaps political advertising, though we will know more about that as the research findings are published. These late night comedy show appearances also emphasize the personal qualities of the candidates, their sense of humor and their ability to make fun of themselves which is apparently quite appreciated by Americans.

Going into Election Day, the Vanishing Voter Project survey revealed a disillusioned electorate, one in which some of the opinions about politics and politicians of likely voters could hardly be distinguished from non-voters (4 November 2000):

Americans are so thoroughly disenchanted with electoral politics that the lines separating voters from non-voters have blurred. The opinions of voters and non-voters are nearly identical, for example, on the question of whether campaign money has too much influence on candidates and public policy — more than 80% of each group say that it does.

"Respondents likely to vote in Tuesday's election are not in all respects similar to those unlikely to participate. Half of the likely non-voters believe that 'most politicians are liars or crooks,' nearly 90% say that 'most political candidates will say almost anything in order to get themselves elected,' and 43% claim that 'Republicans and Democrats are so alike that it does not make much difference who wins.' Likely voters are measurably less skeptical but have anything but a benign view of politics. More than a third question the basic honesty of most politicians, three-fourths question the campaign promises that candidates make, and a fifth say that Republican and Democratic politicians are too much alike.

When it comes to the way that campaigns today are run, however, the differences between voters and non-voters disappear almost entirely. Nearly 70% of each group says that the modern campaigns 'seem more like theater or entertainment than something to be taken seriously,' and over 70% of each group agrees that candidates are 'more concerned with fighting each other than with solving the nation's

problems.' In other ways, however, voters and non-voters are still quite different groups. Non-voters are markedly less interested in politics, less attentive to news, and less content with their personal lives and the condition of the country as a whole.

For those voters and nonvoters who stayed up to watch the Election Night programs, the rollercoaster of results reporting was incredibly exciting and profoundly disappointing not only because of the unresolved contest, but because of the way the news anchors on the networks made the mistake of jumping too soon to call the election outcome. The competitive pressure to be first outweighed the competitive pressure to be accurate, and in the end the networks got it very wrong. Florida results were called before the polls had actually closed in the panhandle, which is in a different time zone from the rest of the state, and this has become the subject of a possible lawsuit by some Republicans who allege that it reduced voter turnout in the region. We are all familiar with the story about how the networks first called the state for Gore, then for Bush, and finally put it back in the too close to call category. In the following days and weeks, the anchors themselves, in various places in print and political talk shows, apologized for the way in which they had got it so badly wrong this time, when their own reporters in Florida were saying it was too close to call. Internal investigations are underway at each of the networks, and so far both CBS and NBC have plans to reorganize their internal strategic units, to avoid such a situation in the future.

If citizens went into Election Day disillusioned, they emerged the next morning thoroughly confused and even downright angry. As time passed, there was even less to reassure them about the integrity of the electoral process. Few thought to pity the news anchors and election commentators who, after twelve months of talking about every single development in the campaign, found themselves glued to their seats for what appeared to become never ending election results programming that continued for several weeks thereafter.

Content analysis of campaign news on the main television networks by researchers at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania concluded that there was far too little candidate-centered discourse (Falk & Aday 2000). The networks "fell far short of the voluntary standard of airing five minutes a night of candidate-centered discourse in the 30 days leading up to the election," according to Paul Taylor, Executive Director of the Alliance for Better Campaigns, who concluded: "This research calls into question the effectiveness of the voluntary approach and suggests the need for mandates" (20 December 2000). The Annenberg analysis of network coverage of campaign 2000 also found (20 December 2000):

In the days leading up to the general election, the average sound bite of the candidates was just nine seconds (12 seconds for NBC, nine for CBS and seven for ABC).

The majority of each network's campaign stories focused on strategy and not issues. However, in the days leading up to the election, the networks improved their performance compared to the days leading up to the primaries. In the days leading up to the general election, about one in four network campaign stories focused on the issues (29 percent for ABC, 24 percent for CBS and 27 percent for NBC). During the primaries, the numbers were lower, with only 21 percent of ABC's stories focusing on issues, 17 percent of CBS's and 26 percent of the NBC stories.

