IN SEARCH OF THE FLOATING VOTER: AN

ANALYSIS OF CONFLICTING INTRA-

ELECTION HYPOTHESES

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INTRODUCTION

Justification of the Study

Who is the "floating voter"? What role does he play in modern

campaigns and elections? What impact does the flow of political infor-

mation have on him? Answers to these questions have been troublesome

to politicians and political scientists alike. Yet, with the exception

of a few early efforts, not many studies have been conducted in an

attempt to resolve these questions. As Edward Dreyer has pointed out

in one of the few recent studies of media use and the floating voter:

> Since the pioneering efforts of Berelson and Lazarsfeld,
> few studies have examined voter responses to the flow of
> current political information. For the most part only
> the reinforcing and activating effects of the electorates
> surveillance behavior have been emphasized, perhaps
> because more dramatic impacts are so imperceptible and
> longterm. In any event, our understanding of the precise
> impact of the mass media is only fragmentary and based
> on dated information.[1]

There would seem to be a number of valid reasons for studying this

problem. One justification would be that the normative theory of

political democracy makes certain requirements of the ideal citizen and

certain assumptions about his capacity to meet them. More specifically

the demoractic citizen is expected to 1) participate and be interested

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[1]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some
Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarter-
ly, XXXV (Fall, 1971), p. 545.

in political affairs, 2) be capable of and engage in discussion, 3) be well-informed about political affairs--know what the issues are, what their history is, what the relevant facts are, what alternatives are proposed, what the party stands for, what the likely consequences of various alternatives are, 4) cast his vote on the basis of principle-- not impulsively or habitually, but with reference to standards not only of his own interest but of the common good as well, and 5) exercise rational judgment in coming to his voting decision.[2] Thus, these requirements ideally conjure up the image of a civic minded, information-seeking individual who independently judges all available information which, in turn, leads to the casting of a rational vote. In general, those studies which have dealt with the question of floating voters define them as those persons who do not make the same choices at two successive elections, or who show indecision and change their minds during the course of a campaign.[3] Accordingly, given the requirements outlined above, the idea that every voter is a potential floater would appear to be central to the classic conception.[4]

Politicians have long realized that the vast majority of voters do not live up to the ideals of normative theory. However, this

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[2] For a more complete discussion of these requirements, see Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting (Chicago, 1954), pp. 306-311, and Bernard Berelson, "Democratic Theory and Public Opinion," Public Opinion Quarterly, XVI (Fall, 1952), pp. 313-330.

[3] The explicit definitions vary due to the nature of the research designs employed in various studies which have touched on the problem. These differences, as well as a critical review of the literature, will be dealt with later in the chapter.

[4] For further discussion of the implications of this concept see H. Daudt, Floating Voters and the Floating Vote (Leiden, 1961), pp. 160-168.

realization apparently has not diminished their enthusiasm for campaigning. Large sums of money have been spent because politicians strongly believe that campaigns can make or break their political careers as well as the strength of their party and its programs. The notion that campaigns are crucial and that a candidate's fortunes ride on the effectiveness of his campaign is well-embedded in political folklore. Numerous examples abound; Harry Truman's upset of Thomas Dewey by a vigorous, no-holds-barred, whistle stop tour of the country in 1948 is one of the more noteworthy.

Since World War II, numerous studies of voting behavior, conducted primarily by political scientists and sociologists, have generated a body of evidence which tends to dispute the politicians' faith in the importance of campaigns. These studies indicate that the factors which mold voting choices are only marginally affected by campaign appeals.[5] Instead of substantiating the classic theory by which every voter is a potential floater, they point to a much more deterministically derived voting decision. The major factor emerging from these studies is party identification. In the long run, voting decisions have been found to be consistently related to the party loyalty of the voter. For independents--those voters who claim no party loyalty and, therefore, are more susceptible to campaign appeals--it has also been found that they more frequently vote for candidates of one party or the other. The stronger a voter's sense of party identification, the more likely

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[5] Berelson, et al., pp. 132-137; Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, _The American Voter_ (New York, 1960), p. 78; and William H. Flanigan, _Political Behavior of the American Electorate_ (Boston, 1968), pp. 98-102.

he is to vote for the candidate offered by his party. In addition,
the studies indicate that of those who identify with a party, most
maintain their party identification over the entire course of their
lives. In fact, it has been shown that about four out of every five
do so.[6]

Another factor suggested by the studies is that the vast majority
of voters reach their electoral decision well in advance of the campaign.
Analyses of presidential elections from 1948 to 1968 reveal that
approximately one-third of the voters make their decisions before the
nominating conventions, one-third during the conventions, and the
remaining one-third make their choice during the campaign.[7] The
stronger a voter's sense of party identification, the more likely he is
to fall into one of the first two groups. The latter group, however,
consists of weak identifiers and independents, and it is this group
which is most susceptible to transient short-term political influences.
The one-third who decide after the conventions are generally classified
as floaters. However, the characteristics of weak identifiers and
independents clash with the requirements of traditional normative
theory. Instead of exhibiting high levels of interest, information and
participation, they tend to be disinterested, hold low and conflicting
levels of information, and demonstrate low levels of political activity.
Thus, the lower a voter's level of political information, interest and

[6] Berelson, et al., pp. 132-137; Angus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, The American Voter (New York, 1960), p. 78; and William H. Flanigan, Political Behavior of the American Electorate (Boston, 1968), pp. 98-102.

[7] Ibid.

participation, the more likely he is to be classified as a floating

voter. Although these findings reveal that the impact of campaigns do

not conform with classic democratic theory, they are still highly

significant because there is an uncommitted segment of the voting popu-

lation large enough to swing an election one way or the other.

Another justification for this study can be found in a conflict in

the literature. The interpretation of the floating voter outlined in

the preceding paragraphs was revised by Philip Converse during the

early 1960's.[8] Converse's revision calls for two types of stable

voters instead of one--those possessing high levels of political infor-

mation and those receiving little or no political information. The

floating voter falls between these two extremes. Edward Dreyer

challenges this view on the basis of analysis of five sets of presiden-

tial election survey data from the Survey Research Center at the

University of Michigan.[9] The results of Dreyer's study appear to con-

firm the earlier theory which states that a voter is more likely to

float as levels of political information diminish. Thus, a conflict in

the literature is evident.

A final justification for this study is derived from the cost and

style of modern political campaigns. It is estimated that at least

$140 million were spent on all political campaigns in 1952, and steadily

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[8]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of
Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E.
Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New
York, 1966), pp. 136-158.

[9]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some
Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarter-
ly, XXIV (Fall, 1971), pp. 544-553.

increasing expenditures since that election make this figure seem

almost dwarf-like by comparison.[10] Much of the increase in spending

has been associated with the rise of the media specialist. Although

media specialists have been involved in political campaigns for decades,

they did not become a significant force in American politics until

1952.[11] Technological innovations in the communications industry have

led to changes in the content and character of mass communications and

in the public's leisure-time habits. This has made it more difficult

for candidates for public office to reach their constituents. Politi-

cians today must contend not only with the appeals of their opponents

for the voter's attention, but with a large variety of nonpolitical

messages as well. This difficulty has led politicians to recruit

communications specialists to wage their exposure campaigns.[12] The

point is that millions of dollars are spent on media campaigns that

are shaped by an imperfect understanding of a segment of the voting

population which can have a significant impact on which party will gain

power.

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[10]In 1956 the figure rose to $155,000,000; in 1960, $175,000,000;
in 1964, $200,000,000; and in 1968, $300,000,000. These figures were
found in Frank J. Sorauf, Party Politics in America (Boston, 1972),
p. 311.

[11]A thorough discussion of the rise of the public relations man in
politics can be found in Stanley Kelley, Jr., Professional Public
Relations and Political Power (Baltimore, 1956).

[12]Dan Nimmo, The Political Persuaders (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey,
1970), p. 112.

Statement of Problem

The first research effort to engage the question of mass media impact on voting behavior was The People's Choice.[13] Conducted in Erie County, Ohio, during the presidential election of 1940, it had two major goals. The first was to study how voters made up their minds during a presidential campaign, with primary emphasis on how they were affected by exposure to the mass media. The second was methodological. A main panel of 600 respondents was interviewed seven times during the course of the campaign. In addition, four matched control groups were interviewed twice. After an elaborate content analysis of the mass media in Erie County was completed, members of the panels were subjected to lengthy interviews concerning their exposure to the media.

Three types of "changers" were distinguished.[14]

1) The "crystallizers"--those who during the first of the series of interviews had no party preference, but who acquired one before a subsequent interview and thereafter retained it throughout the remainder of the election period.

2) The "waverers"--those who during the first interview had a party preference and were either without one or with a different one at a later interview, and who finally reverted to their original decision. This group was further divided into "indecision waverers", namely, those who did not know how they would vote during their temporary

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[13]Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York, 1944).

[14]Ibid., pp. 65-66.

desertion from their party, and the "party waverers", who favored the opposing party during their defection.

3) The "party changers"--those who first declared themselves supporters of one party but ultimately voted for the other.

