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# How Conventions Bump: An Individual-level Investigation

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HOW CONVENTIONS BUMP:  
AN INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL INVESTIGATION

by

Joseph Cera

A Dissertation Submitted in  
Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
in Political Science

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

August 2013

## ABSTRACT

### HOW CONVENTIONS BUMP: AN INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL INVESTIGATION

by

Joseph Cera

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013  
Under the Supervision of Professor Thomas Holbrook

Presidential nominating conventions sometimes trigger shifts in aggregate levels of candidate support large enough to affect election outcomes. While we are able to predict the probable impact of conventions with some degree of accuracy, we do not yet fully understand *how* these large-scale campaign events produce the changes we observe. Current scholarship on the impact of conventions on opinion is almost exclusively limited to aggregate-level analysis. In this study, I focus on individual-level analysis to demonstrate how self-exposure to different sources of information during conventions can produce overlapping yet distinct impacts on candidate support that are not always observable at the aggregate level. Along the way, I discuss the state of current scholarship and present theoretical justifications for the separate consideration of different types of information sources during conventions. I explore the determinants of self-exposure to nominee acceptance speeches, and demonstrate how those speeches exercise a persuasive effect that favors convening candidates. I also examine the influence of partisan bias triggered by an information environment flooded with political messaging. Finally, I consider the joint influence of pairs of conventions within a

given cycle, and I examine the impact of conventions on political knowledge in general and the gap in political knowledge that runs along socioeconomic lines specifically.

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**To my daughter,  
whom I can't wait to meet.**

**(She needs some additional development before she is ready,  
according to a committee of doctors.)**

## Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the members of my committee; each of you made an investment in me somewhere along the line when you could have chosen to keep your resources to yourself. You couldn't have been sure it was an investment that would bear fruit, but you went ahead with it all the same. I will try to follow your example in that regard.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

The nominating convention has been a feature of American presidential elections for almost two centuries. Formally, the conventions serve as vehicles by which the two major parties designate their nominees for president and articulate their platforms. However, over the past few decades, a dramatic expansion of media coverage of convention developments has given convention planners a powerful incentive to present drama-free meetings. Institutional changes such as adoption of binding party primary elections and caucuses have allowed them to do so by producing *de facto* nominees ahead of time. Because it is now possible (and common) for one candidate to achieve a mathematical lock on the nomination months prior to the convention by securing a majority of convention delegates through winning primaries and caucuses, planners have been able to repurpose conventions. They have been transformed from avenues for intraparty deliberation into vehicles for the dissemination of massive doses of tightly controlled, carefully refined campaign information.

Early in the postwar era, before the adoption of binding primaries (when nominees were still chosen by ballot during the conventions), broadcast networks began using the new medium of television to capture *all* of the political drama that unfolded on the floor during conventions as party factions jockeyed for primacy. Modern broadcast and cable television networks no longer present gavel-to-gavel coverage of the now largely ceremonial floor proceedings, but every major network still dedicates multiple hours of primetime coverage each night of the conventions to speeches given

by beloved elder statesmen, rising party stars, members of the nominees' families, and finally the nominees themselves. On the final night of each convention, the convening nominee is presented to a national audience as the leader of a newly united and rejuvenated party, whose platform bears his personal stamp.

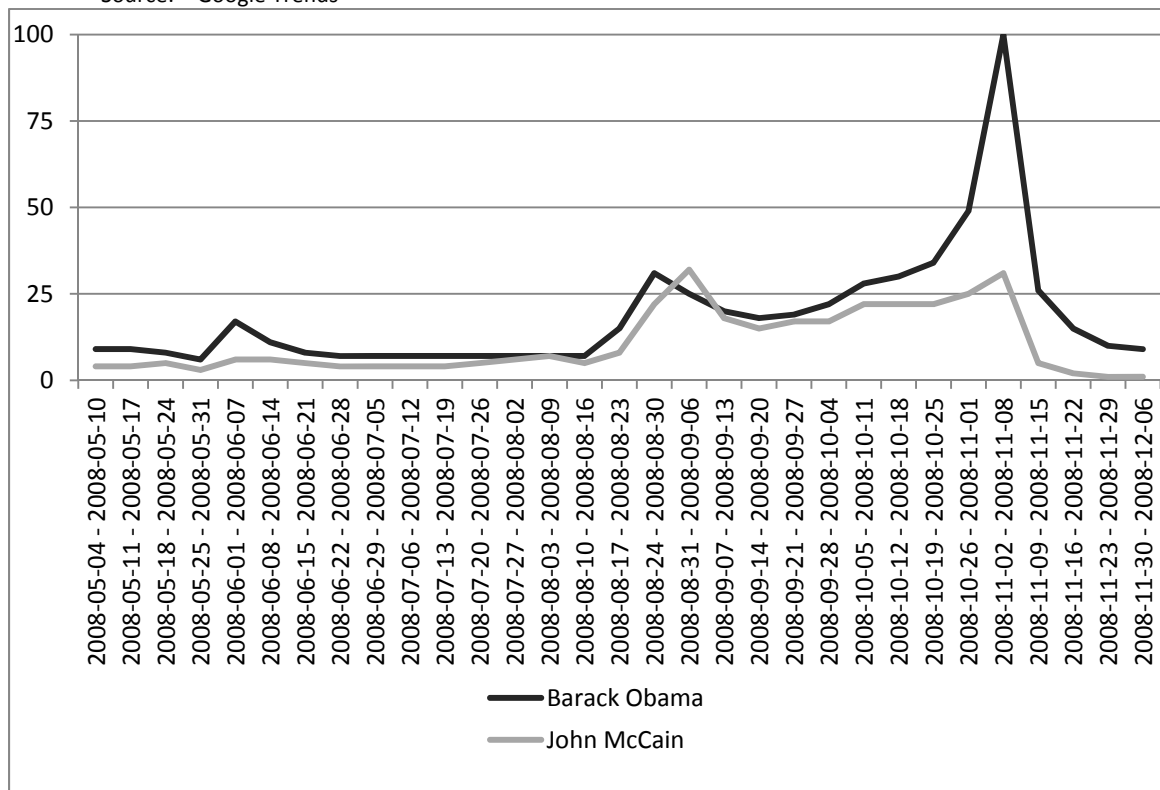
### **Why Study Conventions?**

This choreographed political rollout, media coverage of it, and public attention to it combine to preserve the long-standing norm that the conventions mark the end of the primary campaigns and the beginning of the general election campaign. This is a norm that is recognized not only by political professionals, but by the electorate in general. It is during the conventions that public attention turns to the nominees and the contest between them. An examination of Internet search volumes during the 2008 and 2012 campaigns confirm that dramatic increases in the public's interest in (and curiosity towards) the presumptive nominees coincide with their respective conventions. Figure 1.1 displays Internet search volumes for the search terms "Barack Obama" and "John McCain" during the 2008 campaign, while Figure 1.2 displays Internet search volumes for the search terms "Mitt Romney" and "Barack Obama" during the 2012 campaign.

The 2008 Democratic National Convention was held from August 25<sup>th</sup> through August 28<sup>th</sup>, while the 2008 Republican Convention ran from September 1<sup>st</sup> until September 4<sup>th</sup>. Interest in the candidates remained relatively static in the months following their primary victories (McCain clinched the Republican nomination in March; Obama's main opponent, Hillary Clinton, ended her bid in early June). In the



Fig. 1.1: Weekly Internet Search Volumes for Search Terms “Barack Obama” and “John McCain”  
May 2008 – December 2008  
Source: Google Trends

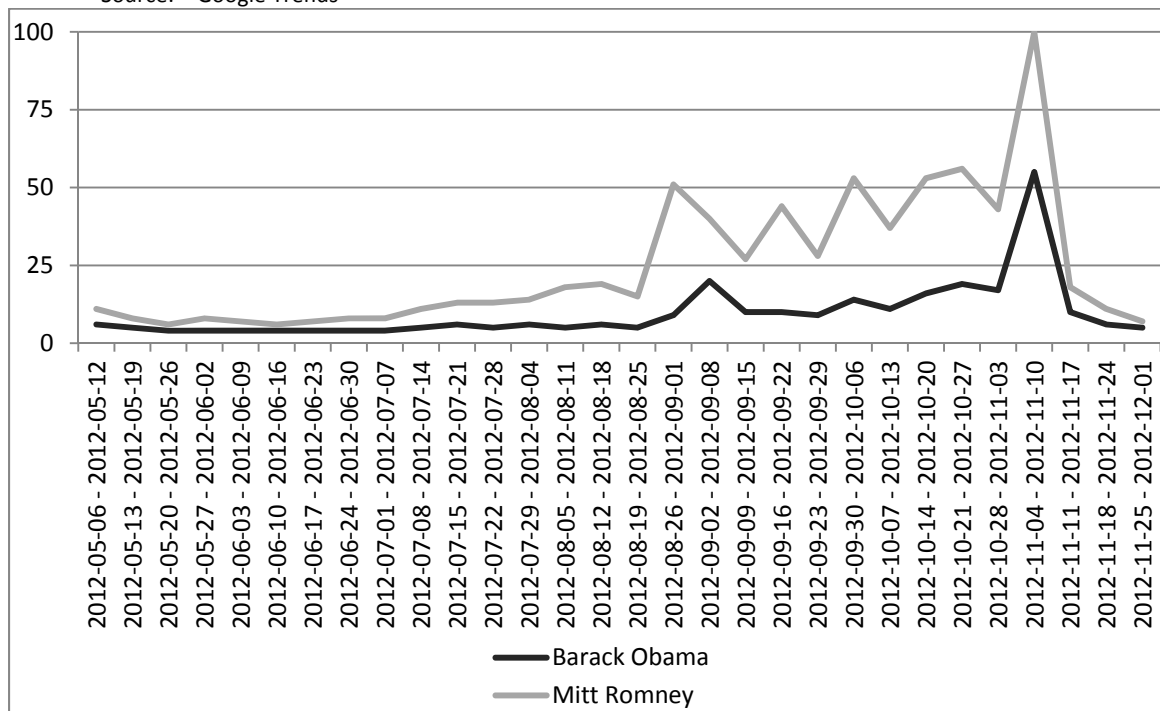


Note: Highest data point set at 100; remaining data points scaled accordingly

week prior to each convention, interest in the convening candidate increased sharply as news media geared up for convention coverage, and peaked as the candidates convened. Interest in Obama would not reach convention levels again until three weeks prior to Election Day. For McCain, his convention represented the peak level of the electorate’s curiosity about him. Although interest in the candidates settled somewhat in the weeks after the conventions, it is clear that the conventions marked the beginning of a new phase in the information environment characterized by increased demand for information about the candidates that only returned to pre-convention levels after Election Day.

The pattern of interest in the candidates was quite similar during the 2012 campaign. Figure 1.2 shows relatively stable periods of interest in Barack Obama and Mitt Romney in the Spring and Summer following Romney's primary victory, followed by dramatic increases in interest during the conventions.<sup>1</sup> Again, these spikes in interest were followed by a period characterized by intensified curiosity regarding the candidates that persisted until the election ended.

Fig. 1.2: Weekly Internet Search Volumes for Search Terms "Barack Obama" and "Mitt Romney"  
May 2012 – December 2012  
Source: Google Trends



Note: Highest data point set at 100; remaining data points scaled accordingly

In this context of heightened attention from the electorate, the political parties use conventions as opportunities to set the tone for the fall campaigns, and to heal internal wounds caused by intra-party primary competition or ideological disagreements

<sup>1</sup> The 2012 RNC was held from August 27<sup>th</sup> until August 30<sup>th</sup>; the 2012 DNC was held from September 4<sup>th</sup> to September 6<sup>th</sup>.

(Campbell, Cherry and Wink 1992). Until the conventions, primary candidates who have been mathematically eliminated are free to publicly use their clout to apply pressure to the policy positions of their party's front runner. At the conventions (and afterward), defeated primary candidates are expected to publicly support their party's nominee and that nominee's policy positions. Conventions are now explicitly planned with a prime-time television audience in mind. Formal party business and official functions taking place on the floor are scheduled for other times; events most likely to cast the party and the candidate in a positive light are slotted for times where the highest possible viewership is likeliest (Trent and Friedenburt 2000). Viewers who tune in to modern conventions end up consuming political theater; conventions have become highly scripted campaign events. However, conventions are not merely rallies writ large; their audiences are not limited to party faithful. Convention audiences are vast, diverse, and hungry for information about the two people competing for the country's top public-sector job. The rebirth of conventions as unique and unmatched campaign events makes them worthwhile targets of study. Among researchers who focus on presidential elections, the view that campaigns (and the high-profile events that animate them) play a modest yet important role in shaping electoral outcomes has emerged as the consensus (Shaw and Roberts 2000; Stimson 2004; Holbrook 1996; Linn, Moody and Asper 2009; Erikson and Wlezien 2012). We know that mass opinion often shifts during conventions. The question is, how are these changes produced?

## What We Know About Convention Effects

Aside from their formal function and traditional importance, what makes conventions special is the structure of the information environment while they are being held. The parties traditionally convene one at a time; the challenging party goes first, followed by the party of the incumbent president. While one party convenes, it completely dominates the attention of the mainstream media; meanwhile, the other party waits its turn, traditionally holding no major events until the convening party finishes.<sup>2</sup> The electorate is especially attentive during these periods, engaging in “intense political learning” and forming enduring impressions (Stimson 2004). Through a content analysis of front-page *New York Times* articles during the 1984, 1988, and 1992 presidential campaigns, Holbrook (1996) demonstrated that the intensity of coverage spikes for convening candidates, *and that the net tone of this coverage also shifts to favor them*. At the heart of the campaign effects literature is the expectation that notable shifts in aggregate candidate support only materialize as a result of campaign messages when those messages are distinct, consistent, and clearly favor one side over the other (Zaller 1991; Zaller 1992; Bartels 1993). When these conditions are *not* met, high-quality presidential campaign operations tend to cancel out each others’ influence on aggregate opinion (Gelman and King 1993). The aforementioned conditions are *always* met during conventions, and as a result conventions are capable of generating significant increases in support for the convening candidates. The tendency for the

---

<sup>2</sup> This may be changing; during the 2012 Republican convention, Barack Obama held an “Ask Me Anything” event on the popular social news website Reddit, where he fielded spontaneous questions from users. This event garnered attention from major broadcast and print media organizations.

convening candidate to enjoy an increase in support (the eponymous “bump”) is well-documented by scholars (Campbell et al. 1992; Gelman and King 1993; Holbrook 1996; Campbell 2001; Stimson 2004). Recent work suggests these bumps do not dissipate, but instead exercise a persistent influence (Erikson and Wlezien 2012). For illustrative purposes, I present changes in the two-party split of aggregate candidate support after every convention between 1964 and 2012 in Tables 1.1 and 1.2:

Table 1.1: Change in Two-Party Split of Candidate Support after Democratic Conventions 1964-2012

Source: Gallup Poll (Registered Voters)

Convention date	Democratic candidate share (pre)	Republican candidate share (pre)	Support split (pre)	Democratic candidate share (post)	Republican candidate share (post)	Support split (post)	Change in support split
1964	65%	29%	Dem +36	65%	29%	Dem +36	None
1968	29%	45%	GOP +16	31%	43%	GOP +12	Dem +4
1972	37%	53%	GOP +16	37%	56%	GOP +19	GOP +3
1976	53%	36%	Dem +17	62%	29%	Dem +33	Dem +16
1980	29%	45%	GOP +16	39%	38%	Dem +1	Dem +17
1984	39%	53%	GOP +14	41%	53%	GOP +12	Dem +2
1988	47%	41%	Dem +6	54%	37%	Dem +17	Dem +11
1992	40%	48%	GOP +8	56%	34%	Dem +22	Dem +30
1996	51%	38%	Dem +13	55%	34%	Dem +21	Dem +8
2000	39%	55%	GOP +16	47%	46%	Dem +1	Dem +17
2004	47%	46%	Dem +1	45%	51%	GOP +6	GOP +7
2008	45%	45%	Tied	49%	41%	Dem +8	Dem +8
2012	47%	46%	Dem +1	50%	44%	Dem +6	Dem +5

Note: GOP = Grand Old Party (Republican Party)

Table 1.2: Change in Two-Party Split of Candidate Support after Republican Conventions 1964-2012

Source: Gallup Poll (Registered Voters)

Convention date	Democratic candidate share (pre)	Republican candidate share (pre)	Support split (pre)	Democratic candidate share (post)	Republican candidate share (post)	Support split (post)	Change in support split
1964	65%	26%	Dem +39	62%	31%	Dem +31	GOP +8
1968	38%	40%	GOP +2	29%	45%	GOP +16	GOP +14
1972	31%	57%	GOP +26	30%	64%	GOP +34	GOP +8
1976	54%	32%	Dem +22	51%	36%	Dem +15	GOP +7
1980	34%	37%	GOP +3	29%	45%	GOP +16	GOP +13
1984	41%	52%	GOP +11	37%	56%	GOP +19	GOP +8
1988	49%	42%	Dem +7	43%	48%	GOP +5	GOP +12
1992	56%	37%	Dem +19	51%	39%	Dem +12	GOP +7
1996	52%	30%	Dem +22	47%	40%	Dem +7	GOP +15
2000	39%	50%	GOP +11	37%	54%	GOP +17	GOP +6
2004	46%	48%	GOP +2	45%	52%	GOP +7	GOP +5
2008	49%	43%	Dem +6	44%	49%	GOP +5	GOP +11
2012	46%	47%	GOP +1	47%	46%	Dem +1	Dem +2

Note: GOP = Grand Old Party (Republican Party)

By comparing Gallup polling data collected just before and just after each convention, we can see that in 22 out of 26 cases, the given convention resulted in a subsequent increase in the two-party split of candidate support for the convening candidate. Political scientists have successfully developed aggregate-level models that explain both the reliable increase in support for the convening party after conventions *and* the wide variation in the size of the increases. Holbrook (1996) describes the direction and magnitude of the convention bump as a function of the discrepancy between observed levels of pre-convention candidate support and what “fundamental” factors (such as approval of the incumbent president and retrospective economic evaluations) suggest levels of support would be if the electorate had more information about objective conditions. Candidates experiencing lower levels of pre-convention support than fundamental factors suggest they should be enjoying tend to get bumps in support after their conventions, while candidates who are “over-performing” the level of support suggested by the fundamentals are likely to see their support remain static or even decrease after their conventions.

It is completely understandable why the bulk of research regarding conventions has focused on aggregate change in polling numbers for the candidates. Polling numbers are directly relatable to election outcomes, and at any given point in time they are an easily accessible and relatively reliable predictor of outcomes. Furthermore, whenever aggregate polling numbers change, it means something important has occurred. The difficulty, as we will see, is that the converse is not true; *when something important occurs, aggregate polling numbers do not always change*. If the “important thing” in

question affects different kinds of people in different ways, or involves multiple overlapping but distinct effects, changes at the individual level can partially or completely mask each other at the aggregate level. The implication is that there may be quite a bit going on beneath the aggregate hood during conventions that cannot be seen by simply comparing the top lines of successive cross-sectional opinion polls. No matter how badly poll watchers want to be able to understand how conventions affect eventual outcomes, conclusions based on aggregate data will involve affirming the consequent<sup>3</sup> because aggregate change is not a necessary condition for the presence of meaningful individual-level effects. Until we engage in thorough individual-level investigation, we won't fully understand how opinion is influenced during conventions.

### **What We Don't Know**

While most of the extant literature on campaign effects avoids the subject of individual-level analysis and sticks to describing or analyzing aggregate change in opinion during conventions, some authors have acknowledged our lack of understanding when it comes to how these effects are actually produced at the individual level. Erikson and Wlezien (2012), for example, refer to the convention period as a "black box," as if the processes by which information is transmuted into updated opinions are unknowable. Hillygus and Jackman (2003) make a huge contribution by acknowledging that *a priori* individual characteristics can influence how individuals react

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<sup>3</sup> "Affirming the consequent" is the formal fallacy of inferring that the converse of a valid argument is always valid. The argument "If *P*, then *Q*; *Q*; therefore, *P*" (the converse of the valid argument "If *P*, then *Q*; *P*; therefore *Q*") is invalid because the conclusion can be false when the premises are true.

to conventions<sup>4</sup>, but these authors treat conventions as indivisible information units—“intervening events”—that are universally and uniformly experienced. In this conception, you are assigned a “1” if you were alive during a given convention and a “0” otherwise, and only your individual characteristics moderate the influence of the convention period as a whole on your post-convention opinion.

We can be reasonably sure that someone banging a gavel in a convention hall does not automatically trigger the uniform activation of dormant opinion-altering individual characteristics wherever they exist throughout the electorate. Individual characteristics don’t cause opinion change; they moderate the influence of incoming information on opinion. We receive information during conventions from a dizzying array of sources—broadcast news, cable news, print media, radio, the Internet, physical ads, other people, and coverage of the convention speeches. Even if we restrict our consideration of information sources to televised convention speeches, which are presented in more or less uniform manner across various channels, we are talking about tens of hours of content spread over several days. There is quite a bit of variation across individuals when it comes to levels of speech exposure.<sup>5</sup> The point is that conventions are not indivisible units of information; they are an amalgamation of many bits of information, any of which can be digested and many of which can be avoided. We have good evidence that the net tone of the information environment favors convening candidates, but individuals are not exposed to the net tone—each individual encounters

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<sup>4</sup> These authors showed that “mismatched partisans” (individuals who expressed a preference for a candidate of the opposite party with which they normally identify) were likely to change their candidate preferences in favor of their own party’s candidate post-convention.

<sup>5</sup> This variation is explored in Chapter 2.



a unique subset of the information available in the environment. The implications of the complexity of the information environment during conventions have not been seriously addressed by researchers.

### **The Information Environment Surrounding Conventions**

Karabell (1998) describes how television as a medium has transformed both the party convention and coverage of it. Parties and the broadcast networks brought about this change together; at first, in the early postwar era, the fledgling networks offered gavel-to-gavel coverage of the then-contentious conventions. The drama and controversies generated by the actual processes of choosing candidates and hammering out party platforms were natural fodder for straight television news reporting. However, this era of televised party conventions as a “transparent events,” where the electorate could actually witness the deliberative and contentious side of intra-party politics, came to an end after the chaotic and violent 1968 campaign. The parties recognized that the open conflict on which network news reporting thrived was not exactly good for the political fortunes of their candidates, and the introduction of the party primary began the process of transforming the conventions from deliberative forums into managed political infomercials. By the 1990s, conventions had become so tightly controlled and devoid of reportable controversy that the networks had little incentive to offer more than minimal prime-time coverage of some of the candidate speeches.

Cable news has come to fill the gap in comprehensive convention coverage formerly occupied by the broadcast networks. In 1996, MSNBC and FOX News became

competitors to the pre-existing major cable news network (CNN). The fledgling cable news channels adopted personality-driven talk-show formats that offered both the chance for them to distinguish themselves from their cable competitors and from vanilla broadcast network news, as well the chance to manufacture and showcase the kind of political controversy that drives ratings. Morris and Francia (2009) argue that this format allows cable news to devote more time to coverage of political events like conventions, because instead of just regurgitating choreographed speeches and events,

“Cable news has adopted a talk-show style format in which opinionated news analysts filter what they deem to be the important information from the convention speeches and proceedings. This new method of covering national party conventions offers much greater opportunity for cable news to spin their coverage. It is assumed—and possibly even expected—that the talk-show personalities will not take an objective approach when anchoring the convention coverage. They are free to solicit editorializing from all participants.” (14)

The increased scope of coverage offered by cable news networks has allowed them to capture an increasing share of viewers. In addition, the freedom granted by the talk-show format (as well as clear business strategies) have resulted in ideological differentiation that has fostered loyal partisan audiences. Some cable news networks now serve as reliable sources of information friendly to specific ideological worldviews.

During the 2000 and 2004 conventions, data from the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES) reveal significant differences in partisan preferences among the major cable news channels during the convention periods. Table 1.3 shows that during the 2004 Democratic convention period, CNN was the most-watched cable news channel, followed by FOX News and MSNBC. However, Republican-identifying respondents preferred FOX over CNN by a large margin, while Democratic-identifying

respondents were overwhelmingly likely to prefer CNN and avoid FOX. While MSNBC rated third across the partisan spectrum, its share of the Republican cable news audience was smaller than its share of Independents and Democrats.

Table 1.3: Cable News Channel Watched Most during Convention Period, by Respondent Partisanship  
2004 Democratic National Convention  
Source: National Annenberg Election Study

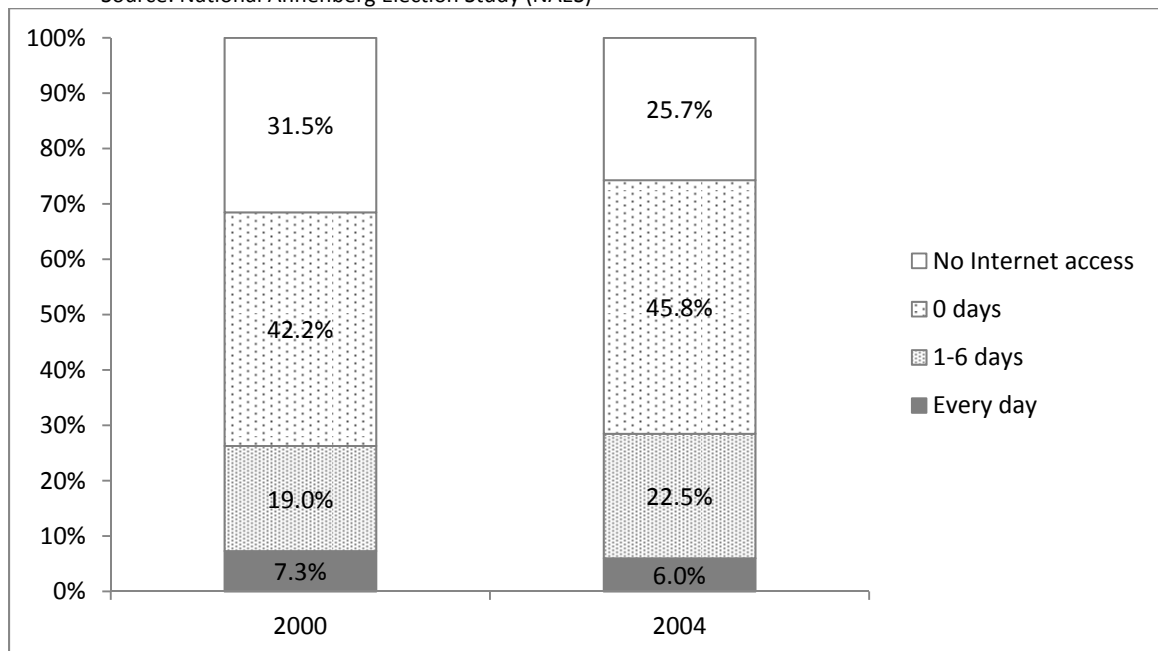
	Republicans	Independents	Democrats	All viewers
FOX News	56.4%	30.6%	17.7%	34.4%
CNN	32.4%	50.8%	67.3%	50.7%
MSNBC	8.3%	14.8%	11.5%	11.4%
All 3 Equally	2.9%	3.8%	3.5%	3.4%
Total	100.0% (N=204)	100.0% (N=183)	100.0% (N=226)	100.0% (N=613)

A content analysis of coverage by FOX News and CNN during the 2004 conventions by Morris and Francia (2009) revealed that FOX's coverage was biased in favor of Republican nominee (and incumbent President) George W. Bush and against Democratic nominee John Kerry (CNN's coverage was found to be balanced). Furthermore, using NAES panel data, they found that FOX's biased coverage influenced post-convention evaluations of both nominees. These findings, in conjunction with the patterns of partisan preferences across cable channels during recent convention periods, suggest that partisans are likely to seek out friendly information sources through which to view televised convention coverage, and are sometimes rewarded with biased analysis likely to reinforce their pre-existing political viewpoints. Despite the diligent efforts of the major parties to carefully choreograph convention messages, the rise of cable news over the last two decades means that parties and candidates cannot count on blanket favorable coverage.

Over the same time period, advances in communication technologies have also had a dramatic impact on the information environment. During the mid-1990s, cheaper personal computers, improvements to graphical user interface-based operating systems and web browsers, and the emergence of companies dedicated to Internet service provision combined to make the Internet a viable medium for the transmission of political information and the facilitation of political discourse. Public use of the Internet exploded in 1996 and 1997, and by 2000 the term “blogosphere” had been coined and the Internet had become a fixture of American political life. Data collected during the week after the first conventions of the 2000 and 2004 campaigns show that over two-thirds of the electorate had the Internet available to them as a source of information

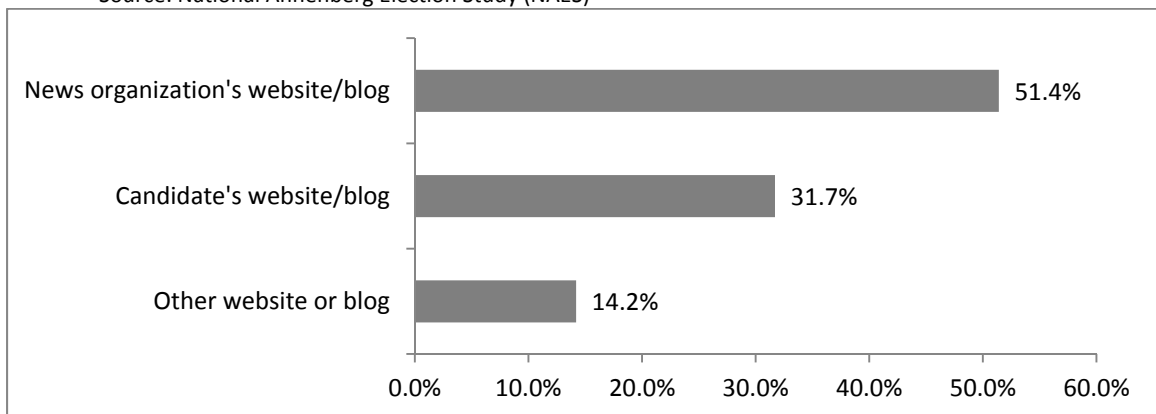
(Fig 1.3):

Fig. 1.3: How Many Days in the Past Week did you Access Information About the Campaign for President Online?  
2000 & 2004 Convention Periods  
Source: National Annenberg Election Study (NAES)



During both of these convention periods, over one-quarter of the electorate used the Internet to access political information at least once a week, and more than one in twenty gathered political information via the Internet on a daily basis. Figure 1.4 shows that in 2004, only just over half (51.4%) of those prospective voters who used the Internet to access political information got that information through a news organization's website or blog. The remainder used either a specific candidate's site (14.2%) or some other website or blog (31.7%). There is no reason to expect that information favorable to a convening candidate would be found on the website of his or her opponent, and there is no reason to expect that political coverage or analysis provided by websites or blogs not belonging to mainstream news organizations would follow long-established journalistic standards or practices, or even attempt to stake out a neutral vantage point. While some political bloggers are dedicated to the straightforward and objective reporting of facts, many of the most popular blogs are popular precisely because they espouse clear policy or ideological objectives and have developed a like-minded following.