The efforts on the part of CBS and NBC to provide time to candidates to discuss issues increased the level of CCD in the days leading up to the election. Not only did the average length of direct candidate sound-bites rise significantly during these segments, (averaging about 35 seconds for NBC and 17 for CBS), issues were the dominant frame. The CBS and NBC segments accounted for 42 percent of the CCD for the three networks for the month.

These findings on the lack of candidate-centered discourse in campaign 2000 are of special concern because previous research has shown that strategy reporting not only leads to less learning on the part of audiences, but also encourages people to adopt cynical attitudes about politics and to become less engaged in the political process (Cappella & Jamieson 1997).

2.5 Post-election reporting and reactions

The CMPA study compared their findings on the amount network news about Florida in the first week after Election Day (8-14 November) to other major news events and concluded: "Network evening news shows devoted more coverage to the electoral fallout in Florida than to the Clinton-Lewinsky scandal and Princess Diana's and John F. Kennedy Jr.'s deaths during the first week after each story broke." The study also shows election coverage received more than half the attention in only seven days (183 stories) as Elian Gonzalez did in his entire five-month ordeal (360 stories from 11/25/99 to 4/25/00)" (22 November 2000). Late night comedy also thrived on the post-election developments. The CMPA study also found that "nearly 9 out of every 10 jokes told on late night talk shows" between 8-20 November have "mocked the extended election process" and "the most popular punchline is neither the parties nor the candidates, but the state of Florida itself" (ibid).

More citizens were also following the election campaign closely after Election Day than at any time prior to that, as can be seen from the Voter Involvement Index reported in the Appendix, and in responses to the individual questions that compose it. The Voter Involvement Index increases with age: the older one is the more likely one is to be involved and rank highly on all four measures that compose the index. But even young people aged 18-24, who expressed the lowest levels of involvement, were far more involved in

the events that unfolded after the election than they had been during the campaign. The *Vanishing Voter Project* conducted fieldwork in the two weeks following the Election Day (14-19 November) and concluded: "Even young adults, whose attention level was well below that of older citizens throughout the campaign, are now paying close attention. During the past two weeks, they have been nearly as attentive to election developments as older citizens" (21 November 2000). The bright spot in this is that perhaps the lessons of this contested election event will be seared into the minds of young voters, though the lessons learned by some (Republicans) may be quite different from those learned by others (Democrats).

But the study also confirmed that the unresolved situation brought further disillusionment:

Americans are not particularly happy with what they have learned about the campaign during the past two weeks. Roughly 60% have claimed to be "discouraged" by what's been happening in the campaign while 20% have said they are "encouraged". In the past four days, the number of "discouraged" citizens has jumped to 70% while only 14% claim to be "encouraged". Half of the public believes the election has been "unfair" to the voters.

Broad attitudes toward politics and government have also worsened in the past two weeks. Just before Election Day, only 1 in every 10 respondents in the Shorenstein Center national poll answered "none" when asked, "How much influence do you think people like you have on what our government does?" In the most recent survey, 1 in 4 expressed this opinion.

The struggle for supremacy in Florida appears to have confirmed people's beliefs about politicians and tarnished their view of George W. Bush and Al Gore. Eighty-six percent say that "most politicians are pretty much willing to say whatever it takes to get themselves elected." Roughly a third claim that Bush is "undeserving" of the presidency. About the same number say that Gore is "undeserving." "Americans have been very patient — most of them still say that the most important thing is to count the Florida votes fully and fairly," says Tami Buhr, research coordinator at the Shorenstein Center. "But, as time and the infighting go on, we can expect them to become increasingly disenchanted with the process and the candidates." (21 November 2000)

In the week of the election (Nov 8th) the Voter Involvement Index stood at 73 % and in the following week at 63%, it then dropped off somewhat around Thanksgiving during the third week of November. As court proceedings and recounts were the focus in the news, the public learned more about the varying standards for voting machinery in the state of Florida, the lack of any uniform standard for evaluating what counts as a valid vote for those ballots that were not counted by the machines, and the lack of correspondence between Florida state law and Federal law on the subject of postmarked absentee ballots. 'Chad' became the word of the month, and some now look back to this time of the

'dimpled,' 'pregnant,' and 'hanging' chads, and their link to counting and chaos in Florida, as the point where the Democrats began to lose the rhetorical battle of the post-election campaign.