The use of the panel technique, with its emphasis on the mass media, was a result of the principal author's research in the area of consumer choice. It was assumed that the voter, much like the new shopper in a supermarket, would go through a period of indecision as he received campaign propaganda. The voter would finally reach a voting decision, perhaps just prior to entering the voting booth. This was analogous to the new shopper who makes a last minute choice after receiving an advertising message. "Thus, voting, like buying, was considered an individualistic act, affected mainly by the voters personality and his exposure to the mass media."[15]

Such an analogy lends itself to the portrait of a rational, individual voter. However, the model did not lead to the anticipated results. Of the 600 respondents in the main panel, only 54 were found who changed preferences during the study.[16] Because much of the interviewing time was spent in obtaining careful measures of the exposure of voters to campaign news, in the absence of changes in voting preference, the effects of the mass media and the campaign could not be clearly discerned. Since the mass media design failed to explain variations in the vote, the researchers had to resort to other variables for an

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[15]Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," In Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (New York, 1959), p. 16.

[16]Paul E. Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet, The People's Choice (New York, 1944), p. 71.

explanation. During the analysis phase it was discovered that the background variables of socioeconomic status, religion and rural-urban residence played a very heavy role in determining which candidate the respondent would prefer. The relationships among these variables were so strong that they accounted for more of the variation in the vote than any other measures included in the survey.[17]

Another set of findings revealed that "changers" were characterized by a relatively low interest in the election and a low level of exposure to campaign propaganda. Voters possessing characteristics that inclined them to vote in one direction and other characteristics with opposite implications were most likely to be indecisive. Far from conforming to the image of the rational, independent voter that the authors had anticipated, the independent voter was seen to be a voter in conflict, subject to cross pressures and characterized as reacting to this conflict by withdrawal and indecision.[18]

Although the initial model viewed voting as an individual act, a third set of findings also deviated from the concept. Respondents frequently alluded to the homogeneity of political preference within the family and to other personal contacts as reasons for their changes in voting preference. This led to the conclusion that the electoral choice was more a group decision than an individual one. There was

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[17] Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," In Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (New York, 1959), p. 18.

[18] Ibid.

more evidence of the effectiveness of personal influence on voters than there was evidence of the effectiveness of the mass media.[19]

Finally, the selective attention of the voter to the content of campaign materials forced a revision in the researchers' conceptions of the role of the mass media. Instead of converting the undecided and the independent, the campaign of each party through the mass media simply reinforced already formed preferences among the partisans. If the campaign had any effect, it was thought that it possibly came from the highly partisan within each camp. The "two-step flow of information"--from the mass media, to highly partisan opinion leaders, to the rank and file--was therefore advanced as a hypothesis that might tie together these findings and the social character of the voting decision.[20]

Early in 1948, planning was begun for a follow-up study to coincide with the presidential election of that year. Elmira, New York, was selected as the site for the research; the researchers envisioned the follow-up study as an opportunity to replicate The People's Choice. A few minor changes were made in the basic design. The study, entitled Voting, employed a panel of 1,000 instead of 600 and no control groups were used.[21] Respondents were interviewed four times instead of seven

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[19]Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," In Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (New York, 1959), p. 19.

[20]Ibid.

[21]For a more complete discussion of these requirements, see Bernard R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting (Chicago, 1954), pp. 381-386.

as in the first study. The same classifications for changers were
employed.[22]

Because of the findings in The People's Choice, some of its major
concerns received far less attention in Voting. Elaborate measures of
exposure to campaign materials were not made, nor was a serious attempt
made to extend the prior concern with opinion leadership. In The
People's Choice issues were studied primarily through the content of
the mass media. Little attention was paid to issues as reflected in the
opinions of respondents. The major sets of data on this topic related
to content of the mass media and measures of respondents' exposure to
campaign material. While Voting did not drop the concern for content
of the mass media altogether, the attention given to it was considerably
less. The results of this content analysis appeared in a short section
and were not integrated closely into the body of the study. Much more
attention was paid to attitudinal reflections of the campaign.[23]

The findings in Voting concerning the effects of political expo-
sure were, however, compatible with those in The People's Choice. The
findings included the following.[24]

1) "The more exposure to the campaign in the mass media, the more
interested voters become and the more strongly they come to feel about
their candidate."

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[22]Although they do not adopt the terminology of The People's Choice,
the authors of Voting obviously make the same distinctions; it is
always clear from the context which type of changing is meant.

[23]Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," In Eugene
Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (New York,
1959, p. 29.

[24]For a more complete discussion of these requirements, see Bernard
R. Berelson, Paul F. Lazarsfeld, and William N. McPhee, Voting (Chicago,
1954), p. 252.

2) "The more exposure to the campaign in the mass media, the less voters change their positions and the more they carry through on election day."

3) "The more exposure to the campaign in the mass media, the more correct information the voters have about the campaign and the more correct their perception of where the candidates stand on the issues." These findings, then, tend to be commensurate with the assertion, found in The People's Choice, that the mass media reinforce partisan opinion instead of converting the voter.

Another series of studies which helped form the backdrop against which an interpretation of the floating voter could be studied was conducted by the Survey Research Center at the University of Michigan. Beginning in 1948, these studies eventually culminated in The American Voter. Since The American Voter synthesized these studies, it would be redundant to examine each of them in detail. Therefore, the following brief summary should be sufficient. These articles include:

Angus Campbell and Robert L. Kahn, The People Elect a President, 1952. (The findings of a nationwide panel study of the American presidential election of 1948, organized by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan);

Angus Campbell, Gerald Gurin, Warren E. Miller, The Voter Decides, 1954. (The findings of a nationwide panel study of the American presidential election of 1952; organized by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan);

Morris Janowitz and Dwaine Marvick, Competitive Pressure and Democratic Consent, 1956. (Further analysis of the American presidential election of 1952 using the same material upon which The Voter Decides is based);

Alfred de Grazia, The Western Public, 1952 and Beyond, 1954.
(Further analysis of the American presidential election of 1952, with
particular reference to the eleven western states, and using the same
material upon which The Voter Decides is based);

Angus Campbell and Homer C. Cooper, Group Differences in Attitudes
and Votes, a Study of the 1954 Congressional Election, 1956. (In this
study by the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan figures
obtained in the investigations into the presidential elections of 1948
and 1952 were included for the purposes of comparison).

The American Voter represents a different research tradition than
the two previously cited studies. Whereas The People's Choice and
Voting express a sociological orientation, the roots of the Survey
Research Center lie more in social psychology.[25] Although the
approaches differ, SRC research lends support to the findings of the
two previous studies. Elections take place within a context of
stability in party identification. The stronger a voter's sense of
party identification the more likely he will be to follow his party
impulse in voting. The stronger a voter's sense of party identifica-
tion the more likely he will be to make up his mind early and possess
high levels of political information because of high attendance to the
mass media. As one moves down the scale of partisan intensity, the
more likely one is to find apathy, indecision, and low levels of media
attendance and information. It will be this group of weak identifiers
and independents who will be most vulnerable to the short-term forces

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[25]Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," In Eugene
Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, American Voting Behavior (New York,
1959), pp. 36-37.

of a campaign and where the floating voter is found. In its traditional

formulation, then, the floating voter hypothesis asserts that changers--

persons who switch their turnout and/or candidate intentions--tend to

be the people who pay the least attention to politics and absorb the

least amount of political information. This traditional interpretation

was revised by Philip Converse in SRC's Elections and the Political

Order,[27] which the authors refer to as a successor to The American Voter.

The final chapters of The American Voter shifted attention "from the

voter to the full electorate and from individual choice to the collec-

tive decision."[26] Converse's revision fits into other explanations of

voting behavior within the context of this shifted emphasis.[27]

Converse analyzes the impact of information flow on the floating

voter during both the inter-election period--fluctuations in the vote

from one election to the next, and the intra-election period--fluctua-

tions in candidate choice during the campaign. He argues that if no

other factors intervene in a systematic way, the two-party division of

the popular vote will remain constant from election to election,

reflecting only an underlying division of loyalties. However, transient

political factors such as candidate attractiveness or religion form

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[26]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of
Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E.
Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New
York, 1966), pp. vii-viii.

[27]The revision is especially harmonious with two other works found
in Elections and the Political Order. These works are Philip Converse,
"The Concept of a Normal Vote," pp. 9-39, and Augus Campbell, "Surge and
Decline: A Study of Electoral Change," pp. 40-62.

"perturbations or oscillations" around this underlying division of

party identification.

> In other words, identification may be seen as an inertia
> or momentum component which determines the partisan
> direction of any individual decision unless there are
> short-term forces in the immediate situation acting with
> sufficient strength in an opposite partisan direction to
> deflect the momentum and shift the behavior.[28]

These oscillations are disproportionately attributable to shifts

in short-term evaluations on the part of less informed voters. At this

point Converse employs a Newtonian metaphor--"mass"--as an analogue for

information level. He assumes that the highly informed voter operates

with a large store of political information, whereas the uninformed

voter is characterized by a poor retention of past political events.

> The probability that any given voter will be sufficiently
> deflected in his partisan momentum to cross party lines
> in a specified election varies directly as a function of
> the strength of short-term forces toward the opposing
> party and varies inversely as a function of the mass of
> stored information about politics.[29]

This is simply a restatement of the traditional floating voter hypothe-

sis and Converse finds support for it during the inter-election period

by analyzing the association between stability or change in presidential

voting over time and political information level for the years 1956 and

1960. Information level is divided into categories of high, medium

and low. These categories are then analyzed against voting stability

for the two elections. The table, as reproduced on the following page,

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[28]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of
Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E.
Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New
York, 1966), p. 140.