Fig. 1.4: Primary Source of Online Information about the Presidential Campaign  
2004 Convention Period  
Source: National Annenberg Election Study (NAES)



The takeaway is that individuals have some control over the information they choose to expose themselves to during conventions, and the tone and content of some of the information chosen for consumption is likely to be a function of individual characteristics like partisanship or ideology.<sup>6</sup> However, those interested in taking advantage of the unique set of information available during conventions—the speeches by the convening candidates—can expect to encounter reliably pro-convening-candidate messages.

We have not developed theoretical expectations regarding how exposure to different kinds of information exposure influences people during conventions. Doing so will provide the best chance of reconciling what we know about the development of opinion at the individual level—that people seek out information from friendly sources (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1948), apply screens to incongruent information they encounter (Bartels 2002), engage in motivated reasoning (Taber and Lodge 2006), and rely on a decision-making calculus that is vulnerable to priming (Kimball 2005; Bartels 2006)—with what we observe at the aggregate level—post-convention attitudes that are more effectively predicted by objective conditions than they were pre-convention (Gelman and King 1993; Holbrook 1996; Erikson and Wlezien 2012).

### **The Layout of This Study**

In subsequent chapters, I engage in a thorough investigation of the different ways conventions impact individuals. In chapter two, I develop the theoretical

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<sup>6</sup> Bimber and Davis (2003) found that visitors to the official campaign websites during the 2000 election were likely to share political views with the candidates whose sites they visited.

distinction between different information sources available during conventions, and single out convention speeches as deserving of special attention. I examine the determinants of self-exposure to speeches, and discuss the implications of how their consumption is distributed throughout the electorate.

In chapter three, I contrast speech exposure against exposure to the remainder of the convention information environment, and explore how each impacts support for candidates at the individual level. After a comparison of these overlapping effects, I demonstrate how they can combine to produce the kinds of post-convention patterns in candidate support we are used to seeing at the aggregate level.

In chapter four, I draw from the literature on political cognition in order to extend the analysis presented in chapter three to pairs of conventions; I look into how information exposure from the first convention in a given campaign cycle can moderate the impact of information exposure on candidate support during the second. The strategic implications of message timing and pre-emption are also discussed.

In chapter five, I explore the impact of convention information on political knowledge, a variable whose importance extends beyond Election Day. I apply the “knowledge gap” framework from the mass communication literature to the convention setting, and examine how socioeconomic status influences the efficacy of convention messages. I highlight differences in how political knowledge is influenced at different points during the convention period, and discuss the normative implications of a fluctuating knowledge gap. I conclude the study with an overview of findings and suggestions for future research along a similar trajectory.

## **Chapter 2:**

### ***Determinants of Self-Exposure to Nominee Speeches During Presidential Nominating Conventions***

#### **Introduction**

While campaigns are, by definition, periods when parties and candidates attempt to disseminate information to the electorate, presidential nominating conventions are designated times within campaigns when parties and candidates are able to draw an *unusual* amount of focused attention to themselves. This is primarily accomplished through cooperation with major broadcast and cable news networks, who displace all of their regular prime-time programming in favor of live broadcasts of speeches by the convening candidates. These televised speeches have become the *raison d'être* for the conventions, and they regularly draw large audiences (Nielsen Media Research reports that 57% of U.S. households watched televised speeches during the 2012 conventions) consisting of partisans of both parties as well as political independents (Shafer 1988; Karabell 1998). These speeches have unique features that set them apart from other avenues of information dissemination employed by parties and their political allies during the nominating conventions. Evaluating the impact these unique and uniquely high-profile events have on opinion requires an understanding of the factors influencing the likelihood of their consumption by individual members of the electorate. In this chapter, I explore the determinants of individual self-exposure to the televised speeches given by the nominees of the convening parties.



## Unpacking the Convention Information Environment

While the information environment during conventions is, on balance, focused on and favorable to the convening party and candidate, the information is conveyed in a variety of ways across multiple mediums by a diverse set of actors with heterogeneous interest, aims, and intentions. In the introductory chapter, I discussed how the complexity of this ecosystem of information sources guarantees that different individuals will encounter different sets of convention information. Compiling a complete bestiary of every informational animal would be an enormous undertaking; instead, it is possible to disaggregate the information environment during conventions into a few distinct *types* or *categories* of information source, each featuring a unique theoretical relationship with individual opinion. Under this rubric, speeches given by the nominees of the convening parties stand out as deserving of special attention. A nominee's acceptance speech, traditionally the last speech on the final night, is both the formal and *de facto* focal point of a given convention. Table 2.1 shows that audiences are most attentive during the final night of recent conventions:

Table 2.1: Daily Convention Viewership  
2008-2012  
Source: Nielsen Media Research

	Day 1		Day 2		Day 3		Day 4	
	Rating*	Viewers (millions)	Rating*	Viewers (millions)	Rating*	Viewers (millions)	Rating*	Viewers (millions)
2008 DNC	7.8	22.3	9.0	25.9	8.4	24.0	13.4	38.4
2008 RNC	-	-	7.3	21.5	12.9	37.2	13.4	38.9
2012 RNC	-	-	7.7	22.3	7.7	21.9	10.5	30.3
2012 DNC	9.1	26.2	8.8	25.1	12.3	35.7	-	-

\*Nielsen ratings represent the percentage of television-equipped households tuning in.

Note: Coverage of 1<sup>st</sup> day of 2008 RNC disrupted by Hurricane Gustav.  
The 1<sup>st</sup> day of 2012 RNC cancelled due to Hurricane Isaac.  
The 2012 DNC was planned to be three days rather than four.

However, it is the distinctiveness of the method of delivery of the nominee speech, and not just its normative importance, that makes it worthy of singling out. Nominee speeches are unique in that they are the only time during campaign cycles when nominees have a chance to present a long and cohesive block of information directly to an unusually attentive national electorate, with near-total compliance and support from the mainstream media, and without immediate formal rebuttal or a simultaneous mirror-image effort from the opposition party. Nominee speeches are presented in their entirety, and without interruption, across every major broadcast and cable news network, and presentations are almost completely uniform apart from minor differences in camera angles and sound levels. At a given convention, the nominee speaks by himself, about himself, for an extended period of time (usually at least an hour), and that information goes directly to the electorate without first being edited, paraphrased, packaged, interpreted or spun by any third party. It is this direct communication from nominee to electorate that makes it worthwhile to unpack the nominee speeches from the rest of the convention information environment. Once the decision to watch a speech has been made, the viewer can set aside the system of shortcuts and standards usually used to gauge the reliability of interlocutors and engage in a direct evaluation of the convening candidate. These speeches are excellent opportunities for candidate evaluation and opinion-crafting.

Televised presidential debates are qualitatively similar to nominating conventions in this regard. While debate participants must contend with opposing viewpoints and cannot exercise control over subject matter the way convening

candidates can, they offer viewers the opportunity to make evaluations based on direct observation. An inquiry into the impact of debate-watching during the 1996 election by Tsfati (2003) yielded evidence that post-debate opinion varied significantly among those with different levels of exposure to the debates, and that the influence of other streams of information during debate periods (such as news analysis) depended on the amount of debates directly viewed. Assuming a similar dynamic exists during conventions, isolation of exposure to speeches from overall exposure to the information environment becomes critical to understanding how individual opinion is shaped.

Convention studies by Cera and Weinschenk (2012a; 2012b) that have singled out exposure to convention speeches have helped to shed light on the way conventions impact some types of individual opinion, such as perceptions of candidate personality traits. These studies supplement work by Hillygus and Jackman (2003) which highlighted the role of individual characteristics in shaping how individuals are impacted during conventions. Our understanding can be further improved by a careful analysis of the role individual characteristics (and other individual-level variables) play in motivating individuals to expose themselves to the political information contained within nominee convention speeches. Such an analysis will lay the groundwork for understanding how the effects conventions exercise on dimensions of opinion more directly related to election outcomes (such as individual candidate preference) are likely to be distributed throughout the electorate. Ultimately, the combination of knowledge about how speeches influence individual opinion and knowledge of the reach of that influence has

the potential to yield new methods of predicting the aggregate effects of individual convention speeches.

### **Determinants of Speech Exposure**

Why tune in to watch a convention speech? Broadly speaking, a desire to gather information is the most plausible motivation. However, it is not safe to assume that such a desire rises from a shortage of information necessary to determine a preference between the candidates. As with debate viewing, convention viewing may be more about reinforcing preexisting preferences than about forming vote intentions (Hagner and Rieselback 1978). While some potential viewers could undoubtedly use information made available during convention speeches to form initial impressions of the candidates, one of the oldest axioms of American political science is that such low-information individuals are, at the end of the day, the least likely to engage in political information-gathering (Campbell et al. 1960).<sup>7</sup> It is more likely that speech viewing is motivated by a desire to evaluate candidates against a subjective set of criteria used to justify a preexisting degree of support.<sup>8</sup> This set could conceivably include perceptions of candidate viability or campaigning skills, evaluations of character, judgments of ideological positioning, or evaluations of specific issue positions. These types of judgments can influence subsequent levels of support (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994) and can be instrumental in the translation of soft support for a convening candidate into

<sup>7</sup> In addition to having low levels of interest, those with incoherent preferences are also likely to have low levels of political *awareness* (Zaller 1991). The relationship between speech-viewing and political knowledge is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

<sup>8</sup> Among NAES respondents, 89.7% preferred one candidate to the other prior to the first convention of the 2000 election cycle, and heading into the first convention in 2004, 92.7% were able to articulate a candidate preference.

a substantive participatory act (Mutz 1995). Even if entertainment (and not purposeful information-gathering) is the primary individual motivator for speech-watching, these dynamics may still come into play as the viewer absorbs some of the political information contained in the speeches.<sup>9</sup>

To put it simply, it is likely that many viewers make their decisions to watch convention speeches based on a desire to see how their preferred candidate stacks up against the other guy. This type of “rooting” or “cheerleading” behavior implicates candidate preference and political interest as probable suspects in the hunt for determinants of speech exposure. In constructing additional hypotheses about speech viewing, I also consider research on the relationship between resources and political participation, as well as the literature on information, political learning, and political knowledge; each is considered in turn.

*Political preferences.* Numerous studies over several decades have shown party identification to be a highly stable and enduring predictor of political decisions (Campbell et al. 1960; Bartels 2000; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). It would be quite surprising if party preference did not influence whether or not individuals watch high-profile political speeches; people generally engage in activities they are likely to enjoy. However, research in the area of political cognition suggests that reasons for watching preferred candidates go beyond the simple desire to engage in enjoyable activities. Convention speeches are extremely high-profile and unusually accessible

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<sup>9</sup> Moy, Xenos and Hess (2005) find that consumption of “infotainment” can result in higher levels of vote intention and increased levels of interpersonal political discussion among those with relatively higher levels of preexisting political sophistication.

sources of the kind of informational cues partisans can use to update their policy views. Popkin's (1991) theory of "low-information" or "gut" rationality proposes that individuals use information shortcuts available in their environments to help overcome informational deficits and make choices in their own best interests. Convention speeches are times when candidates are expected to express opinions on a wide range of policy questions. Mondak (1993) argued that it is cognitively efficient for individuals to look to favored politicians for informational cues when evaluating policies: "By transferring judgments concerning relevant political officials to the policies with which they are associated, individuals are able to minimize the expenditure of cognitive resources while still producing relatively well-grounded political judgments." (p. 188) He found evidence that survey respondents were more easily able to evaluate policies when Ronald Reagan's name was attached to questions about them. Subsequent research suggests that policy-evaluation cue-users can approximate the decision-making of highly informed voters (Lupia 1994) and the absence of informational cues can make aggregate voter preferences less clear (Schaffner and Streb 2002). It is reasonable to conclude that for partisans of the convening party, convention speeches represent a safe medium through which they can "learn how to feel" about a range of issues with minimum cognitive cost. Partisans can be reasonably sure that they will not encounter dissonant information during these events, making them "easy" to watch.

*Orientation towards political participation.* While not connected to an immediate and discrete outcome the way voting is, it can be argued that conventions have a strong participatory element. Because they completely dominate the information environment,

those who choose not to “participate” by watching the speeches are limited in the role they can play in subsequent political discourse. As a result, some members of the electorate may see speech-watching as a civic duty. Fostering this kind of “must-see” dynamic is in the interest of the convening party and the media; conventions are not treated as mere newsworthy occurrences; they are promoted and covered as “events” on par with the Academy Awards or high-profile sports matches. Accordingly, consumption of these convention “events” can involve a noteworthy social component and a chance for viewers to engage in partisan-group bonding. It is likely that this kind of “participation” in convention speech-watching would be most likely among individuals who feel they have a stake in the political process. External efficacy has been shown to be a consistent predictor of institutionalized forms of participation such as voting and contacting (Pomper and Sernekos 1991). McLeod, Scheufele and Moy (2001) place external efficacy at the end of a causal chain; interpersonal discussion and political interest motivate the consumption of political news, which in turn improves political knowledge and fosters a belief in the responsiveness of the larger political system to individual input. These findings suggest that those more likely to talk with others about politics, those who express higher interest in politics and campaigns, and those who express relatively higher levels of external efficacy would all be more likely to watch convention speeches.

*Resources.* In *An Economic Theory of Democracy*, Downs (1957) argued that variation in levels of political involvement across individuals is the natural result of unequal resources and the division of labor. Some individuals have surpluses of

resources to expend on political involvement, resulting in uneven involvement. Some individuals specialize in areas related to politics, which motivates outsourcing by those whose specializations lie elsewhere during the search for political information. Downs asserted that any conception of a system of fully informed, equal participants is founded on the assumption of irrational actors. Subsequent studies by Verba and Nie (1972) and Brady, Verba and Schlozman (1995) described the link between socioeconomic status and various forms of participation ranging from voting to campaigning to activities that allow clear transmissions of values between constituents and office-holders (such as contacting). This line of inquiry revealed a connection between socioeconomic status and the development of the kind of civic skills likely to result in political activity.

Employment and active involvement in secular or religious organizations (which are most likely among those whose basic life needs are fully met; see Maslow [1943; 1998]) foster proficiency with “skill acts” similar to those that need to be performed to yield success in the civic arena.<sup>10</sup> These researchers also found that free time is positively associated with time spent on political activities. All things being equal, full-time employment and the presence of children in the household reduce the amount of free time available for expenditure on politics. Of course, the types of political participation examined in these studies are not limited to certain times of the day. Political conventions are broadcast after the conclusion of the normal 9am-5pm workday, during “prime-time.” Employment status may not play as much of a role predicting convention

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<sup>10</sup> These findings are reinforced by the work of McFarland and Thomas (2006) who show that organizational involvement among young people yields greater political participation in adulthood, even when other factors (including socioeconomic status) are held constant.



speech-watching as it does predicting other forms of participation. The presence of children and/or a spouse/partner in the household, however, should still be expected to reduce the amount of free time available to be spent watching televised convention speeches. Additionally, larger household size could mean more competition over control of household televisions during “prime-time.”

*Political information.* Regardless of whether or not self-exposure to convention speeches is viewed as having a participatory aspect, convention speeches are unmatched venues for political learning. Delli Carpini and Keeter (1998) demonstrate that Americans are generalists when it comes to political knowledge; those who are knowledgeable about one area or domain of politics are likely to also know quite a bit about other areas or domains. This finding suggests that any type of appetite for political information should increase the chance an individual would spend time watching convention speeches. Accordingly, habits related to information search—consumption of local, network, and cable television news, and frequency of newspaper reading—are potential predictors of convention speech exposure. Political knowledge can only be the result of consumption of political information (although it is clearly moderated by intelligence and ability). A direct evaluation of individual political knowledge is also a potential predictor of speech exposure. Educational attainment, a widely cited covariate of political knowledge (Hamill, Lodge, and Blake 1985; Jennings 1996; Galston 2001; Shaker 2012) is also a potential predictor, although recent work by Highton (2009) suggests that covariance between education and political sophistication is actually largely attributable to pre-adult factors.

## Data, Measurement, Variables and Method

To examine the determinants of convention speech exposure, I make use of the convention panel datasets from the 2000 and 2004 National Annenberg Election Studies (NAES). In both 2000 and 2004, the NAES interviewed large numbers of respondents before each convention and then again afterwards.<sup>11</sup> This data structure allows me to investigate the predictive power of a wide range of individual characteristics and practices on consumption of convention speeches.

I operationalize the dependent variable, *exposure to nominee convention speech*, through responses to questions about how much of a given convention's nominee's speech was consumed. For the 2000 conventions, responses fell on a four-point scale (none, some, most, entire speech). For the 2004 conventions, responses fell on a five-point scale (none, a few minutes, half hour, one hour, entire speech). To facilitate comparability, I collapsed the middle categories and recoded these variables into a common three-point scale (none, some, entire speech).

I draw groups of independent variables from the categories considered earlier in the theory section of this chapter. To represent political preferences, I focus on *pre-convention nominee favorability*, *party identification*, and *strength of party identification*. Orientation towards political participation is measured with self-reported *voting frequency*, *intention to participate in campaign*, responses to questions about *internal efficacy* and *external efficacy*, a measure of perceived *importance of voting as a responsibility*, *frequency of political discourse*, and a composite variable measuring

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<sup>11</sup> The NAES changed its panel study format in 2008, and the Annenberg Public Policy Center did not conduct the NAES in 2012.

*political interest*. Resources available for expenditure on political activity are measured with *household income, number of children under 18 in household, marital status, retirement status, religiosity, and moved within last year*. To represent political information, I rely on *education, interviewer assessment of respondent political knowledge*, a measure of whether or not respondents felt they had *already learned enough about the candidates*, and *frequency of newspaper reading, local news viewing, network news viewing, and cable news viewing*. Finally, I included demographic variables such as *age, gender, and race* as controls.<sup>12</sup>

The first stage of the analysis in this chapter consists of an exploration of bivariate relationships. I use non-parametric analysis in order to examine relationships between variables in isolation. This type of investigation is appropriate because many of the variables involved are measured on ordinal or nominal scales. Tests against a null hypothesis of independence are performed on each variable pairing.<sup>13</sup> The strength of relationships between various independent variables and speech exposure is gauged via correlation-like Cramér's V coefficients derived from the  $\chi^2$  statistics. These coefficients allow for comparison of strength of relationships across variable pairs. While some of the relevant independent variables are measured on ordinal scales, it is necessary to treat all variables included in the analysis as nominal to achieve this type of comparative test. One of the advantages of this method is that for each dependent-independent variable pair, I am able to use data from every panel respondent who answered both

<sup>12</sup> All of these predictor variables are based on pre-convention measurements.

<sup>13</sup> In some cases, variable categories were combined in order to ensure that cells in the cross-tabulations used to generate  $\chi^2$  statistics met minimum required counts.

related questions. In many cases, only subsets of each NAES panel were asked certain questions, and many times subsets of respondents to different questions have little or no overlap. Relying on multivariate analysis alone would make examining some of these variables difficult and examining others impossible.

The results from the bivariate tests help to inform the subsequent multivariate analysis. In order to uncover the effects of independent variables of interest on nominee speech exposure while accounting for changes in the values of other relevant variables, I employ maximum likelihood estimation. I run four tests; one for each convention in 2000 and 2004. In each of these tests, the dependent variable is the three-category measurement of *exposure to nominee convention speech*.

### **Results – Bivariate Analysis**

Data from the 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panels indicate that audiences for convention speeches by the candidates are quite broad and surprisingly diverse. In 2000, 77.8% of respondents reported watching at least some of George W. Bush's speech, and 83.2% tuned in for Al Gore's speech. In 2004, 62.9% reported watching John Kerry's speech, and 62.2% said they watched at least part of Bush's. Table 2.2 shows the percentages of respondents to the 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panels that reported various amounts of the nominee speeches.

Speech viewership generally tended to bridge demographic, socioeconomic, and even political cleavages. Case in point: For each of the four conventions examined here, each convening speaker managed to draw in a majority of opposite-party partisans as

Table 2.2: Self-Exposure to Nominee Convention Speeches  
2000-2004

	2000 Republican convention	2000 Democratic convention	2004 Democratic convention	2004 Republican convention
Did not watch the nominee's speech	156 (22.2%)	131 (16.8%)	313 (37.1%)	356 (37.8%)
Watched some of the speech	320 (45.5%)	353 (45.1%)	296 (35.1%)	303 (32.2%)
Watched the entire speech	228 (32.3%)	298 (38.1%)	234 (27.8%)	282 (30.0%)
Totals	704 (100.0%)	782 (100%)	843 (100.0%)	941 (100.0%)

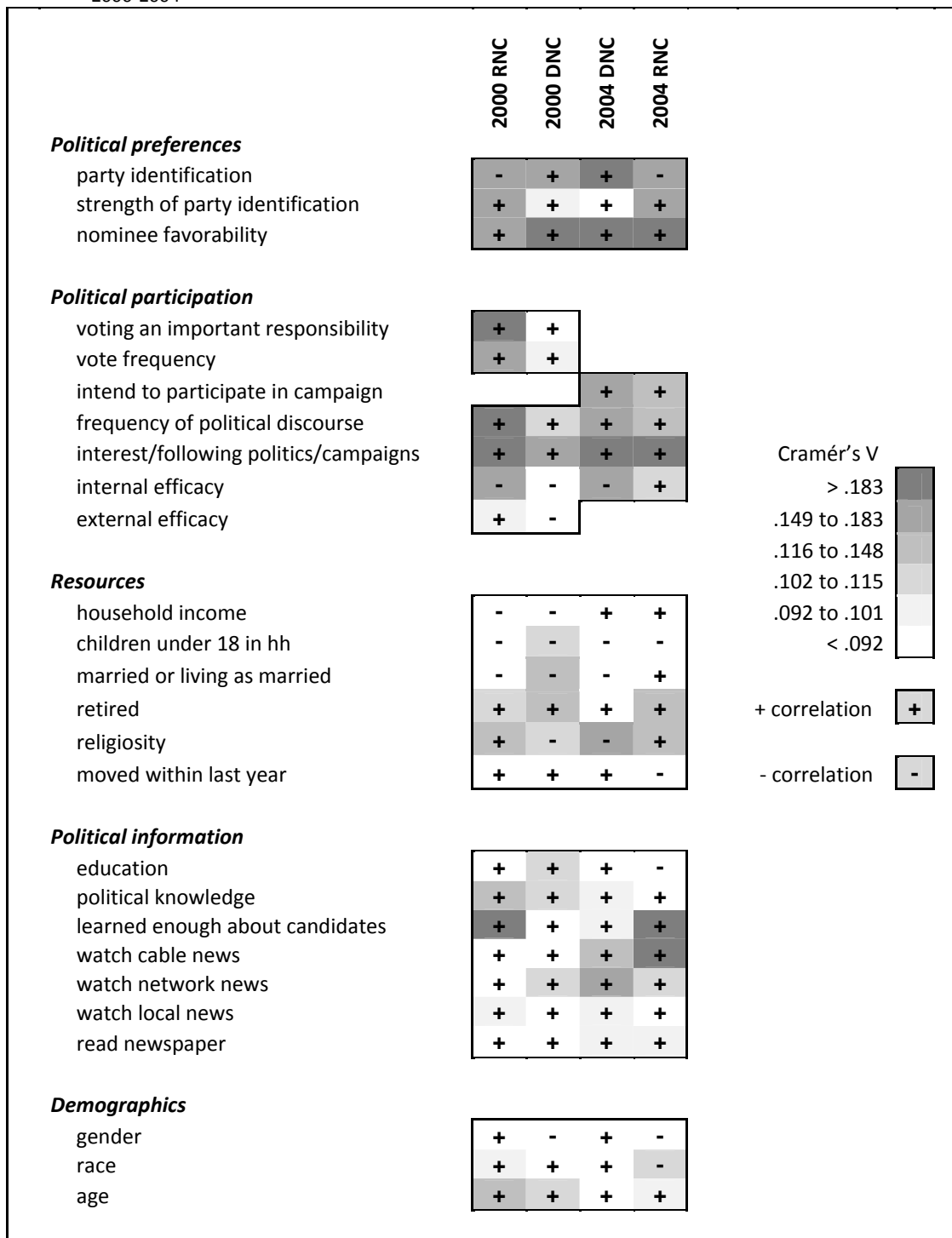
viewers. Despite broad and diverse viewership, there was visible and significant variation in speech exposure associated with a wide variety of variables from each of the observed groups of predictors. Figure 2.1 presents a visualization of the relative strength of bivariate associations between salient respondent attributes and self-exposure to convention speeches.<sup>14</sup>

An examination of the coefficients of association leads to the observation that political preferences exhibit the strongest visible relationship with speech exposure. The individual variable most strongly and consistently associated with speech viewing is *nominee favorability*. This measure of candidate support yielded the highest Cramér's V coefficient for three of the four conventions under examination. *Party Identification* was also strongly associated with exposure to the speeches. However, *nominee favorability* exhibited the stronger association at all conventions except the 2000 RNC; it appears that personal judgments of the speakers trumped party loyalty more often than not. An examination of correlation coefficients<sup>15</sup> for these variable pairings indicates that individuals tend to watch the speeches of candidates whom they like and with whom they share party affiliation.

<sup>14</sup> See Appendix A for a comprehensive table of Cramér's V coefficients.

<sup>15</sup> See Appendix B for a full table of correlations for all variable pairings.

Fig. 2.1: Strength of Variable Associations with Nominee Convention Speech Exposure 2000-2004



Some of the variables measuring orientation towards political participation also frequently exhibited moderate-to-strong associations with speech exposure across multiple conventions. Relatively high Cramér's V coefficients indicate that *interest in politics/campaigns* is strongly associated with speech exposure during conventions, and the signs of the relevant correlation coefficients show that highly interested individuals are more likely to watch more of the speeches. *Frequency of political discourse* is also strongly (and positively) associated with voluntary exposure to nominee speeches. Variables measuring *vote frequency* and *importance of voting as a responsibility* were only measured in 2000; these variables are strongly associated with speech exposure for the 2000 RNC. While these voting-related measures were not available in 2004, during the 2004 DNC and RNC respondents were asked about their *intention to participate in the campaign*. Reported intention of participation is strongly associated with speech exposure at both conventions in the 2004 cycle. Overall, informal engagement in politics (such as following it or frequently talking about it) is more closely related to speech exposure than are more formal types of participation, such as voting or campaigning.

The associations between speech exposure and measures of resources available for expenditure on political activity are comparatively weak. *Children in household, marital status, household income, and moved within last year*<sup>16</sup> display only weak-to-moderate associations with speech exposure. *Retirement status* is moderately associated with speech exposure; those past employment age are more likely to take in more of the nominees' speeches. The variable in this group most strongly associated

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<sup>16</sup> Moving recently is an important predictor of participation in Timpone's 1998 study of registration and voting.

with speech exposure was *religiosity*. This measure of frequency of church attendance achieved moderate-to-strong associations with speech exposure during each convention measured here. However, an examination of the signs of the related correlation coefficients reveals that frequent churchgoers watched more of the Republican speeches but less of the Democratic speeches. While Verba et al. (1993) found that taking part in this type of regular organized activity could yield higher rates of participation, the change in sign coinciding with the change in party observed here makes it likely that the observed association is an artifact of the relationship between religiosity and party affiliation, not religiosity and the propensity to participate in the speech-viewing experience.

Two of the most common traditional measures of political information—education and political knowledge—display weak or moderate associations with speech exposure.<sup>17</sup> Likewise for measures of media consumption such as *frequency of watching local news* and *frequency of newspaper reading*. Consumption of media more likely to feature stories about national politics—*frequency of watching network and cable news*—presented strong associations with speech-viewing in 2004, but not in 2000. A measure of whether or not respondents felt they had already *learned enough about the candidates* was strongly associated with speech exposure during both Republican conventions, but not during either Democratic convention. An examination of the signs of related correlation coefficients reveal that during the GOP conventions, those who felt they already knew the candidates well were the ones *more* likely to watch them

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<sup>17</sup> The interesting implications associated with this observation are examined in detail in Chapter 5.



speak. Speech exposure here was highest among those already relatively engaged with politics and did not seem to be a reaction to a perceived information deficit. Given what we know about the consequences of the division of labor on information search (Downs 1957) and the information-gathering tendencies of the habitually informed versus the chronically uninformed (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1998), this finding is not especially surprising.

Finally, consideration of Cramér's  $V$  and correlation coefficients reveals mostly weak relationships between demographic variables such as *race* and *gender* and speech exposure. *Age* was a factor in speech exposure for three of the four conventions; older individuals were moderately more likely to watch convention speeches. A study of political activism among seniors by Campbell (2003) suggests that the increased free time associated with retirement age is likely to yield greater-than-normal engagement in activities related to politics when barriers to such participation are low.

Examination of relative measures of association shows that speech exposure tends to be most strongly associated with political preferences and engagement/interest in day-to-day political activities. A closer examination of the direction of bivariate relationships indicated by the signs of the relevant correlation coefficients suggests that speech consumers tend to be highly politically invested and informed, and warm towards the convening nominee/party. While painting a picture of the convention speech audience is generally useful, many of the individual attributes constituting the picture tend to co-vary. It is not possible to judge the independent

effects of these individual predictors of speech exposure without continuing on to multivariate analysis.

### **Results – Multivariate Analysis**

Patterns of association between speech exposure and political interest/political preferences are easily observable. Respondents who had already made an investment in a candidate or politics in general were more likely to build on that investment with exposure to additional information in the form of convention speeches. Judging the magnitude of impact of these and other determinants of convention speech exposure depends on multivariate analysis. Table 2.3 displays separate tests for each convention in the 2000 and 2004 cycles. Coefficients for each predictor are presented along with standard errors in parenthesis. Asterisks denote statistically significant coefficients.

Reported model parameters indicate that changing the values of many of these variables consistently yield statistically significant and substantively meaningful impacts on speech exposure. For each convention, the models offer improved predictive power regarding self-exposure to nominee acceptance speeches. Tables 2.4 through 2.7 compare predicted and actual values of speech exposure, as well as the proportional reduction in error associated with each model.