Involvement did not mean that citizens were happy about what they saw. Based on fieldwork conducted between 29 Nov and 3 December, the *Vanishing Voter Project* concluded (7 December 2000):

As the election contest has continued, Americans have become increasingly disenchanted with the presidential selection process. They also increasingly believe that the electoral system has failed them. The latest *Shorenstein Center* weekly national poll indicates that 66% of Americans now say that the 2000 campaign has been "depressing", up from 46% in the week before Election Day. Fewer than one in five Americans describe the campaign as "uplifting". Democrats (69%) and Independents (69%) are more critical of the campaign, but even a majority of Republicans (59%) say it has been depressing. "While most Americans say they are paying reasonably close attention to the Florida developments, a stunning 66% say the 2000 election campaign has been 'depressing' — a huge leap from the 46% in the last week of the campaign," says *Marvin Kalb*, executive director of the Shorenstein Center's Washington Office. "Paying attention to politics these days may lead to being depressed about politics."

The election was perceived as unfair to voters, though this view is more common among Democrats than Republicans: "Compared with 71% of Democrats and 64% of Independents, only 30% of Republicans claim the election has been 'unfair' to the voters." The survey found that African Americans were most strongly affected by the election process:

African Americans are particularly likely to think the voters have been shortchanged. Eighty-six percent of them say the election has been "unfair" to the voters, up from 64% the week of November 19. African Americans' general opinion of American politics has also soured. On October 24, 49% of African Americans were "very" or "fairly" satisfied with "the way politics is being conducted in the country these days." That fraction has now plummeted to 13%. Among Americans as a whole, satisfaction with politics has declined from 43% to 25% in the past six weeks. Many Americans also question whether either candidate has earned the presidential office. Thirty-five percent describe George W. Bush as "undeserving" of the presidency. Forty-two percent hold this view of Al Gore (7 December 2000).

Court tv has long been popular in the US. From the real shows in which real citizens bring real complaints forward to be decided by TV-made celebrity Judge Wapner, to the extensive coverage and attention paid to every detail in the O.J. Simpson trial, Americans find the real courtroom even more interesting than L.A. Law, a popular television series set in a Los Angeles law firm that was around a decade ago. When a case was brought in Florida, once

the judge was identified, reporters and pundits speculated about how the personal experience or biases of the sitting judge could influence the decision. Cameras were in the circuit courtrooms and viewers were treated to the chess-like boredom of some of the lengthy proceedings. Cameras were also present in the Florida Supreme Court.

Speculation was rife about which way the U.S. Supreme Court would decide, and the decision itself generated enormous media interest, though the proceedings were behind closed doors and accessible to viewers only via artist's sketch and audiotape. Reporters and anchors, having been burned by speaking without correct information on Election Night, resorted to reading parts of the lengthy decision aloud on the air as it came off the fax machine, in order to be first in bringing the news. On CNN for example, while Bernard Shaw read bits and pieces from the majority opinion, Judy Woodruff interrupted to call attention to a few sentences in one of the dissenting opinions, Jeff Greenfield emphasized the comments of another dissenting justice, and so on. It brought back memories of my beloved Constitutional Law college class, when as a pre-law student I read and discussed pages and pages of Supreme Court opinions every week for several months. On CNN, a member of Al Gore's legal counsel who was also a professor of law described the decision in terms of how he would 'teach' it, pointing out that a dissenter will often seize upon an issue in his or her minority opinion and make it appear to be much larger than it actually was in the closed discussion among the justices in chamber, a discussion for which there is no official record. Yet within minutes of the decision being issued, before anyone in news media or the Gore or Bush camps had a chance to read through these dozens of pages of text, the decision was being described as 'the end' of Al Gore's campaign for the presidency.

Thirty-six days after the national election, on Wednesday 13 December 2000, only days before the members of the Electoral College were scheduled to meet, Al Gore and George W. Bush ended the race for the presidency with back-to-back primetime speeches pledging bipartisan cooperation and calling for national unity. By 17 December, the day before the Electoral College members met in their respective states to cast their votes, the Voter Involvement Index remained at 60 percent (see Appendix).

