

MANDATE POLITICS

Lawrence J. Grossback • David A. M. Peterson • James A. Stimson

CAMBRIDGE

CAMBRIDGE

www.cambridge.org/9780521866545

This page intentionally left blank

Mandate Politics

Whether or not voters consciously use their votes to send messages about their preferences for public policy, the Washington community sometimes comes to believe that it has heard such a message. In this book, the authors ask, "What then happens?" This book focuses on these perceived mandates – where they come from and how they alter the behaviors of members of Congress, the media, and voters.

These events are rare. Only three elections in postwar America (1964, 1980, and 1994) were declared mandates by media consensus. These declarations, however, had a profound if ephemeral impact on members of Congress. They altered the fundamental gridlock that prevents Congress from adopting major policy changes. The responses by members of Congress to these three elections are responsible for many of the defining policies of this era. Despite their infrequency, then, mandates are important to the face of public policy and our understanding of Congress, the president, and the responsiveness of our government more generally.

Lawrence J. Grossback is Adjunct Assistant Research Professor in the Department of Political Science at West Virginia University and works as a policy analyst for the federal government. He has published articles in the *American Journal of Political Science*; *British Journal of Political Science*; *Journal of Health Policy, Politics, and Law*; *American Politics Research*; and other journals and edited volumes. He was co-winner of the 2002 Patrick J. Fett Award from the Midwest Political Science Association for the best paper on Congress and the Presidency.

David A. M. Peterson is Associate Professor of Political Science at Texas A&M University. His work has been supported by the National Science Foundation and has appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science*, *Journal of Politics*, *Political Behavior*, and other journals. He was co-winner of the 2002 Patrick J. Fett Award from the Midwest Political Science Association for the best paper on Congress and the Presidency.

James A. Stimson is Raymond Dawson Distinguished Bicentennial Professor of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He has authored or coauthored five books: *Yeas and Nays: Normal Decision-Making in the U.S. House of Representatives* (with Donald R. Matthews); *Issue Evolution: Race and the Reconstruction of American Politics* (with Edward G. Carmines); *Public Opinion in America: Moods, Cycles, and Swings*; *The Macro Polity* (with Robert S. Erikson and Michael B. MacKuen); and *Tides of Consent: How Public Opinion Shapes American Politics*. He has won the Heinz Eulau and Gladys Kammerer Awards of the American Political Science Association, the Chastain Award of the Southern Political Science Association, and the Pi Sigma Alpha Award of the Midwest Political Science Association.

Mandate Politics

LAWRENCE J. GROSSBACK

West Virginia University

DAVID A. M. PETERSON

Texas A&M University

JAMES A. STIMSON

University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

cambridge university press
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521866545

© Lawrence J. Grossback, David A. M. Peterson, James A. Stimson 2007

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provision of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published in print format 2006

ISBN-13 978-0-511-24348-6 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-24348-0 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-86654-5 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-86654-5 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> vii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
1 A Single Time in a Single Place	1
1.1 Mandates as Social Constructions	14
1.2 The Study of Mandates	17
1.3 Telling the Larger Story of Mandate Politics	24
2 The Evolution of Mandates	27
2.1 The Media Spin: On the Declaration of Mandates	27
2.2 Before the Election	34
2.3 Election Night	35
2.4 The Buildup to Taking Office	52
3 Members of Congress Respond	63
3.1 Mandated Congresses?	65
3.2 Setting up a Test	77
3.3 Modeling Mandates	84
3.4 Who Responds to Mandates?	87
3.5 Duration of Mandates	90
3.6 Members and the Mandate Signal	102
4 The Pattern of Congressional Response	106
4.1 Congress in the Aggregate	107
4.2 Pivotal Politics	114

4.3	Movement Back toward Equilibrium: A Longer View	124
5	Consequences	131
5.1	Institutional Politics	131
5.2	Turning the Mandate Off	144
5.3	Mandates and the Flow of Public Policy	154
5.4	Appendix	157
6	The Irresistible Meets the Unmovable	161
6.1	The Return to Normal Politics	161
6.2	The Subsequent Election	166
7	Conclusion: A Mandate View of Normal American Politics	179
7.1	The 2004 Mandate?	179
7.2	Thinking About Normal	183
7.3	The Efficiency of Democracy	183
7.4	Dramatic Beginnings	186
7.5	Elections in America: A Reinterpretation	187
7.6	The Democratic Dilemma of Mandates	189
	<i>Bibliography</i>	195
	<i>Index</i>	199