Table 2.3: Determinants of Nominee Acceptance Speech Exposure  
2000-2004  
Ordered Probit

	2000 Republican convention	2000 Democratic convention	2004 Democratic convention	2004 Republican convention
Party Identification	-.170 (.068)**	.115 (.064)*	.085 (.068)	-.008 (.071)
Strength of party identification	.184 (.110)*	.175 (.103)*	-.001 (.103)	.022 (.100)
Nominee favorability ranking	.114 (.056)**	.241 (.050)**	.283 (.052)**	.271 (.049)**
Past voting frequency	.062 (.063)	.013 (.061)	-	-
Likely to participate in campaign	-	-	.082 (.061)	.171 (.058)**
Frequency of political discourse	.092 (.027)**	.070 (.024)**	.087 (.023)**	.050 (.021)**
Interest/following politics/campaign	.186 (.078)**	.247 (.080)**	.273 (.082)**	.242 (.075)**
Household income	-.039 (.033)	-.045 (.033)	.074 (.031)**	.024 (.026)
Number of children in household	-.052 (.056)	-.103 (.047)**	-.077 (.053)	-.005 (.052)
Living as married	.041 (.124)	-.070 (.112)	-.135 (.112)	-.102 (.103)
Retired	.101 (.165)	.186 (.160)	-.247 (.143)*	.125 (.138)
Religiosity	.022 (.043)	-.030 (.039)	.011 (.038)	.037 (.035)
Education	-.003 (.027)	.055 (.025)**	-.016 (.024)	.005 (.022)
Political knowledge	.164 (.062)**	.077 (.059)	-.028 (.057)	-.096 (.050)*
Frequency of cable news viewing	-.012 (.021)	.037 (.019)**	.052 (.017)**	.079 (.016)**
Frequency of network news viewing	.011 (.023)	.053 (.022)**	.055 (.020)**	.015 (.019)
Frequency of local news viewing	.007 (.023)	-.036 (.022)	.013 (.019)	.015 (.019)
Frequency of newspaper reading	.011 (.021)	-.009 (.019)	.028 (.018)	.011 (.016)
Female	.010 (.105)	-.013 (.102)	-.042 (.097)	-.089 (.090)
Non-white	.386 (.197)**	.014 (.163)	-.192 (.180)	-.113 (.164)
Age	.006 (.005)	-.005 (.005)	.007 (.004)*	-.000 (.004)
N	511	608	678	741
Prob > chi <sup>2</sup>	.000	.000	.000	.000
Pseudo R-squared	.100	.111	.146	.127

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Table 2.4: Proportional Reduction in Error Associated with Model of Exposure to Bush's 2000 RNC Speech

Predicted values of Speech Exposure	Actual values of Speech Exposure			Total
	None	Some	All	
None	14	17	3	34
Some	88	191	89	368
All	7	34	68	109
Total	109	242	160	511

Percent correctly predicted: 53.4%

Percent in modal category: 47.4%

Proportional reduction in error: 11.5%

Table 2.5: Proportional Reduction in Error Associated with Model of Exposure to Gore's 2000 DNC Speech

Predicted values of Speech Exposure	Actual values of Speech Exposure			Total
	None	Some	All	
None	12	15	1	28
Some	72	192	95	359
All	18	67	136	221
Total	102	274	232	608

Percent correctly predicted: 55.9%

Percent in modal category: 45.1%

Proportional reduction in error: 19.8%

Table 2.6: Proportional Reduction in Error Associated with Model of Exposure to Kerry's 2004 DNC Speech

Predicted values of Speech Exposure	Actual values of Speech Exposure			Total
	None	Some	All	
None	158	80	26	264
Some	59	100	58	217
All	23	60	114	197
Total	240	240	198	678

Percent correctly predicted: 54.9%

Percent in modal category: 35.4%

Proportional reduction in error: 30.1%

Table 2.7: Proportional Reduction in Error Associated with Model of Exposure to Bush's 2004 RNC Speech

Predicted values of Speech Exposure	Actual values of Speech Exposure			Total
	None	Some	All	
None	183	108	38	329
Some	53	56	50	159
All	35	73	145	253
Total	271	237	233	741

Percent correctly predicted: 51.8%

Percent in modal category: 36.6%

Proportional reduction in error: 24.0%

While the models perform well, there is still a good deal of unexplained variation. It appears that decisions regarding speech viewing also depend on unmeasured contextual factors; availability during the speech, personal attention span, awareness of the timing of the speech, availability of alternative activities, *et cetera*. Despite this limitation, we are able to learn quite a bit about how variation in each of the captured variables influenced the base likelihood of watching convention speeches.

In this section, I engage in separate discussions of each of the five groupings of related individual variables (*political preferences, orientation towards political participation, resources available for expenditure on political activity, political sophistication, and demographics*). Within each grouping, I discuss variables that exercise significant influence over speech exposure and explore the magnitude of these effects. For each predictor, I present a visualization of change in the predicted

probability of an individual watching the entire speech as that predictor moves from its minimum to maximum observed value. Each visualization presents this relationship for all four modeled conventions. Relationships with significant model coefficients are highlighted by dark grey ( $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests) or black ( $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests) lines.

Because the magnitude of the effects of explanatory variables in probit models depends on the values of other included predictors, for analytical purposes I hold variables not under immediate discussion at their sample median values.<sup>18</sup> Table 2.8 summarizes the sample median values for all predictors, for each convention.

Table 2.8: Median Values of Variables in the 2000 and 2004 NAES Convention Panel Samples

	2000 Republican convention	2000 Democratic convention	2004 Democratic convention	2004 Republican convention
Party Identification	Republican	Democrat	Democrat	Independent
Strength of party identification	Strong	Strong	Strong	Strong
Nominee favorability ranking	Like	Like	Neutral	Like
Past voting frequency	Always	Always	-	-
Likely to participate in campaign	-	-	Somewhat	Somewhat
Frequency of political discourse	3 days/week	3 days/week	3 days/week	3 days/week
Interest/following politics/campaign	Somewhat	Somewhat	Very	Somewhat
Household income	\$35k-\$49.9k	\$35k-\$49.9k	\$50k-\$74.9k	\$50k-\$74.9k
Number of children in household	0	0	0	0
Living as married	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Retired	No	No	No	No
Religiosity	1-2x per month	1-2x per month	1-2x per month	1-2x per month
Education	2-yr degree	2-yr degree	2-yr degree	Some college
Political knowledge	"C" grade	"C" grade	"B" grade	"B" grade
Frequency of cable news viewing	2 days/week	3 days/week	4 days/week	2 days/week
Frequency of network news viewing	3 days/week	4 days/week	3 days/week	3 days/week
Frequency of local news viewing	5 days/week	5 days/week	5 days/week	5 days/week
Frequency of newspaper reading	5 days/week	5 days/week	5 days/week	4 days/week
Female	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Non-white	No	No	No	No
Age	49	49	52	52

<sup>18</sup> When discussing variable effects in probit models, it is useful to hold independent variables at values that are interesting and substantively meaningful, but also realistically possible. Setting variable values at their means can make effect interpretation difficult if the values don't find expression in the real world (for example, no one is 0.6 married). Choosing alternative measures of central tendency, such as median or modal values, can make it more likely that the discussed effects could actually manifest in the real world.

*Political preferences.* While *party identification* exhibits a strong bivariate association with speech exposure, when other factors are controlled it only exercised a significant impact during the 2000 conventions. Figure 2.2 shows that when other factors are held at their median values, Republicans were more likely than independents or Democrats to watch George W. Bush's 2000 acceptance speech, while Democrats were more likely to take in Al Gore's 2000 DNC speech. Figure 2.3 shows that *strength of partisan affiliation* yielded higher levels of speech exposure in 2000, but not 2004.

*Nominee favorability rankings* exercised the strongest impact on speech exposure of any of the predictors included in the models. Figure 2.4 shows that affinity towards the convening candidate dramatically increased the chance that an individual would watch that candidate's speech; this effect was present at each of the four conventions under examination. The strongest effect was found during the 2004 DNC; when other factors were held at their median values, those who felt least favorable towards Al Gore only had a 17% probability of watching his speech in its entirety, while those who liked him the most had a 56% probability of viewing his entire speech.

Fig. 2.2: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Respondent Party Identification

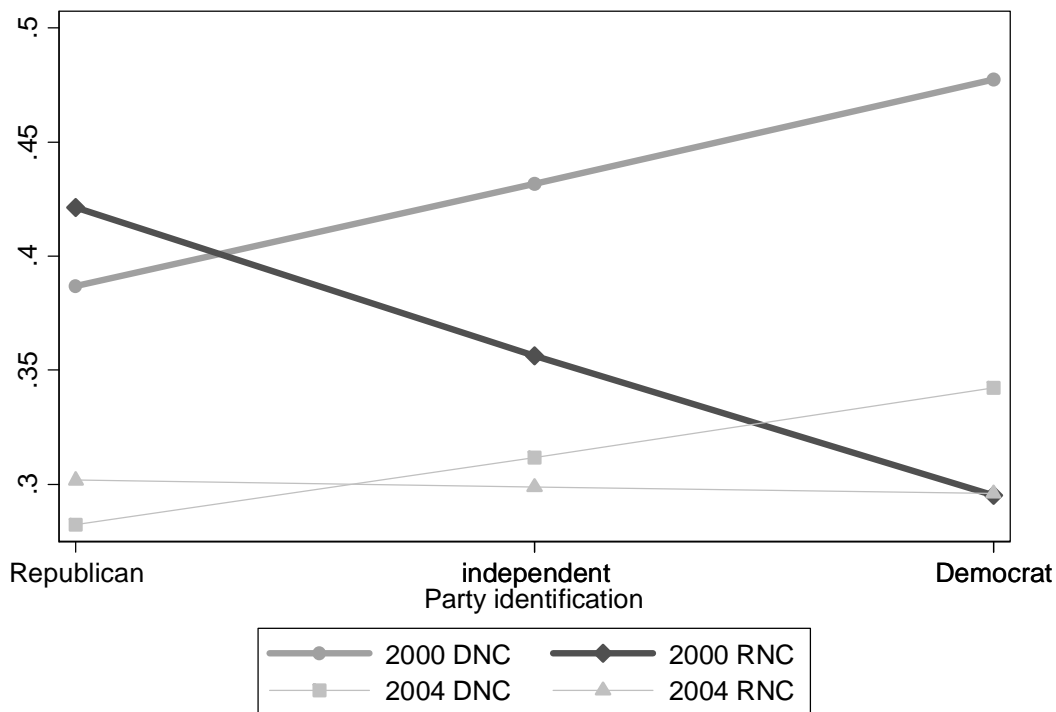


Fig. 2.3: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Strength of Partisan Affiliation

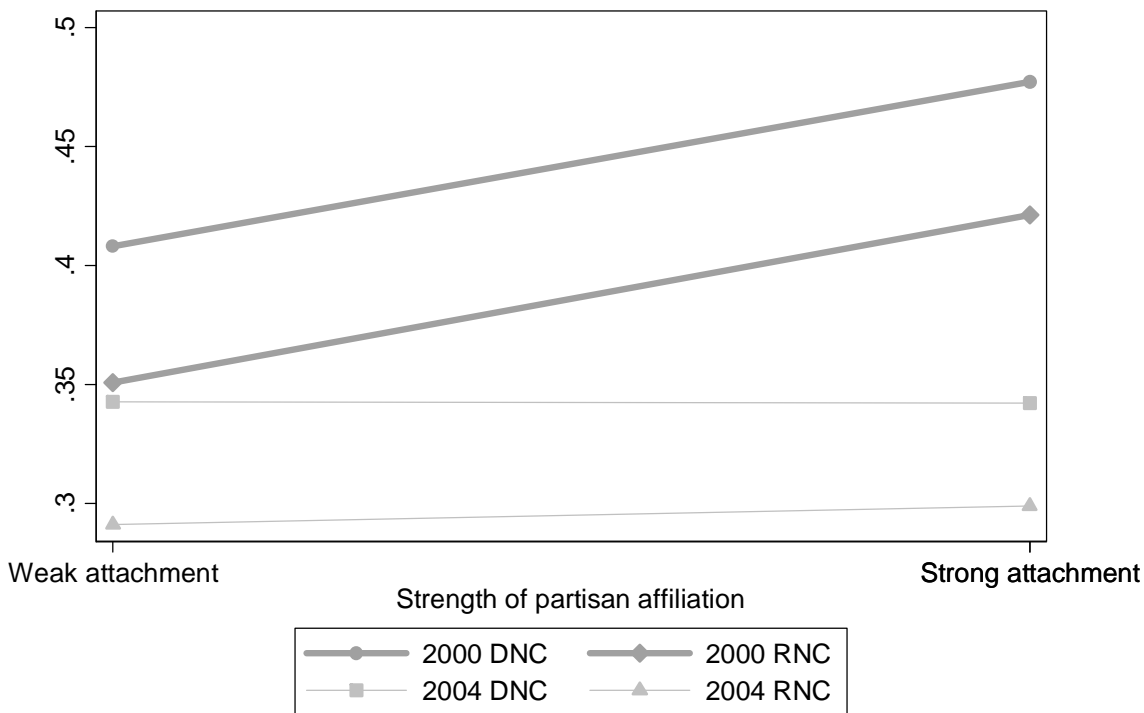
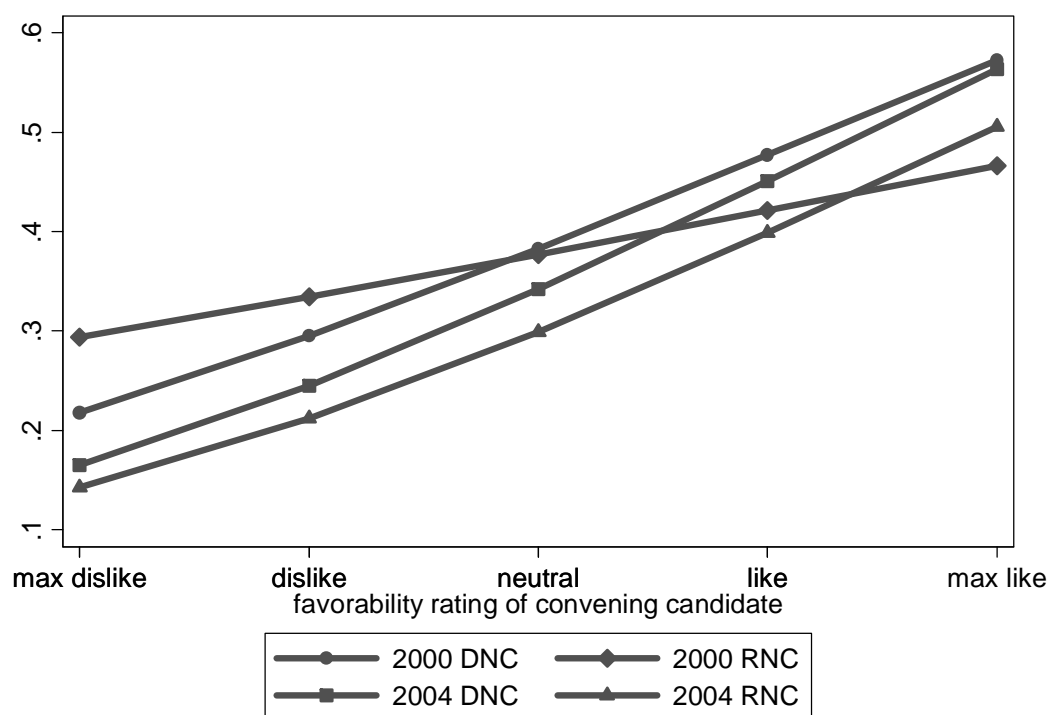


Fig. 2.4: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Ranking of Nominee Favorability



*Orientation towards political participation.* Past voting frequency, the variable used to measure orientation towards institutionalized participation for the 2000 convention tests, did not exercise significant effects in either case. However, the variable used in the 2004 tests—*likelihood of participation in campaign*—had a significant impact during the 2004 RNC. Figure 2.5 shows that those who indicated they were “very” likely to participate in the campaign were more likely to watch George W. Bush’s 2004 RNC speech than those who were “somewhat” or “not very” likely to participate. However, the effect was modest; those “very” likely to participate had a 36% chance of watching all of Bush’s speech, but those who were “not very” likely to participate still had a 24% chance of taking in Bush’s entire speech. By comparison, the variable measuring orientation towards more casual forms of participation—*frequency*



*of political discourse*—exercised a much stronger and much more consistent effect across the four convention periods under examination (Figure 2.6). When other factors were held at their median values, more frequent conversations about politics with family and friends yielded consistently higher predicted probabilities of watching convention speeches by the nominees. For example, during the 2000 Republican National Convention, the model predicts that those who “never” engaged in political discourse during the week preceding the convention had a 35% chance of watching all of Bush’s speech, while those who talked about politics “every day” had a 61% chance of consuming Bush’s entire speech.

Fig. 2.5: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Interest in Participation in Campaign

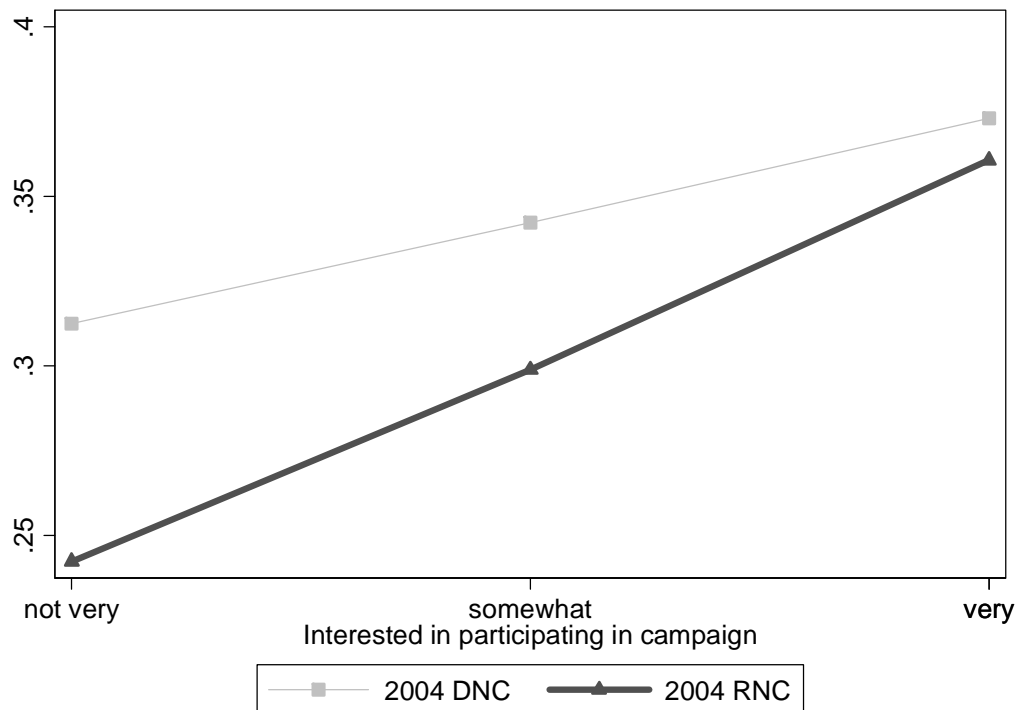
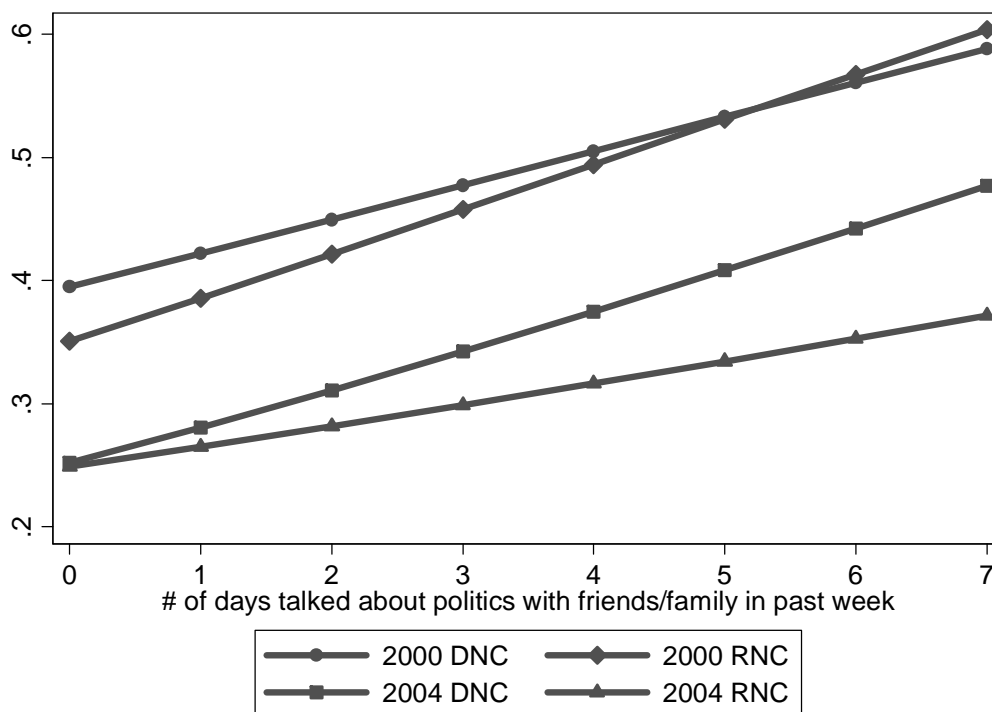
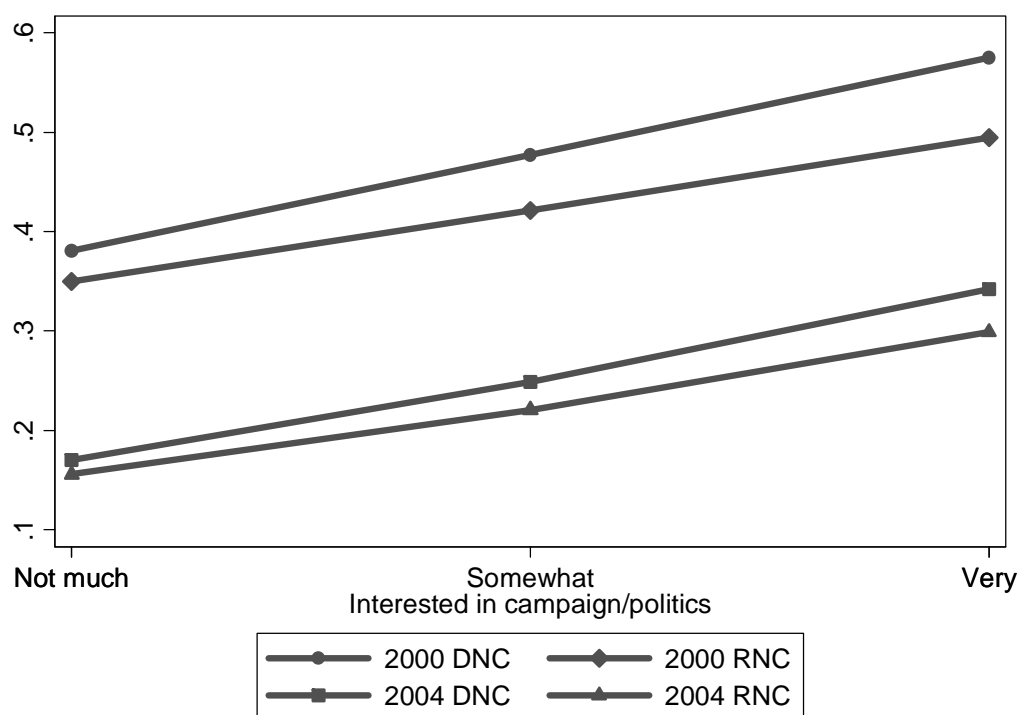


Fig. 2.6: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Frequency of Political Discourse



Increased levels of *political interest* also consistently yielded significantly higher levels of speech exposure, after controlling for other factors. Figure 2.7 shows that this significant relationship persisted across all four conventions. Interest yielded the strongest influence on speech-watching during the 2004 DNC; those indicating they were “very” interested in politics had a 34% probability of watching the entirety of John Kerry’s speech, compared to a probability of 18% among those “not” interested in politics. Overall, within the group of variables intended to measure orientation towards political participation, the variables related to more casual or “soft” involvement in politics had much better predictive power than did the combination of variables measuring more formal “institutional” forms of participation.

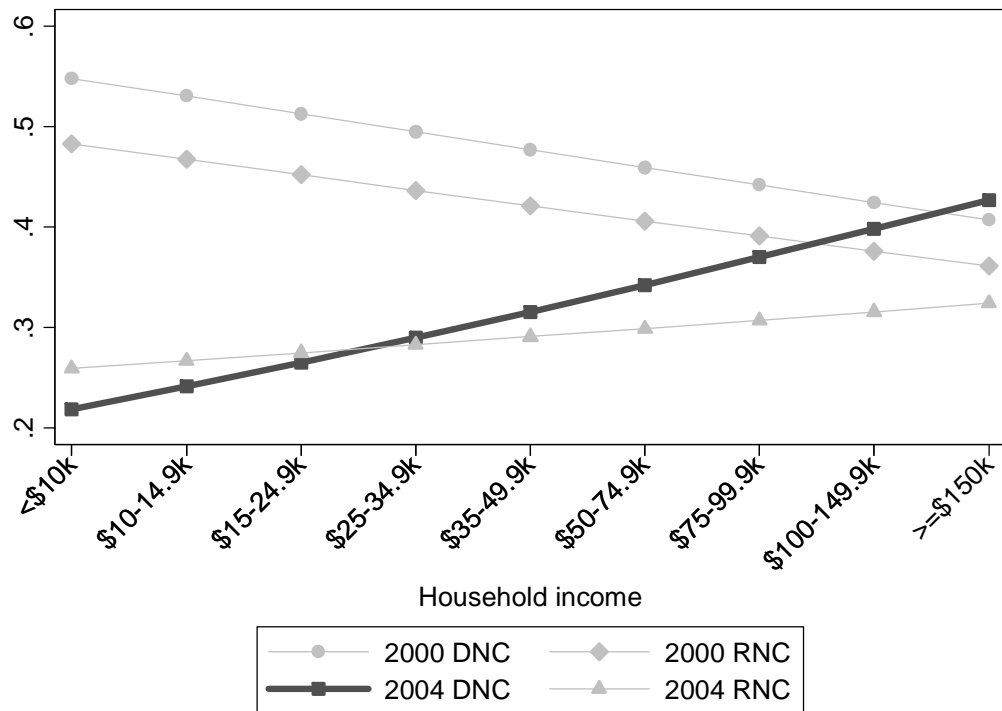
Fig. 2.7: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Political Interest



*Resources.* Many of the variables measuring resources failed to significantly predict self-exposure to nominee speeches in any of the models. The variable with the strongest bivariate association with speech exposure (*religiosity*) did not produce a significant coefficient for any of the conventions measured. This is not a surprise; its covariation with partisanship and the changing sign of its correlation coefficients based on the party of the convening candidate suggested it would not exercise a noticeable independent effect once other factors were controlled. Additionally, *living as married* failed to achieve significant effects on speech exposure. Only three of the resources-related variables affected speech exposure, and that impact was not consistent across conventions. *Retirement status* had an effect during the 2004 DNC only. *Household income* also exercised a significant impact during just one of the four tests. At the 2004

DNC, higher household income yielded higher exposure to John Kerry's convention speech (Figure 2.8). With other predictor values set at sample medians, the poorest respondents had a 26% probability of watching all of Kerry's speech, while the wealthiest respondents had a 43% probability of watching Kerry's speech in its entirety.

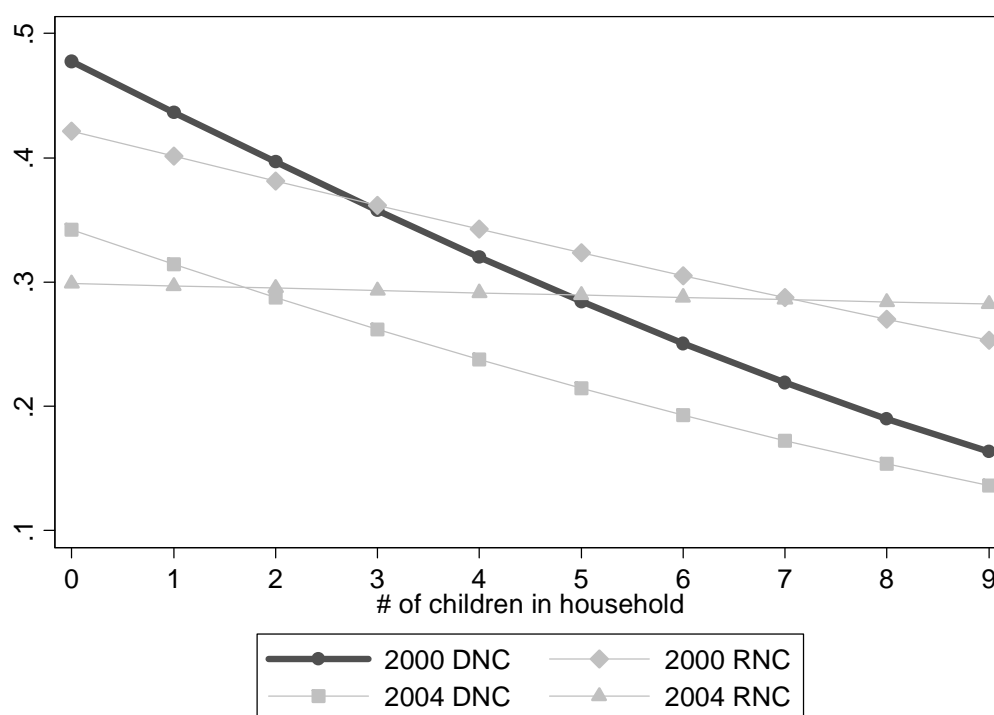
Fig. 2.8: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Household Income



The other resources-related variable to register an impact was *number of children in household*, but this predictor also only displayed a significant relationship with self-exposure to nominee speeches during one of the four conventions. During the 2000 Democratic convention, after controlling for other factors, the presence of additional children in the household made watching Al Gore's speech progressively less likely. Figure 2.9 shows that once other factors are held constant at their median values, those in childless households had a 48% predicted probability of watching Gore's entire

speech, but each additional child decreased the odds of taking in the whole speech by about 4%. Overall, personal resources did not play a strong role in predicting exposure to convention speeches during the 2000 and 2004 conventions after factors measuring political preferences, political sophistication, and orientation towards participation were taken into account.

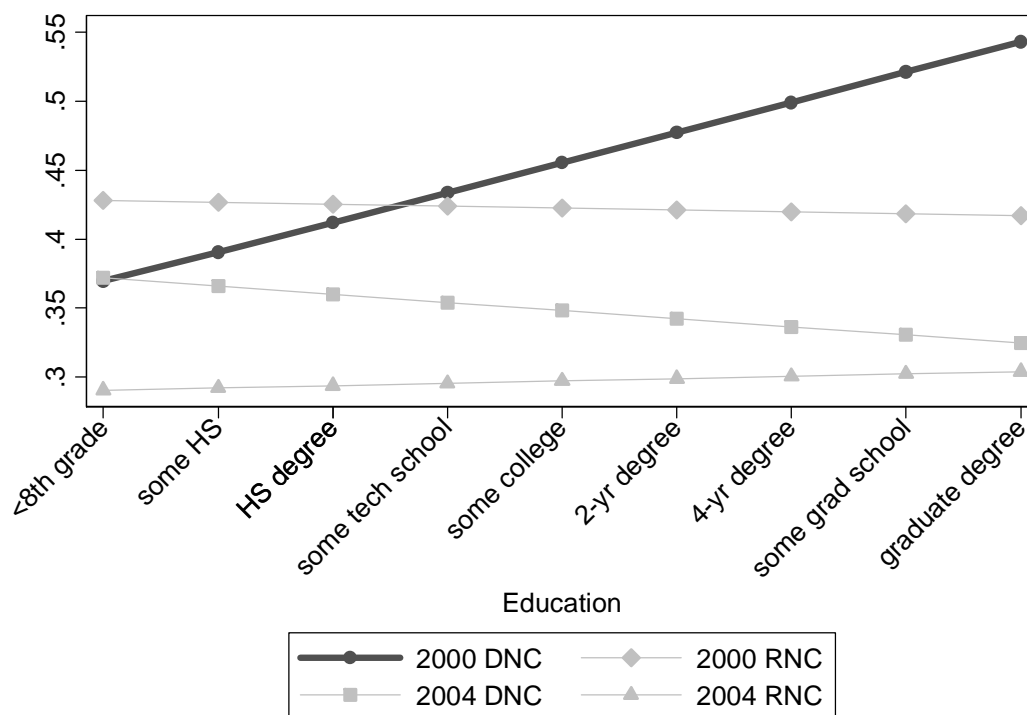
Fig. 2.9: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by # of Children in Household



*Political information.* Four of the six variables related to political information were significantly related to speech exposure, but just one was consistently related. Relatively higher *education* only yielded higher levels of speech exposure during the 2000 Democratic National Convention. Figure 2.10 shows a modest increase in the probability of watching all of Al Gore's speech as education moves from its lowest to

highest values. Those with less than a high school diploma were predicted to have ~40% probability of watching Gore's entire speech, while those with a four-year degree or better were predicted to have between a 50% and 55% chance of watching all of Gore's speech.