[29]Ibid., p. 141.

shows that those with high levels of information demonstrate the most

stability, and as information level decreases, instability increases.[30]

TABLE I

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY OR CHANGE IN PRESIDENTIAL VOTING
OVER TIME AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL, 1956-1960
(in percent)

Information Level*	Voted Twice and for Same Party (N = 712)	Voted Twice but Shifted Parties (N = 207)	Failed to Vote in One of Two Elections (N = 220)	Twice a Nonvoter (N = 201)
High	49	33	19	11
Medium	32	32	35	17
Low	19	35	46	72
Total	100	100	100	100

*By and large, knowledge of the more obvious items of political
information turns out to show cumulative scale properties for a cross
section of the national population. This is a preliminary measure
based on a scaling of items concerning such knowledge about the 1960
presidential candidates as the region from which they came and knowledge
about which party controlled the 1960 Congress.

It is during the intra-election period that Converse reformulates

tha hypothesis. He starts by noting the difference in turnout between

high-stimulus and low-stimulus elections. During a high-stimulus

election the public is massively bombarded by information about the

candidates; during a low-stimulus election the flow of information is

noticeably weaker. Since the uninvolved and uninformed segment of the

electorate is more susceptible to whatever short-term forces it may

[30]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of
Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E.
Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New
York, 1966), p. 139.

encounter, the flow of current political information operates as an important force governing its electoral choices. As a result of this reduced flow of information, the less involved or floating voter tends to drop out of the low-stimulus electorate. Of those who do vote, a large proportion are likely to be strong party identifiers who support their party more regularly than the less involved. Therefore, a low- ✔ stimulus election exhibits fewer defections and more party regularity than a high-stimulus election.

It is presumed that the more actively one monitors campaign activities through the mass media, the greater will be one's intake of current political information. However, large intake does not have the same impact as the smaller volume of intake among the less actively exposed. The less actively exposed are far more susceptible to small amounts of information since their understanding and "mass" of stored political knowledge is so low. The uninvolved voter is, therefore, most susceptible to short-term change provided new information reaches him, but, when the flow of political information is weak, the uninvolved voter is least likely to demonstrate changes in electoral behavior.

From this point of view, it follows that in any single election the pre-election day intensions of voters who experience no new intake of information should remain perfectly stable and the votes cast by this group should correlate very strongly with its existing partisan loyalties. Converse's revision of the hypothesis also predicts a dramatic change in the stability of vote intentions from the most stable among those who employ no medium to monitor a campaign to the most unstable among those who follow it in one medium only. Beyond this point stability should increase with the number of media employed

in following the campaign. Thus, Converse's reformulation logically calls for two types of stable voters instead of one. Both the lowest and highest exposure groups should exhibit the greatest stability in their electoral choices. Theoretically, then, Converse's revision of the floating voter hypothesis can be expressed graphically by the following comparison:

TABLE II

THE TRADITIONAL FLOATING VOTER HYPOTHESIS
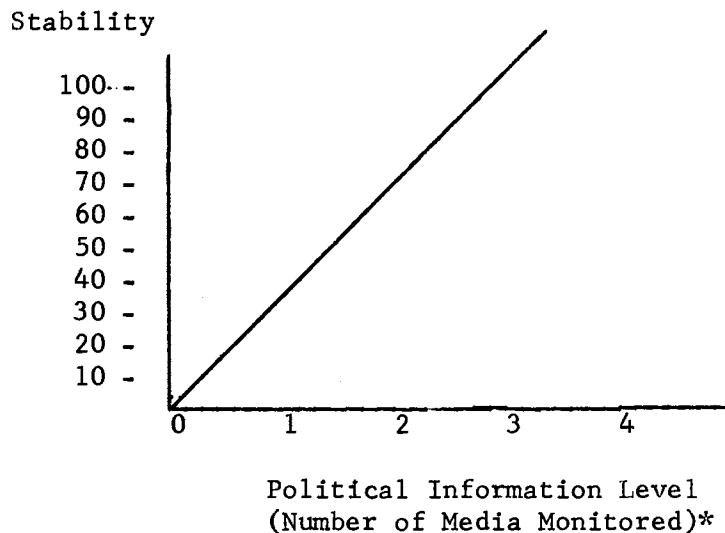
Stability