List of Figures

2.1	Balance of Pro- and Antimandate Press Mentions for Election Cycles of 1980–1981 Through 2002–2003	<i>page</i> 30
2.2	Election Outcomes for Four Offices (Standardized) by Year: 1960–1980	37
2.3	Election Outcomes for Four Offices (Standardized) by Year: 1982–2002	38
2.4	Cumulative Impact of Four Office Outcomes by Year	40
2.5	The 1964 Presidential Horse Race: Johnson Percentage	44
2.6	The 1980 Presidential Horse Race: Reagan Percentage	46
2.7	The 1994 Congressional Horse Race: Republican Percentage	49
2.8	Election Explanations by Winning and Losing Partisans	58
2.9	Support and Opposition to Mandate Claims by Party of Story Source	61
3.1	Balance of Pro- and Antimandate Press Mentions, 97th and 104th Sessions of Congress	70
3.2	Expected Member Response to Mandate Perception	76
3.3	Mandate Coding for Dante Fascell, 1981	80
3.4	Mandate Coding for Paul Tsongas, 1981	82
3.5	Mandate Coding for Gary Hart, 1981	83
3.6	Predicted Probability of a Mandate Reaction by Loss in Victory Margin	89
3.7	Predicted Probability of a Mandate Reaction by Ideological Extremity	90
3.8	Number of Members of Congress Who React to the Mandates by Year and Time	92

3.9	Percentage of Members Affected by the Mandate by Change in Victory Margin and Time	93
3.10	Percentage of Members Affected by the Mandate by Chamber and Time	94
3.11	Percentage of Members Affected by the Mandate by Seniority and Time	95
3.12	Percentage of Members Affected by the Mandate by Ideological Extremity and Time	96
3.13	Hazard Rate of the Mandate, with and without Media Effects	100
3.14	Hazard Rate of the Mandate by Change in Victory Margin	101
3.15	Hazard Rate of the Mandate by Ideological Extremity	103
4.1	All Years and Both Houses Combined	108
4.2	House and Senate Aggregate Liberalism, 1965	110
4.3	House and Senate Aggregate Liberalism, 1981	111
4.4	House and Senate Aggregate Liberalism, 1995	113
4.5	Krehbiel's Pivotal Politics Theory	116
4.6	Dynamic Pivots in the 89th Congress	122
4.7	Dynamic Pivots in the 97th Congress	123
4.8	Dynamic Pivots in the 104th Congress	124
4.9	Evolving Support for the Mandate in 1981	126
4.10	Evolving Support for the Mandate in 1995	127
5.1	Illustration of the Counterfactual Procedure: A Hypothetical Roll Call	146
5.2	Policy Liberalism by Congress, 82-104 (1951-1996)	156
6.1	Quarterly Mandate Coverage in the <i>New York Times</i> , Comparing Coverage Rates of the Previous and Forthcoming Elections, 1982 and 1996	166
7.1	Cumulative Impact of Four Office Outcomes by Year: Repeated from Chapter 2 with 2004 Added	181

List of Tables

2.1	<i>New York Times</i> Stories Interpreting Election Outcomes: 1960–1978	<i>page</i> 31
2.2	Measures of the Election Outcome	36
2.3	A Summary of Election Explanations	53
2.4	Mandate Explanations by Year, Percent	55
3.1	Member Response to Mandate	88
3.2	A Full Model of Mandate Duration	98
4.1	Pivot Positions Before and After the 1964 Election, Liberalism Propensities	117
4.2	Pivot Positions Before and After the 1980 Election, Liberalism Propensities	119
4.3	Pivot Positions Before and After the 1994 Election, Liberalism Propensities	120
4.4	Aggregate Voting Outcomes over the Term Explained by Media Commentary and Presidential Approval (Error Correction), 1981 and 1995	129
5.1	The Extent of Congressional Rule Changes, 1965–2002	143
5.2	Summary of Counterfactual Analyses – 89th Congress	148
5.3	Summary of Counterfactual Analyses – 97th Congress	150
5.4	Summary of Counterfactual Analyses – 104th Congress	152
5.5	Counterfactual Reversals – 89th Congress	157
5.6	Counterfactual Reversals – 97th Congress	158
5.7	Counterfactual Reversals – 104th Congress	159
5.8	Counterfactual Reversals and Congressional Quarterly Key Votes	160
6.1	Mandate Coverage One Year Later: Reinterpreting the Past and Thinking Ahead	163