Fig. 2.10: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Education



Higher *interviewer evaluation of respondent political knowledge*—a more direct measure of sophistication—yielded increased speech exposure during the 2000 RNC.

After other factors were controlled, higher levels of political knowledge yielded somewhat higher levels of exposure to George W. Bush's speech. Figure 2.11 shows that those who received a grade of "A" from their interviewer had a 49% predicted probability of watching Bush's speech in its entirety, while those who received an "F"

had just a 24% chance of watching it all. However, the opposite relationship was in evidence at the 2004 RNC; those with higher levels of political knowledge were *less* likely to watch Bush's 2004 speech, after other factors were controlled. This curious pattern may be related to the timing of the conventions; this possibility is discussed in Chapter 5. Cable news viewership during the week prior to the given convention was the only measure of political sophistication that displayed a consistent relationship with speech exposure. At three of the four conventions, more days spent watching cable news in the lead up to the convention yielded higher levels of self-exposure to nominee speeches. Cable news viewership exercised the strongest influence during the 2004 RNC; Figure 2.12 shows that after other predictors were held at median values, those who avoided cable news altogether in the week before the 2004 Republican National Convention had a 20% predicted probability of watching Bush's entire speech, while those who reported watching cable news every day had a 38% chance. By comparison, network news viewing was significant in just two of the four tests. Increased consumption of network news yielded higher levels of speech exposure, after other factors were controlled, at both of the Democratic conventions (Figure 2.13). The two remaining variables meant to measure political sophistication—local news viewing and newspaper reading—did not achieve significant independent impacts on convention speech exposure during the 2000 or 2004 election cycles.

Fig. 2.11: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Political Knowledge

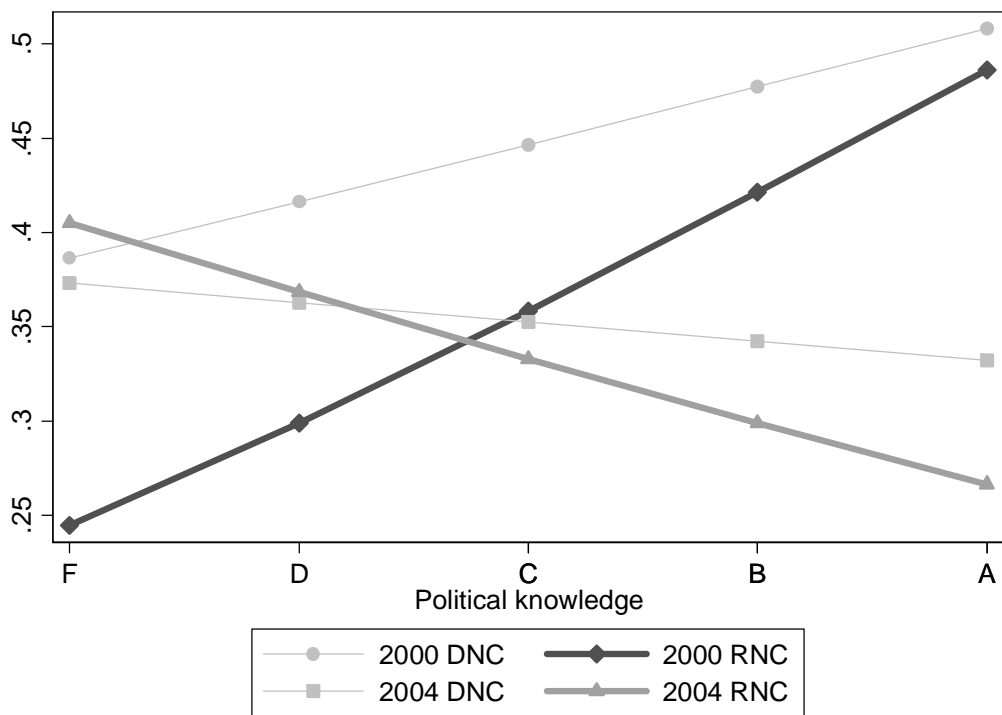


Fig. 2.12: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Cable News Viewing

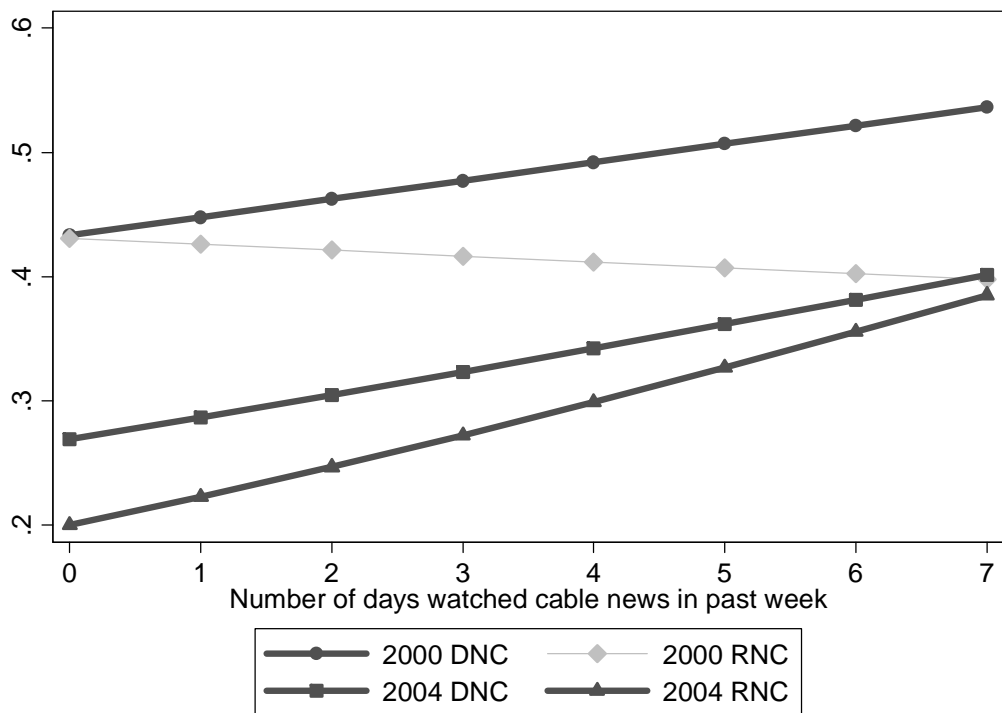




Fig.2.13: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Network News Viewing

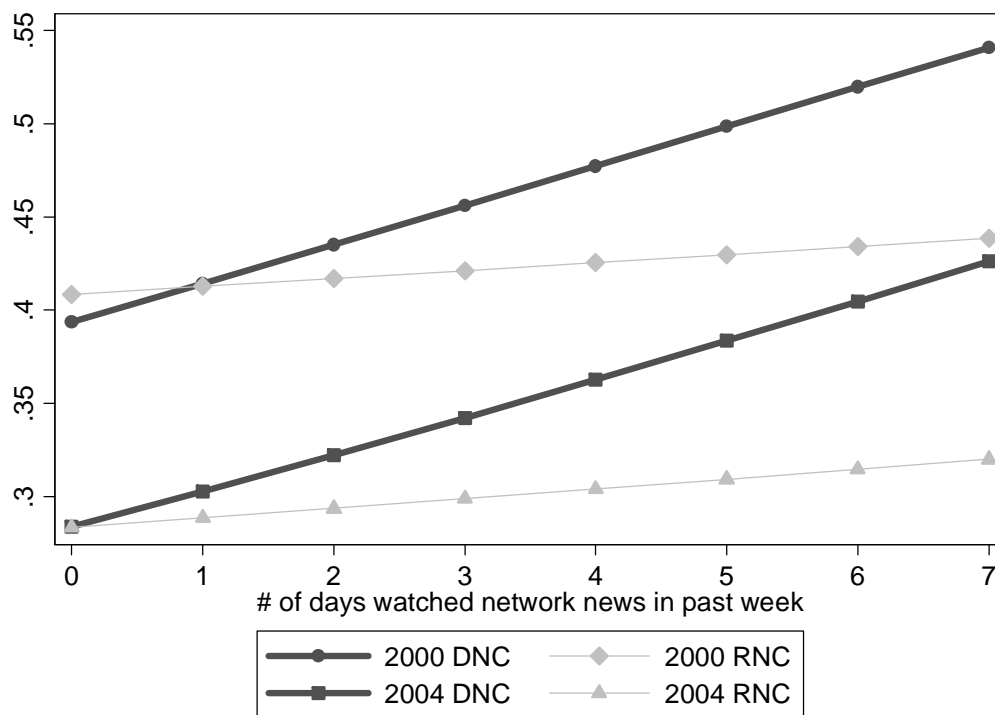
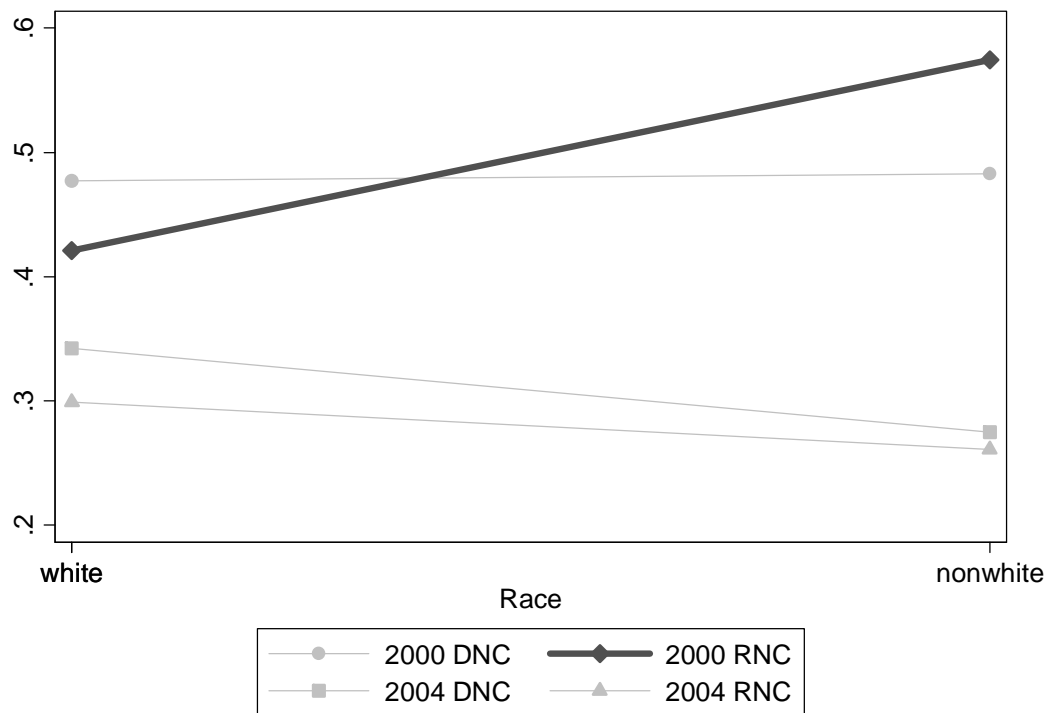


Fig. 2.14: Predicted Probability of Watching Entire Nominee Speech, by Race



*Demographics.* Of the three demographic variables included in the models—gender, race and age—respondent race and age appeared to exercise an independent impact on speech exposure, but each only at one of the four conventions. Figure 2.14 shows that during the 2004 RNC, nonwhite respondents were more likely than white respondents to watch George W. Bush’s speech. This finding is counterintuitive; the bivariate relationships lead to a directionally opposite expectation.

Overall, the best and most consistent determinants of self-exposure to nominee speeches were pre-convention nominee favorability rankings, political interest, and frequency of political discourse and cable news consumption. Individuals were much more likely to watch candidates they already liked; this aspect of political preference trumped party identification in importance. Individuals were likely to watch convention speeches if they found politics or campaigns in general interesting and if they enjoyed sharing that interest with others around them. Finally, individuals were more likely to watch televised convention speeches if they were already in the habit of spending significant time watching cable news, which tends to focus on political coverage (Morris and Francia 2009).

## **Discussion**

The convention speeches are unique opportunities to evaluate presidential candidates firsthand. They also represent opportunities for participation in widely shared political experiences that can provide common touchstones for subsequent discourse. However, survey data from 2000 and 2004 reveals that speech-watching is not motivated by a deficit in information about the candidates. Nor it is explained by the

distribution of resources available for expenditure on political participation; the explanatory power of common socioeconomic and demographic predictors of formal, institutional forms of participation such as voting did not extend to participation in the convention speech-watching experience. Speech-watching is most widespread among those who are causally engaged in politics, regularly digest news media, and (most importantly) already like the convening candidate. The best predictors of speech exposure were pre-convention candidate favorability rankings, political interest, and habits pertaining to information search. Those that choose to invest time watching candidates accept their parties' nominations tend to already possess strong opinions regarding candidates and parties. Furthermore, speech viewers tend to follow politics generally, discuss it often, and have robust habits regarding the collection of political information from other sources.

The models presented in this chapter also predict that those who are disengaged from politics and/or have extremely low affinity towards a convening candidate are unlikely to watch that candidate's speech (and *very* unlikely to watch that candidate's *entire* speech). However, for a large sector of the electorate—whose opinions of the candidates are *not* extremely polarized, and who express moderate levels of interest and engagement in politics—the models do a relatively poor job of clearly predicting speech-watching behavior. The likelihood that the speeches capture the attention of the people in this group does not appear to be mainly determined by the usual covariates of engagement in politics. However, the analysis presented in this chapter demonstrates

that moderates, “undecideds,” and casual participants in politics can still constitute an important part of the audience for convention speeches.

These results support the assertion that for most individuals, convention viewing has more to do with validating preexisting preferences than it has to do with the search for information that might be used in the formation of new preferences. However, at first glance, this argument does not seem compatible with what we often see after conventions—large swings in candidate preference. In the next chapter, I investigate changes in support for candidates during conventions at the individual level, and I attempt to shed light on how the effects of exposure to different types of information during conventions combine to produce observed results.

### Chapter 3:

#### *Individual-level Effects of Presidential Nominating Conventions on Candidate Support*

##### Introduction

In early 2012, Democratic National Committee Chair Debbie Wasserman Schultz announced that upcoming 2012 Democratic National Convention would be shortened to three days, down one day from the traditional four. Veteran political commentator Charlie Cook opined that “four days is really an anachronism. There’s arguably not more than one day’s business to do.” Additionally, the traditional opening ceremonies would be replaced by a “family-friendly” festival-like gathering at Charlotte Motor Speedway. University of Colorado political scientist Ken Bickers suggested to the *Charlotte Observer* that the campaign would focus on “preaching to the choir (to) get the choir excited and enthusiastic” and “working hard to line people up and get social media contact information”. Interviews with White House press secretary Jay Carney and convention CEO Steve Kerrigan yielded additional hints that the 2012 convention would be less about presenting the candidate to a national audience and more about building support in North Carolina specifically and expanding fundraising networking opportunities amongst convention attendees. DNC Chair Schultz echoed these sentiments during the press conference at which she announced the format changes: “We want this convention to be about more than just the pageantry and speeches you see on TV.”

The bulk of the scholarship on conventions focuses on aggregate-level changes in candidate support (Campbell 2001; Campbell et al. 1992; Gelman and King 1993; Holbrook 1996; Stimson 2004). Political elites are aware that the presidential

nominating conventions are capable of generating “bumps” in support for their candidates, but given how little individual-level work has been done, it is likely that elites lack a complete understanding of how conventions impact individuals. It is easy to think of conventions as “punctuations” that “instantly” re-arrange the opinion landscape. It is especially tempting to think of conventions in this way when looking at visualizations of candidate support levels over time. However, as campaign events go, conventions are quite lengthy, and they persist long enough that notable variation in information exposure across individuals can arise. Without taking into account variation in how much information is consumed over the course of conventions, or taking into account variation in the types of information encountered, there is an insufficient basis from which to draw conclusions about how conventions go about producing the changes in opinion they produce.

Of course, an incomplete understanding of how conventions influence individuals has not diminished the need to plan and hold conventions. The party elites that plan conventions work with the information available to them, and after examining cross-sectional polling it is easy to conclude that the impact of conventions on opinion is mostly limited to energizing those who are already predisposed towards the convening party. Because these “soft” supporters seem to be the most deserving targets of an investment of campaign effort, 2012 convention planners made moves to de-emphasize engagement with a broad, national audiences in favor of engaging more focused, regional, partisan audiences. In this chapter, I present evidence that may serve to motivate convention planners to reconsider such moves. Using panel data, I show that

individual-level change in candidate support after conventions is driven by a pair of distinct effects; first, a partisan-bias-activating effect triggered by exposure to the heavily politicized atmosphere surrounding the conventions, and second, a persuasive effect triggered by exposure to candidate convention speeches. Among those who identify with the convening party and tune in to watch candidates' speeches, these effects reinforce each other, yielding observable shifts. Among supporters of the opposition party, exposure to convening candidates' speeches *counteracts* the impact of the surrounding partisan information environment, obscuring change among members of that group. Therefore, any move to de-emphasize broad engagement with the electorate threatens a counterweight that partially offsets declining support for convening candidates among opposition partisans, and any move to decrease the amount of time available for speech exposure dilutes a driver of support among like-minded partisans.<sup>19</sup>

### **Individual-level Convention Effects Studies**

Hillygus and Jackman (2003) marked a departure from the trend of studying conventions only in regard to their aggregate impacts. These authors embarked on an individual-level investigation of the 2000 conventions. By making use of panel data that contained some measures of individual characteristics, they were able to identify that so-called "mismatched partisans" (those whose candidate preferences were at odds with their stated party affiliations) were most likely to change their candidate support

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<sup>19</sup> The misconception that speeches by the convening candidates and their allies are only watched by co-partisans is addressed in Chapter 2.

after the convention period. Although this study was groundbreaking in its demonstration that individual characteristics contributed to variation in the impact of conventions on individuals, the authors still referred to conventions as “monolithic information events” (p. 588). The possibility that individuals experience conventions differently in terms of the types and amounts of information they encounter and consume was not addressed.

In a pair of related studies, Cera and Weinschenk (2012a; 2012b) attempted to expand on earlier individual-level investigations by integrating measures of information consumption. In these studies, Cera and Weinschenk showed that in both 2000 and 2004, individual post-convention judgments of candidates regarding various character traits (“knowledgeable,” “inspiring,” “stubborn,” “arrogant,” etc.) were influenced by individual partisan affiliation and by exposure to convention speeches. They argued that involuntary exposure to partisan symbols, slogans and imagery during the highly charged convention periods increases the influence of personal partisanship in the evaluative process; just by being bombarded with reminders of partisan affiliation, individuals became more likely to base their evaluations of candidate traits or characteristics on their partisan loyalties. At the same time, these researchers showed that increasing levels of voluntary exposure to convention speeches consistently yielded improved judgments of the convening candidate’s characteristics, even when individual partisanship was controlled.

Cera and Weinschenk justified their focus on evaluations of candidate traits and characteristics with the observation that convention planners attempt to increase



support for their candidates by presenting convening candidates in the best possible light, often highlighting positive traits and minimizing negative traits, or drawing characteristic-based contrasts against opposing candidates. Therefore, they argued, measurements of candidate trait evaluations are likely to reflect the direct influence of exposure to information during conventions. While they noted the role of candidate trait/characteristic evaluations in the “funnel of causality” leading to ultimate candidate support, Cera and Weinschenk fell short of testing a more explicit link between individual exposure to convention information and ultimate support for candidates. While measuring evaluations of candidate traits has helped us understand how conventions can influence individuals, there is still the question of how that impact translates to election outcomes. Bartels (2002) allows that assessments of candidate personalities have the potential to influence the outcomes of very close U.S. presidential elections, but he argues that evaluations of candidate traits are, in the long run, determined by support, and not vice versa. If Bartels is correct, it is not safe to assume that observed post-convention shifts in evaluations of candidate character attributes are evidence of enduring or lasting change in an underlying candidate preference dynamic. Understanding how the individual-level effects of conventions influence eventual electoral decision-making hinges on the selection of a dependent variable more directly related to candidate support.

### **Determinants of Candidate Support**

In this chapter, I directly examine the relationship between information exposure during conventions and candidate support by modeling the determinants of

post-convention candidate favorability ratings. There are a multitude of factors that might influence how individuals rate candidates in terms of their overall favorability or unfavorability. However, the vast majority of these factors remain static or near-static over the course of a given presidential nominating convention (socioeconomic status, age, gender, *et cetera*). The influential factors which are likely to vary (either in value or in importance relative to one another in the evaluative calculus) over the course of a convention make up a small subset. I will proceed by isolating these variable factors, and proposing theoretical expectations regarding how each might behave during conventions.

### **The Partisan Atmosphere and Group Attachment**

It is undeniable that group attachment plays a role in determining individual favorability ratings of candidates. While there are a variety of group attachments that might exercise influence on individuals in this regard, one in particular is likely to become most salient during convention periods: party identification. Even if other group attachments become salient during conventions, because of the catch-all nature of our two-party system, these other attachments are likely to be subsumed in importance by party identification.

Conventions can cause party identification to exercise a stronger pull on opinion than it would under normal circumstances. A mechanism behind this influence is exposure (both voluntary and involuntary) to the partisanship-saturated convention atmosphere. There are few times during the four-year presidential election cycle when partisan messages, images, slogans and symbols more prevalent in the information

environment (Campbell et al. 1992; Trent and Friedenbergr 2000). Conventional media is dominated by convention coverage in which these types of partisan information are predominantly featured. While evidence from the 1980s and early 1990s suggests that the *net* tone of mainstream media convention coverage favors the convening candidate (Holbrook 1996), it has become easy for individuals to tailor the coverage they consume to their political tastes. The ease with which individuals now apply partisan screens during their information searches stems from the important changes to the information environment which occurred during the mid-1990s, which I discuss in more detail in the introductory chapter; the rise of ideologically differentiated cable news networks, and the proliferation of highly specialized online sources of political news. These new sources of political coverage have been able to efficiently cultivate partisan audiences because of the tendency of individuals to prefer news sources with whom they share a common outlook. These narrow coverage sources do not always cater to the convening candidate. Morris and Francia (2010) demonstrated that FOX News's coverage was consistently biased towards the Republican candidate during *both* conventions in the 2004 cycle, and that this biased coverage significantly influenced the opinions of FOX viewers. Survey data from the 2004 National Annenberg Election Study show that FOX News was the second-most-watched cable news network during the 2004 Democratic National Convention, and that (unlike its competitors) its audience was primarily composed of Republican identifiers. Such a combination of selective information exposure and biased coverage should be expected to reinforce partisan attitudes. Meanwhile, during conventions political advertisements (which are designed to be hard

to avoid) are everywhere; television, radio, bumper stickers, billboards, ad spaces on all manner of websites. Political discussions permeate schools, workplaces and social spaces. It may be that these types of atmospheric information tilt in favor of the convening candidate; however, as Cera and Weinschenk point out, “for partisans, it does not seem to matter which party has its imagery and symbols prominently featured. That is the beauty of partisan information shortcuts in a two-party system; you only need to have one party symbol waved in your face to remind you of where your allegiance lies.” (2012a, p. 26)

Partisanship’s role in political evaluations and decision-making is well-established (Campbell et al. 1960; Rahn 1993) but it is more visible and more accessible to individual members of the electorate during conventions. Visibility and accessibility are relevant to political judgments because it is not possible for most individuals to engage in a complete analysis of all possibly relevant dimensions when they are preparing to choose between alternatives. Instead, most decision-makers employ heuristics that simplify the decision task. Multiple experimental (Iyengar et al. 1984; Iyengar and Kinder 1987) and real-world studies (Krosnick and Kinder 1990; Iyengar and Simon 1993, Bartels 2006) have shown that reliance on information that is easily accessible in memory is one of the most widely-used of these heuristics. This “priming” literature repeatedly demonstrates that the issues most likely to be easily accessible in memory are ones that receive the greatest share of news coverage. Kimball (2005) demonstrated that partisanship itself can become the story and subsequently receive a greater weight in individuals’ decision-making calculus; he found that individual

evaluations of Congress polarize along partisan lines when party politics itself is the subject of media coverage. Presidential nominating conventions are festivals dedicated to party politics, and this is heavily reflected in media coverage. Party is what is on peoples' minds during conventions, and as a result, party identification is likely to become more important in individuals' evaluative processes during these periods.

### **The Convention Speeches and Persuasion**

Convention speeches are unique events where the nominees have a long block of time (typically an hour or more) in which they speak directly to the electorate, without any interference from third party interpreters. These speeches are broadcast live on major networks and cable news channels, indicating to the electorate an elite judgment that these events are worth watching for all and any members of the electorate. Although viewership of these events has declined since the days when the conventions were broadcast in their entirety by the major networks, they are still widely viewed. While partisan bias in information exposure can play a role in shaping the composition of the audience, partisans of all kinds as well as independents make up sizable proportions of those audiences (Karabell 1998; Shafer 1988; Cera and Weinschenk 2012a; Cera and Weinschenk 2012b). Convention speeches are tailored to highlight the best qualities of the convening candidate and to make the opposition candidate seem unappealing by comparison. Tuning in to convention speeches represents a desire to gather political information about the candidates in a unique spin-free context, and by extension, represents a peerless opportunity for persuasion.

## Hypotheses

I derive three testable hypotheses from theoretical expectations regarding how persuasion and group attachment drive opinion regarding candidates during presidential nominating conventions. First, because convention speeches are an optimal format for persuasion, I expect that exposure to convention speeches will yield improved post-convention ratings of the convening candidate (and worse ratings of the opposition candidate) when pre-convention ratings and respondent partisanship are held constant.

Second, following the literature on partisan bias in information processing that suggests increased receptivity to outlook-reinforcing messages (Bartels 2002; Goren 2002), I test whether or not individual partisanship conditions the persuasive impact of speech exposure. Cera and Weinschenk (2012a) found that occasionally the persuasive impact of speech exposure on candidate trait evaluations is limited to partisans of the convening party. I test if this extends to general candidate support.

Third, because of the overwhelming amounts of partisan information in the environment surrounding conventions, I expect that respondent partisanship will be significantly predictive of post-convention candidate ratings, even after pre-convention ratings and voluntary speech exposure are controlled.

## Data and Method

The data for this chapter are drawn from the 2000 and 2004 waves of the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES).<sup>20</sup> In both 2000 and 2004, the NAES

<sup>20</sup> NAES did not conduct convention panel studies in 2008 or 2012.

conducted separate panel studies timed around each major party's presidential nominating convention. Each of these four panel studies contained paired interviews (one interview just prior to a given convention, and a follow-up interview afterwards) with unique national cross-sectional samples. In 2000, respondents for the Republican convention panel were given pre-convention interviews between July 21 and July 30, and post-convention interviews between August 4 and August 13. Respondents for the 2000 Democratic convention panel were given pre-convention interviews between August 4 and August 13, and post-convention interviews between August 18 and August 27. In 2004, respondents for the Democratic convention panel were given pre-convention interviews between July 16 and July 26, and post-convention interviews between July 30 and August 8. Respondents for the 2004 Republican convention panel were given pre-convention interviews between August 20 and August 29, and post-convention interviews between September 3 and September 13.

In this chapter, I use ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to model determinants of candidate favorability ratings (George W. Bush and Al Gore, Jr. in 2000; John Kerry and George W. Bush in 2004). In 2000, the variables under examination were measured on a 101-point ordinal scale, making OLS an appropriate method. In 2004, the variables under examination were measured on an 11-point ordinal scale; for consistency and comparability, I again used OLS. I also employed *F*-tests to investigate whether or not alternative multiplicative conditional models offered increased explanatory power over basic linear-additive models. Finally, to better examine cases where conditional models might offer increased explanatory power, I used OLS to

generate slope coefficients and standard errors for explanatory variables at relevant values of conditional variables of interest.

### **Variables and Measurement**

The variables I used to measure candidate support were drawn from the 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panels. These questions asked respondents to rate a given candidate on a favorability scale. In 2000, the scales ran from 0 to 100, with 0 being the lowest rating and 100 the highest, and 50 identified as a neutral midpoint. In 2004, the scales ran from 0 to 10, with 0 being the lowest rating and 10 being the highest, and 5 identified as a neutral midpoint. In terms of describing candidate support, candidate favorability ratings function similarly to other commonly used measures, such as binary vote intention. For example, among respondents to the 2000 NAES Democratic post-convention survey, the correlation between an intended vote for Al Gore over George W. Bush and rating Al Gore higher than George W. Bush on the favorability scale was .92. An additional benefit of using candidate favorability ratings to as a measure of candidate support is increased sensitivity over binary measurements. An individual who rates Hypothetical Candidate A quite a bit higher than Hypothetical Candidate B may have a much higher probability of translating that difference into a voting act or another substantive form of political participation than an individual who rates Candidate A only slightly higher than B. A binary measurement of candidate support would not register a difference between these two situations. In this chapter, post-convention favorability ratings for each candidate are used as dependent variables, while pre-convention favorability ratings are used as control variables.



The panel format used by the NAES in 2000 and 2004 allows modeling of candidate support where the focus can be on explanatory variables affected by information exposure during the convention, while holding all other influential variables constant via a lagged measure of support. I attempt to isolate the effects of different types of information exposure on candidate favorability ratings during conventions by holding pre-convention favorability ratings constant. Except in cases where exposure to convention information exercised an effect, pre-convention ratings should explain all of the variation in post-convention ratings. I attempt to explain the remaining variation in post-convention ratings with independent variables measuring involuntary exposure to the politicized information atmosphere surrounding the conventions and voluntary exposure to the focused persuasive content presented by the candidates themselves during their convention speeches.

The independent variable measuring exposure to candidate speeches is constructed using questions from the 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panels where respondents were asked to report how much of the nominee's televised acceptance speech they watched. In 2000, voluntary exposure to the convention speeches was recorded on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "none" to "all". In 2004, speech exposure was recorded on a five-point ordinal scale ranging from "none" to "the entire speech."

While involuntary exposure to the hyperpartisan information atmosphere surrounding the convention is assumed to be constant across individuals, its partisan-bias-inducing effects are hypothesized to vary according to individual partisanship. I

operationalize partisanship using a 7-point measure constructed from responses to a trio of questions from the pre-convention waves of the 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panels. In both 2000 and 2004, respondents were asked about their party affiliation, and if they responded “Democrat” or “Republican”, they were asked a follow-up question about the strength of that partisan attachment. If they self-identified not as partisan but as independent, they were asked a different follow-up question asking if they leaned Democratic or Republican. From responses to these questions, I constructed a seven-point measure of partisanship ranging from “Strong Republican” to “Strong Democrat”.