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100 -
 90 -
 80 -
 70 -
 60 -
 50 -
 40 -
 30 -
 20 -
 10 -
     0    1    2    3    4
```

Political Information Level
(Number of Media Monitored)*

*The number of media monitored refers to a diversity of media. For example, the numbers 1 - 4 on the political information level measures of Tables II and III refer to four separate media--television, radio, newspapers and magazines--not to multiples of any of these media.

TABLE III

CONVERSE'S REFORMULATED FLOATING VOTER HYPOTHESIS
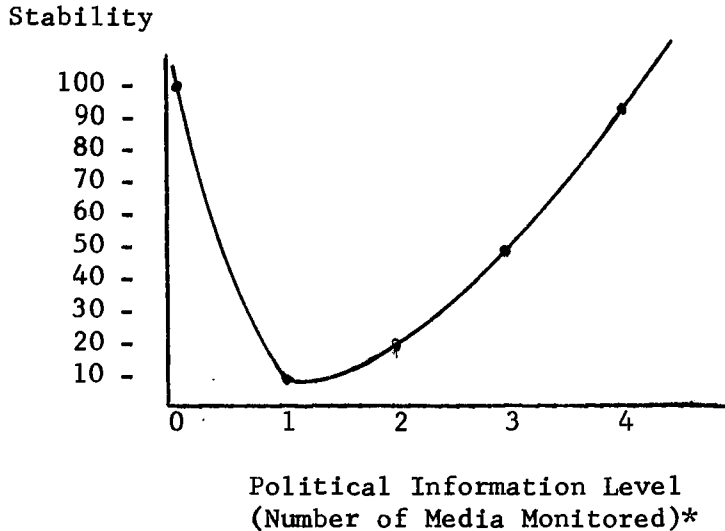
Stability

Political Information Level
(Number of Media Monitored)*

*The number of media monitored refers to a diversity of media.
For example, the numbers 1 - 4 on the political information level
measures of Tables II and III refer to four separate media--television,
radio, newspapers and magazines--not to multiples of any of these media.

To test his revision of the floating voter hypothesis, Converse

employed data from the Survey Research Center's study of the 1952

presidential election. Political involvement was measured by the number

of media respondents reported using to monitor the progress of the

campaign. To measure the stability of partisan attitudes, two differ-

ent indices were used. The first was the rate of turnover between

statements of vote intentions prior to the election and actual voting

behavior. This was measured by a 2 x 2 table (party intention by party

choice) and a 3 x 3 table (vote intention by vote).[31] A second index

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[31]The table is based on the following options: a Republican vote,
a Democratic vote, or a failure to vote.

of electoral change or stability was the defection rate of party
identifiers (party identification x vote).

The results tended to support Converse's revision of the hypothe-
sis. Those at the lowest and highest ends of the exposure continuum
demonstrated the most stability. Where exposure was lowest, change was
practically non-existent. As individuals encountered new information
due to increased exposure to the media, instability also increased.
Where exposure increased to the maximum level, the trend was reversed
and a greater resistence to change was again demonstrated.

Edward Dreyer's replication of Converse's effort challenged the
revision and makes a case for the traditional interpretation of the
floating voter hypothesis. Where Converse used 1952 data only, Dreyer
in addition used SRC data from subsequent elections. Two approaches
were employed. Applying the same tests and procedures Converse used
with the 1952 data, Dreyer tested the reformulated hypothesis against
pooled SRC data from 1952-1964 and against individual elections from
1952-1968. The correlations that emerged from the pooled data for the
party intention by party choice and vote intention by vote choice
measures supported Converse's revision. It was the party identifica-
tion by party vote measure, however, where support for the revised
version of the hypothesis broke down. Dreyer's findings for this
measure pointed to a much more linear trend, which is characterized by
the traditional floating voter hypothesis.

When the revised hypothesis was applied against individual elec-
tions, Dreyer found that the set of findings characterizing the 1952

elections "breaks down with virtually each successive election."[32]

Except for a minor deviation in the vote intention by vote choice test, the predicted trend held only for the election of 1956. In the party intention by party choice test, only the election of 1968 provided correlations that conform with the expectations of the revised hypothesis. Moreover, the predicted dramatic change from stable preferences among those with no exposure to very unstable choices among those with minimal exposure failed to materialize. In most cases, stability tended to increase rather than decrease. For the party identification by party vote test, Dreyer found that the relationship declined with each passing election and at every level of media exposure.

The lack of any consistent support for the revised hypothesis led Dreyer to conclude that the 1952 findings were perhaps the exception rather than the rule. In the conclusion he summed up his findings as follows:

> Some "educated guesses" about the impact of political
> communication on electoral choices suggest the following
> conclusions. First, with the growing availability of
> mass media (primarily television since 1952), and the
> increased utilization of the media by candidates and
> parties, the flow of short-term political stimuli--both
> during campaigns and in the lengthy lulls between them--
> has affectively penetrated all segments of the elec-
> torate. These data also suggest that the more or less
> immediate circumstances that surround any given election
> have eroded and probably will continue to erode the
> stabilizing influences normally associated with the
> electorate's partisan loyalties. This weakening of
> the party identification--party vote relationship will
> be manifested across the total electorate. Finally,
> Converse's modification of the floating voter hypothe-
> sis, while probably applicable to an earlier era of

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[32]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXIV (Fall, 1971), p. 551.

rather weak political communication, no longer seems to apply to the current situation. If anything, the data presented in this paper suggest that the traditional floating voter hypothesis applies to both the inter- and intra election situation.[33]

It is apparent, then, that the current understanding of the floating voter during the intra-election period is clouded by conflicting findings. Therefore, the purpose of this study will be to submit the traditional and revised floating voter hypotheses to an independent test in an attempt to shed some light on the validity of one or the other. Chapter II will be devoted to the test, which will entail some changes in the methods employed by Converse and Dreyer. These methods will be discussed in the methodological section of this chapter. The third chapter, contingent upon the findings of the test, will entail a discussion of the underlying assumptions of the hypotheses.

Hypotheses

Both Converse and Dreyer employ a political information scale which can be conveniently structured as high, medium and low. Therefore, the hypotheses will be stated in the following manner:

Given three levels of political information--high, medium and low:

1) Voters possessing high and low levels of political information will demonstrate greater stability in their voting preferences than voters with medium levels of political information.

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[32]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXIV (Fall, 1971), p. 553.

2) Voters possessing high levels of political information will
demonstrate greater stability in their voting preferences than voters
with medium or low levels of political information.

Methodology

The data for this study will be based on a multistage probability
sample survey of the presidential and senatorial campaigns in the State
of Oklahoma during 1972.[34] In addition, data on the Democratic
senatorial primary campaign is available and will be employed. The
survey contains a sample size of 500, and a panel of 250 respondents
was established through a second interview by telephone at the end of
the campaign. The information contained in the survey allows for cer-
tain changes in the methods used by Converse and Dreyer. These altered
methods and the reasons for their use will be discussed in the following
paragraphs.

One of the strengths of The People's Choice was its panel design.
Respondents' pre-campaign voting choices were registered and then
judged against any fluctuations which occurred during the campaign.
Since any study of information flow and the floating voter is essentially
one of the impact of a campaign on voting preferences, this would seem
to be a sensible and logical procedure to follow. Yet, the SRC
surveys, upon which Converse's and Dreyer's studies are based, were not
conducted until the month of October.[35] In other words, the respondents'

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[34]The survey was conducted by Professor Thomas G. Kielhorn, Political
Science Department, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma.

[35]Inter-University Consortium for Political Research, The 1964 SRC
Study (Ann Arbor, 1971).

initial voting preferences were not registered prior to the campaigns but at least two months after they had begun. The problem with this procedure is obvious. It is quite possible that a voter might have switched his voting preference during that period of the campaign prior to the interview; but, if he voted in accordance with his initial response, the fact that he "floated" would never be recorded.

Another problem is presented by the measures of attitude stability. Party intention by party choice, vote intention by vote, and party identification by vote, when used as measures of attitude stability, make it very difficult to monitor the activities of independents. Converse alluded to this problem in his discussion of these measures: "Since the ultimate voting act consisted of a Republican vote, a Democratic vote, or a failure to vote, it was inconvenient to consider any respondents who were unclear as to their vote intention before the election."[36] Yet it is the indecisive, apathetic independent who is most likely to be unclear as to his vote intention before the election; and he is also the most likely to be a floating voter. It would appear that if these measures were based upon specific candidate choice or a lack of candidate choice instead of party preference, much of this problem could be obviated.

Candidate choice instead of party preference also could aid in dealing with another problem presented by the attitude stability measures. It can best be explained by the following example. Although voting behavior studies demonstrate that the votes of the vast majority