Content analysis shows that the networks paid far more attention to Florida and the events following Election Day, than they had to events during the campaign itself. The Center for Media and Public Affairs concluded (20 December 2000⁴):

Triple Play: In the five weeks following Election Day, the networks devoted 37 minutes per night to the Florida electoral process, averaging out to over 12 minutes each night per network. This amounted to three times the networks' coverage of the

general election campaign, when they combined to average only 12 minutes each evening overall—or 4 minutes each night per network.

Full Primary Eclipse: The nightly network news programs dedicated 21 _ hours to post-election news and commentary. This was 60 percent more than the nine-week general election (13 hrs, 25 min) and 25 percent more than the total for the five-month primary period (17:08).

Network Breakdown: Both CBS' (a 2 hr, 58 min increase) and NBC's (up 3:32) post-election coverage rose 74 percent from the general election level, compared to an increase of only 34 percent for ABC (up 1:35). Though all the post-election coverage rose substantially, industry leader NBC (8:18) dedicated an hour and nineteen minutes more than CBS (6:59), and over two hours more than ABC (6:13).

3 It's about politics, stupid

It is no coincidence that on 16 December, Bush nominated General Colin Powell for the post of Secretary of State, making him the first African-American to be put forward for that office. At one of his first press conferences as President-elect, Bush introduced Colin Powell as well as Condoleezza Rice, his nominee for national security adviser, also African-American, and Al Gonzales, a Hispanic American, appointed in 1999 by Bush to serve on the Texas Supreme Court, as his nominee for White House counsel.

Revelations about what transpired in Florida in the weeks preceding Election Day and on Election Day itself with respect to the difficulties faced by African Americans in getting to the polls, and details about the operation of the well-oiled Republican machine in Florida in the election's aftermath have been the subject of numerous media accounts. Most notable is the analysis of what happened in Florida in the investigative coverage in the *New York Times*. Reverend Jesse Jackson with his own television talk show and a regular guest on other shows, emphasized how African Americans were effectively disenfranchised in Florida. The Powell and Rice nominations were an effort to combat the impression that Bush is anti-African American; in their remarks at the press conference, both emphasized their race and that they came from humble origins and fought against the odds, though neither mentioned that they have in the past been outspoken supporters of affirmative action policies that Bush opposes.

The nomination of Colin Powell did little to diminish the perception that Bush was undeserving of the Presidency, among those who held that view earlier.⁵ Many of those who opposed Bush continued to refer to him as the 'President-select' rather than the President-elect. Efforts to overturn the official result urged citizens to take action by contacting their Senators and members of the House directly to ask them to challenge the Electoral College results.⁶ Section 15 of the U.S. Code specifies that Congress will convene in joint session at 1 p.m. on 6 January, presided over by the President of the Senate (Vice

President Al Gore), who will open the Certificate of Ascertainment from each state in alphabetical order and call for objections. The Code notes that an objection must be made in writing, and signed by at least one Senator and one member of the House before it shall be received. The proceedings on 6 January 2001 were televised live from the floor of the House and all went smoothly until Florida. Then came 18 minutes of political drama. The first objection was raised by a member of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC), and this was followed by another, then another, and another, as each of the members of the CBC individually came forward to object to the Florida vote. "For what reason does the gentlewoman/gentleman from Florida/Georgia approach the podium?" Al Gore, the President of the Senate, asked again and again. "To object to the Florida electoral college vote..." Gore, interrupting the speaker: "I must ask the gentlewoman/man to suspend and answer the question 'Is the objection signed by a Senator and a Member of the House?'" This scene was repeated a dozen times or more, drawing boos from the floor when any CBC member of the House spoke quickly enough to slip in a reference to "disenfranchised voters" or "corrupt and contested results" before s/he was 'suspended', and drawing laughter when Rep. Maxine Waters cut off the President of the Senate with the comment "And I don't care if my objection is not signed by a Senator!" After all the objections had been heard and 'not received' due to the lack of a Senator's signature, all the members of the CBC walked out of the proceedings amidst applause from the floor and then held their own press conference immediately, which was covered live as the proceedings continued to be covered live. Several CBC members spoke at the CBC press conference, and provided graphic and compelling accounts of how they personally as well as their constituents were deeply affected by the developments in Florida. They praised Al Gore for the statesmanlike fashion in which he had just handled the objection process, and they called for George W. Bush to seriously consider their ideas and not just "the ideas of people who think like him but look like us." They congratulated Bush on the appointments of Powell and Rice, because they support affirmative action policies that "put them where they are today," but were saddened by the fact that in their foreign policy roles, the two of them would be excluded from domestic policy. And CBC members who have the strongest support of any members of Congress in their districts and therefore hold among the safest of seats in the House, promised that the form of protest just witnessed on the floor of the House would be used again and again, in the confirmation process for controversial cabinet appointments and in the coming years under the Bush administration. They vowed that we must never forget.