6.2	Predicting Representative Retirement, by Party	171
6.3	Election Results in the Subsequent Election, by Party	175
6.4	Change in the Margin of Victory in the Subsequent Election, by Party	176

Preface

We confess. We are sinners. According to the gospel of political methodology, one should never let method determine choice of topics to investigate. The prohibition is so sensible that it needs no explanation. And yet this is exactly what we did. In the spring of 1997, four of us sat around a table in a seminar room in Minneapolis and asked the question, “What would be a good application of the duration modeling techniques that we had been studying together?”

In a few minutes of conversation, we spun a story about observing members of Congress faced with a Washington consensus that the election just passed had carried a voter mandate. We asked what the reaction should look like and, because this was a methods course and we are social scientists, how we could model it. Although we may not have known it then, the question of the impact of perceived mandates had been investigated before. Importantly, however, the tools used and assumptions made were blunt. Scholars asked if the year following a mandate was different from the year that preceded it, concluding that it was not. The duration model, in contrast, focused on a temporary response that had run its course, as we now know, by midyear – and lost most of its force well before that. In this case, the tool matters.

The question originated from both the 1994 election and its aftermath, on the one hand, and the opportunity to test a piece of the theory Stimson had developed elsewhere (“Dynamic Representation,” with coauthors Michael B. MacKuen and Robert S. Erikson), on the other.

The four of us were quite amazed at the dynamics of the aftermath of the Republican revolution. The Republicans took control of Congress for the first time in a generation and were poised to make tremendous changes in public policy. In the space of two years, this opportunity had collapsed. We could not agree if there really was something in public opinion that propelled the Republicans to power in 1994. We could not agree if that election had been a mandate or if *any* election could be a mandate. Despite years of trying, we never could develop a test of whether or not a mandate had occurred. Instead, we decided that the beliefs of the members of Congress comprised a more testable, and ultimately more theoretically interesting, question.

The second motivation is the one we were more interested in and the one that maintained this project for eight years. Stimson's work in "Dynamic Representation" proposed a theory that members of Congress were forward-looking observers of public opinion who constantly monitored all the signs of what the public wanted and how that might be changing so that they could be ahead of the curve, reacting to what could be known today so that they would never be caught out of line with public sentiment in a future election. This required members to be ambitious – and they are – and to be assiduous processors of all the little scraps of information that might forecast where the public was heading. If these were true, then the currents that move elections should be fully anticipated and the elections themselves should have no influence on the future behavior of members. Future elections in this world of rational expectations might move current behavior, but past elections were just history.

But we found one detail in this story troublesome. In a world of uncertainty, it should be the case that even the most assiduous information processors make forecast errors. Trying very hard to get it right, as if one's whole career depends on it – which it does – still does not guarantee that all will be foreseen. The loose end is the answer to the question, "What if some elections surprise, their outcome different from what informed observers expected?" Then, contrary to the main line of the dynamic representation theory, these elections should matter. Surprises do lead rational actors to change behavior.

And so our interest in statistical theory, tied to our observations about politics and grafted onto a nugget of theoretical anomaly, led to an animated discussion of thirty minutes or so in which much of the

research that would eventually lead to this book was anticipated. It played out in our minds without a scrap of data at hand.

We were a class, not a research group. We were not looking for a project and had no plan to do something together. In most circumstances it would have been a fun discussion and then . . . nothing, on to the next week's topic. The work we anticipated was massive and none of it had been started. There was no assurance that it would work, that we actually could demonstrate that mandate elections changed behavior. It was crucial in this regard that the computer routines that produced the data for the dynamic representation research were available off the shelf. With them in hand, we generated the aggregate voting patterns that will be seen in Chapter 4, a matter of a few hours' work. This evidence was unmistakable. For the three elections that we considered reasonable candidates to have been perceived by Washington insiders as mandates, there was noticeable movement toward the mandate at the beginning of a new Congress, which then decayed back to normal voting patterns as the session progressed – exactly what we had anticipated with our prior theory.