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[36]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New York, 1966), p. 145.

of the electorate are determined by party identification, the studies also demonstrate that a much smaller portion of the electorate casts its votes by crossing party lines. Much of this switching is associated with the short-term forces of a campaign. However, let us assume that a voter who identified with the Democratic party had benefitted handsomely from the policies of the Nixon administration. On the basis of these benefits the voter decided before the campaign that he would vote for President Nixon. During the campaign he perceived the Democratic candidate advocating policies which ran counter to the benefits he had received. He therefore maintained his pre-campaign choice and eventually cast his vote for President Nixon. Attitude stability measures based on party preference would label him a floater when, in fact, the campaign had failed to induce him to switch. Attitude stability measures based on candidate choice would have labeled him for what he actually was--a stable voter.

In fairness to the Converse study, it should be pointed out that the use of party preference measures was dictated in large part by Converse's interest in the impact of information flow on partisan stability and the discussion just conducted was in no way meant to detract from the importance or significance of that study. What is being argued, however, is that if a study of information flow and the floating voter were to be based on the changes alluded to in that discussion, perhaps a different slant on the question could be arrived at which could shed some light on the conflict between the traditional and revised versions of the floating voter hypothesis.

The Oklahoma survey presents such an opportunity. The first interviews were conducted in March and April of 1972. This was well in

advance of the presidential, senatorial and Democratic senatorial

primary campaigns. Each respondent indicated his candidate preference,

or lack of one, for each race at this point. The panel was completed

late in October, 1972 with the telephone interviews. At this point

respondents were again asked to state their candidate preferences for

the presidential and senatorial races, and how they voted in the

Democratic senatorial primary race. Thus, there is measurement prior

to and at the end of the campaigns with a measure of stability based

on candidate choice.

For the purpose of this study, the floating voter will be defined

as any voter who switched from his pre-campaign choice. The following

categories will be used: 1) standpatters - those who expressed a

candidate choice at the first interview and expressed the same choice

at the second interview; 2) converters - those who expressed a candi-

date choice at the first interview and expressed a different candidate

choice at the second interview; 3) waverers - those who expressed a

candidate choice at the first interview and were unsure and expressed

no candidate choice at the second interview; and 4) crystallizers -

those who expressed no candidate choice at the first interview but did

express a candidate choice at the second interview.

Although the concept of "mass" is essential to Converse's revision

of the traditional hypothesis, levels of stored political information

are not measured by a political information scale per se. Instead, a

surrogate measure based on the number of media a respondent utilizes to

monitor the progress of a campaign is employed. For example, it is

assumed that a voter who monitors a campaign through the use of tele-

vision, radio, newspapers and magazines will possess a higher level of

stored political information than a voter who monitors the campaign

through television and radio only. Converse refers to this surrogate

measure as crude but serviceable and justifies its use because voting

behavior studies demonstrate a high correlation between the number of

media a person uses to monitor a campaign and his store of historically

rooted political information.[37] This study will employ the same surro-

gate measure and will categorize it in the following manner: low--0-1

medium; medium--2-3 media; high--4 media. A further control will be

employed to serve as a check on the validity of the surrogate political

information scale. The Oklahoma survey contains a political informa-

tion scale based on candidate knowledge prior to the campaign. Prior

information of the candidates or a lack of it would more specifically

point to levels of political information and its relationship to sta-

bility during the campaigns.

Five tests of the floating voter hypotheses will be conducted. The

first will test information flow against stability for candidate

preferences in the presidential campaign. The second will test the

same data but control for prior information. The same procedures will

be applied to the senatorial campaign (tests 3 and 4). The senatorial

primary campaign will provide a somewhat different test because of its

low-stimulus nature as opposed to the high-stimulus nature of the other

two campaigns. As was pointed out earlier, low-stimulus elections

attract the highly partisan and the less involved voter tends to drop

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[37]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of
Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E.
Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New
York, 1966), p. 144.

out.[38] The media also tend to reinforce the partisanship of those who strongly identify with their party. However, in a party primary the stabilizing aspects of party identification are absent. Thus, the tendency to float could possibly be heightened.

Each test will be plotted graphically, pitting information flow against stability. A linear trend would tend to support the traditional floating voter hypothesis; a curvilinear or J-shaped trend would tend to support the revised version of the hypothesis (see page 19).

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[38]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller, and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New York, 1966), p. 142.

CHAPTER II

TESTING THE HYPOTHESES

Test Procedure

The major thrust of the Converse and Dreyer studies centers on the

impact of the mass media on voting preferences during a political cam-

paign. Using pooled data from the presidential elections of 1952 - 1968

Dreyer found confirmation for Converse's three-by-three (vote intention

by vote choice) and two-by-two (party intention by party choice) tests.

In each, Converse's predicted J-shaped curves emerged. In the party

identification by party vote test, however, the result was that of a

more linear trend, which tended to dispute Converse's revision of the

traditional floating voter hypothesis.

When the Converse hypothesis was tested in individual elections

from 1952 - 1968, even less confirmation was found. The results of the

three-by-three and two-by-two tests were uneven, and the party identi-

fication by party vote test again resulted in a linear trend. Thus,

while at least partial confirmation was found for the first two tests,

the major area of dispute centered on the third test. Dreyer summed

up his findings on this test in the following manner: "But the data

most damaging to Converse's modified hypothesis are found in the party

identification--party vote test. In none of the elections do the pre-

dicted J-shaped curves emerge."[1]

Converse's revision of the traditional floating voter hypothesis

was based on data from the presidential election of 1952 and Dreyer's

replication was an attempt to test its current validity. On the basis

of the conflict which emerged between the two studies, especially the

party identification by party vote test, Dreyer went on to conclude

that the increased use of the mass media by candidates and political

parties has effectively penetrated all segments of the electorate. This

penetration has, in turn, eroded partisan loyalties. While Converse's

revision of the traditional floating voter hypothesis may have applied

to an earlier era of rather weak political communication, it is no

longer relevant to the current situation. Instead, Dreyer's replication

of the Converse study indicates that the traditional floating voter

hypothesis gives a more accurate description of the current behavior

of the electorate.

To accurately measure the impact of a media campaign on an elec-

tion, the methodology employed should be as accurate and critical as

possible. In the methodological section of Chapter I an alternative

to the tests used by Converse and Dreyer was discussed. It was argued

that the tests contained certain faults. More specifically, the tests

excluded independents because of their party identification orientation.

In addition, the data for the tests were gathered late in the cam-

paigns. These procedures, in effect, exclude that portion of the

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[1]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some Politi-
cal Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarterly,
XXXV (Fall, 1971), p. 552.

electorate most likely to float and could easily fail to uncover those who floated before the initial interview. Therefore, tests based on candidate choice, instead of party identification with the initial interview taken prior to the campaign, should give a more accurate picture of who floats due to the impact of the media during a political campaign. These revised measures will serve as the basis for the five major tests to be conducted in this chapter. However, prior to conducting these tests, presidential and senatorial data from the Oklahoma Survey will be analyzed in terms of party identification by party vote. This will be done for the following reasons: 1) the party identification by party vote test is the major area of conflict between the studies conducted by Converse and Dreyer; and 2) the party identification by party vote test will serve as a backdrop against which the revised measures can be compared and contrasted. Therefore, the tests which immediately follow are based on the party identification by party vote measure employed by Converse and Dreyer.