Any attempt to have a Senator sign such an objection in the days prior to the certification by Congress was ultimately lost when on Friday, 5 January 2001, Democrat minority leader Senator Tom Daschle and Republican majority leader Trent Lott held a lengthy press conference to announce their agreement

on the unprecedented 50-50 division of power within the Senate. There is no guarantee that this agreement will work, but for the period leading up to the inauguration of the President, there is considerable optimism within the Senate.

4 Concluding remarks

There are undoubtedly many research projects underway analyzing how the campaign and the debates were reported, and any effects this may have had on the public's perceptions of the candidates. Those projects will probably identify further evidence of characteristics that made US television news reporting stand out from its British counterparts in a comparison of campaign coverage in the two countries in the 1980s, that showed US news to be less substantive, more horse racist, more personalized, and more hoopla oriented (Semetko et al. 1991). They will also probably reveal a continuation of the trends identified in a study of US presidential election news coverage in major news magazines and the *New York Times*, from 1960 to 1992, that pointed up the less descriptive and more interpretive and analytical character of the news, and its increasingly strategic and game oriented, rather than policy oriented, focus, as well as its emphasis on the negative (Patterson 1994).

Previous research points up the importance of the debates in presidential campaigns (Kraus 2000). The real test will be whether it is possible to determine if coverage of pre-debate speculation and statements about expectations of candidate performance made any difference to the post-debate reporting of statements and evaluations of candidate performance, and if this in turn had any impact on citizens, in terms of firming up wavering support or swaying undecideds in specific campaign information environments. As mentioned at the outset of this article, even Saturday Night Live's comic take off on the first debate became a subject of serious study for Vice President Al Gore as he prepared to improve his performance in the second debate. An understanding of the battle involving spin doctors, reporters, pundits, and even the candidates themselves in defining the standards by which debate performance would be measured, is crucial.

The closeness of the 2000 race provides unusually fertile territory for researchers interested in the power of the media in politics, and especially the short-term forces such as campaign information, advertising, and social networks on public perceptions of the parties, leaders and issues, and ultimately on turnout and vote choice (see, for example, Kaid & Bystrom 1998; McCombs & Reynolds 1999; Hart 2000; Graber 2001). Despite all the hoopla about the tight race, turnout was not up from what it had been in 1992. Some of the most interesting research on Election 2000 should be able to take

advantage of the data available on the advertising buys and the cable markets in competitive districts, and connect that with other geographical and contextual influences on the vote, to investigate influences on turnout. If we take the latest research on the effects of negative advertising as a guide, we can expect findings to be tailored to the electoral contexts in which voters found themselves (Kahn & Kenny 2000).

Partisanship was no doubt of considerable importance in shaping public reactions to campaign events and campaign reporting in 2000 as it has been in the past (Dalton et al. 1998). One of the most interesting questions in my view is how partisanship in comparison with the lack of any strong political attachments shaped public perceptions of the post-election process and the institutions and the players involved. Legitimacy is a continuing issue, and this crisis points up the importance of the post-election period for shaping public perceptions of democracy. Are partisan lenses equally important for younger and older voters' perceptions? How long will large segments of the public continue to hold the view that George W. Bush is undeserving of the presidency? Will this have any influence on the so-called honeymoon period, participation in the 2002 congressional elections, and perceptions of our most cherished national institutions?