## Results

To examine the individual-level effects of conventions on candidate support, I present a series of sets of regression model parameters; one set for each convention in 2000 and 2004 (four total sets). Within each set, for each of the two major-party candidates I present a linear-additive model as well as a multiplicative-conditional model where the linear restraint on the speech exposure variable is relaxed (it is allowed to vary by partisan affiliation). For each candidate, I compare the explanatory power of the unconstrained alternative model form to the base constrained model with an *F*-test. I also present separate slope coefficients and associated standard errors for the speech exposure variable for each category of partisan affiliation for each of the conditional models. Table 3.1 presents the set of regression model parameters for the 2000 Republican convention, while Table 3.2 presents the associated marginal effects of speechwatching during that convention at different levels of partisan affiliation.

Table 3.1: Determinants of Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings (101-point scale)  
2000 Republican Convention

	George W. Bush		Al Gore, Jr.	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Pre-convention favorability	.63 (.02)**	.63 (.03)**	.65 (.03)**	.64 (.03)**
Speech exposure	1.71 (.55)**	6.37 (1.76)**	-.95 (.63)	2.47 (2.06)
Strong Republican	10.47 (2.56)**	19.46 (4.41)**	-11.04 (2.90)**	-2.08 (5.07)
Weak Republican	7.44 (2.57)**	14.31 (4.09)**	-4.40 (2.91)	1.39 (4.76)
Independent, leans Republican	8.63 (2.51)**	15.79 (3.98)**	-3.26 (2.89)	2.19 (4.66)
Independent, leans Democrat	-6.55 (2.73)**	.70 (4.36)	3.53 (3.19)	8.04 (5.06)
Weak Democrat	-1.82 (2.69)	4.00 (4.21)	2.80 (3.14)	6.47 (4.89)
Strong Democrat	-10.86 (2.57)**	-3.13 (3.97)	7.32 (3.00)*	11.03 (4.55)**
Strong Republican x Speech	-	-5.77 (2.13)**	-	-5.37 (2.49)**
Weak Republican x Speech	-	-4.85 (2.22)**	-	-4.07 (2.58)
Leans Republican x Speech	-	-5.02 (2.13)**	-	-3.85 (2.48)
Leans Democrat x Speech	-	-5.13 (2.47)**	-	-3.17 (2.88)
Weak Democrat x Speech	-	-3.96 (2.54)	-	-2.41 (2.93)
Strong Democrat x Speech	-	-5.60 (2.30)**	-	-2.42 (2.66)
Constant	21.40 (2.44)**	14.73 (3.45)**	21.10 (2.87)**	16.39 (4.04)**
N	686	686	696	696
Adjusted R-squared	.73	.73	.66	.66
F-test	.20		.47	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression values.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Table 3.2: Marginal Effects of Speech Exposure on Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings, by Partisan Category  
2000 Republican Convention

Partisan Category	George W. Bush	Al Gore, Jr.
	Slope coefficient (SE)	Slope coefficient (SE)
Strong Republican	.60 (1.21)	-2.90 (1.41)**
Weak Republican	1.52 (1.35)	-1.60 (1.57)
Independent, leans Republican	1.35 (1.19)	-1.38 (1.38)
Independent	6.37 (1.76)**	2.47 (2.06)
Independent, leans Democrat	1.24 (1.73)	-.70 (2.02)
Weak Democrat	2.41 (1.82)	.07 (2.09)
Strong Democrat	.77 (1.48)	.05 (1.67)

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Constrained model parameters presented in Table 1 show that after holding pre-convention opinion and party identification constant, exposure to George W. Bush's 2000 convention speech yielded more positive post-convention favorability rankings of him. The coefficient for the speech exposure variable shows a 1.71-point increase per "unit" of speech exposure (which was measured on a 4-point scale ranging from "none"

to “all”); this yields a 6.84-point difference (on an 101-point favorability scale) between those who watched “none” of the speech and those who watched “all” of it. While greater speech exposure yielded improved rankings for Bush, increased exposure to Bush’s speech did not significantly influence Al Gore’s post-convention favorability rankings.

Regression parameters from the unconstrained models (in which the impact of speech exposure is allowed to vary by party identification) are also presented in Table 3.1, and the marginal effects of speech exposure for each category of party identification are presented in Table 3.2.<sup>21</sup> For post-convention ratings of Bush, no partisan bias in information processing is apparent; the effects of increased speech exposure among Democratic and Republican identifiers are indistinguishable. Instead, Bush’s speech made its largest impact among Independents. For ratings of Gore, the significance of the coefficient for speech exposure among Strong Republicans provides a small measure of support for the idea that partisanship has the potential to condition the influence of the speeches. However, the results of the *F*-tests displayed in Table 3.1 indicate that the unconstrained models do not offer significantly better fits to the data. Removing the linear constraint on the speech exposure variable does not increase enough additional explanatory power to justify increased model complexity.

Constrained model parameters in Table 3.1 also show that after controlling for speech exposure and pre-convention ratings, party identification emerged as a

<sup>21</sup> Regression parameters alone do not facilitate effective examination of relationships in multiplicative-conditional models because the coefficients for the interaction terms and the coefficients for any variables included in the interaction terms do not represent average effects. (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006).

significant predictor of post-convention ratings of both candidates. Because both pre-convention ratings and exposure to Bush's speech were held constant, this emergent bias can only be explained by exposure to the information environment surrounding the conventions. *Ceteris paribus*, when compared with post-convention ratings among independents (the excluded category), post-convention ratings of Bush were significantly more favorable among all groups of Republican identifiers (+10.47 among Strong Republicans, +7.44 among Weak Republicans, and +8.63 among Republican Leaners) and significantly lower among Democratic identifiers (-10.86 among Strong Democrats and -6.55 among Democratic Leaners). This divergence in post-convention ratings of Bush along party lines is strong evidence that exposure to the atmosphere surrounding the conventions can increase the importance of party as a criterion for candidate evaluation. This effect was also observed for ratings of Gore. After controlling speech exposure and pre-convention opinion, post-convention ratings for Gore were less favorable among Strong Republicans (-11.04) than they were among independents, and higher among Strong Democrats (+7.32) than they were among independents. Clearly, exposure to the convention atmosphere increased the importance of partisanship in the evaluative calculus regarding both candidates.

Table 3.3 shows that exposure to Al Gore's speech during the 2000 Democratic convention influenced post-convention support for both candidates. The base model shows that increased speech exposure yielded more positive favorability rankings for Gore, after controlling for partisanship and pre-convention opinion. Each additional "unit" of speech exposure yielded an additional 2.29 points; there was a 9.16-point

Table 3.3: Determinants of Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings (101-point scale)  
2000 Democratic Convention

	Al Gore, Jr.		George W. Bush	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Pre-convention favorability	.62 (.03)**	.62 (.03)**	.59 (.03)**	.60 (.03)**
Speech exposure	2.29 (.60)**	2.16 (2.12)	-1.34 (.60)**	-3.03 (2.13)
Strong Republican	-8.19 (2.99)**	-9.44 (4.8)**	15.86 (3.04)**	13.6 (4.91)**
Weak Republican	-2.51 (3.18)	-5.36 (5.34)	9.21 (3.26)**	5.87 (5.46)
Independent, leans Republican	-4.68 (3.24)	-6.85 (5.35)	7.23 (3.27)**	4.07 (5.46)
Independent, leans Democrat	3.37 (3.08)	4.82 (5.48)	-1.53 (3.14)	.80 (5.49)
Weak Democrat	5.21 (3.00)*	8.22 (5.12)**	.27 (3.04)	-7.18 (5.11)
Strong Democrat	6.56 (2.87)**	6.72 (5.12)	-2.92 (2.91)	-5.12 (5.08)
Strong Republican x Speech	-	.93 (2.52)	-	1.30 (2.55)
Weak Republican x Speech	-	1.86 (2.77)	-	2.10 (2.82)
Leans Republican x Speech	-	1.47 (2.81)	-	1.98 (2.84)
Leans Democrat x Speech	-	-.75 (2.69)	-	-.87 (2.71)
Weak Democrat x Speech	-	-1.68 (2.54)	-	4.47 (2.58)*
Strong Democrat x Speech	-	-.06 (2.46)	-	1.56 (2.50)
Constant	24.19 (2.98)**	24.31 (4.32)**	19.67 (3.09)**	21.91 (4.27)**
N	773	773	772	772
Adjusted R-squared	.66	.66	.63	.63
F-test	.71		.33	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression values.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Table 3.4: Marginal Effects of Speech Exposure on Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings, by Partisan Category  
2000 Democratic Convention

Partisan Category	Al Gore, Jr.	George W. Bush
	Slope coefficient (SE)	Slope coefficient (SE)
Strong Republican	3.09 (1.38)**	-1.73 (1.40)
Weak Republican	4.02 (1.79)**	-.92 (1.83)
Independent, leans Republican	3.63 (1.84)**	-1.05 (1.88)
Independent	2.16 (2.12)	-3.03 (2.13)
Independent, leans Democrat	1.41 (1.64)	-3.90 (1.67)**
Weak Democrat	.47 (1.43)	1.45 (1.43)
Strong Democrat	2.10 (1.26)*	-1.46 (1.28)

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

difference on the 101-point favorability scale between those who watched none of Gore's speech and those who watched all of it. The results of the *F*-test indicate that allowing speech exposure and partisanship to condition each other does not result in significantly higher explanatory power. (Table 3.4 shows that when these variables are

allowed to interact, the model predicts that watching Gore's speech helped him most among *Republican* identifiers, indicating that a partisan bias in information processing did not come into play among those who watched Gore's speech.) The base model also shows that exposure to Gore's speech damaged Bush's post-convention favorability rating. Each additional "unit" of speech exposure lowered Bush's rating by 1.34 points, yielding a 5.36-point difference on the 101-point scale between those who watched none of Gore's speech and those who watched all of it. Once again, the *F*-test shows that the conditional model does not offer a significantly better fit to the data over the base model.

After the 2000 Democratic convention, partisanship once again played a significant role in determining post-convention ratings for both candidates, even after controlling for pre-convention ratings and exposure to Gore's speech. Table 3.3 shows that Gore's post-convention ratings were significantly lower among Strong Republicans (-8.19) and significantly higher among Weak Democrats (+5.21) and Strong Democrats (+6.56) than they were among independents. After the convention, ratings of Bush were considerably higher among Strong Republicans (+15.86), and substantially higher among Weak Republicans (+9.21) and Republican Leaners (+7.23). Post-convention ratings among Democratic identifiers were indistinguishable from ratings among independents. The atmosphere surrounding the Democratic convention made party a more important determinant of support for Gore among strong partisans of both parties, and triggered increased support for Bush among his co-partisans.

Table 3.5: Determinants of Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings (11-points scale)  
2004 Democratic Convention

	John Kerry		George W. Bush	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Pre-convention favorability	.68 (.02)**	.68 (.02)**	.74 (.02)**	.74 (.02)**
Speech exposure	.11 (.03)**	.08 (.15)	-.05 (.04)	-.19 (.15)
Strong Republican	-1.18 (.23)**	-1.17 (.30)**	1.46 (.24)**	1.29 (.30)**
Weak Republican	-.52 (.26)**	-.77 (.34)**	1.00 (.27)**	.85 (.34)**
Independent, leans Republican	-.66 (.26)**	-.54 (.33)	.91 (.26)**	.78 (.33)**
Independent, leans Democrat	.50 (.24)**	.37 (.33)	-.07 (.23)	-.46 (.32)
Weak Democrat	.31 (.24)	.24 (.33)	.14 (.24)	-.02 (.32)
Strong Democrat	.72 (.24)**	.74 (.34)**	-.07 (.23)	.05 (.33)
Strong Republican x Speech	-	-.02 (.17)	-	.16 (.17)
Weak Republican x Speech	-	.21 (.19)	-	.13 (.19)
Leans Republican x Speech	-	-.09 (.18)	-	.13 (.18)
Leans Democrat x Speech	-	.08 (.16)	-	.25 (.16)
Weak Democrat x Speech	-	.05 (.17)	-	.14 (.17)
Strong Democrat x Speech	-	.01 (.16)	-	.04 (.16)
Constant	2.00 (.23)**	2.03 (.28)**	1.04 (.22)**	1.19 (.27)**
N	830	830	841	841
Adjusted R-squared	.79	.79	.84	.84
F-test	.78		.91	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression values.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Table 3.6: Marginal Effects of Speech Exposure on Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings, by Partisan Category  
2004 Democratic Convention

Partisan Category	John Kerry	George W. Bush
	Slope coefficient (SE)	Slope coefficient (SE)
Strong Republican	.07 (.08)	-.03 (.08)
Weak Republican	.29 (.12)**	-.06 (.12)
Independent, leans Republican	-.13 (.10)	-.06 (.10)
Independent	.08 (.15)	-.19 (.16)
Independent, leans Democrat	.16 (.07)**	.06 (.07)
Weak Democrat	.14 (.08)*	-.05 (.08)
Strong Democrat	.09 (.07)	-.15 (.07)**

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Parameters for the constrained model in Table 3.5 show that exposure to John Kerry's speech at the 2004 Democratic convention yielded more positive post-convention rankings for him. The coefficient for the speech exposure variable shows an increase in Kerry's post-convention rating of .11 points per "unit" of speech exposure.

For the 2004 NAES convention panels, speech exposure was measured on a 5-point



scale ranging from “none” to “the entire speech”; this yields a net difference of .55 points (on the 11-point favorability scale used in the 2004 NAES panels) between those who watched “none” of the speech and those who watched “the entire speech.”

Meanwhile, constrained model parameters show that exposure to Kerry’s speech failed to have an appreciable effect on support for his opponent, the incumbent President Bush. It may be worth noting that the partisan group-specific coefficients derived from the unconstrained models (presented in Table 3.6) indicate that Kerry’s speech did exercise a measurable negative impact on ratings of Bush among Strong Democrats. Yet again, the *F*-test results suggest that the impact of the speeches is most efficiently modeled as linear; allowing the effects of the speech to vary by individual partisanship does not improve the model fits enough to justify their increased complexity.

Table 3.5 also reveals more evidence that the information environment surrounding the convention speeches can trigger a greater role for partisanship in structuring post-convention candidate evaluations. After holding pre-convention ratings and speech exposure constant, Democratic identifiers rated Kerry significantly higher (+.72 among Strong Democrats and +.50 among Democratic Leaners) and Republican identifiers rated Kerry significantly lower (-1.18 among Strong Republicans, -.52 among Weak Republicans, and -.66 among Republican Leaners) than did independents (the excluded category). Meanwhile, Republican identifiers gave significantly higher post-convention ratings to Bush (+1.46 among Strong Republicans, +1.00 among Weak Republicans, and +.91 among Republican Leaners) than did independents. Ratings among Democratic identifiers were not statistically distinguishable from ratings among

independents after other factors were controlled. These emergent gaps, mostly drawn along partisan lines, are additional proof of a partisan bias-inducing atmospheric effect during conventions.

At the 2004 Republican convention, exposure to George W. Bush's speech yielded significantly improved post-convention ratings for him, and significantly worse post-convention ratings for his opponent John Kerry, even after holding party identification and pre-convention opinion constant. Table 3.7 shows an increase in Bush's post-convention rating of .14 points per "unit" of speech exposure, yielding a total difference of .70 points between those who watched "none" of the speech and those who watched "the entire speech." Kerry's ratings fell by .09 points per "unit" of speech exposure; those who watched "the entire speech" rated Kerry .45 points lower than did those who avoided the speech altogether. For this convention, significant *F*-statistics indicate that the unconstrained models offer enough additional explanatory power to warrant their increased complexity. However, despite the increased predictive power offered by relaxing the linear constraint on the speech variable, the unconstrained models do not offer evidence of a partisan bias in the processing of speech information. There were large and significant differences in the magnitude of the effect of exposure to Bush's speech among different partisan subgroups; however, the *pattern* of those effects is not one that is consistent with the presence of the kind of partisan bias that leads individuals to reject encountered information that is incongruent with a pre-existing political worldview. Table 3.8 shows that exposure to

Bush's speech *improved* his standing, and *damaged* Kerry's, among some Democratic identifiers.

Table 3.7: Determinants of Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings (11-point scale)  
2004 Republican Convention

	George W. Bush		John Kerry	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Pre-convention favorability	.76 (.02)**	.75 (.02)**	.73 (.02)**	.72 (.02)**
Speech exposure	.14 (.03)**	.39 (.10)**	-.09 (.03)**	.02 (.10)
Strong Republican	.32 (.20)*	.84 (.27)**	-.45 (.19)**	-.16 (.26)
Weak Republican	.20 (.21)	.27 (.27)	-.13 (.20)	.07 (.26)
Independent, leans Republican	.14 (.21)	.59 (.29)**	-.46 (.20)**	-.27 (.29)
Independent, leans Democrat	-.88 (.20)**	-.45 (.25)*	.91 (.19)**	.97 (.25)**
Weak Democrat	-.69 (.21)**	-.36 (.27)	.38 (.20)*	.79 (.26)**
Strong Democrat	-1.24 (.19)**	-.98 (.24)**	1.02 (.19)**	1.03 (.23)**
Strong Republican x Speech	-	-.33 (.11)**	-	-.18 (.11)
Weak Republican x Speech	-	-.09 (.13)	-	-.16 (.13)
Leans Republican x Speech	-	-.31 (.12)**	-	-.14 (.12)
Leans Democrat x Speech	-	-.34 (.12)**	-	-.05 (.12)
Weak Democrat x Speech	-	-.27 (.13)**	-	-.32 (.13)**
Strong Democrat x Speech	-	-.22 (.12)*	-	.01 (.12)
Constant	1.66 (.18)**	1.37 (.21)**	1.30 (.18)**	1.18 (.21)**
N	937	937	931	931
Adjusted R-squared	.86	.86	.83	.84
F-test	2.48**		2.13**	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression values.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

Table 3.8: Marginal Effects of Speech Exposure on Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings, by Partisan Category  
2004 Republican Convention

Partisan Category	George W. Bush	John Kerry
	Slope coefficient (SE)	Slope coefficient (SE)
Strong Republican	.06 (.06)	-.15 (.06)*
Weak Republican	.31 (.09)**	-.13 (.09)
Independent, leans Republican	.08 (.08)	-.12 (.08)
Independent	.39 (.10)**	.02 (.10)
Independent, leans Democrat	.05 (.07)	-.02 (.07)
Weak Democrat	.12 (.09)	-.30 (.10)**
Strong Democrat	.17 (.07)**	.04 (.07)

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

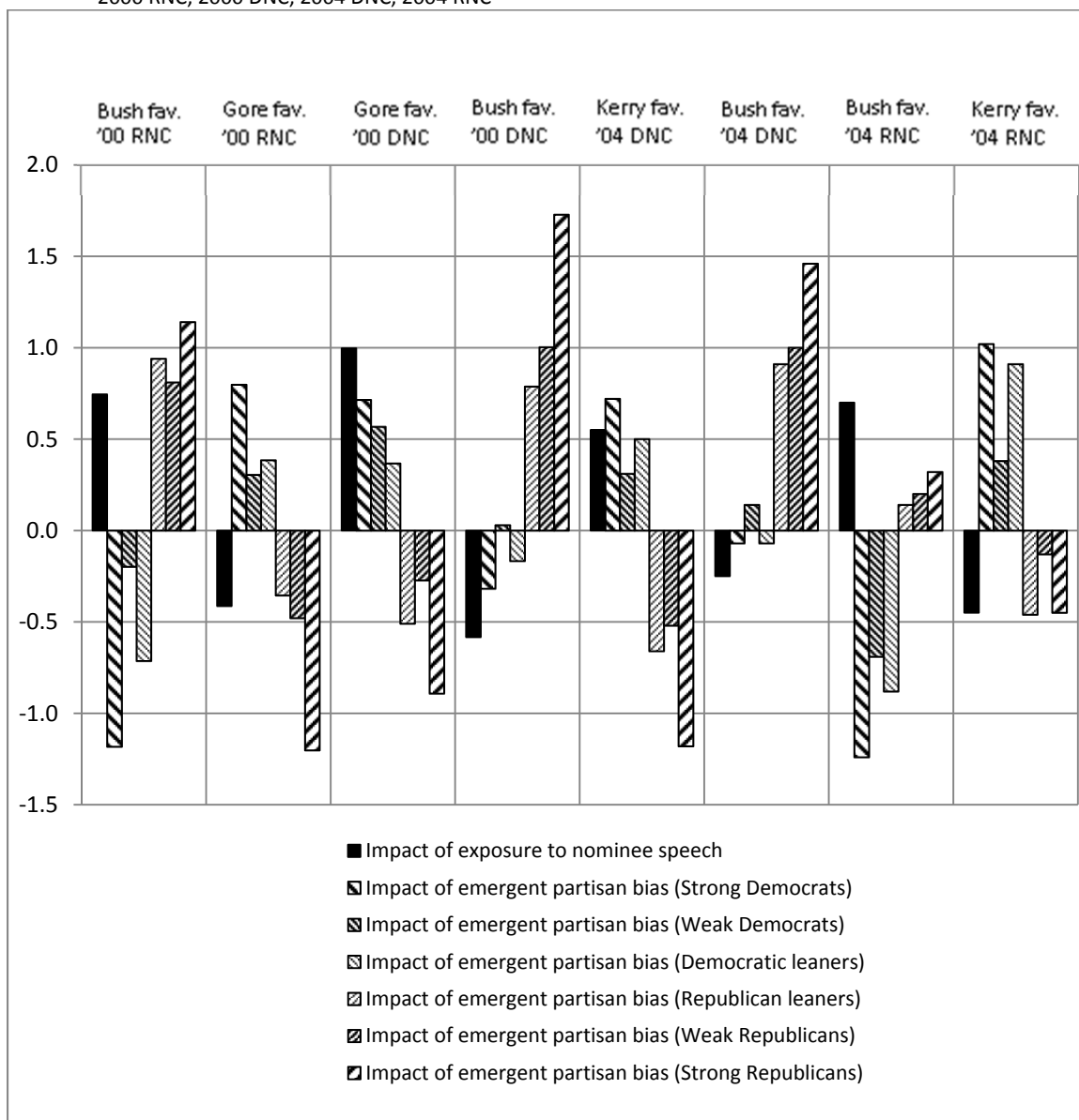
A significant and substantively meaningful pattern of partisan bias in post-convention evaluations did arise as a result of exposure to the 2004 GOP convention atmosphere. This finding is consistent with the pattern established in the other three

conventions under examination in this chapter. After controlling for pre-convention candidate ratings and speech exposure, individual partisanship played a systematic role in predicting post-convention ratings of both candidates. Table 3.7 shows that Democratic identifiers gave Bush significantly lower ratings (-1.24 among Strong Democrats, -.69 among Weak Democrats, and -.88 among Democratic Leaners) than did Independents. Ratings of Bush among Republican identifiers were not significantly different than ratings of Bush among independents. For Kerry, Democratic identifiers gave him higher post-convention ratings (1.02 among Strong Democrats and .91 among Democratic Leaners) than did independents, while Republican identifiers gave Kerry worse ratings (-.45 among Strong Republicans, and -.46 among Republican Leaners).

For comparative purposes, Figure 3.1 presents the impact of exposure to each of the 2000 and 2004 nominee speeches on candidate favorability plotted alongside the impact of emergent partisan bias caused by immersion in the partisanship-saturated information environment surrounding the conventions. To facilitate comparisons between the 2000 and 2004 cycles, I re-scaled the constrained-model regression coefficients from 2000 (which were based on a 101-point favorability scale) to match the 11-point favorability scale used in 2004.

Figure 3.1 shows a relatively constant pattern of effects across each convention. Speech exposure yields higher post-convention favorability ratings for the convening candidates and lower ratings for their opponents. At the same time, ratings for both

Fig. 3.1: Comparison of the Effects of Exposure to Nominee Convention Speeches\* and Emergent Partisan Bias Caused by Exposure to the Partisan Convention Atmosphere on Post-convention Candidate Favorability (11-point favorability scale)\*\*  
2000 RNC, 2000 DNC, 2004 DNC, 2004 RNC



Note: \*The impact of *maximum* self-exposure to speeches is displayed.  
\*\*Favorability was measured on a 101-point scale in 2000; these effect coefficients were re-scaled for comparability with the 11-point scale used in 2004.

candidates diverge along partisan lines after conventions. It is clear that these effects can alternatively reinforce or conceal one another.<sup>22</sup>

While the directional pattern of effects is uniform across conventions, there is notable variation in the size of the effects from convention to convention. In some instances, the impact of speech consumption is equal to, or larger than, the effects of emergent partisan bias (for example, Gore at the 2000 DNC). In other cases, the effect of partisan bias on post-convention opinion dwarfed that of speech exposure (see Gore at the 2000 RNC). Additionally, at some conventions, emergent partisan bias played a larger role for one side than it did for the other; regarding opinions of Bush after the 2004 DNC, Democrats did not express opinions significantly different than independents, but Republicans were much more likely to express higher post-convention favorability ratings for him.

## Discussion

Results from the individual-level tests presented in this chapter confirm that convention speeches exercise a substantively meaningful persuasive influence on candidate support among speech consumers that is favorable to the convening candidate. During the 2000 Republican convention, exposure to George W. Bush's speech yielded higher post-convention ratings for him. During the 2004 Democratic convention, exposure to Al Gore's speech yielded higher ratings for him as well as lower ratings for Bush. At the 2004 Democratic convention, exposure to John Kerry's speech

<sup>22</sup> An alternate approach is to examine post-convention change in net candidate favorability. Such an approach involves a dependent variable that encapsulates shifts between the pre- and post-convention differences in *both* candidates' favorability ratings. Model parameters for such tests can be found in Appendix C.

yielded improved post-convention ratings for him. At the 2004 Republican convention, exposure to Bush's speech yielded improved ratings for him, and damaged ratings of Kerry. While there are instances where the speeches failed to exercise a uniform persuasive effect across the partisan spectrum, there is insufficient evidence to conclude that the persuasive impact of the speeches is systematically attenuated or reversed when the speaker and the viewer do not share a party label. In many cases, opposition partisans were just as moved as convening partisans, and in some cases, more so. While there were some instances where opposition partisans were unmoved by speeches, speech exposure never damaged the ratings of convening candidates among opposition partisans. After holding individual partisanship and pre-convention candidate ratings constant, convention speeches exercised a consistent effect beneficial to the speaker among those who chose to watch.<sup>23</sup>

The results of the tests in this chapter also constitute unmistakable evidence that exposure to the information atmosphere *surrounding* the conventions serves to increase partisan bias. In every test, after controlling for pre-convention ratings and speech exposure, individual partisan affiliation played a significant role in predicting post-convention candidate ratings. In each case, this increased predictive power was directionally consistent with the alignment of partisanship between the respondent and the convening party. Regardless of which party was convening, after holding pre-convention opinion and exposure to speech information from the convening candidate

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<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, the conditional effect of speech exposure on the impact of partisanship on post-convention candidate support could be considered; exposure to the speeches could reasonably be expected to exercise a moderating impact on the emergence of partisan bias. However, the results of the *F*-tests presented here indicate such effects are not easily uncovered.

constant, Republican identifiers were more supportive of Republican candidates and Democratic identifiers were more supportive of Democratic candidates after that convention.

After the conventions examined in this chapter, the observed persuasive effects associated with exposure to the nominee speeches and the increased impact of partisanship on post-convention evaluations resulting from immersion in the hyperpartisan information atmosphere surrounding the conventions were of relatively similar magnitudes. These effects are often clearly capable of concealing one another at the individual level when the partisanship of the convening nominee and the viewer are out of alignment. When the viewer and nominee share a party label, these effects reinforce each other, producing a net increase in support for the convening candidate that is easily observable.

This individual-level study of convention effects is informed by both the instrumental and the social/psychological approaches to understanding political behavior. I hope this work serves as an example for how these approaches can be viewed as complementary. In addition, the study in this chapter is an example of how our understanding of phenomena that are primarily studied at the aggregate level (convention bumps) can be enhanced by individual-level investigation. In addition to these implications for the literature on campaign effects and political behavior, the research in this chapter has normative implications. For their 2012 convention, the Democrats did indeed shorten their convention to three days, down one day from the



traditional four.<sup>24</sup> The findings presented in this chapter suggest that by reducing the amount of time for the broadcast of primetime convention speeches, convention planners are decreasing opportunities for broad persuasion based on political learning through the direct and unmoderated observation of our most prominent politicians. If this truncated convention schedule becomes the norm, it is reasonable to expect that media outlets will fill the airtime formerly occupied by convention speeches with the type of audience-specific political programming likely to increase partisan polarization of opinion.

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<sup>24</sup> The Republicans also cut their 2012 convention to three days, but they had planned to go with four; the cut was forced by the arrival of Hurricane Isaac.

## **Chapter 4:**

### ***The Conditional Effects of Competing Convention Messages***

#### **Introduction**

The major parties maintain a shell of traditional convention pageantry around the modern core of their primary-driven candidate selection processes. While the primary seasons for the parties overlap, the tradition of the parties scheduling their nominating conventions so that they do *not* overlap persists. The results from the last chapter suggest it is this one-at-a-time scheduling scheme that makes conventions into truly unique campaign events; the convening party draws the attention of the media and the public while the opposing party waits for its turn. For the most part, this tradition allows us to isolate the impact of each convention on candidate support. Turn-based scheduling also opens the door for convening candidates to engage in messaging strategies that would not be possible if the conventions were held simultaneously. The first candidate to convene can try and pre-empt the anticipated message of the second candidate. The second candidate can attempt to counteract impressions made by the first candidate. How effective are these strategies? Even if candidates and parties do not choose to engage in these types of strategic behaviors, the electorate will still be exposed to sequential doses of diametrically opposed rhetoric. Could the order of the delivery of campaign information during the convention period influence its impact? Candidates and their parties undoubtedly care about the answers to these questions. Political scientists have not yet examined the *joint* impact both conventions in a given election cycle can have on individual-level support for candidates. In this chapter, I

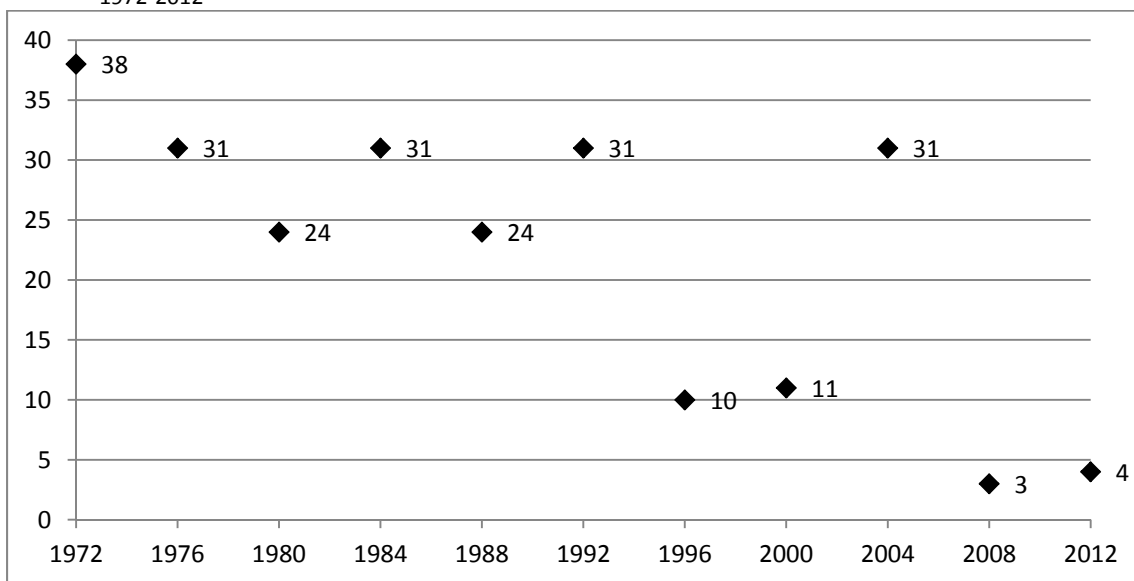
present evidence that a complete understanding the effects conventions have on individuals requires studying them in pairs.