Party Identification by Party Vote

To conduct these tests the following procedure was followed. All respondents were categorized in terms of their party identification. Once party identification was determined, all respondents who voted with their party were analyzed in terms of media use. If the Converse revision of the floating voter hypothesis is correct, the J-shaped curve indicating two types of floating voters should emerge. If Dreyer is correct, the percentage of party loyalty should decrease with decreasing levels of information.

The Presidential Test

The results of this analysis for the presidential election are found in Table IV (page 33) and no strong confirmation for either hypothesis is discernable. Those respondents employing zero to one medium were stable in their voting preferences fifty-two percent of the time; those employing two media were stable fifty percent of the time, those employing three media were stable fifty-five percent of the time, and for the four media respondents the rate of stability was fifty-seven percent. Although there is a very slight dip in the two media category, it does not begin to approximate the dramatic step change which Converse predicts. With the exception of the two media category, there would seem to be a very slight, but steady, upward progression which would tend to support the Dreyer interpretation. However, the curve which emerges is very flat, and since there is very little meaningful variation in these figures, one could be led to conclude that this test fits neither of the predicted projections.

The Senatorial Test

When the party identification by party vote test is applied to the senatorial data, relatively strong support for the Converse interpretation is demonstrated. The results of this test are found in Table V (page 33). Those respondents monitoring zero to one medium were stable seventy percent of the time, those monitoring two media were stable only fifty-six percent of the time; those monitoring three media were stable sixty-seven percent of the time; and the four media respondents were stable seventy-five percent of the time. As Table V

TABLE IV

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN PRESIDENTIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
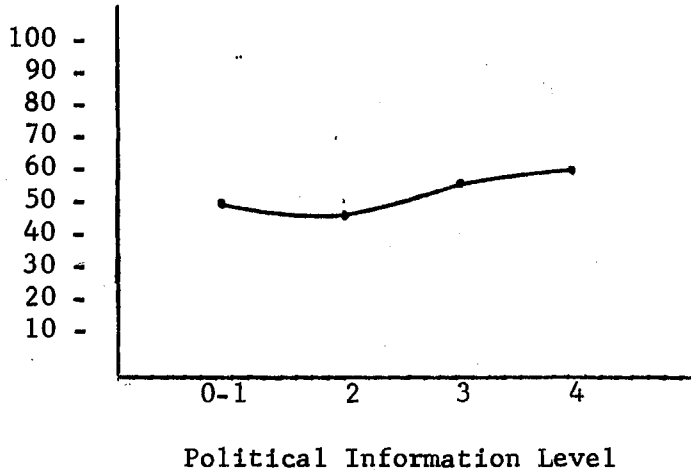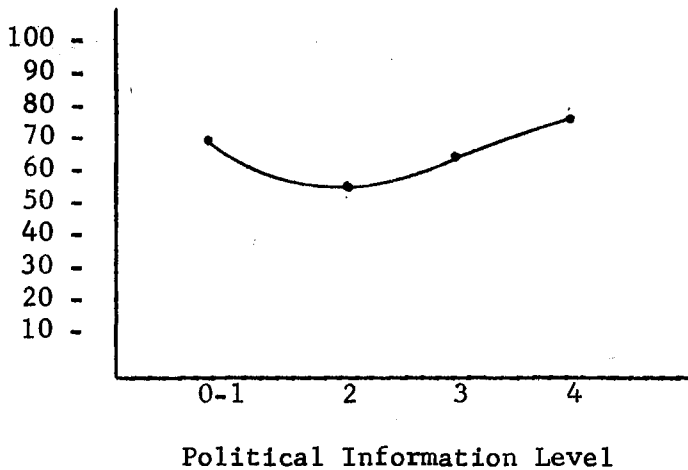
Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

TABLE V

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

demonstrates, Converse's predicted J-shaped curve clearly emerges. The predicted step change from zero to one medium to two media is clearly evident and the middle levels of media use exhibit less stability than the two extremes.

The question which immediately arises is why do neither of the predicted curves emerge from the presidential data? One explanation could be, quite simply, that the predictions of both Converse and Dreyer are incorrect. However, in light of the curve which emerges in the senatorial data, this does not appear to be adequate. Since the presidential curve is a composite of the vote of both Democrats and Republicans, the party identification by party vote test was applied to each party individually in an attempt to shed some light on the results of the presidential test.

The Presidential Test (By Party Breakdown)

The results of this test for the Democrats are contained in Table VI (page 35), and Table VII (page 35) contains the results for the Republicans. As Table VI demonstrates, Converse's predicted curve holds true for the Democrats. For the Republicans there is partial confirmation of the Converse prediction. The step change from zero to one medium to two media use is evident, but the three media category demonstrates slightly higher stability than the zero to one medium category. Although the medium levels of media use do tend to demonstrate a higher tendency to float than the high and low levels, it is interesting to note that among the Democrats Converse's curve emerges in spite of the fact that the voting behavior of the Democrats deviates from SRC theory, which is the basis for Converse's floating voter

TABLE VI

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN PRESIDENTIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
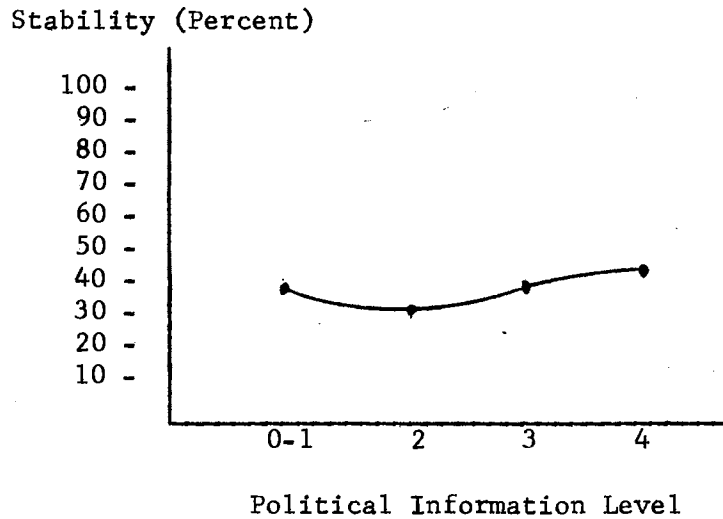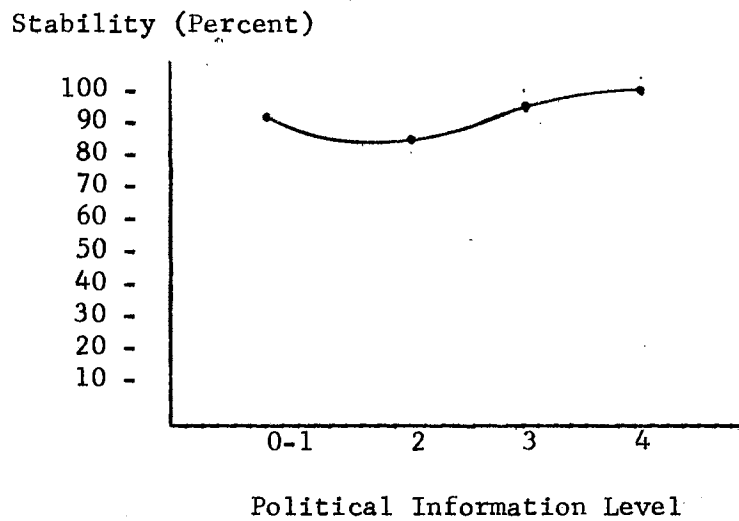(DEMOCRATS)

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

TABLE VII

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN PRESIDENTIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
(REPUBLICANS)

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

formulation.   According to that theory any particular election takes

place within a context of overall stability in party identification.

Variable, short-term influences cause deviations from the basic party

division, and these deviations may determine the outcome of an election.

However, variable, short-term influences do not appear to determine as

many votes as do stable influences such as partisanship.   Yet, among the

Democrats in the presidential race, less than fifty percent supported

the candidate of their party regardless of their media habits.

Conversely, a much higher percentage of the Republicans voted for their

party's candidate.   What this seems to indicate is that a very strong

short-term force overcame the usual Democratic advantage in strength of

party identification.   The 1960 election shows the short-term candidate

image favoring Nixon over Kennedy rather strongly, but this was not

enough for the Republican candidate to overcome the basic Democratic

advantage.[2]   However, in 1964, not only did Johnson have the usual

Democratic advantage in basic strength, but he was viewed much more

favorably by the voters than was Goldwater.[3]   During the four elections

from 1952 - 1964 Goldwater was atypically the only candidate to be

viewed more negatively than positively by the electorate.[4]   Whether due

to candidate perception or some other short-term force, it would appear

that the election of 1972 was also atypical.   The atypical nature of

this election is the reason for the flatness of the curve in the

presidential test.   When broken down by party rather handsome

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[2]Dan Nimmo, The Political Persuaders (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1970), p. 74.

[3]Ibid.

[4]Ibid.

confirmation for the Converse interpretation is found. However, the vast differences in the percentages of party loyalty between Democrats and Republicans make the curve appear flat when the two are combined.

The Senatorial Test (By Party Breakdown)

The senatorial race, however, is not atypical in that more than a high percentage of both parties supported their candidates. As was noted earlier, the composite curve for this race supports the Converse interpretation. When broken down by party, the curve for the Democrats again supports Converse (Table VIII, page 38). For those employing zero to one medium seventy-one percent voted for the candidate of their party. The dramatic step change is highly evident in the two media category with only forty-seven percent supporting their candidate. From this point the curve swings upward again in the three and four media categories which register sixty-one percent and sixty-eight percent respectively.

It is among the Republicans that the only instance of the Dreyer prediction appears for the party identification by party vote test (Table IX, page 38). For those employing zero to one medium sixty-seven percent voted for their party's candidate. The step change does not appear in the two media category. The percentages for the two, three and four media categories are seventy-two percent, seventy-six percent and one hundred percent respectively. Thus an upward linear trend indicating a correlation between declining loyalty and declining levels of information is demonstrated. When the two curves are joined in the composite, the large dip in the two media category for the Democrats is large enough to make the composite conform to the Converse prediction.

TABLE VIII

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL VOTING
AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
(DEMOCRATS)
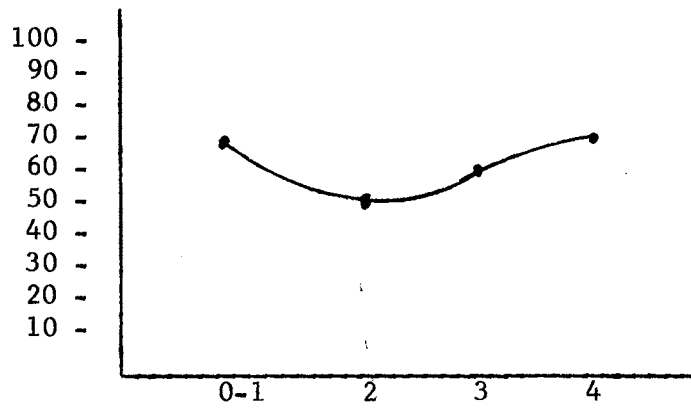
Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level
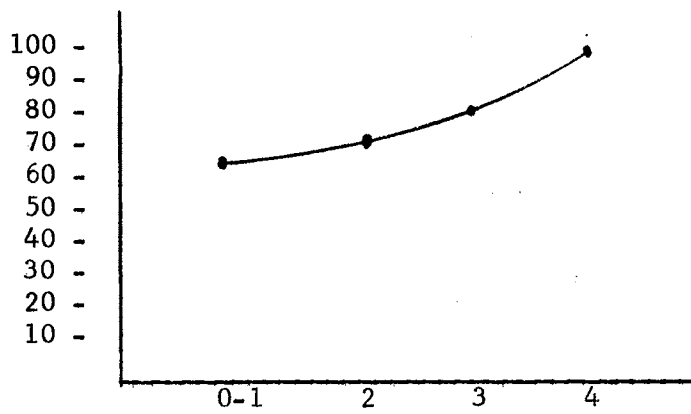
TABLE IX

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL VOTING
AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
(REPUBLICANS)

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

It can be concluded then, that when the data from the Oklahoma Survey is analyzed in terms of party identification by party vote, rather strong support is found for the Converse hypothesis. In the preceeding six tests the major exception to this conclusion is found among the Republicans in the senatorial test (Table IX, page 38). Although the confirmation is not absolute, in most instances those voters in the high and low media-use categories demonstrate less of a tendency to "float" than those in the medium levels of media use. With the conclusion of these tests it is now possible to move on and analyze the Oklahoma Survey data in terms of the revised measures. If the party identification by party vote measures are accurate, a strong similarity between the results of those tests and the results of the tests employing the revised measures should appear.

The Revised Measures

Breakdown of Electorate

For the purposes of this study the floating voter has been defined as any voter who deviates from his pre-campaign candidate choice. Three types of "floaters" were outlined in the methodological section of chapter one--converters, waverers and crystallizers. Those voters who did not deviate were labeled "standpatters". The breakdown of these categories for the presidential election (Table X, page 40) and the senatorial election (Table XI, page 40) shows that the vast majority of voters were standpatters, seventy-one percent and sixty-three percent respectively. The percentage of floaters, especially the waverers and the crystallizers, presented a problem for analysis because they were based on a small number of cases. For example, the percentage of