From that first discussion in which we had real results, tentative though they were, we were hooked. We knew then that the difficult and sensitive duration analysis was likely to uncover the same patterns already seen in the easy aggregate analyses. It was worth the effort, which was considerable. We ceased to be a class and became a research team of four. Our fourth member, Amy Gangl, was present at the creation and made valuable contributions to our early research program, including the first published article from it. To our regret, she decided that this project was too far removed from the political psychology that is her specialty and professional identity.

And what of the duration modeling that sparked the discussion that was the origin of this research? Well, we did it. As we thought it would be in advance, it became the key evidence for the micro theory of member response to mandates. But to put the matter in context, it is just one section in one chapter of the seven-chapter book that follows. How members of Congress respond to news of a mandate is a pretty important part of our story, but it led us to ask several other questions. How do the media create the story of an election being a mandate? Why do some elections create these messages, whereas others don't? What are the policy changes induced by these responses? How do voters react

to these responses in subsequent elections? Each of these questions was completely beyond our original plan and each caused us to immerse ourselves in history and in textual analysis that were well beyond our normal research styles. In combination, we have a more or less complete story of mandate elections that begins with those elections and ends when members of Congress face the voters two years later.

For eight years, we immersed ourselves in the idea of electoral mandates. This book is the result.

Acknowledgments

As with any other book, the authors leaned heavily on many other people. The project began while all three of us were at the University of Minnesota. Minnesota provided a rich academic environment and strong research support to launch this effort. We all have since moved on and have received institutional support from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Stimson), Texas A&M University (Peterson), and West Virginia University (Grossback). WVU, in particular, awarded a Faculty Senate Research Grant to assist in this project.

Several of our friends and colleagues have provided valuable comments on portions of the manuscript. These include Patricia Hurley, Kim Hill, B. Dan Wood, Eric Lawrence, Paul Kellstedt, Walter Mebane, Adam Berinsky, Mike MacKuen, Jan Leighley, Stephen Ansolabehere, Neal Beck, Scott Chrichlow, Stephen Borelli, Byron Schaeffer, participants of the 1997 and 1998 Annual Meetings of the Society for the Study of Political Methodology, and the WVU Department of Political Science Research Seminar. Janet Box-Steffensmeier and Brad Jones, in particular, helped with the duration analysis and encouraged the project along the way. Chaun Stores, Teresa Hutchins, and Brian Fogarty provided invaluable research assistance. Brian deserves special mention for his work on the content analysis in Chapter 2.

Some of our data come from archival sources. The Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research provided much of the roll call and election data we rely on. We are indebted to Keith Poole for his meticulous work archiving and making public roll call data for

recent congresses. Data on key laws were taken from David Mayhew, and we appreciate his continued efforts at identifying these laws and making the data public.

We also thank Lori Biederman, Dianne Stimson, and Teresa Warkel. Each of us in our own way knows why.

Finally, this project began with four authors. When we started exploring mandates, Amy Gangl was an equal partner. At some point, Amy decided that this project did not fit into her research agenda and chose to work on other things. She helped develop the theory and analysis that form the basis of Chapter 3 of this book (and the *American Journal of Political Science* article that was an earlier version of that chapter). Several of the ideas that we would explore after she was no longer part of the project, particularly those about the media in Chapter 2, were heavily influenced by our early discussions with her on the topic. We know that this book is better off because of her involvement at the beginning – and worse off for her absence at the end.

A Single Time in a Single Place

On the morning of November 5, 1964, Arthur Krock of the *New York Times* posed a problem for newly elected President Lyndon Johnson. How would he answer the “great question created by the most emphatic vote of preference ever given to a national candidate: How will he use the mandate to lead and govern that has been so overwhelmingly tendered by the American people?” (1964, p. 44). Krock’s words capture the reaction of many to the landslide that had brought victory to more than Johnson. In the upcoming Congress, the Democrats would hold a two to one margin in both chambers. Thirty-eight new House Democrats extended their majority to 295 seats while two new Democratic Senators gave them a total of 68, the second largest majority the Democrats had ever held in both chambers (Morris 1965). If there ever was a partisan surge, this was it.