### **Convention Scheduling**

The conventions themselves are artifacts of the days when the major parties needed to physically convene to settle important political business. Before the emergence of the primary-driven nomination process in the 1970s, party insiders dominated the process of candidate selection, and this generally involved a lengthy process of favor-trading and negotiation between representatives of the various state/local party machines. Between 1830 and 1972, the prime concern of convention organizers was to ensure that candidate selection could be achieved early enough to allow for effective campaigning down the stretch. This burden was often not as heavy for the party of the incumbent president for obvious reasons, and a norm emerged in which the challenging party would convene a month or more prior to the president's party.

Even after the parties instituted primary-driven candidate selection processes following the riots at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, this norm persisted for another two decades. However, Figure 4.1 shows a change after 1992; four of the five subsequent election cycles have seen conventions scheduled within two weeks of one another, and the last two cycles have involved conventions held less than one week apart.

Fig. 4.1: Number of Days between Major-Party Conventions  
1972-2012



During the 1990s, political scientists resurrected the notion that campaigns deserve a place alongside voter characteristics and group affiliations in the pantheon of election outcome determinants. Subsequent research has pointed out that the effects of major-party campaigns often counteract each other at the aggregate level (Fiorina and Peterson 2002; Campbell 2008a). Therefore, campaign effects which manifest as visible aggregate shifts in opinion should only be expected when one side has a distinct information advantage and a focused message (Bartels 1993), and that convening parties enjoy those precise circumstances (Holbrook 1996; Stimson 2004; Erikson and Wlezien 2012). In the post-1968 era of candidate selection via primary and caucus, conventions have been relatively conflict-free, and convening parties have had the luxury of presenting a finely tuned message to a relatively undistracted electorate. Media types and political professionals have gradually come to realize that a successful,

smoothly-executed convention can (under the right circumstances) yield substantial increases in support for the convening candidate in post-convention opinion polls.

The media treats any change in the status of the horserace as newsworthy (Broh 1980; Iyengar, Norpoth and Hahn 2004; Benoit, Stein, and Hansen 2005), so a candidate experiencing clear positive movement in the polls after a successful convention can expect to enjoy a stream of favorable front-page news.<sup>25</sup> Findings of studies focusing on the connection between media coverage and voter preferences (Lichter and Noyes 1993; Just et. al 1996; Shaw 2001) indicate that an effective campaign strategy is to maximize positive headline news for your candidate, while minimizing positive coverage of your opponent. Over the last few decades, capacity for public polling has improved dramatically and as a result researchers have an easier time quantifying the impact of high-profile campaign events. Political professionals that pay attention to research have become increasingly aware of the potential for these high-profile campaign events to create feedback loops of positive coverage and positive movement in the polls (Eisinger 2003; Heith 2004; Dunn Tempas and McCann 2007). This increased awareness has yielded incentive for candidates and their campaigns to knock “good news” for their opponents off front pages by whatever means available. In 2000, the Gore campaign made tactical use of the announcement of Joe Lieberman as Gore’s running mate by announcing it just five days after the end of the Republican convention (and a full four

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<sup>25</sup> This phenomenon is not limited to American presidential general elections. For a discussion of horserace reporting during Canadian elections, see Andersen (2000).

days before the Democratic convention).<sup>26</sup> Prior to 2000, nominees announced their VP selections during their conventions; Gore's predecessor Bill Clinton had a full month to enjoy media coverage of his 1992 convention before the Republicans convened and captured the media's attention. Gore was able to refocus media attention on his campaign less than a week after the Republicans wrapped up their 1996 convention. In 2008, the McCain campaign announced that Sarah Palin would be McCain's running mate *the day after* the end of the Democratic convention, in a clear attempt to disrupt positive coverage for his Democratic opponent. Campaigns now see VP announcements as tools to control the media spotlight and have decoupled them from the conventions. There are too many logistical considerations to simply shift the dates of conventions themselves "on the fly" in this manner, but the clear trend towards the conventions being scheduled almost directly adjacent to one another is strong evidence that campaigns now view convention timing tactically as well.

### **Competing Messages and the Joint Impact of Pairs of Conventions**

While there is evidence that campaigns compete over media coverage via the timing of big announcements and events, control of headline real estate is not the whole story. Candidates and parties try to make their "brand" the most visible, but they also must address specific policy and personality issues that have drawn the public's attention. Each side must do this within the context of the efforts of the other side. In the last chapter, I examined the effects these efforts have on individual opinion during

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<sup>26</sup> Contrast this against 1988, when Republican candidate George H.W. Bush had the opportunity to announce his running mate after the opposition Democrats finished convening. Bush Sr. waited until his own convention; news of his selection of Dan Quayle broke on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of the RNC.

single conventions, but it is clear that convention participants believe the efforts of their convening counterparts are part of the equation.

Scholars are just beginning to make attempts at understanding the joint impact pairs of conventions have on individuals in the electorate. Based on contemporary models of political cognition and research on the biases that come into play when individuals encounter new information, Cera and Weinschenk (2012b) postulated that exposure to information from “Convention A” (the first convention in a given cycle) would have measurable effects on individuals’ perceptions of candidate character traits (such as “honest,” “inspiring,” “knowledgeable”) collected after “Convention B” (the second convention in that cycle). First, based on the “on-line” model of information processing introduced by Lodge, McGraw, and Stroh (1989), Cera and Weinschenk predicted that information encountered during Convention B would not have as strong an influence on the perceptions of those who had consumed relatively more information from Convention A, even after controlling for pre-convention perceptions and partisanship. In the “on-line” model, when new information about a candidate is encountered, individuals evaluate that information in working memory and update a running summary judgment of the candidate (stored in *long-term* memory) based on that evaluation. The information item itself is then discarded from working memory. Each new evaluation has a lower impact on the stored summary judgment relative to the impact caused by earlier evaluations (as the total number of evaluations constituting the stored summary judgment has increased). Cera and Weinschenk found that after the 2000 Democratic Convention, higher exposure to the earlier Republican convention

yielded post-convention-period candidate character judgments less favorable to Gore and more favorable to Bush, even after holding individual party affiliation and exposure to speeches at the Democratic convention constant. The implication is that pro-Gore/anti-Bush information encountered during the second convention did not influence character judgments as much among individuals who had already encountered relatively more anti-Gore/pro-Bush information during the first convention.

These authors established a second expectation based on the extensive literature dealing with biased information processing (Ditto and Lopez 1992; Edwards and Smith 1996; Redlawsk 2002; Taber and Lodge 2006; Nyhan and Reifler 2010). They postulated a conditional effect of exposure to information encountered during Convention A on the relationship between Convention B and post-convention-period candidate character judgments. The key idea here is that it is not simply the balance of exposure to information that matters; different pieces of information can receive different weights in the evaluative calculus based on the degree to which they are congruent with a previously-held viewpoint. Sometimes, newly encountered information can be ignored outright if it threatens an evaluation in which a significant cognitive investment has been made. Cera and Weinschenk found that the negative impact of exposure to Gore's convention speech on post-convention judgments of George W. Bush's character was attenuated by exposure to coverage of the earlier Republican convention, even after controlling for individual party identification. Their finding indicates that people who make a time investment in gathering information and



making evaluations during conventions are also likely to make an accompanying cognitive investment that yields an evaluative bias down the road.

Research on the importance of timing as it relates to the *storage* of political messages in memory is also relevant to any investigation of how the effects of pairs of conventions interact. Much of the work done in this area proceeds from the assumption that some political information regarding candidates is important enough to be preserved in (and later accessed and retrieved from) memory, rather than simply used to update a running summary judgment before being discarded. Early work in this area by cognitive psychologists suggested a cognitive bias towards information that is encountered earlier rather than later (Waugh and Norman 1965; Crowder 1976). This “primacy” bias stems from our limited memory capacity; in a competition for scarce storage space, information arriving first would have an advantage in securing that space. More recently, Zaller (1992) focused attention on “recency” bias; because information stored in memory can decay over time, recently encountered information can be more accessible and more likely to be relied upon. In an experimental study, Haugtvedt and Wegener (1994) found evidence of primacy effects when subjects cared about a topic enough to scrutinize incoming information related to it, but detected recency effects when messages concerned a topic of low importance to the subject. In the course of an investigation of primacy and recency effects caused by get-out-the-vote messages during municipal elections, Panagopoulos (2010) found that both individual attributes and contextual factors are likely to influence how information is likely to be handled in memory. Because convention speeches touch on a broad range of issues, each of which

varies in terms of importance to individual viewers, it is not feasible to construct specific expectations regarding these types of timing effects. Results from chapter two suggest that a *general* interest in campaigns and politics is associated with convention speech viewing; this tips the scale slightly in favor of an expectation of primacy bias.

The literature on political cognition suggests that conventions work in concert to shape individual assessments of candidate character; impressions made during Convention A have the potential to endure beyond Convention B, and impressions made during Convention A can influence impression formation during Convention B. In the last chapter, I presented evidence that the influence each (single) convention exercises on opinion extends beyond altering perceptions of character; I showed that exposure to speeches by convening candidates influences candidate *support*, as measured by candidate favorability rankings. The next logical step is to examine whether or not additional explanatory power can be gained by considering the joint impact of conventions on candidate support.

### **Hypotheses**

I draw two testable hypotheses from theoretical expectations regarding how individual candidate support may be shaped by exposure to information at both conventions in a given election cycle.

First, based on cumulative impact of information implicit in the “on-line” processing model, I expect post-convention-period candidate preferences more favorable to Candidate A among those who consumed relatively more information

during Convention A, even after holding individual partisanship and exposure to Candidate B's speech constant.

Second, based on the tendency of individuals to make cognitive investments in information and then discount or ignore new incongruent information, I expect to find that information consumption during Convention A will attenuate the impact of exposure to Candidate B's speech on post-convention-period candidate support. I expect this conditional effect to be apparent even after controlling for individual party affiliation.

### **Data and Method**

The data for the tests in this chapter are drawn from the 2000 wave of the National Annenberg Election Study (NAES). The panel dataset situated around the 2000 Democratic convention has a special feature that the other convention datasets lack; in addition to being asked questions about information consumption during the Democratic convention, respondents were also asked questions about the earlier Republican convention. This allows me to test for a direct effect of information consumption from the Republican convention on post-convention-period opinion, as well as for a conditional effect of that information on the relationship between exposure to the Democratic candidate's speech and opinion.

I again use ordinary least squares regression (OLS) to examine the effects of information consumption in the context of conventions on candidate support. The variable I use to operationalize candidate preference is measured on a 101-point ordinal scale, making OLS an appropriate method. I employ *F*-tests to hunt for improvements in

explanatory power between models. For conditional models, I use OLS to generate slope coefficients and standard errors for explanatory variables at relevant values of conditional variables of interest.

### **Variables and Measurement**

In order to operationalize candidate support, I rely on questions from the 2000 NAES that asked respondents to rate the candidates on a 101-point favorability scale, with 0 being the lowest rating, 100 the highest rating, and 50 identified as a neutral midpoint. As I point out in the preceding chapter, in terms of describing candidate support, candidate favorability ratings are nearly interchangeable with binary vote intention or other commonly used measures<sup>27</sup>, and offer increased sensitivity over such alternatives that could be useful in better understanding the translation between political preference and political action.<sup>28</sup> In this chapter, post-convention favorability ratings are used as dependent variables, while pre-convention ratings are used as control variables.

To capture exposure to Al Gore's speech at the 2000 Democratic National Convention, I used a measure drawn from responses to a survey question from the 2000 NAES that asked how much of his speech was viewed. Responses to this question fell on a four-point ordinal scale ranging from "did not watch" to "all." To capture consumption

<sup>27</sup> In Chapter 3, I show that among respondents to the 2000 NAES Democratic post-convention survey, the correlation between an intended vote for Al Gore over George W. Bush and rating Al Gore higher than George W. Bush on the 101-point favorability scale was (.92).

<sup>28</sup> In Chapter 3, I argue that an individual who rates Candidate A quite a bit higher than Candidate B may have a much higher probability of translating that difference into a voting act or other substantive form of political participation than an individual who rates Candidate A only slightly higher than B. A binary measurement of candidate preference would not register a difference between these individuals.

of political information from the earlier 2000 Republican convention, I used responses to a survey question aimed at measuring voluntary exposure to broadcasted portions of it. The response scale for this question ranged from “did not watch” to “two hours or more.” Finally, to capture party identification, I combined the responses to two related pre-convention survey questions and recoded them into seven mutually exclusive dichotomous variables: Strong Democrat; Weak Democrat; Independent (leans Democrat); Independent; Independent (leans Republican); Weak Republican; and Strong Republican.

## Results

It is useful to couch the investigation of individual-level effects in this chapter within the larger picture of the aggregate impact of the conventions. Tables 1 and 2 present mean pre- and post-convention favorability ratings for both candidates for the 2000 Republican and Democratic conventions.

Table 4.1: Aggregate Change in Candidate Favorability Ratings, 2000 Republican Convention

	Mean pre-convention favorability	Mean post-convention favorability	N	Difference (post-pre)
Bush	57.25	60.48	1146	3.23**
Gore	48.64	49.99	1154	1.35**

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$  (two-tailed *t*-tests)

Table 4.2: Aggregate Change in Candidate Favorability Ratings, 2000 Democratic Convention

	Mean pre-convention favorability	Mean post-convention favorability	N	Difference (post-pre)
Gore	52.06	58.49	1186	6.44**
Bush	60.61	59.04	1186	-1.57**

Note: \*\* $p \leq .05$  (two-tailed *t*-tests)

Before the 2000 RNC (Republican National Convention), Bush held a substantial advantage over Gore, and although both candidates had significantly improved mean favorability ratings after the RNC, Bush was able to expand his advantage over Gore

from 8.61 to 10.49 (101-point scale). The Democratic National Convention (DNC) convened just over a week later. While Bush's post-RNC and pre-DNC candidate favorability ratings were comparable, Gore's standing improved slightly over the interim; by the start of the DNC, Bush's advantage stood at 8.55 points. After the Democratic convention concluded, Gore enjoyed a large increase in support, while Bush suffered a significant decline; Bush's advantage over Gore disappeared. On aggregate, Gore appears to have been the primary beneficiary of the convention period; while Bush was able to extend his support slightly during the RNC, he did not damage Gore, and if he was able to pre-empt Gore's DNC message, it is not apparent at the aggregate level. Gore, on the other hand, enjoyed aggregate movement in his favor after the DNC that suggests he may have had some success at counteracting Bush's message. Holbrook (1996) argues that the aggregate improvement in support for Gore after his 2000 convention was to be expected; his pre-convention support was artificially low compared to a "baseline" support level suggested by fundamental variables (positive evaluations of recent economic performance and a relatively popular copartisan incumbent president). Individual-level investigation will shed additional light on the nature of this movement.

Just as the aggregate impact of a single convention depends on individual exposure to information during that convention, the aggregate *joint* impact of a pair of conventions depends on the extent to which individuals exposed themselves to information from *both* conventions. Table 4.3 summarizes self-reported patterns of individual exposure to televised convention coverage during both conventions in the

2000 cycle. This cross-tabulation is drawn from responses to a pair of questions presented to the 2000 NAES Democratic convention panel:

Table 4.3: Cross-tabulation of Exposure to Broadcast Portions of the 2000 Republican and Democratic Conventions

		Democratic convention			
		“Did not watch”	“Few minutes” to “1 hour”	“≥2 hours”	Totals
Republican convention	“Did not watch”	N: 324 Row: 65.7% Column: 73.1% Cell: 26.4%	N: 123 Row: 25.0% Column: 28.4% Cell: 10.0%	N: 46 Row: 9.3% Column: 13.2% Cell: 3.8%	N: 493 Row: 100.0% Cell: 40.2%
	“Few minutes” to “1 hour”	N: 82 Row: 20.1% Column: 18.5% Cell: 6.7%	N: 234 Row: 58.5% Column: 54.0% Cell: 19.1%	N: 84 Row: 21.0% Column: 24.1% Cell: 6.9%	N: 400 Row: 100.0% Cell: 32.7.0%
	“≥2 hours”	N: 37 Row: 11.1% Column: 8.4% Cell: 3.0%	N: 76 Row: 22.9% Column: 17.6% Cell: 6.2%	N: 219 Row: 66.0% Column: 62.8% Cell: 17.9%	N: 332 Row: 100.0% Cell: 27.1%
	Totals	N: 443 Column: 100.0% Cell: 36.2%	N: 433 Column: 100.0% Cell: 35.3%	N: 349 Column: 100.0% Cell: 28.5%	N: 1225 Cell: 100.0%

Note: Cramér’s V = 0.47

Large majorities of respondents reported watching at least some of each convention; 59.8% watched at least a few minutes of RNC coverage, while 63.8% reported watching at least a few minutes of DNC coverage. Many respondents reported investing substantial amounts of time consuming convention information; 27.1% reported watching at least two hours of RNC coverage, and 28.5% watched at least two hours of DNC coverage. While 26.4% of respondents reported complete abstention from self-exposure to any amount of either convention, 50.1% reported watching at least a few minutes of coverage of both the RNC and the DNC, and 17.9% reported watching at least two hours of both conventions. These measures of exposure to the televised portions of the two conventions display a moderate degree of association (Cramér’s V = .47); those who watched one convention were likely to watch the other, and those who

avoided one were likely to avoid both. It is clear from a cursory examination of these wide and overlapping distributions of convention exposure that the potential exists for any joint impact of conventions felt at the individual level to manifest as meaningful aggregate movement.

In the previous chapter, I presented evidence that individual-level change in candidate support after a given convention is driven by a pair of effects: first, a persuasive effect resulting from voluntary exposure to the convening candidate's speech that is capable of influencing consumers regardless of partisan affiliation; and second, a partisan bias-activating effect resulting from exposure to "atmospheric" information (involuntary exposure to partisan ads, slogans, symbols and messaging or voluntary exposure to political commentary delivered by 3<sup>rd</sup> party sources). After the 2000 Democratic convention, I found that exposure to Gore's speech yielded better post-convention candidate favorability ratings for him and worse ratings for Bush, even after controlling for pre-convention ratings and individual party identification. I also found that exposure to the information atmosphere surrounding conventions yielded divergent post-convention candidate favorability ratings among Democrats and Republicans, even after controlling for pre-convention ratings and speech exposure. Here, I iterate on the base model for the 2000 Democratic Convention by incorporating measurements of individual information exposure during the earlier Republican convention. Table 4.4 presents two new sets of regression model estimates for post-DNC favorability ratings for Al Gore and George W. Bush: first, a set of "constrained" models, in which exposure to the televised portions of the earlier RNC and exposure to



Gore's convention speech at the DNC are limited to exercising linear effects on post-convention favorability ratings; and second, a set of "unconstrained" models, where these linear restraints are relaxed and each information consumption variable is allowed to the condition the impact of the other. In both sets of models, coefficients are reported for each independent variable with standard errors in parentheses. Asterisks denote statistically significant coefficients and *F*-statistics.

Table 4.4: Determinants of Post-convention Candidate Favorability Ratings (101-point scale)  
2000 Democratic Convention

	Al Gore, Jr.		George W. Bush	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Pre-convention favorability	.62 (.03)**	.62 (.03)**	.58 (.03)**	.58 (.03)**
Exposure to Al Gore's DNC speech (4-point ordinal scale)	2.48 (.61)**	3.50 (1.25)**	-1.56 (.61)**	-4.27 (1.26)**
Strong Republican	-7.76 (3.00)**	-7.89 (3.00)**	15.36 (3.04)**	15.92 (3.04)**
Weak Republican	-2.44 (3.17)	-2.42 (3.17)	9.17 (3.25)**	9.25 (3.23)**
Independent, leans Republican	-4.33 (3.24)	-4.45 (3.24)	6.79 (3.27)**	7.28 (3.27)**
Independent, leans Democrat	3.29 (3.07)	3.41 (3.07)	-1.51 (3.13)	-1.82 (3.13)
Weak Democrat	4.91 (3.00)	4.89 (3.00)	.61 (3.04)	.66 (3.03)
Strong Democrat	6.44 (2.87)**	6.38 (2.87)**	-2.83 (2.91)	-2.67 (2.90)
Exposure to RNC (dichotomous)	-3.10 (1.66)*	-.99 (2.81)	3.78 (1.69)**	-1.75 (2.82)
Exposure to RNC x Exposure to Al Gore's DNC speech	-	-1.32 (1.42)	-	3.50 (1.43)**
Constant	24.89 (3.65)**	24.89 (3.65)**	17.58 (3.22)**	21.60 (3.61)**
N	773	773	772	772
Adjusted R-squared	.66	.66	.63	.63
<i>F</i> -test	.86		6.01**	

Note: Coefficients are unstandardized OLS regression values.

\*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

\* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

The “constrained” model specification is identical to the base specification from the last chapter, with one addition; *exposure to RNC* was added to the list of predictors of *post-convention candidate favorability ratings* (alongside *pre-convention favorability*, *exposure to convening candidate’s speech*, and a set of mutually exclusive dichotomous variables representing *respondent party identification*). (*Exposure to RNC* is a dichotomous variable that takes a value of “0” when an individual did not watch any of the Republican convention, “1” when an individual watched at least some of the Republican convention.) As expected, in the “constrained” models, exposure to Gore’s convention speech yielded higher favorability ratings for Gore and lower ratings for Bush. Those who reported watching all of Gore’s speech were likely to rate him 9.92 points higher (and Bush 6.24 points lower) on the 101-point scale than those who watched none of it, even after controlling for pre-convention ratings, party identification, and exposure to the televised portions of the earlier RNC. Partisanship was also a significant predictor of post-convention favorability ratings in the “constrained” models; after holding pre-convention ratings and other variables constant, strong Republican identifiers offered much lower post-convention ratings for Gore and much higher ratings for Bush relative to pure Independents (the excluded category), while strong Democrats reported significantly higher post-convention ratings for Gore.

The new variable, *exposure to RNC*, was a significant predictor of post-convention ratings of both candidates. Exposure to broadcast portions of the Republican convention yielded significantly lower favorability ratings for Gore, and significantly

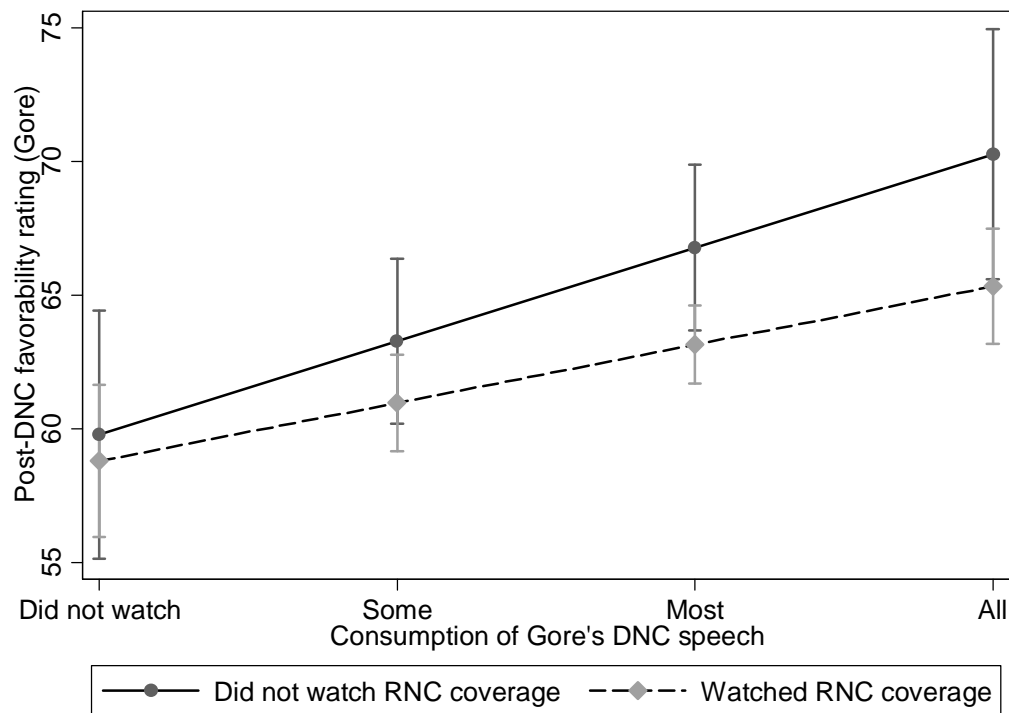
higher favorability ratings for Bush, after the Democratic convention (after holding the other variables constant). *Ceteris paribus*, those who consumed ostensibly pro-Bush/anti-Gore information delivered during the earlier Republican convention rated Bush 3.78 points higher, and Gore 3.10 points lower, than those who did not watch the RNC at all. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, individuals who had the chance to make evaluations of the candidates after self-exposure to information during the RNC assigned relatively lower weights to evaluations made during the DNC, when anti-Bush/pro-Gore information was more accessible.

The “unconstrained” model specification features a multiplicative-conditional variable that allows the impact of the variable measuring exposure to Gore’s DNC speech to vary based on values of the variable measuring exposure to the televised portions of the Republican convention. Results of *F*-tests between the constrained and unconstrained specifications indicate that the multiplicative-conditional modeling choice allows for superior explanatory power regarding Bush’s favorability ratings after the Democratic convention. To complement the regression parameters in Table 4.4 and facilitate a more complete discussion of these interaction effects, I represent them graphically in Figures 4.2 and 4.3.

These figures show how the relationship between exposure to Gore’s speech and post-DNC favorability ratings of the candidates varies among respondent groups with different levels of exposure to the televised portions of the earlier Republican convention. Figure 4.2 shows a small but statistically insignificant difference between these groups when it comes to ratings of Gore. Exposure to Gore’s speech had a positive

effect on respondents whether or not they watched the earlier Republican convention. An  $F$ -statistic that fails to reach the critical value for significance reinforces the point that there is little to be gained in terms of predictive power by removing the linear constraints on the information consumption variables.

Fig. 4.2: Relationship Between Exposure to Gore's DNC Speech and Gore's Post-DNC Favorability Ratings, by RNC Exposure 2000

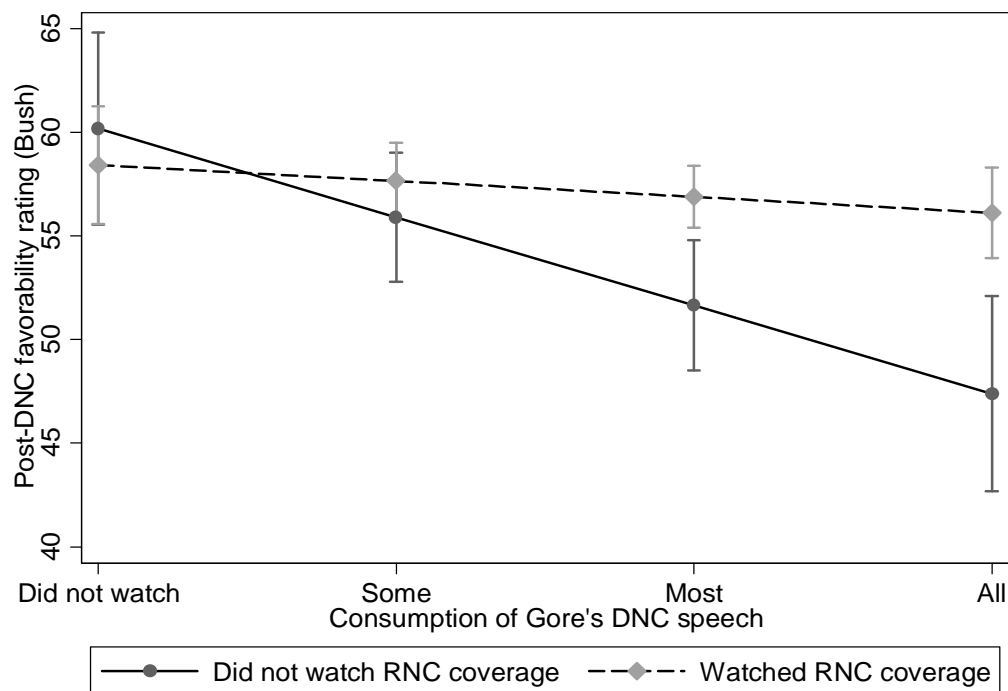


Note: Individual party identification and pre-convention favorability ratings are held constant.

In contrast, the  $F$ -statistic for the models of Bush's post-DNC favorability ratings is large enough to denote a significant increase in predictive power due to adoption of the "unconstrained" model, and Figure 4.3 shows that consumption of information during the Republican convention exercised a statistically significant and substantively meaningful conditional effect on the relationship between exposure to Gore's speech

and post-DNC evaluations of Bush. After controlling for pre-convention favorability ratings and party identification, exposure to Gore's DNC speech yielded substantially lower post-DNC favorability ratings for Bush, but this relationship is dramatically attenuated by exposure to the earlier Republican convention. Among those who watched the Republican convention, the effect of watching Gore's speech was indistinguishable from zero. Those who watched the Republican convention did not just assign evaluations made during Gore's speech at the DNC relatively smaller weights in their summary judgments of Bush—they effectively discounted the new incongruent information about Bush to the point where it did not visibly exercise any systematic impact at all.

Fig. 4.3: Relationship Between Exposure to Gore's DNC Speech and Bush's Post-DNC Favorability Ratings, by RNC Exposure  
Exposure  
2000



Note: Individual party identification and pre-convention favorability ratings are held constant.

The slope of the line for RNC consumers presented in Figure 4.3 is solid evidence in support of the conditional effect hypothesized in this chapter, but it also hints at a related cognitive phenomenon that has been demonstrated to come into play during conventions. Cera and Weinschenk (2012b) demonstrated that exposure to Gore's 2000 DNC speech prompted *increasingly positive* judgments of George W. Bush's character traits among those who watched large amounts of the 2000 RNC, even after controlling for partisanship and pre-convention judgments. Their finding fit the description of the "backfire effect" described in work by Lodge and Taber (2000), Redlawsk (2002), and Nyhan and Reifler (2010). These authors outline instances where exposure to information that contradicts previously held political views triggers *intensified attachment* to the original views; the process of constructing mental counterarguments to newly encountered information that is not compatible with a previously-established viewpoint results in individuals developing more organized and structured beliefs that they would have developed had they never encountered the "problematic" new information.

The regression line for the effect of exposure to Gore's speech on post-DNC support for Bush among RNC watchers in Figure 4.3 has a flat slope. However, the line represents the average effect among this subgroup of respondents; the model suggests that all things being equal, individuals who watched the Republican convention were just as likely to express higher post-DNC favorability ratings for Bush after watching Gore's speech as they were to express lower post-DNC ratings for him.