TABLE X

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	14%	17%	30%	10%	71%
Converters	3%	3%	3%	4%	13%
Waverers	3%	4%	3%	0%	10%
Crystallizers	2%	1%	3%	0%	6%
Total	22%	25%	39%	14%	100%
	N=49	N=57	N=89	N=35	N=230

TABLE XI

SENATORIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	11%	13%	28%	11%	63%
Converters	4%	9%	7%	3%	23%
Waverers	4%	2%	1%	1%	8%
Crystallizers	3%	1%	2%	0%	6%
Total	22%	25%	38%	15%	100%
	N=49	N=57	N=89	N=35	N=230

waverers in the presidential breakdown was based on N's of 6, 9, 6 and

1; the percentage of crystallizers was based on N's of 4, 2, 7 and 1.[5]

The same problem was encountered in the senatorial breakdown. The

original reason for breaking the floaters down into sub-categories of

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[5]The percentages were rounded off to the nearest .5%.

converters, waverers and crystallizers was to analyze whatever similai-

ties or unique characteristics each might possess.   However, the

percentage based on an extremely small number of cases within some of

the cells was misleading and made meaningful analysis difficult.   To

overcome this problem of small numbers the sub-categories were aggre-

gated into the more general category of floaters.   The breakdown of this

aggregated data is found in Tables XII and XIII on page 42.   Thus, where

previous analysis of the crystallizers employing two media in the

presidential election was based on an N of two, analysis of the floaters

employing two media is now based on an N of nineteen.   When the floaters

are combined with the standpatters in the two media category the total

N comes to fifty-seven.   The same process applies to the other media

categories.   The aggregation of this data will in no way affect the

validity of the presidential, senatorial and senatorial primary tests

which follow.   Neither Converse nor Dreyer employed sub-categories for

the purposes of analysis.   Each based his findings on the simple

dichotomy of stable voters and floaters.

The following tests will be based on candidate choice by vote.

The presidential and senatorial data also will be tested for prior in-

formation about the candidates.   This prior information control will be

employed as a check on the validity of the political information scale

employed by Converse and Dreyer.[6]

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[6]See the methodological section of Chapter I, pp. 23-24.

TABLE XII

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN
(AGGREGATED DATA)

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	14%	17%	30%	10%	71%
Floaters	8%	8%	9%	4%	29%
Total	22%	25%	39%	14%	100%
	N=49	N=57	N=89	N=35	N=230

TABLE XIII

SENATORIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN
(AGGREGATED DATA)

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	11%	13%	28%	11%	63%
Floaters	11%	12%	10%	4%	37%
Total	22%	25%	38%	15%	100%
	N=49	N=57	N=89	N=35	N=230

The Presidential Test

When the presidential data is analyzed in terms of candidate choice by vote neither the Converse nor the Dreyer hypothesis is confirmed. The results of this test are found in Table XIV (page 43). Those voters employing zero to one medium exhibited a stability rate of sixty-seven percent. A stability rate of sixty-seven percent was also registered by those voters employing two media. Voters in the three media category were stable seventy-nine percent of the time.

TABLE XIV

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN PRESIDENTIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL
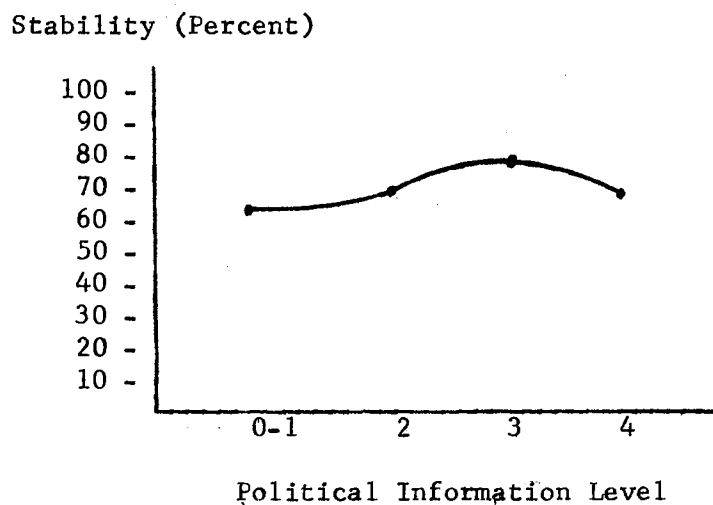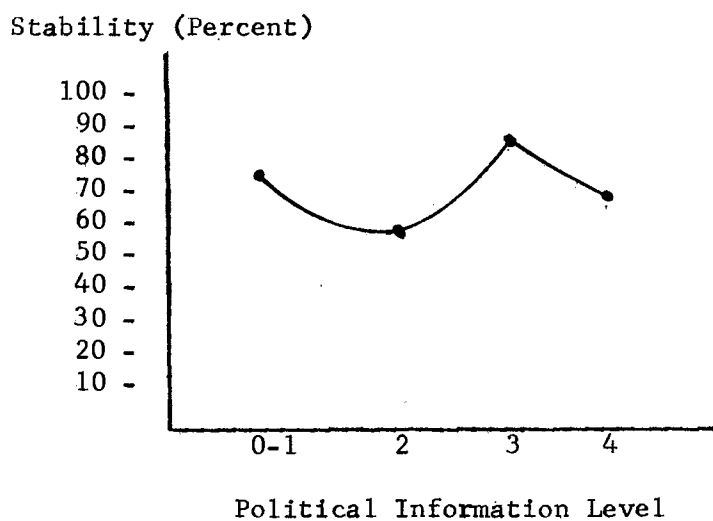
Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

TABLE XV

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN PRESIDENTIAL VOTING
AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL CONTROLLED
FOR PRIOR INFORMATION

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

Up to this point it would appear that rough confirmation for the Dreyer

hypothesis is developing. It is in the four media category, however,

that something unusual occurs. Those voters in the four media category,

instead of exhibiting a rate of stability beyond the seventy-nine percent

found in the three media category, drop to a stability rate of sixty-six

percent. This unusual because neither floating voter hypothesis pre-

dicts such behavior. Converse and Dreyer disagree on the behavior of

voters in the low and medium levels of media use, but both maintain

that those voters employing the highest number of media should exhibit

the highest degree of stability.

There is a possibility that the results of this test are due to the

political information scale employed by Converse and Dreyer. To check

on the validity of this scale a control for prior information was used.

Prior information about the candidates should more specifically point

to levels of political information and their relationship to stability

during a campaign. If Converse and Dreyer are correct, voters in the

four media category should exhibit the highest degree of stability when

the control for prior information is applied.

Prior Information

To control for prior information each respondent was asked a series

of questions concerning the candidates. The responses were then ranked

according to levels of information. The breakdown for this control group

is found in Table XVI (page 45).

When the presidential data is analyzed in terms of prior informa-

tion, the drop in thefour media category is even more pronounced. In

Table XV (page 43) those respondents employing zero to one medium

TABLE XVI

PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN CONTROLLED
FOR PRIOR INFORMATION

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	14%	14%	34%	10%	72%
Floaters	5%	10%	8%	5%	28%
Total	19%	24%	42%	15%	100%
	N=22	N=28	N=47	N=18	N=115

exhibited a stability rate of seventy-three percent; for those employ-
ing two media, the rate was fifty-seven percent; for those employing
three media, the rate jumped back up to eighty-three percent; and for
those employing four media, the rate again dropped, this time to sixty-
seven percent.

Contrary to the predictions of Converse and Dreyer, these tests
would seem to indicate that those voters employing four media to moni-
tor the progress of a political campaign are not more stable than
voters in the other media categories. However, it was pointed out
earlier in this chapter that the presidential election was somewhat
atypical, and this could have had an impact on the results of the pres-
idential test. To further test these findings, a more typical elec-
tion is needed for purposes of comparison. The senatorial test, which
follows, provides an opportunity for such a comparison because it more
closely conforms to what one would expect according to SRC theory.

The Senatorial Test

In the first three media categories of the senatorial test, the curve which emerges very closely resembles the curve produced in the presidential test. The results are found in Table XVII. As one moves across the first three categories of media use, percentages of fifty-one, fifty-three and seventy-three are registered. In the four media category there is again a drop in stability. But the drop is much more slight than in the presidential test, thirteen percent as opposed to two percent. Still, the same general pattern of an upward progression culminating in a drop in the four media category is noted.

TABLE XVII

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level
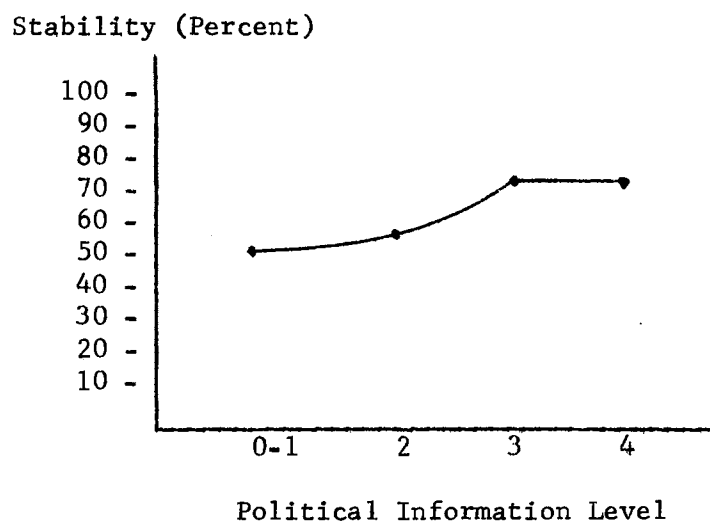
Prior Information

When the senatorial data is controlled for prior information, the
resemblance to the presidential curves is even stronger. The test
results are found in Table XVIII and the breakdown for this control
group is found in Table XIX (page 48). A steady upward progression is
registered as one moves through the first three media categories. Those
respondents employing zero to one medium to monitor the campaign have a
stability rate of fifty percent; those employing two media have a
stability rate of sixty-one percent; and those employing three media
have a stability rate of seventy-seven percent. At sixty-seven percent,
those respondents in the four media category again show a significant
drop.

TABLE XVIII

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL VOTING
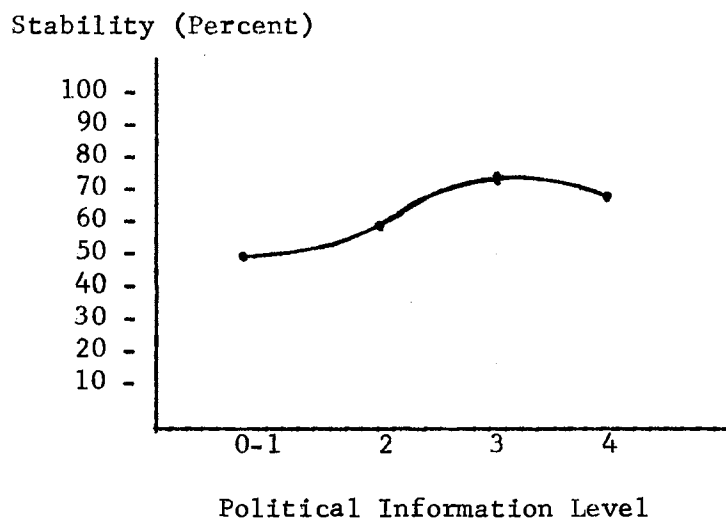AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL CONTROLLED
FOR PRIOR INFORMATION

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

TABLE XIX

SENATORIAL ELECTION BREAKDOWN CONTROLLED
FOR PRIOR INFORMATION

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	10%	15%	31%	10%	66%
Floaters	10%	9%	9%	6%	34%
Total	20%	24%	40%	16%	100%
	N=22	N=28	N=47	N=18	N=100

Senatorial Primary Test

The senatorial primary test concludes the testing for this study. This test was included because it provided a low-stimulus campaign as opposed to the high-stimulus nature of the other two campaigns. According to Converse, partisan deviation depends on the flow of current information. And "the actual flow of information about local candidates for the national Congress. . . is extremely weak."[7] Low-stimulus campaigns attract the highly partisan and the less involved voter tends to drop out. Moreover, the media tend to reinforce the partisanship of those who strongly identify with their party. However, in a primary, the tendency to float could be heightened because the stabilizing aspects of party identification are absent. This would leave information as the major factor determining stability. Therefore, according

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[7]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, Philip E. Converse, Warren E. Miller and Donald E. Stokes, Elections and the Political Order (New York, 1966), p. 145.

to the formulation just outlined, one would expect those possessing the highest levels of information to be the most stable.