There was, as always, a debate over whether the Democratic surge constituted a mandate for Johnson’s policies. Most Republicans attributed the defeat to the rejection of Barry Goldwater’s brand of conservatism. Some Democrats argued that the victory was rooted more broadly in support of liberalism than in support of Johnson. There was some truth to this last notion. Outside the South, liberal Democrats replaced conservative Republicans. In the South, conservative Republicans replaced equally conservative Democrats. The liberal gains thus went beyond additional Democratic seats. Still, many in the media and in politics saw this as a mandate, and many of them ranked it as among the most significant in history. Even reluctant Republicans had

to concede defeat and admit that voters had expressed their support for the major parts of Johnson's program. One Republican congressman summed up the meaning of the election well. "He's got the votes. There's not much we can do to stop his program if we tried" ("Great Society" Editorial, p. E1).

Johnson's answer to Krock's question came the following January in his State of the Union Address. Johnson (1965a) would seek the creation of a "Great Society [that] asks not how much, but how good; not only how to create wealth but how to use it; not only how fast we are going, but where we are headed." The Great Society included calls for health insurance for the elderly, the federal funds to support secondary and higher education, a department of housing and urban development to lead a war on poverty, and efforts to fight crime and disease. Johnson also touched on his desire to build on the passage of the Civil Rights Act the year before. The statement was brief, promising "the elimination of barriers to voting rights," but it would come to have major consequence for American politics.

Voting rights were on the agenda of others as well, and well they should have been. In 1964, only about 43 percent of Southern blacks were registered to vote, but the figure was as low as 7 percent in Mississippi (Davidson 1994). One week after the Democratic landslide, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference decided that it needed a rallying point around which to build support for voting rights across the nation (Davidson 1992). The rallying point would be Selma, Alabama. Selma and surrounding Dallas County had 30,000 blacks eligible to vote, of whom only 355 were then registered. Soon the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. would request a meeting with the president to discuss voting rights proposals. The election results played a role in the renewed drive to pass a voting rights bill. One reporter noted that "passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the outcome of the Nov. 3 election had the effect of crumbling much of the massive white opposition to change that existed in the Deep South states" (Herbers 1965, p. E5). It did not crush all the resistance, and it had little effect on the white leaders of Selma. It was they who on March 7, 1965 – hence forth known as "Bloody Sunday" – led a group of men on to Edmund Pettus Bridge to attack civil rights marchers, wounding close to a hundred.

The violence of Bloody Sunday led members of Congress from both parties to call on the Johnson administration to quickly send the anticipated voting rights bill to Congress. The mandate made it time to act. Johnson had wide public support outside the South, and he saw the need to take advantage of the Democrats' massive advantage in Congress before Southern support for the party eroded further (Davidson 1994). On March 15, the president spoke to the country about the need for a voting rights bill. He spoke of an American promise that had to be kept and of the destiny of democracy. He also spoke of Selma. His words were eloquent:

... at times history and fate meet at a single time in a single place to shape a turning point in man's unending search for freedom. So it was at Lexington and Concord. So it was a century ago at Appomattox. So it was last week in Selma, Alabama. (Johnson 1965b)

As critical as Selma was, it was not enough to ensure passage of a forceful voting rights bill. The bill had to get through the U.S. Senate where Southerners controlled key committees and where they could filibuster the bill to death. The first challenge was the Senate Judiciary Committee. Since 1953, James Eastland (D-MS) had chaired the committee. In that time, 122 civil rights bills had been referred to the committee. Of that number, only one was ever reported back, and that case required the entire Senate to overrule the chair (Kenworthy 1965a). The mandate consensus, however, had strengthened Johnson's hand and the hand of the Senate leadership. To get past Senator Eastland, the Senate leadership required that the bill be reported back in fifteen days. If not, the party leaders would cancel the Easter recess. The mandate effect also lowered the threat of a filibuster. A number of Southern Senators who had opposed the Civil Rights Act of 1964 appeared ready to allow a bill to come to a vote. Their ranks included J. W. Fulbright of Arkansas, George Smathers of Florida, and Albert Gore of Tennessee. Of them, only Gore would join four other Southern Senators who – along with sixty-five others – would vote for cloture.