The story of how Americans vote only ranks highly in terms of news value when the result is announced, when things go terribly wrong, or when the result is very close. Little attention has been paid to the real story of this election, and that is the problematic conditions under which people cast their ballots and how this can vary dramatically from state to state, county to county, and precinct to precinct. In 2000 we heard about the difficulties faced by many African Americans in Florida, but there were also stories of polling places in other states that closed despite the fact that people stood outside waiting in line. Having always voted in a well-appointed public school or township office when I was in the state of Michigan, I was struck by Professor Michael Schudson's experience, which he describes in the opening of his book *The Good Citizen* (Schudson 1998: 1-3):

In 1996, I served as an election inspector on the San Diego precinct where I vote. Of the five volunteers, I was the only one not yet a grandparent. Though I turned fifty a few days before the election, I was the youngster of the group. The oldest was seventy-three, the same age as Republican candidate Bob Dole. We worked for fifteen hours in a garage donated year after year by a law enforcement official and his family. He sees this as part of his children's political education. He received \$24 for his efforts, the clerks \$35, and I, as supervisor of the clerks, \$50.

Dozens of the 563 voters who cast ballots thanked us for our efforts on behalf of this democracy... The labor required to run an election is substantial: with more than 25,000 precincts in California alone, each employing three to five poll workers, the outpouring of volunteer labor is enormous and their organization and training no

mean feat...

The clerks divided their labors in an orderly fashion. The first clerk took the voter's name and had the voter sign in on the alphabetical roster. The second clerk marked the voter's name on the list of street addresses. The third clerk handed out the voting device and demonstrated it if the voter was unfamiliar with the punch-card contraption. The fourth clerk received the device back after the voter had voted, folded the ballot and placed it in the ballot box in the presence of the voter... When the clerks and I counted the ballots at the end of the day before delivering them to the sheriff's department at the designated checkpoint, we were beat. We had spent more than thirteen hours at the polls (with two 45-minute breaks for each clerk, but none of them took their full breaks). We were cold from sitting in the garage, which got quite chilly after sunset. The seventy-three-year-old clerk's daughter brought by several blankets. The government worker's wife set up a Mr. Coffee for us. But mostly the clerks just persevered. In this end, there was a strong shared sense of a day well spent, especially when the number of ballots in the ballot box tallied perfectly with the number of signatures on the roster of voters...

One needs to remember that this scene did not take place in a poor neighborhood but in a rather a well-to-do Republican precinct in California, a state that has one of the largest economies in the world. Despite all the rhetoric about being the greatest democracy on earth, informed observers know that the US lags behind other democracies, such as those in Western Europe since 1945, in the extension and protection of voting rights for everyone (White, Rose & McAllister 1997: Table 1.1). It was not until 1965 that the Voting Rights Act was passed in the US. It is now clear that the machinery and methods of voting presented problems that require immediate attention by policymakers.

In the aftermath of the 2000 election, radio talk shows across the country delved into the topic of the campaign. On National Public Radio, one very disappointed young first-time voter from Wisconsin called Gov. Bush the 'President-select' and said that she would probably never vote again. But this pessimism among some is balanced by a fighting optimism among others. In the words of one woman attorney and mother: "This very close election should stimulate people to realize how much of a difference one vote can make and why it is so profoundly important to vote in the future."⁷

Before 2000, many of us believed that if we took it upon ourselves to go to the polls and vote, then the act of voting for President was one of those few special common experiences that Americans shared. Now even that image is shattered. In Florida, it seems there are more ways and means to vote, and to count votes, than there are cable channels.

This synopsis of the findings of the *Vanishing Voter Project* and the developments that followed Election Day is being written in early January, when most Americans have come to terms with the fact that George W. Bush will take the oath of office within two weeks. Yet some people continue to

anticipate the results of the wire service recounts of the Florida votes, with the hope that Bush will be shown to have lost the popular vote in Florida too. With the Congressional Black Caucus prepared to object dramatically in the House to controversial Republican initiatives, the Senate teetering on an unprecedented 50/50 see-saw that could bring to the floor any committee dispute, a Supreme Court forever tainted by its 5/4 decision split precisely on partisan lines on how to remedy the vote recount problem, and a new President who is cheered by some and seen as a usurper by others, one can only hope that the coming four years is not marred by any other crisis such as, for example, the discovery of a mad cow somewhere in the nation's borders. With conflict and drama as primary news values, US political reporters and editors already have their plates full with everything inside the beltway.

Election 2000 has raised questions about the legitimacy of the electoral process that has cast a long shadow over the nation's most cherished principles and institutions. One of these is the independent fourth estate. The news media is the target of considerable criticism not only from partisans on both sides for the wrong decisions they took in the Election Night coverage, but also because of the little attention paid to the candidates and the issues in network news in a very close election that was especially deserving of coverage.