## Discussion

In this chapter, I expanded on the understanding of the individual-level effects of conventions on candidate support laid out in chapter three by considering the joint impact of pairs of conventions. I demonstrated how information consumption during the first convention in a given cycle can exercise influence on individual-level candidate support that persists after the end of the second, and I investigated the conditions under which conventions within a given election cycle can condition the effects of one another. First, drawing on what is known about political cognition and opinion formation, I hypothesized a direct effect of information from the first convention on opinion after the second. Using a panel dataset situated around the 2000 Democratic National Convention that includes individual-level data regarding information consumption during both the DNC and the 2000 RNC, I was able to show that those who reported exposure to the televised portions of the RNC gave the candidates post-DNC favorability ratings more favorable to the Republican candidate (George W. Bush), even after controlling for pre-convention opinion, exposure to Al Gore's DNC speech, and respondent party identification. In other words, those who made a relatively larger proportion of their candidate evaluations based on information disseminated during the RNC tended to express improved support for George W. Bush after the conventions, regardless of individual party affiliation or pre-convention opinion.

Second, based on the literature on bias in information processing, I hypothesized a conditional effect of information from the first convention in a given cycle on the impact of information from the second on post-convention candidate support. By

allowing an interaction between the information consumption variables for both conventions, I was able to demonstrate that the negative relationship between exposure to Gore's DNC speech and Bush's post-DNC favorability rating was attenuated by earlier exposure to RNC broadcasts. This conditional effect was apparent regardless of pre-convention opinion and was evident across the partisan spectrum. Those that avoided watching the RNC were very likely to rate Bush less favorably after watching Gore's DNC speech, but among individuals that spent time watching and evaluating Bush during the RNC, the persuasive impact of Gore's speech was nullified.

The 2000 election is an attractive target for study because Al Gore lost despite enjoying the advantages of a strong economy and being part of a popular incumbent administration. Although it was not enough to propel him to a final victory, aggregate-level analysis has shown that the net increase in support Gore experienced after the convention period was consistent with the electorate receiving a dose of information which strengthened his link with these fundamental variables (Holbrook 1996). The individual-level analysis presented here shows that George W. Bush had a small measure of success at pre-empting the eventual increase in favorability Gore enjoyed among those who tuned in to his speech. While Gore was quite successful at using his convention speech to link himself to positive fundamentals, when it came to knocking down Bush he failed to make inroads among a crucial speech-watching demographic—those who also spent time watching the earlier Republican convention. Gore was unsuccessful at dislodging positive opinions of Bush formed during the RNC. It may be that Gore ultimately lost because he failed to do what was necessary down the



campaign stretch to press his advantage, but evaluations made and biases formed by viewers during the Republican convention are part of the story and can't have helped Gore's situation later in the campaign.

This analysis suggests that in 2000 both campaigns were relatively successful at crafting enduring positive messaging around their candidates, although (consistent with the expectations set by aggregate-level literature) the Democratic effort resulted in a shift of larger magnitude. It remains to be seen if favorable impressions built by candidates during conventions in other years are as resilient against preemption or subsequent negative attacks. To further the investigation, researchers will have to commit more resources to developing panel studies with a focus on patterns of information consumption.

## **Chapter 5:**

### ***How Conventions Affect Political Knowledge***

#### **Introduction**

“Two months from today, voters will make a choice based on the records we have built, the convictions we hold, and the vision that guides us forward. A presidential election is a contest for the future. Tonight I will tell you where I stand, what I believe, and where I will lead this country in the next four years.”

(George W. Bush, during his speech at the 2004 Republican National Convention)

Political parties and their allies disseminate a broad range of information during presidential nominating conventions in the hopes of influencing the electorate. At the heart of this blizzard of campaign information is a set of specific substantive messages delivered by the convening candidates themselves. During their televised prime-time speeches, these candidates relay their qualifications, experiences, beliefs, and policy positions directly to viewers. In previous chapters, I have shown how attentive members of the electorate make use of convention speech information for evaluative purposes, sometimes resulting in notable shifts in opinion. Prior research suggests that the evaluative processes individuals engage in during campaigns involve assigning blame or credit for economic performance (Fiorina 1981), making judgments about relative ideological or issue-specific positions (Downs 1957), or looking for clues about candidates’ group-based affiliations/sympathies or intraparty-factional dispositions (Campbell et al. 1960).<sup>29</sup> Members of the electorate can also take information

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<sup>29</sup> For more on how the varying traditions of research on political behavior have treated campaigns, see Gelman and King (1993) and Holbrook (1996).

disseminated by political elites during conventions as cues to flesh out their own beliefs and positions (Zaller 1992; Berinsky 2007; Levendusky 2010).

Holbrook (2002) argues that information unites the various instrumental and social-psychological strains of research where the formation of political opinions during campaigns is concerned. Convening parties have a great deal of incentive to provide information tailored to benefit them electorally to as wide an audience as possible. However, a large body of work largely centered in the field of mass communication suggests that information disseminated during mass media campaigns is not evenly absorbed by mass audiences. Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien (1970) explain:

“As the infusion of mass media information into a social system increases, segments of the population with higher socioeconomic status tend to acquire this information at a faster rate than lower status segments, so that the gap in knowledge between these segments tends to increase rather than decrease.” (159-160)

This “knowledge gap” theory dovetails with Anthony Downs’s assertion that an unevenly informed electorate is an inevitable and *rational* consequence of unequal resources and a division of labor. If cognitive ability and resources available for expenditure on critical examination of information are unevenly distributed throughout a social system, it is only logical that some individuals will consistently accumulate knowledge at a greater rate than others. If knowledge gaps exist along socioeconomic lines, and if efforts to disseminate information exacerbate those gaps, the negative implications for representative democratic governance are clear. Groups that are relatively less efficient at evaluating the performance or positions of political elites would be less likely to see their latent political preferences successfully translated into

public policy, and attempts to address the problem through information dissemination would only make it worse. Presidential nominating conventions are the highest-profile campaign events of the four-year electoral cycle, and they are explicitly designed as vehicles for information aimed at the mass electorate. They exercise immediate, demonstrable effects on perceptions of candidates and alter the role variables like partisanship play in the evaluative calculus, but a question remains: How do conventions affect levels of political knowledge?

### Examining Knowledge Gaps

Over the last four decades, at least thirty studies grounded in the knowledge gap theoretical perspective have examined differences (and changes) in social/political knowledge across socioeconomic divisions.<sup>30</sup> Broadly speaking, most of these studies focus on educational attainment as the key measure of socioeconomic status. Liu and Eveland (2005) make the observation that education attained prior to a given campaign does not (and cannot) cause individuals to have knowledge of items revealed during that campaign; rather, education is a covariate of the ability to translate encountered information into knowledge. Holbrook (2002) points out that education works as a superior measure of *sophistication*; sophisticated individuals are more likely to care about (and pay attention to threats to) a wide range of interests. Holbrook argues that in addition to serving as a reliable measure of cognitive skills and economic resources, education (as a measure of preexisting sophistication) can't be contaminated by recent

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<sup>30</sup> See Hwang and Jeong (2009) for a meta-analysis of the wider knowledge gap literature. Although their study suffers from some (self-diagnosed) methodological limitations, it serves as an excellent summary of the cross-disciplinary body of literature on the knowledge gap.

exposure to information and has a high degree of cross-survey reliability when compared to alternative measures.

Most of these political knowledge gap studies variously test for the presence of knowledge gaps and examine the conditions under which they shrink or grow. Within a few years of publication of the original knowledge gap article, scholars began identifying variables capable of moderating the positive conditional influence education can exercise on the translation of information into knowledge, as well as conditions under which information dissemination fails to increase extant knowledge gaps. After an examination of survey data from Minnesota communities regarding a variety of local issues, Donohue, Tichenor and Olien (1975) concluded that the knowledge gap between the educated and uneducated tends to *shrink* rather than grow when issues are highly conflictual and/or of intense local interest. These authors demonstrated that the relatively higher levels of interpersonal discourse that accompany contentious local issues help those in lower socioeconomic strata achieve levels of knowledge comparable to those in higher strata. Kwak (1999) examined survey data from residents of Dane County, Wisconsin during the 1992 presidential campaign, and found a relatively smaller knowledge gap regarding the candidates among those with higher levels of interest. Kwak also noted that the medium of information delivery influences political knowledge gaps. Higher levels of self-exposure to television news decreased the knowledge gap between those with low and high levels of education, but increased newspaper reading only closed the gap between highly educated, uninterested individuals and highly educated, highly interested individuals. Liu and Eveland (2005) offer a pair of

explanations as to why newspaper reading is only helpful for educated voters, while the television medium is more broadly helpful. First, educated individuals have experience working with and learning from written materials, while uneducated individuals may find gleaning key information from print media more difficult. Second, watching television news is qualitatively similar to having firsthand experiences in that they both involve audiovisual stimuli. Audiovisual experiences tend to activate more sensory neurons in the brain than are activated by reading, and this type of increased neuronal activity has been associated with improved recall.<sup>31</sup>

The duration of information campaigns has also been examined as a possible moderator of the emergence of education-based knowledge gaps. In their original paper on the knowledge gap, Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) postulated that knowledge gaps may close if the intensity of information dissemination is maintained long enough for information to diffuse to individuals in lower socioeconomic strata. Rhine, Bennett, and Flickinger (2001) provide a relatively recent example of this phenomenon. They attributed a *shrinking* gap in knowledge between educated and uneducated sectors of the public regarding the civil war in Bosnia in the mid-1990s to near-nightly news coverage over the course of three years. Moore (1987) explicitly tested knowledge gaps around issues that had been in the public eye for different durations. He found that duration in the public eye and issue complexity interact to influence knowledge gaps; while a relatively complex and novel issue produced an increasing gap in knowledge, a

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<sup>31</sup> For more on this second point, see Graber (2001).

less complex issue which had been under examination in the public space for a longer period of time exhibited a static gap.

### **Knowledge Gaps and Conventions**

Expectations regarding how conventions might influence political knowledge depend on whether or not conventions are treated as monolithic information events. In an analysis of the determinants of aggregate opinion during presidential campaigns, campaign information can be modeled as a steadily increasing flow, punctuated by a handful of very high-profile events (conventions and debates) that temporarily inundate the public with information as media coverage spikes. In this context, the impact of a given convention could be understood as the change in aggregate knowledge over the course of its duration. The extant literature regarding the impact of conventions on political knowledge is sparse. Chaffee, Zhao and Leshner (1994) analyzed the impact of campaign media on knowledge of parties and candidates in two states during the 1992 election, and found that conventions increased knowledge of policy differences between candidates and knowledge of candidates' personal attributes. While investigations of the impact of conventions on knowledge have been limited, there has been extensive study of the effects of presidential debates on knowledge and some of that work is relevant here. The consensus of multiple studies over the last four decades is that debates facilitate acquisition of political knowledge (Chaffee 1978; Bishop, Oldendick and Tuchfarber 1978; Becker, Sobowale, Cobbey and Eyal 1978; Chaffee and Dennis 1979; Miller and MacKuen 1979; Drew and Weaver 1991; Lanoue 1992; Lemert 1993; Weaver and Drew 1995; Holbrook 1999; Holbrook 2002; Drew and Weaver 2006).

Two of these studies explicitly address how the acquisition of political knowledge is distributed. Lemert (1993) found that education-based gaps in political knowledge were larger after the 1988 debates than they were prior. Holbrook (2002) included a variable measuring actual exposure to the debates in his analysis of the six presidential campaigns between 1976 and 1996, and found larger increases in candidate-related knowledge among debate viewers with relatively lower levels of educational attainment. In explaining how debates stand out from the general campaigns as ideal vehicles for political learning among unsophisticated individuals, Holbrook (2002) also nicely summarizes why these findings could be expected to extend to conventions as well:

“Debates are high-profile, high stimulus campaign events that can only be rivaled by the party conventions in terms of the amount of interest and media attention they generate...debates take place during prime time and are covered uninterrupted by all major networks. This coverage is followed by immediate post-debate ‘analysis’ and by at least a day or two of analysis of the fallout from the debate.”

It is important to note that Holbrook cites the timing of debates as a factor that allows them to close knowledge gaps. Because the debates are held late during campaigns, much of the disseminated information is not “new” to high-information viewers; this provides low-information viewers a chance to “catch up.” In contrast, the first convention in a given cycle usually marks the beginning of the general election campaign; information disseminated at this stage is more likely to be novel to high-information viewers.

Following in the footsteps of some of these earlier studies, we may be interested in the impact of specific information sources during conventions, such as the televised



convention speeches, different types of news coverage of the conventions, or discourse with other individuals in social settings. The complexity, accessibility, and content of messages disseminated by different sources varies during conventions; impacts on knowledge of different magnitudes could be expected from each. While sophisticated individuals may find quite a bit of novel information to acquire in the information environment surrounding conventions, the highly accessible format and managed, message-tested content of the prime-time speeches may allow unsophisticated viewers the opportunity to immediately close an informational deficit regarding basic facts about the candidates.

In this context, we must measure individual exposure to these different types of information if we want to understand their distinct effects on knowledge. If there is reason to believe that individual characteristics such as education might moderate the impact of any of these information flows, it becomes necessary to measure those characteristics as well and incorporate them into the models. In this chapter, I examine both the aggregate effects of conventions on political knowledge, as well as the individual-level impact of exposure to distinct sources of information on knowledge (and education-based gaps in knowledge).

### **Hypotheses**

I draw a series of eight testable hypotheses from theoretical expectations regarding how exposure to information sources during conventions affects political knowledge, and how sophistication conditions that impact in various situations.

- H1: Post-convention political knowledge (operationalized as the mean percentage of political knowledge questions answered correctly) will be significantly higher than pre-convention political knowledge.
- H2: Within a given election cycle, the increase in knowledge after the first convention will be significantly larger than the increase in knowledge after the second.<sup>32</sup>
- H3: Knowledge gaps (defined as significantly different levels of political knowledge between given groups) across groups with varying degrees of educational attainment will be in evidence before conventions.
- H4: During the first convention in a given cycle, higher levels of educational attainment will yield improved information acquisition; the education-based knowledge gap will increase significantly (as sophisticated individuals absorb novel information from the convention information environment).
- H5: During the second convention in a given cycle, higher levels of educational attainment will not yield improved information acquisition when compared to acquisition among those with lower levels of attainment (as saturation of the information environment increases and low-information individuals have a chance to “catch up”).

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<sup>32</sup> Information encountered earlier in campaigns has increased potential to impact knowledge; see Bartels (1993). Additionally, Campbell et al. (1992) argue that 1<sup>st</sup> conventions yield larger effects on the electorate because there is less information available before the conventions about challengers.

- H6: When education and interest are controlled, increased exposure to nominee convention speeches will yield significantly higher levels of post-convention political knowledge.
- H7: When the relationship between speech exposure and political knowledge is allowed to vary based on values of the education variable, speech exposure will yield significantly greater increases in political knowledge among unsophisticated individuals during the first convention in a given cycle (as noncomplex prime-time speech information allows unsophisticated viewers to close a deficit regarding basic facts about the candidates).
- H8: During the second convention in a given cycle, educational attainment does not condition the impact of speech exposure on political knowledge (diminishing returns for unsophisticated viewers, who “caught up” after the first convention).

### **Data, Measurement, Variables, and Method**

Data for this chapter were drawn from National Annenberg Election Study (NAES) convention panel datasets. In both 2000 and 2004, NAES collected panel data situated around each major party’s convention. Within each panel, pre-convention, respondents were asked a series of political knowledge questions, in addition to questions about their individual characteristics. Post-convention, respondents were again presented with the knowledge question battery, but also asked about recent information consumption including self-exposure to nominee convention speeches. These panel datasets enable an examination of how political knowledge changes over the convention period at both the aggregate and individual levels, as well as an

assessment of how exposure to specific information sources accessible during these periods affects political knowledge.

To measure political knowledge, I rely on responses to sets of 2000 and 2004 NAES convention panel survey questions about the backgrounds and political positions of each major-party presidential candidate (George W. Bush and Al Gore in 2000; George W. Bush and John Kerry in 2004). Unfortunately for the purposes of this study, in each of the four panels examined here, not all knowledge questions were asked of the entire sample. In many cases, there was little overlap between the subsamples that were asked knowledge questions and the subsamples that were asked about exposure to various kinds of political information. For this analysis, I rely on responses to questions with considerable overlap between these two areas. I was able to identify seven appropriate questions for both the 2000 Republican and Democratic conventions, ten questions for the 2004 Democratic convention, and thirteen questions for the 2004 Republican convention. A complete listing of included knowledge questions is presented in Appendix D.

Each NAES panel only contains data for respondents that answered all the questions in both the pre- and post-convention waves, so individual counts of correct answers provide a measure of political knowledge with a high level of comparability across individuals. When comparing knowledge across conventions with different numbers of total knowledge questions is called for, I use mean percentage of questions answered correctly. In all cases, correct answers are coded as “1”, while incorrect answers are coded as “0.” “Don’t know” responses are always coded as “0.”

To capture information exposure during conventions, I rely on three variables constructed from responses to NAES survey questions about the amount of speechwatching, newspaper reading, cable television news viewing, and political discourse respondents engaged in. Respondents to the NAES panels were interviewed within a few days after the conclusion of given conventions, and they were asked about the number of days in the past week they read the newspaper, watched cable TV news, or talked with friends and family about politics. In addition, respondents were asked how much of the nominee speeches they watched on four- or five-point ordinal scales ranging from “none” to “entire speech.”

Educational attainment is operationalized as a nine-point ordinal scale that runs from “8<sup>th</sup> grade or less” to “Graduate degree.” Data for this education variable was drawn directly from responses to NAES survey questions. In the bivariate analysis, these scales are collapsed into dichotomous variables where a four-year degree and higher are coded as “1” and anything less than a four-year degree is coded as “0.” In the multivariate analysis, the full ordinal scales are used.

As controls, I also include measures of political interest, race, and sex. All three of these variables have been studied extensively as important determinants of political knowledge.<sup>33 34 35</sup> In this study, I measure political interest using a combination of two NAES survey questions. For each panel, respondents were either asked to gauge their

<sup>33</sup> For an examination of the relationship between political interest and knowledge, see Galston (2001).

<sup>34</sup> For discussions of race as a determinant of political knowledge, see Ch. 4 of Delli Carpini and Keeter (1996) and Galston (2001). For a discussion of how survey methodology can induce a race-based bias in results of knowledge batteries, see Davis and Silver (2003).

<sup>35</sup> For an excellent overview of research into sex as a determinant of political knowledge, see Delli Carpini and Keeter (2000). For an explanation of how survey methodology can create gender-based bias in results of knowledge batteries, see Mondak and Anderson (2004).

interest in either political campaigns or presidential campaigns specifically. I combined these into one three-point ordinal variable, where the lowest level of interest is coded “0,” the highest level of interest is coded “2”, and any interim value is coded “1.” Race is measured by a dichotomous variable where white respondents are coded “0” and nonwhite respondents are coded “1.” Sex is measured by a dichotomous variable where females are coded “1” and males are coded “0.”

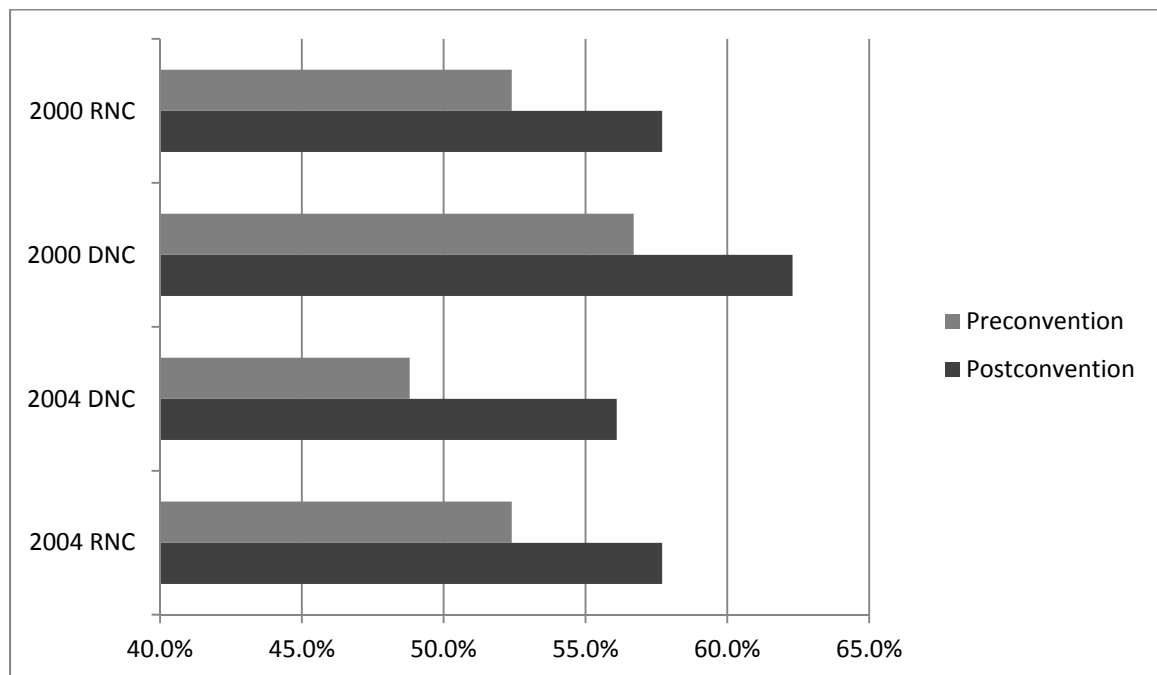
The first set of hypotheses presented in this chapter (H1 through H5) involves differences in aggregate pre- and post-convention political knowledge as well as inequality in the development of those differences among groups with different levels of education. In order to test for significant knowledge gaps and significant changes in those gaps across groups over the course of convention periods, I employ a series of *t*-tests. The second set of hypotheses (H6-H8) involves investigating the specific role of exposure to convention speeches in the development of political knowledge during conventions. To model the relationship between education, exposure to certain types of political information during conventions, and political knowledge, I use the generalized linear model (GLM) with a binomial link function (specifically, the logit link). This modeling choice is appropriate given that the dependent variable in each case (number of knowledge questions answered correctly) is in essence a count of the outcome of a fixed number of Bernoulli trials that produced a value of “1” (correct) rather than “0” (incorrect). The GLM is a more appropriate alternative than ordinary linear regression, which would predict impossible values of the dependent variable in this case for several combinations of values of the independent variables (OLS assumes that dependent

variables are functions of linear combinations of predictors and, as such, can vary indefinitely in either direction). The GLM allows for expression of the probability that the dependent variable will take a given (possible) value at relevant or interesting values of specified predictor variables.

## Results

In order to examine pre-convention levels of political knowledge as well change in political knowledge over the course of convention periods, I calculated the mean percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly before and after each convention; these values are displayed in Figure 5.1:

Fig. 5.1: Mean % of Knowledge Questions Answered Correctly  
2000 and 2004 conventions



During the 2000 election cycle, just prior to the 2000 RNC, the mean percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly stood at 52.4%. This figure increased

significantly to 57.7% ( $t=4.59$ ) post-convention.<sup>36</sup> Levels of political knowledge remained unchanged leading up to the subsequent 2000 DNC, with a pre-DNC mean percentage of 56.7%. Over the course of the 2000 DNC, this figure increased significantly to 62.3% ( $t=5.10$ ). During the 2004 election cycle, leading up to the 2004 DNC, the mean percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly stood at 48.8%. This figure increased significantly to 56.1% ( $t=5.89$ ) post-convention. Levels of political knowledge decreased slightly in the interim between the 2004 DNC and the 2004 RNC, with the pre-RNC mean percentage dropping to 52.4%.<sup>37</sup> After the 2004 RNC, the measure increased significantly to 57.7% ( $t=2.75$ ).

These aggregate results show that convention periods in 2000 and 2004 were associated with significant and substantively meaningful increases in political knowledge. Aggregate knowledge increased significantly over the course of conventions, but not during the periods in-between conventions; this finding suggests that observed increases in knowledge are linked to events during conventions, and are not simply functions of time. Interestingly, while the magnitudes of the aggregate knowledge increases over the course of the two 2000 conventions were even, the increase in knowledge after the 2004 RNC was significantly smaller than the increase in knowledge after the 2004 DNC ( $t=3.14$ ). I hesitate to attribute this to a ceiling effect, because the mean percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly after the 2004 RNC (the 2<sup>nd</sup> convention in the 2004 cycle) was still far below its maximum possible value. It is

<sup>36</sup> All  $t$ -tests are two-tailed; significance is reported at the 0.05 level.

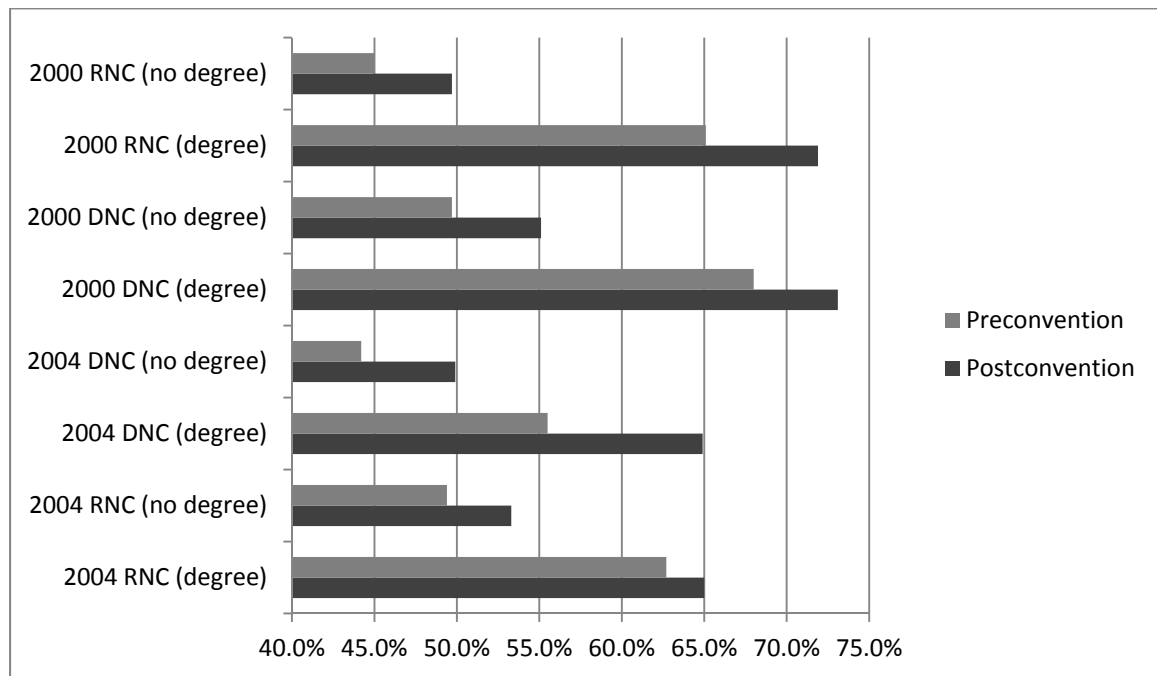
<sup>37</sup> This decrease may be due to the fact that the set of questions asked to respondents in the 2004 NAES DNC and RNC convention panels were not uniform. The questions asked during the 2004 RNC panel may have been more difficult. During the 2000 NAES convention panels, the questions asked during both conventions were identical, allowing for a more valid comparison.



possible that the more modest gains in political knowledge after the 2004 RNC were related to the quality of information disseminated. These findings provide strong support for Hypothesis 1 and partial support for Hypothesis 2.

In order to detect gaps in political knowledge, I disaggregated each convention panel into two groups; those who attained 4-year degrees or higher, and those who did not. Figure 5.2 shows that substantial knowledge gaps associated with educational attainment were in evidence leading up to each of the four conventions examined in this study, lending support to Hypothesis 3.

Fig. 5.2: Mean % of Knowledge Questions Answered Correctly, by Educational Attainment 2000 and 2004 Conventions



Prior to the 2000 RNC, the mean percentage of knowledge questions answered correctly was 19.9 percentage points higher ( $t=12.73$ ) among those with four-year degrees. Prior to the 2000 DNC, the mean percentage among those with degrees was 18.3 percentage

points higher ( $t=12.33$ ). Before the 2004 DNC, the mean percentage among those with degrees was 11.3 points higher ( $t=6.69$ ), and leading up to the 2004 RNC, the mean percentage among those with degrees was 13.3 points higher ( $t=8.01$ ). Significant gaps persisted after the convention periods ended in all four cases. During the 2000 RNC, the knowledge gap increased slightly, increasing from 19.9 points to 22.2 points ( $t=1.78$ ); this increase is significant given a directional expectation (Hypothesis 4). The knowledge gap remained static over the course of the subsequent 2000 DNC ( $t=0.13$ ). During the 2004 cycle, the knowledge gap increased significantly ( $t=2.72$ ) during the Democratic convention, going from 11.3 points to 15.9 points. The gap decreased slightly during the subsequent 2004 Republican convention, falling from 13.3 points to 11.7 points, but this decrease falls short of statistical significance ( $t=-1.48$ ). However, it is interesting to point out that during the 2004 RNC, those with degrees failed to experience a significant increase in knowledge over the course of the convention ( $t=1.49$ ), while knowledge among those without degrees increased significantly ( $t=2.60$ ).

There are notable patterns that emerge from the aggregate data. First, during the earlier convention in a given cycle, those with higher levels of educational attainment acquired information at a faster rate than did those who were less educated, although this effect was not always strong. Second, this effect tapered off during the second convention in a given cycle. In 2004, the loss of efficiency in information acquisition among those with degrees over the course of the two conventions was dramatic; after gaining 9.4 percentage points during the 2004 DNC, those with degrees gained just 2.3 points during the 2004 RNC. This decrease in the rate of information

acquisition was statistically significant ( $t=-4.33$ ). These findings are consistent with Hypotheses 4 and 5.

It is clear that aggregate levels of political knowledge increase during conventions, and that conventions affect the tangible gaps in knowledge between those with high and low levels of educational attainment. However, the complexity of the information environment and the diversity of information sources makes it difficult to evaluate how these aggregate effects are being produced. In order to isolate and analyze the specific effects of exposure to the “main events” during conventions—the televised prime-time convention speeches given by the convening candidates—I rely on multivariate analysis. Table 5.1 displays the results of a series of GLM regressions in which I modeled the determinants of political knowledge (measured as the number of knowledge questions answered correctly) after each of the conventions held during the 2000 and 2004 election cycles. For each convention, I fit a pair of models; a constrained model, where post-convention knowledge is a function of pre-convention knowledge, speech exposure, education, media consumption, interest, gender, and race; and an unconstrained model, in which education is allowed to condition the impact of speech exposure on post-convention knowledge. Coefficients are reported for each predictor, with standard errors in parenthesis. Statistical significance is denoted by asterisks.