The belief in a mandate would have a direct influence on the content of the bill as well. In analyses to come, we suggest that certain elections, such as 1964, are perceived to carry a message about the will of the voters. These mandates lead members of Congress to reevaluate how

to vote on legislation to satisfy their constituents. We can assess the effect of the perceived mandate by asking what would the outcome of roll call votes have been absent these reevaluations. We rerun history (by a method to be detailed later) to observe roll call outcomes in a “normal” 1965 Senate – one in which the effect of the mandate has been removed.

Absent the mandate, two votes on amendments to the Voting Rights Act would have come out differently. One was a (Republican) amendment to limit the ability of the U.S. Attorney General to bring cases under the Act’s provisions. The second was a Southern Democratic amendment that would have given federal courts in the South the discretion to hear cases arising from the Act. Both had a simple purpose: gutting the enforcement provisions of the Act. By putting enforcement in the hands of Southern state attorneys general and sitting Southern judges, the amendments would have watered the bill down to almost nothing, an endorsement of voting rights that would be without practical effect. Both were defeated, primarily because the spirit of the times led a small number of Senators to cast votes that were more liberal than would have been the case in normal conditions.

The result was a second “single time in a single place” when history and fate met to extend freedom to a long oppressed group of citizens. The moment came on August 6, 1965, in the U.S. Capitol. President Johnson entered the President’s Room off the Senate chamber, the very same room that Abraham Lincoln entered in 1861 to free slaves pressed into confederate military duty. He sat at the desk he used as a Senator and at which some believe Lincoln also sat on that earlier day (Kenworthy 1965b). There Lincoln freed the slaves, and there Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Johnson (1965c, p. 8) would remark that “today is a triumph for freedom as huge as any victory that’s ever been won on any battlefield.”

The implication here is striking. The Democratic gains in Congress were not enough to ensure an effective voting rights bill.¹ Absent the unusual politics a sense of mandate put in place, the Great Society would have been very different, especially to black voters across the

¹ And we don’t need to rerun history to know that numbers weren’t enough. That *same* 89th Senate would turn balky the following year, denying Johnson much of what he wanted.

South. Mississippi may not have seen the percentage of blacks registered to vote increase from 7 percent in 1964 to nearly 60 percent in 1968. Nor would the South see the number of black elected officials rise from fewer than 100 to over 3,265 by 1989 (Davidson 1992). Absent the mandate, the history of racial politics and, indeed, partisan politics might have been very different (Carmines and Stimson 1989).

1.0.1 “Our Enemy is Time” – Budget Politics and the Reagan Revolution

On May 7, 1981, two roll call votes took place in the House of Representatives. The first sought to replace the Fiscal 1982 Budget Resolution prepared by the (Democratic) majority Leadership with a substitute resolution written by Ronald Reagan’s budget director, David Stockman. The second would be on the adoption of the resolution that emerged. The substitute resolution was the Reagan revolution. It called for nearly \$37 billion in spending cuts for fiscal 1982, another \$44 billion in cuts by fiscal 1984, and left room for a 30 percent cut in individual tax rates that would cost nearly \$50 billion in its first year and over \$700 billion over five years. The goal was simple; fundamentally scale back the scope of the federal government. Victory for Reagan was not assured. The Republicans had 192 members in the House, 26 short of a majority.

In scheduling the two votes, the Democratic controlled Rules Committee had imposed an up or down vote on the revolution. The Reagan White House framed the vote in simple terms (Stockman 1986, p. 174): “Are you with Ronald Reagan or against him?” In the end, 253 members were with Reagan on the first vote, 270 on the second. Sixty-three Democrats joined 190 Republicans to defeat the Democratic alternative. As members prepared to vote on final adoption, the easy victory led Minority Leader Robert Michel (R-IL) to proclaim, “Let history show that we provided the margin of difference that changed the course of American government” (*CQ Almanac* 1981, p. 253).

Six months earlier, in October 1980, historic change in the course of American government was not inevitable, in fact, it seemed unlikely. Opinion polls showed that President Jimmy Carter had eroded the lead Ronald Reagan had held since early summer (Pomper 1981). Just before the two candidates debated on October 28, Carter opened a