When one thinks about the sorry state of democracy in America today, one can only begin to chuckle at the thought of SNL's character George W. Bush. When he was asked to sum up in a word what special contribution he would bring to the Oval Office as President, he replied confidently: "**dignitude**". Although this word was not known to De Toqueville, and has yet to find its way into an American or Oxford English dictionary, we think we understand, and we can only hope that he succeeds.

Appendix

Voter Involvement Index (www.vanishingvoter.org)

The Voter Involvement Index is calculated by averaging the responses to four questions: whether people say they are currently paying close attention to the campaign, and whether they have thought, talked, or seen a news story about it in the past day.

Voter Involvement Measures:

Attention

(Asked of half of sample)

During the past week, how much attention did you pay to the presidential

election campaign: a great deal, quite a bit, just some, only a little, or none?
Positive response in the table: 'a great deal of attention + quite a bit'

News

(Asked of half of sample)

Still thinking about the past day only. Can you recall a particular news story about the presidential campaign that you read, saw, or heard during the past day? Answer: yes, no, do not know.

Positive response in the table: 'yes'

Talk

(Asked of half of sample)

Now we'd like you to think about the past day only. During the past day have you discussed the presidential campaign with anyone? Answer: yes, no, do not know.

Positive response in the table: 'yes'

Thinking

(Asked of half of sample)

Now we'd like to know about the past day only. During the past day, have you been doing any thinking about the presidential campaign, or is this something that you haven't been thinking about?

Answer: yes, no, do not know.

Positive response in the table: 'yes'

Poll Date	Attention	News	Talk	Think	Index
Dec 13-17 '00	50%	67%	62%	61%	60%
Dec 6-10	46%	60%	54%	62%	56%
Nov 29-Dec 3	49%	65%	58%	62%	59%
Nov 22-26	52%	65%	55%	62%	59%
Nov 15-19	57%	69%	62%	65%	63%
Nov 8-12	67%	71%	78%	76%	73%
Nov 1-5	34%	54%	49%	64%	50%
Oct 25-29	40%	38%	45%	58%	45%
Oct 18-22	37%	45%	42%	48%	43%
Oct 11-15	36%	43%	43%	53%	44%
Oct 4-8	37%	47%	44%	55%	46%
Sept 27-Oct 2	26%	43%	38%	42%	37%
Sept 20-24	25%	40%	35%	43%	36%
Sept 13-17	22%	44%	31%	44%	35%
Sept 6-11	19%	25%	26%	29%	25%

Poll Date	Attention	News	Talk	Think	Index
Aug 30-Sept 3	26%	40%	25%	44%	34%
Aug 23-27	25%	35%	32%	43%	34%
Aug 16-20	24%	50%	39%	54%	42%
Aug 2-6	23%	51%	36%	47%	39%
July 26-30	18%	48%	28%	33%	32%
July 19-23	17%	37%	23%	35%	28%
July 12-16	12%	28%	19%	30%	22%
July 5-9	16%	24%	14%	30%	21%
June 28-July 2	17%	34%	15%	35%	25%
June 21-June 25	18%	44%	17%	33%	28%
June 14-June 19	13%	24%	12%	26%	19%
June 7-June 11	16%	25%	15%	26%	21%
May 31-June 4	13%	20%	17%	29%	20%
May 24-28	17%	25%	16%	25%	21%
May 17-21	9%	20%	12%	21%	16%
May 10-14	11%	27%	16%	25%	20%
May 3-7	12%	23%	11%	26%	18%
Apr 26-30	12%	18%	16%	26%	18%
Apr 18-22	16%	22%	14%	27%	20%
Apr 12-16	12%	22%	20%	20%	19%
Apr 5-9	19%	23%	16%	30%	22%
Mar 29-Apr 2	19%	26%	17%	36%	25%
Mar 15-19	24%	32%	19%	43%	30%
Mar 10-14	34%	38%	26%	49%	37%
Mar 8-12	36%	54%	38%	55%	46%
Mar 1-5	31%	45%	30%	44%	38%
Feb 23-27	29%	45%	35%	43%	38%
Feb 18-22	23%	51%	31%	43%	37%
Feb 16-20	23%	46%	25%	47%	35%
Feb 9-13	24%	47%	26%	38%	34%
Feb 4-9	20%	37%	25%	37%	30%
Feb 2-6	27%	51%	33%	39%	38%
Jan 27-30	22%	37%	33%	36%	32%
Jan 21-27	20%	38%	26%	42%	32%
Jan 19-23	16%	36%	17%	33%	26%
Jan 12-16	16%	33%	16%	35%	25%
Jan 5-9	11%	39%	15%	34%	25%
Dec 29 '99-Jan 2 '00	8%	19%	11%	11%	12%
Dec 21-26	14%	25%	14%	20%	18%
Dec 15-19	10%	32%	17%	19%	20%
Dec 8-12	19%	24%	11%	31%	21%