Parameters from the constrained models indicate that exposure to nominee convention speeches yielded significant increases in post-convention knowledge during the first convention in each election cycle, after holding other factors constant. However, this relationship was not in evidence during the second conventions in each

Table 5.1: Determinants of Post-convention Political Knowledge  
2000 and 2004 Conventions  
Generalized Linear Model (GLM), Binomial Link Function

	2000 RNC		2000 DNC		2004 DNC		2004 RNC	
	Const. model	Unconst. model	Const. model	Unconst. model	Const. model	Unconst. model	Const. model	Unconst. model
Pre-convention knowledge	.46 (.02)*	.46 (.02)*	.48 (.02)*	.78 (.02)*	.24 (.02)*	.24 (.02)*	.22 (.01)*	.22 (.01)*
Exposure to conv. speech	.07 (.03)*	.26 (.08)*	.06 (.03)	.04 (.08)	.09 (.02)*	.10 (.05)	-.01 (.02)	-.03 (.04)
Education	.08 (.02)*	.13 (.03)*	.05 (.02)*	.04 (.03)	.07 (.01)*	.07 (.02)*	.02 (.01)	.01 (.02)
Speech x Education	-	-.04 (.01)*	-	.00 (.01)	-	-.00 (.01)	-	.00 (.01)
Cable news consumption	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Newspaper reading	.03 (.01)*	.03 (.01)*	.00 (.01)	.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	-.00 (.01)	.01 (.01)	.01 (.01)
Political discourse	.00 (.02)	.01 (.02)	.02 (.02)	.00 (.01)	.05 (.01)*	.05 (.01)*	.05 (.01)*	.05 (.01)*
Political interest	.01 (.05)	.02 (.05)	.21 (.05)*	.21 (.05)*	.04 (.05)	.04 (.05)	.04 (.04)	.04 (.04)
Female	-.16 (.07)*	-.16 (.07)*	-.13 (.07)	-.13 (.07)	-.19 (.06)*	-.19 (.06)*	-.06 (.05)	-.06 (.05)
Nonwhite	-.13 (.12)	-.11 (.12)	-.22 (.10)*	-.22 (.10)*	.00 (.11)	.00 (.11)	-.08 (.09)	-.08 (.09)
Constant	-1.78 (.13)*	-2.07 (.17)*	-1.73 (.14)*	-1.71 (.18)*	-1.51 (.13)*	-1.51 (.15)*	-1.59 (.11)*	-1.56 (.12)*
N	648	648	739	739	513	513	587	587

Note: Coefficients are GLM regression values.

\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests

cycle. This finding lends only partial support for Hypothesis 6; it appears that exposure to the speeches yields knowledge increases early on when information is relatively scarce, but not later in the convention period when information is more abundant.

After holding other variables constant, increased educational attainment yielded increases in post-convention knowledge after three of the four conventions examined in this study. Those with higher levels of education answered more knowledge questions correctly after the 2000 RNC, the 2000 DNC, and the 2004 DNC. The two measures of media exposure—frequency of cable news viewing and frequency of newspaper

reading—rarely exercised significant effects on post-convention political knowledge after controlling for other factors. Cable news viewing was not a significant predictor in any of the four constrained models, while newspaper reading yielded increased knowledge during the 2000 RNC, but at no other point.

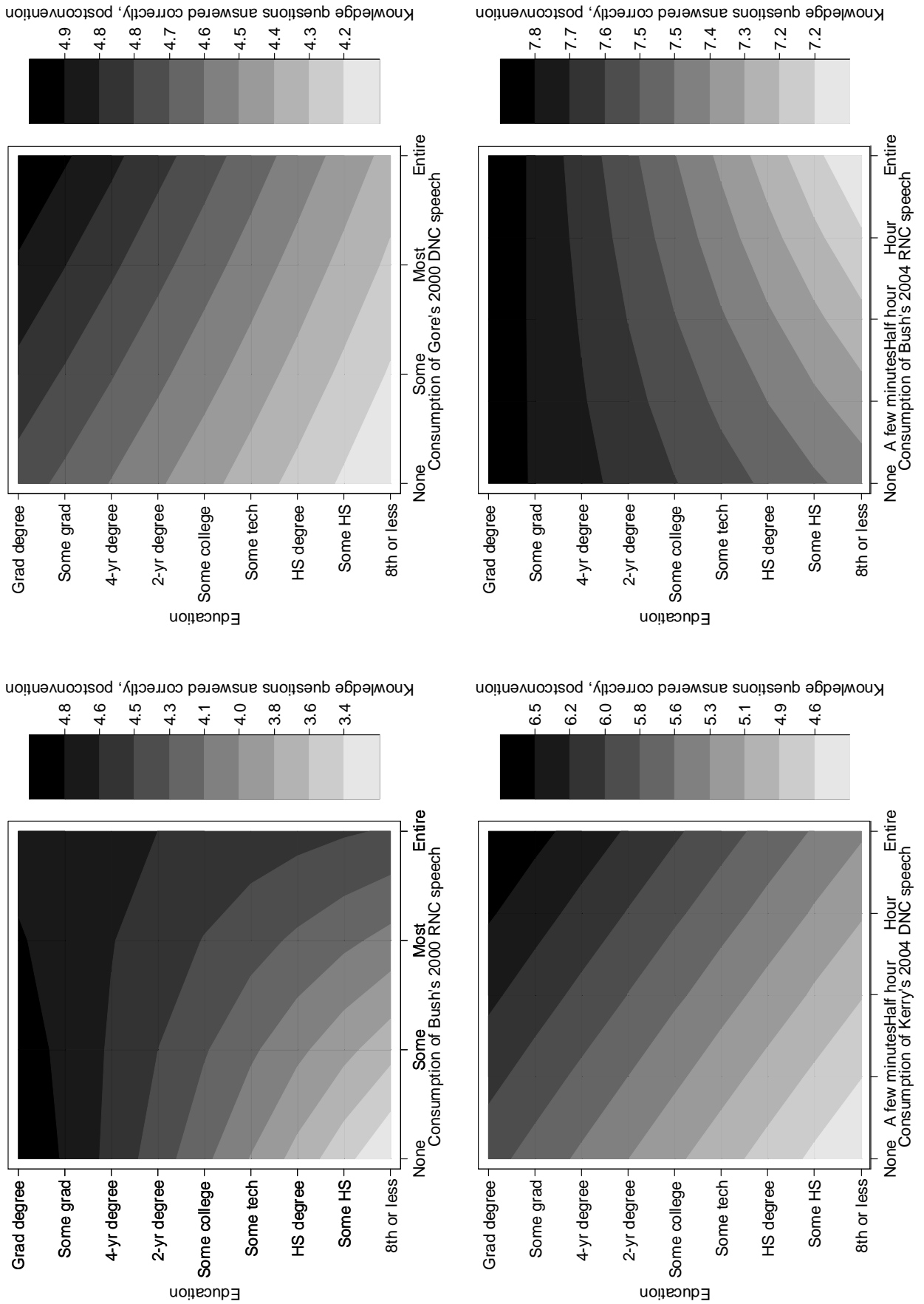
Relatively higher frequency of political discourse with friends and family during conventions yielded increases in knowledge, all else held constant, during both conventions in the 2004 election cycle, but relatively higher frequencies of political discussions during convention periods failed to affect post-convention knowledge in 2000. Political interest, a common predictor of political knowledge, exercised an effect in just one of the four constrained models after pre-convention knowledge, education, information exposure, and demographic variables were controlled; those with higher levels of interest answered more questions correctly after the 2000 DNC. Regarding the sex control, females demonstrated lower levels of political knowledge than male respondents (all else being equal) after the first convention in both 2000 and 2004, but their performance on knowledge question batteries was indistinguishable from that of males after the second convention in both cycles. “Don’t know” responses were pooled with “incorrect” answers in this analysis; therefore, the observed behavior of the sex variable may be related to a relatively lower tendency among female respondents to guess documented by Mondak and Anderson (2004). The race variable was a significant predictor of post-convention knowledge in just one of the four tests; nonwhite respondents answered fewer questions correctly than white respondents after

controlling for other factors after the 2000 DNC. Race did not exercise a significant impact on knowledge during any other convention.

An examination of the possible conditional effect of education on the relationship between exposure to televised nominee speeches and post-convention political knowledge is enabled by the unconstrained models. Because the model coefficients alone are not sufficient for a thorough discussion of the effects in question, visual representations in the form of contour plots are presented in Figure 5.3. Within each plot, speech exposure is represented on the X-axis, and educational attainment is represented on the Y-axis. Values of the dependent variable (*# of knowledge questions answered correctly, post-convention*) are represented on a gradation scale. Darker shading corresponds to higher values of the dependent variable. In estimating the predicted number of knowledge questions answered correctly, independent variables were held at their sample median values.

The data presented in Figure 5.3 illustrate how education strongly conditioned the impact of speech exposure on knowledge during the 2000 Republican convention. For those with the lowest levels of educational attainment, speech exposure made the largest impact; increasing exposure to George W. Bush's speech from "none" to "entire speech" for those with a high school degree or less increased the predicted number of correct answers, on average, by about 1. As education increases, the returns from watching Bush's convention speech diminish; those with high school or technical degrees were likely to increase their predicted number of correct answers by about .5 on average. At the highest levels of education, speech exposure had no impact on the

Figure 5.3: Conditional Effects of Education on the Relationship Between Speech Exposure and Postconvention Knowledge



predicted number of correct answers. In contrast, the contour plot for the 2000 Democratic convention shows that education did not condition the impact of exposure to Gore's speech on post-convention knowledge. Moving from minimum to maximum speech exposure yielded an average increase in the predicted number of correctly answered questions of about .3, regardless of education level.

During the 2004 Democratic convention, exposure to Kerry's speech had a constant impact on predicted post-convention knowledge; increasing speech exposure from "none" to "entire speech" yielded an increase in the predicted number of correctly answered questions by about .8, regardless of education level. During the 2004 Republican convention, exposure to George W. Bush's speech had no impact among those with the highest levels of educational attainment. The unconstrained model predicts that those with lower levels of education were more likely to answer less questions correctly after watching Bush's speech, but the predicted effect is of a small magnitude (-.3) and falls short of achieving statistical significance.

These findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 7. Education exercised a significant conditional effect on the translation of speech information into knowledge during the first convention in the 2000 cycle; those with relatively lower levels of education were able to make better use of the information contained in Bush's speech. However, during the first convention in 2004, educated and uneducated alike translated acquired speech information into knowledge at similar rates. It appears that the format and content of early convention speeches *can* provide a disproportionate benefit to uneducated viewers, but that they do not *always* have that property. Analysis of the



unconstrained model series lends more complete support for Hypothesis 8. Exposure to speeches during the later conventions in the two election cycles examined here did not contribute to education-based knowledge gaps; neither educated nor uneducated viewers made significant gains in knowledge as a result of speech exposure.

### **Discussion**

Survey data from 2000 and 2004 provides evidence that conventions are times of marked political learning; aggregate levels of political knowledge increased significantly after each of the four conventions examined in this study. Although increases in political knowledge after conventions are widespread, there is evidence that gaps in knowledge between those with varying levels of education can expand as a result of the initial blitz of information accompanying the first convention. After the first convention in 2004, the increase in the mean level of political knowledge among those with four-year degrees was significantly larger than the increase among those without degrees. However, there is also evidence that growth in education-based knowledge gaps can stop or even reverse as high levels of information dissemination persist throughout the joint convention period. After the second convention in 2004, the magnitude of the increase in knowledge among those with degrees was about half of what it was among those without degrees, and less than one third of what it had been after the first convention. A similar but less pronounced set of patterns is observable during the 2000 conventions. These aggregate-level findings are in keeping with the work of Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970), Moore (1987), and Rhine, Bennett, and Flickinger (2001), whose results indicated that education-based differences in the rate of

knowledge gain arise when issues are novel, but those differences can be ameliorated when the issues in question remain in the public eye long enough for information to reach those in the lower socioeconomic strata.

In addition to an examination of changes in aggregate levels of political knowledge during conventions, this study is the first to examine how individual attributes and exposure to specific types of information interact to influence political knowledge during presidential nominating conventions. Multivariate analysis of data from 2000 and 2004 shows that exposure to televised speeches by the nominees exercised a significant impact on political knowledge, but that the nature of this impact depended on timing. Only during the first conventions in the election cycles examined here did exposure to speeches yield significant increases in post-convention political knowledge. In some cases, the impact of convention speech exposure also depended on education. During the first convention in the 2000 election cycle, all else held constant, exposure to the convening candidate's speech had a significantly stronger effect on those with lower levels of educational attainment, while the most educated respondents failed to see any benefit in terms of increased knowledge as a result of higher levels of speech exposure. This effect can be attributed to the unusual accessibility and simple, straightforward content of the prime-time speeches; exposure to these early speeches may allow unsophisticated viewers an opportunity to close a gap in basic knowledge about the candidates.

The normative implications of the findings presented in this chapter are clear and relatively positive where democratic governance is concerned. Conventions are

times of unambiguous political learning; they help members of the electorate absorb information necessary to make choices consistent with political predispositions. In addition, the televised, prime-time speeches given by convening candidates have the potential to help unsophisticated voters close the knowledge gap. The pattern of individual-level change in political knowledge during conventions is evidence that the knowledge gap hypothesis developed in the mass communication literature is not generalizable to all types of mass information dissemination efforts. It appears that by crafting events that are broadly accessible in terms of format and content, convention planners are not only setting the stage for positive evaluations of convening candidates, but also facilitating an equitable spread of political information throughout the electorate.

## **Chapter 6:**

### ***Conclusions and Suggestions for Future Research***

#### **How Conventions Bump**

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how conventions affect individuals. While a number of studies have examined convention bumps, this study represents the first systematic effort at understanding how the individual-level changes that underlie aggregate shifts in candidate support during conventions are produced. This is a topic worthy of consideration for a number of reasons. First, reliance on measurements of aggregate change can obscure important patterns of individual-level movement. This is a point that should resonate with any modern student of campaign effects; it is the same argument used to re-ignite interest in campaigns as objects worthy of study after decades of consensus that their effects were minimal (see Finkel 1993 and Bartels 1993). Second, conventions represent ideal targets for individual-level campaign effects studies because of their unique one-party-at-a-time format and because of the uniformity with which the convention speeches are relayed to mass audiences. Conventions approximate a natural experiment; it is almost shameful not to study how they influence individuals. Finally, their status as major campaign events rivaled only by debates makes conventions worthy of attempts to thoroughly understand them.

In the first chapter of this study, after a review of what we know about conventions, I ask the question that animates much of this study: How can we reconcile what we know about the biases individuals apply to incoming political information with the increased correspondence between opinion and objective conditions we see at the

aggregate level? In the second chapter, I begin the process of addressing that question by singling out convention speeches as sources of information likely to exert distinct and consistent effects on opinion. I examine determinants of acceptance speech exposure, and conclude that speech-watching is motivated by political interest and the desire to validate political predispositions. While speech exposure is more common among those with a stake in politics, audiences are surprisingly broad and can include partisans of all stripes and individuals from a wide variety of socioeconomic and demographic backgrounds.

In the third chapter, I present evidence that speech exposure exercises a persuasive effect that moves candidate support in favor of the convening candidate, even after pre-convention favorability and partisanship are controlled. At the same time, I show that exposure to the remaining information environment can be expected to increase the weight of partisanship in the evaluative calculus. For partisans who share a party label with the convening candidate, these effects can reinforce each other, but for opposition partisans, these effects pull in opposite directions. The possible conditional effect of partisanship on the persuasive influence of the speeches is considered, but I conclude that modeling the effect of the speeches as constant across partisan groups yields a superior mix of explanatory power and parsimony. In the fourth chapter, I extend this model to pairs of conventions; I consider how information from one convention can condition the relationship between information consumed at the second convention and post-convention-period opinion. I present evidence that

candidates can make enduring impressions during their conventions that go on to diminish the persuasive power of subsequent opposition messages.

In the fifth chapter, I consider the impact of conventions on political knowledge, a variable with importance that extends beyond single election cycles. I investigate the impact of conventions on the knowledge gap that exists between socioeconomic strata. I find that information from the earlier convention is incorporated into knowledge at a faster rate by political sophisticates, but also that information from the second convention works to the advantage of the less-educated as that additional information yields diminishing returns for sophisticates but relatively larger gains in knowledge for informationally-disadvantaged individuals. I single out speeches specifically and show that they are an information delivery vehicle that is especially friendly to those with low levels of educational attainment.

It is my hope that this study effectively makes the case that conventions and other high-profile campaign events should not be treated as mere punctuations or disturbances to be controlled for, but instead as opportunities to understand the impact of exposure to specific sources of information across individuals from different backgrounds. Additionally, I am hopeful that this study provides a good example of an approach to studying campaign effects that incorporates ideas from both the instrumental and social/psychological traditions of American political science, which under the right circumstances can complement one another.

### What Remains to be Done

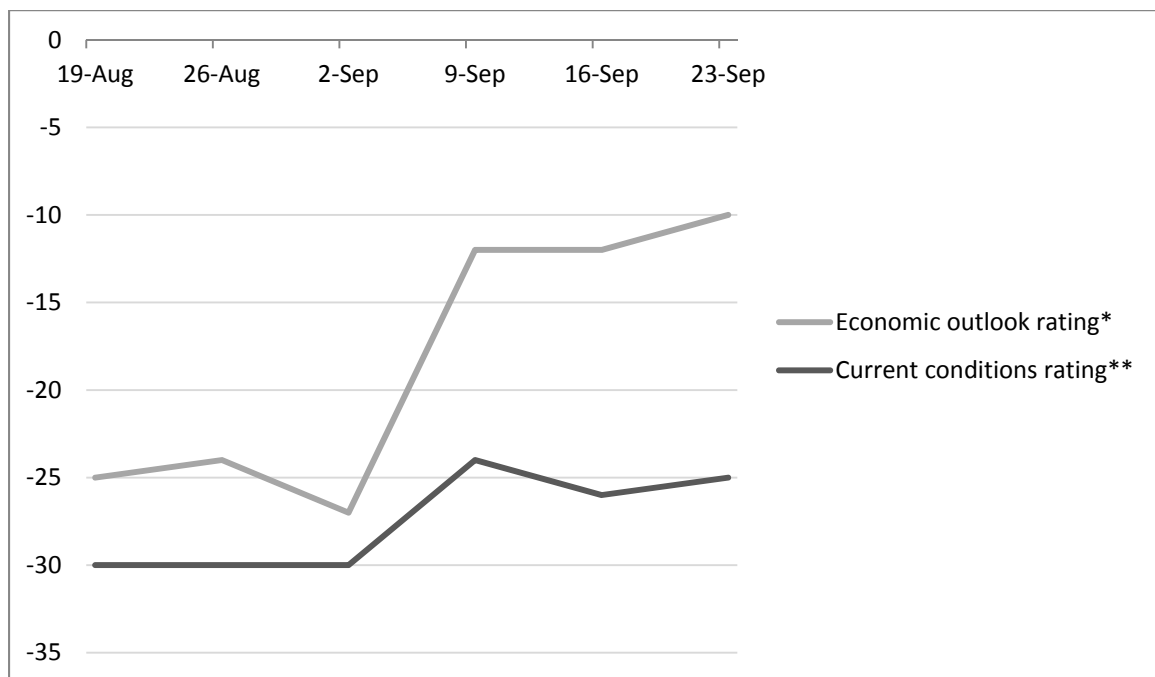
I would like to end by making suggestions for future research along this vein. The first and most obvious extension of the work presented here would be the further isolation and analysis of distinct information sources available during conventions. While quite a bit can be learned just by separating out the effects of the speeches from the general information environment, there is likely additional utility in disaggregating the remaining information sources further. With existing data, it would be possible to examine, for example, individual exposure to specific news networks and print media sources. Following the work of Tsftati (2003) on the conditional effects of debate viewing on the impact of other information sources on post-debate opinion, it would be interesting to examine the possible conditional effects of speech exposure on the impact of self-exposure to FOX News, for example, or the New York Times.

Another promising avenue of future research would be to apply the methods used here to other high-profile examples of dissemination of political information outside of the campaign setting. For example, the model from the third chapter in this study could be applied, with similar theoretical justification, to an analysis of presidential job approval following a State of the Union address.

Finally, following recent work by Erikson and Wlezien (2012), I would encourage an examination of the impact of exposure to various information sources during conventions on the “fundamental factors” themselves, such as macropartisanship or economic evaluations. While quite a bit of work has been done that suggests fundamental factors have greater predictive power regarding post-convention opinion

as opposed to pre-convention opinion, there is evidence from past conventions that some of these factors shift (sometimes dramatically) during conventions, possibly as a result of information conveyed during them. For example, Figure 6.1 shows that during the week of the 2012 DNC, Gallup's indices of economic confidence increased sharply after stability during the previous weeks, and subsequently remained at high levels:

Fig. 6.1: Economic Confidence Index, Weekly Averages (Gallup)  
August 2012 – September 2012



Notes: The 2012 Democratic National Convention was held September 4 – September 6

\* = (% getting better) - (% getting worse)

\*\* = ((% excellent) - (% good)) - (% poor)

It would be interesting to determine if this effect was related to the speeches given by President Obama, former President Bill Clinton, or some other combination of information sources.

Of course, all of these potential projects would be enriched greatly by the continued collection of panel survey datasets. It is unfortunate that a lack of data from



2008 and 2012 made it impossible to extend much of the analysis in this study to more recent election cycles. With any luck, research similar to this will help spur the collection of high-quality data situated around future high-profile campaign events.

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**Appendix A: Strength of Variable Associations With Nominee Convention Speech Exposure  
2000-2004  
(Cramér's V coefficients)**

	2000 Republican convention	2000 Democratic convention	2004 Democratic convention	2004 Republican convention
Party Identification	.178	.155	.197	.183
Strength of party identification	.153	.099	.077	.124
Nominee favorability ranking	.156	.199	.268	.227
Voting an important responsibility	.196	.057	-	-
Past voting frequency	.153	.095	-	-
Likely to participate in campaign	-	-	.150	.130
Frequency of political discourse	.189	.110	.156	.146
Interest/following politics/campaign	.223	.154	.196	.190
Internal efficacy	.180	.058	.137	.104
External efficacy	.101	.092	-	-
Household income	.043	.042	.092	.091
Number of children in household	.111	.102	.092	.032
Living as married	.076	.117	.055	.090
Retired	.102	.127	.074	.119
Religiosity	.127	.108	.157	.121
Moved within last year	.075	.021	.072	.080
Education	.062	.106	.052	.024
Political knowledge	.133	.108	.098	.052
Learned enough about candidates	.191	.050	.077	.216
Frequency of cable news viewing	.064	.081	.149	.202
Frequency of network news viewing	.066	.116	.151	.103
Frequency of local news viewing	.097	.071	.098	.071
Frequency of newspaper reading	.090	.070	.095	.093
Female	.036	.056	.050	.052
Non-white	.098	.054	.032	.109
Age	.136	.105	.086	.093

**Appendix B: Correlations of Nominee Speech Exposure with Predictors  
2000-2004  
(Pearson's *r* coefficients)**

	2000 Republican convention	2000 Democratic convention	2004 Democratic convention	2004 Republican convention
Party Identification	-.0898	.3061	.2727	-.2504
Strength of party identification	.1912	.1528	.0695	.1203
Nominee favorability ranking	.1779	.0328	.3372	.3211
Voting an important responsibility	.2167	.3547	-	-
Past voting frequency	.2185	.1268	-	-
Likely to participate in campaign	-	-	.2010	.1958
Frequency of political discourse	.2622	.1532	.2862	.1871
Interest/following politics/campaign	.3359	.1102	.2081	.2527
Internal efficacy	-.1081	-.0424	-.1743	-.1335
External efficacy	.0049	-.0833	-	-
Household income	-.0484	-.0039	.0676	.1311
Number of children in household	-.0708	-.0730	-.1293	-.0732
Living as married	-.0590	-.1311	-.0028	.0824
Retired	.0627	.0871	.0217	.1469
Religiosity	.1102	-.0913	-.1105	.1448
Moved within last year	.2282	.0317	-.0926	-.0602
Education	.1414	.1735	.0264	-.0056
Political knowledge	.3420	.1282	.0758	.0151
Learned enough about candidates	.2515	.0168	.0515	.1365
Frequency of cable news viewing	.0521	.0742	.1369	.3211
Frequency of network news viewing	.2043	.1825	.2375	.0589
Frequency of local news viewing	.0512	.0415	.1095	.1276
Frequency of newspaper reading	.3203	.0915	.1524	.1135
Female	.2086	-.0439	.0324	-.0445
Non-white	.0939	.0219	.0267	-.1330
Age	.2301	.0341	.0982	.1629

### Appendix C: Determinants of change in net favorability advantage for convening candidates, 2000-2004

DV = ((postconvention convening candidate rating – postconvention opposing candidate rating) – (preconvention convening candidate rating – preconvention opposing candidate rating))

2000 conventions (101-point favorability scale)

	2000 RNC		2000 DNC	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Net favorability advantage for convening candidate (pre)	-.30 (.03)**	-.30 (.03)**	-.32 (.03)**	-.32 (.03)**
Speech exposure	2.61 (.85)**	3.38 (1.88)*	3.59 (.85)**	4.48 (1.93)**
Weak Republican	-7.80 (3.27)**	-6.33 (6.13)	10.02 (3.57)**	10.07 (5.86)*
Independent, leans Republican	-7.74 (3.08)**	-6.10 (5.88)	10.57 (3.50)**	9.58 (5.93)
Independent	-16.87 (4.11)**	-16.62 (7.10)**	19.91 (4.49)**	17.28 (7.14)**
Independent, leans Democrat	-25.72 (4.26)**	-23.64 (6.79)**	22.56 (4.01)**	20.21 (6.53)**
Weak Democrat	-21.53 (4.10)**	-18.77 (6.63)**	23.22 (3.77)**	32.78 (5.74)**
Strong Democrat	-32.23 (4.30)**	-29.43 (6.35)**	25.66 (3.93)**	25.47 (5.98)**
Strong GOP * Speech	-	-.65 (2.84)	-	-.26 (3.17)
Weak GOP * Speech	-	-.76 (2.64)	-	.20 (3.26)
GOP Leaner * Speech	-	.16 (3.39)	-	1.36 (3.67)
Dem Leaner * Speech	-	-1.12 (3.29)	-	.73 (3.01)
Weak Dem * Speech	-	-1.77 (3.41)	-	-5.85 (2.78)**
Strong Dem * Speech	-	-1.83 (2.98)	-	-.52 (2.63)
Constant	16.93 (3.11)**	15.30 (4.78)**	-13.23 (2.96)**	-14.08 (3.80)**
N	681	681	761	761
Adjusted R-squared	.163	.157	.185	.187
F-test	.11		1.28	

Note: "Strong Republican" is the base (excluded) PID category; \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests; \* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

2004 conventions (11-point favorability scale)

	2004 DNC		2004 RNC	
	Constrained model	Unconstrained model	Constrained model	Unconstrained model
Net favorability advantage for convening candidate (pre)	-.22 (.02)**	-.22 (.02)**	-.19 (.02)**	-.20 (.02)**
Speech exposure	.13 (.05)**	.07 (.12)	.21 (.04)**	.19 (.08)**
Weak Republican	.75 (.32)**	.46 (.41)	-.24 (.25)	-.58 (.37)
Independent, leans Republican	.89 (.29)**	.99 (.37)**	-.04 (.23)	-.01 (.40)
Independent	2.08 (.38)**	1.75 (.47)**	-.35 (.29)	-.57 (.39)
Independent, leans Democrat	2.40 (.34)**	2.46 (.42)**	-1.85 (.30)**	-1.73 (.38)**
Weak Democrat	2.11 (.33)**	2.10 (.40)**	-1.30 (.30)**	-1.63 (.40)**
Strong Democrat	2.51 (.35)**	2.23 (.46)**	-2.21 (.30)**	-2.18 (.38)**
Strong GOP * Speech	-	.25 (.21)	-	.20 (.15)
Weak GOP * Speech	-	-.08 (.20)	-	-.02 (.14)
GOP Leaner * Speech	-	.30 (.26)	-	.16 (.17)
Dem Leaner * Speech	-	-.01 (.17)	-	-.12 (.13)
Weak Dem * Speech	-	.02 (.18)	-	.23 (.16)
Strong Dem * Speech	-	.13 (.16)	-	-.07 (.13)
Constant	-1.45 (.23)**	-1.39 (.25)**	.89 (.20)**	.96 (.27)**
N	827	827	924	924
Adjusted R-squared	.125	.123	.132	.134
F-test	.70		1.40	

Note: "Strong Republican" is the base (excluded) PID category; \*\* $p \leq .05$ , two-tailed tests; \* $p \leq .10$ , two-tailed tests

## Appendix D: NAES 2000 & 2004 Knowledge Question Wording

### *2000 Republican Convention Panel & 2000 Democratic Convention Panel*

cBG11: To the best of your knowledge, who supported legislation allowing people to carry concealed handguns?

George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD10: To the best of your knowledge, who is a state governor? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD11: To the best of your knowledge, who was a United States senator? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD12: To the best of your knowledge, who is the son of a former United States senator? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD13: To the best of your knowledge, who is a Vietnam veteran? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD14: To the best of your knowledge, who gave a speech at Bob Jones University? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD15: To the best of your knowledge, who considers himself a born-again Christian? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

cD16: To the best of your knowledge, who owned a major league baseball team? George W. Bush, Al Gore, both or neither?

### *2004 Democratic Convention Panel*

cCB25: To the best of your knowledge, who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCB27: John Kerry says that he would eliminate George W. Bush's tax cuts on those making how much money—over \$50,000 a year; over \$100,000 a year; over \$200,000 a year; or over \$500,000 a year?

cCB46: To the best of your knowledge, who favors eliminating tax breaks for overseas profits of American corporations and using the money to cut corporate income taxes—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCB73: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to make it easier for unions to organize—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCC07: To the best of your knowledge, who favors the federal government helping to pay for health insurance for all children and helping employers pay the cost of the workers' health insurance—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCC34: To the best of your knowledge, who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCD68: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to extend all provisions of the USA Patriot Act in order to fight terrorism—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCE37: To the best of your knowledge, who urges Congress to extend the federal law banning assault weapons—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCG05: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to limit the amount of money people can be awarded in lawsuits—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cDA17: To the best of your knowledge, who is a former prosecutor—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

*2004 Republican Convention Panel*

cCB25: To the best of your knowledge, who favors making the recent tax cuts permanent—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCB27: John Kerry says that he would eliminate George W. Bush's tax cuts on those making how much money—over \$50,000 a year; over \$100,000 a year; over \$200,000 a year; or over \$500,000 a year?

cCB48: To the best of your knowledge, who favors eliminating tax breaks for overseas profits of American corporations and using the money to cut taxes for businesses that create jobs in the United States—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCB75: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to make it easier for labor unions to organize—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCC09: To the best of your knowledge, who favors a health insurance plan that would do both of the following—help to pay for health insurance for all children and help employers pay the cost of the workers' health insurance—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCC26: To the best of your knowledge, who favors changing the recently passed Medicare prescription drug law to allow reimporting drugs from Canada—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCC34: To the best of your knowledge, who favors allowing workers to invest some of their Social Security contributions in the stock market—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCD09: To the best of your knowledge, which candidate proposes moving 60,000 to 70,000 troops stationed in Europe and South Korea to other locations, including the United States, in the next decade—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCE37: To the best of your knowledge, who urges Congress to extend the federal law banning assault weapons—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCG05: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to limit the amount of money people can be awarded in lawsuits—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cDA17: To the best of your knowledge, who is a former prosecutor—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCD68/70: To the best of your knowledge, who wants to extend all provisions of the USA Patriot Act (to fight terrorism)—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?

cCE10/12: To the best of your knowledge, who favors federal funding of research on diseases like Alzheimer's (Parkinson's) using stem cells taken from human embryos—George W. Bush, John Kerry, both, or neither?



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