Poll Date	Attention	News	Talk	Think	Index
Dec 1-5	16%	29%	14%	25%	21%
Nov 23-28	15%	19%	10%	20%	16%
Nov 19-23	12%	25%	10%	21%	17%
Nov 10-14	19%	27%	17%	28%	23% ⁸

Notes

1 I would like to thank the Democrat and Republican voters who took the time to speak with me about their impressions of the campaign and American democracy when I was in the US for a number of weeks from mid-December 2000 to mid-January 2001. I would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments, and especially Huib Pellikaan, the Managing Editor of *Acta Politica*, for his encouragement and advice on the manuscript.

2 Another major project on the Election 2000 was conducted by scholars working with Kathleen Hall Jamieson at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. The Annenberg project has collected a rich array of data from a variety of sources, but the project was not designed to have findings reported in real time during the campaign. For more information about the project, visit www.appcpenn.org. The findings they report from their content analysis of campaign news on television, in a press release issued 20 December, point up findings that are similar to what was found by other research institutes.

3 The Center for Media and Public Affairs (CMPA), www.cmpa.com, teamed up with the Brookings Institution, www.brookings.edu, to study the coverage of campaign 2000 across all types of media, including news, talk shows, and late night comedy programs. ElectionWatch is published weekly by the CMPA, a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and educational organization. CMPA's ongoing scientific content analysis of election news measures the tone and focus of news coverage by examining on-air statements from reporters and other non-partisan news sources.

4 These findings reflect the stories broadcast on ABC, CBS and NBC evening news covering the primary campaign (January 1st to June 5th), the general election campaign (September 4th - November 6th) and the post-election situation in Florida (November 8th - December 12th).

5 Interview with Thomas Patterson, 5 January 2001. This view is based on the latest survey data that has not yet been published.

6 An example of an e-mail urging citizens to contact their member of Congress, based on information about procedures from the TrustThePeople.com website, can be obtained from the Managing Editor at *Acta Politica*.

7 Interview with Sheila E. Norman, a resident of Arlington, Virginia, 3 January 2001.

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Culture, Democracy and Post-Communism: The Course of Regime Change in Eastern Europe

Graeme Gill

University of Sydney

Abstract

The collapse of communism ushered in widespread hopes that democracy would become the prevailing form of government throughout Eastern Europe. These hopes have not been realized: non-democratic regimes continue to rule in a number of countries in the region. How can this diversity in the outcome of regime transformation be explained? The key factor is the interaction between civil society forces and elites. In those countries where the process of regime transition was managed overwhelmingly by old regime elites, democracy did not ensue from the fall of communism. In those where the process was controlled by civil society forces, with their roots in society at large, democracy has been the outcome.

1 Introduction

The collapse of the communist regimes of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union marked a major turning point in the history of the century. But, as well as being a significant geopolitical event, it has also provided a fertile field for scholars interested in the transition from authoritarian rule to something else. It constituted a phenomenon unique in modern history: the transformation of a large number of political systems within the space of a few years during peacetime. The result was the emergence of 26 independent states with a range of different systems where formerly there had been nine states ruled by communist parties with systems constructed basically along the lines of the Soviet prototype.¹ The almost simultaneous occurrence of so many instances of regime change provides a perfect laboratory for the testing of theories about regime transformation. The proximity of these cases, both geographically and temporally, makes this region a much better site for comparative analysis than Latin America, which played a crucial structuring role in the development of studies of democratic transition. Important, too, is the fact that the political outcomes of these cases of regime change have been very different.

The collapse of these regimes was accompanied by the widespread