Tables XX and XXI provide the breakdown and the results of this test. The stability rates are as follows: zero to one medium--fifty-nine percent; two media--fifty-seven percent; three media--sixty-seven percent; four media--fifty percent. These results follow very closely the patterns established in the presidential and senatorial tests. Those with the highest level of information do not, as predicted by Converse and Dreyer, exhibit the highest degree of stability.
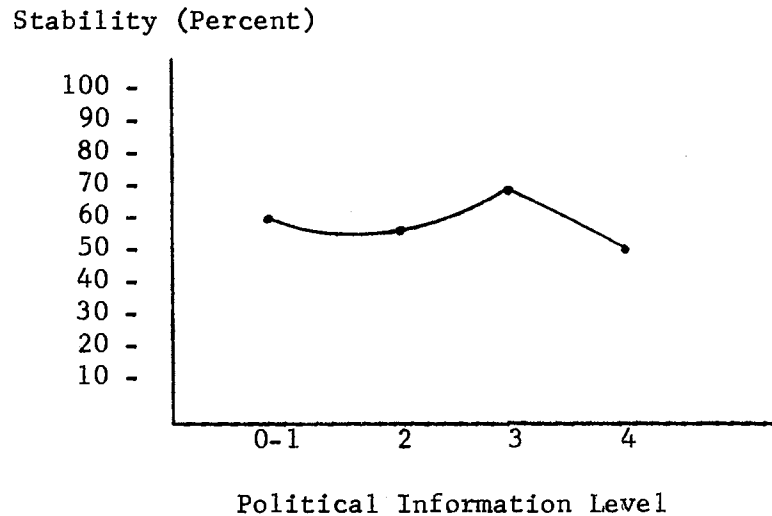
TABLE XX

SENATORIAL PRIMARY BREAKDOWN

Media Use	0-1	2	3	4	Total
Standpatters	12%	14%	26%	8%	60%
Floaters	8%	11%	13%	8%	40%
Total	20%	25%	39%	16%	100%
	N=17	N=21	N=33	N=14	N=85

TABLE XXI

THE ASSOCIATION BETWEEN STABILITY IN SENATORIAL PRIMARY
VOTING AND POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL

Stability (Percent)

Political Information Level

Results

The results of the preceeding tests indicate the following:

1)   The party identification by party vote measures lend rather strong support to Converse's reformulated floating voter hypothesis.

2)   The revised measures support neither the traditional nor the reformulated floating voter hypotheses.

3)   As one moves from low to middle levels of media use, stability tends to increase.

4)   Those respondents possessing the highest level of information do not exhibit the highest level of stability.

5)   When controlled for prior information, the rate of instability, among those possessing the highest level of information, increases.

6)   In the absence of stabilizing partisan influences, those respondents possessing the highest level of information are the least stable.

The third chapter will entail an analysis of the underlying assumptions of the floating voter hypotheses and conclusions, based on the results of the preceeding tests will be discussed. In addition, recommendations for further research will be outlined.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

This study was initiated in an attempt to validate one of two con-
flicting intra-election hypotheses.   Both floating voter hypotheses
employ party identification as a baseline for stability, and both main-
tain that stability is governed by the flow of political information.
Levels of information, from low to high, are determined by the number
of media a voter monitors during the course of a political campaign.
Information levels, in turn, determine stability.   Both Converse and
Dreyer accept this general scheme as a means for determining who will
"float" as the result of the short-term forces generated by a political
campaign.

The hypotheses come into conflict because Converse and Dreyer
disagree on the strength and impact of the media.   Converse maintains
that the flow of information for those at the bottom of the media use
scale is very weak, and in some cases nonexistent.   This extremely
weak or nonexistent flow of information is not sufficient to deflect
the voters in this category from following whatever weak partisan
attachments they may possess.   Conversely, high levels of political
information have been found to correlate strongly with partisanship.
Thus, two types of stable voters should emerge--those in the low and
high categories of media use.   Those voters in the middle levels of

media use are the most likely to float because they do receive a flow of information strong enough to deflect them from their partisan attachments, but it is not as strong as the flow chich reinforces the partisanship of those in the high media category.

Dreyer, on the otherhand, states that Converse's hypothesis was probably applicable to an earlier era of weaker political communication, but it no longer applies because the media have now penetrated "all segments of the electorate."[1] This being the case, those voters at the bottom of the media use scale no longer function in an environment where the flow of information is extremely weak or nonexistent. Therefore, there can no longer be two types of stable voters. Instead, Dreyer maintains that this increased flow of political information is now eroding partisanship; and, as levels of information decrease, stability increases.

On the basis of the tests conducted in the preceding chapter, it must be concluded that neither hypothesis has been substantiated. The revised measures substituted candidate choice for party identification as a baseline for stability, and the relationship between media use and levels of information was tested by controlling for prior information. These changes did not alter the basic scheme employed by Converse and Dreyer. Stability was still gauged by the flow of political information. In none of the tests did the predicted curves emerge. Those voters in the low and medium levels of media use tended to conform to

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[1]Edward C. Dreyer, "Media Use and Electoral Choices: Some Political Consequences of Information Exposure," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXIV (Fall, 1971), p. 552.

Dreyer's prediction in most cases.[2] The predictions of both hypotheses

broke down, however, in the high media use category. In none of the

tests did the voters in this category exhibit the highest degree of

stability. When controlled for prior information and when partisan

influences were removed, their rate of instability increased.[3]

By concluding that the increased flow of political information has

now penetrated "all segments of the electorate," Dreyer seems to be

assuming that the impact of information flow on voters in each of the

media categories is proportional. In other words, the impact of infor-

mation flow for voters inthe three media category would be approximately

three-fourths of the impact for voters in the four media category; the

impact for voters in the two media category would be approximately one-

half of the impact for voters in the four media category, and so on.

This is in line with Dreyer's predicted upward linear curve.

On the basis of the tests conducted in this study, it could be

argued that neither Converse nor Dreyer is correct in assessing the

impact of information flow. The behavior of the voters in the four

media category suggests two alternative explanations. First, it is

possible that the actual strength of the flow of information falls

between the Converse and Dreyer estimations. The increased flow of

information may be eroding stability in only the four media category

while not affecting the others. Thus, penetration is not complete.

Second, if all media categories have been penetrated by the increased

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[2]See Table XIV, page 46, and Table XVI, page 48 in Chapter II.

[3]See Table XV, page 46, and Table XVII, page 49 in Chapter II.

flow of communication, it is possible that the intensity of its destabilizing effects are not proportional, but is much more strongly felt by voters in the four media category than in the other media categories. If the media penetration Dreyer speaks of does not exist, Converse's predicted curve should have emerged in the tests. If the media penetration does exist, Dreyer's predicted curve should have emerged.

One of the major assumptions of both hypotheses is that high levels of information correlate strongly with voting stability. To measure levels of information, Converse and Dreyer employ a surrogate scale based on media use. It is assumed that the higher the number of media a voter employs to monitor a political campaign, the more stable the voter will be. The results of the tests conducted in this study point to a different form of behavior. In none of the tests did those voters possessing the highest level of information exhibit the highest degree of stability. It must be concluded, therefore, that conformation for the theoretical basis of this surrogate measure was not found. The results of this study indicate that the theoretical explanations underlying both floating voter hypotheses have not been borne out. V. O. Key has stated, "Given the limits of knowledge of the political role and effects of mass communications, about all that can be done is to make educated guesses around the edges of the problem."[4] Dreyer, in referring to this quote, summed up his conclusions in terms of "educated guesses". Although the behavioral sciences have not been highly successful in analyzing the impact of the mass media on political

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[4] V. O. Key, Jr., <u>Public Opinion and American Democracy</u> (New York, 1961), p. 345.

campaigns, the results of the tests conducted in this study do indicate that certain methodological refinements need to be made. These refinements could, perhaps, shrink the edges of the problem to which Key alludes.

Recommendations for Further Research

Any study of the floating voter is essentially a study of the impact of information flow on voting preferences during a political campaign. Two measures are necessary--a measure of stability, and a measure of information flow. The two variables which represent these measures are candidate choice and media use. These variables conveniently lend themselves to analysis through the use of the panel technique. As Peter Rossi has pointed out: "The value of this technique stems from its ability to detect and interrelate changes in a set of mutually interacting variables."[5] Its use, then, depends to a large extent on the two empirical characteristics to which it may be applied: First, changes must occur in the dependent variable--in this case candidate choice; and second, the independent variable--media use--must be related to that change. The superiority of candidate choice over party identification was discussed earlier in this study and its use appears to be essential. However, refinements need to be made for the information flow variable.

The major problem with the surrogate media use scale employed by Converse and Dreyer is that it stresses the quantity of media over the

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[5] Peter H. Rossi, "Four Landmarks in Voting Research," in Eugene Burdick and Arthur J. Brodbeck, <u>American Voting Behavior</u> (New York, 1959, p. 342.

quality of media. No distinction is made between radio, television, newspapers, and magazines. This, to a certain extent, leaves us in the dark when it comes to analysis. For example, did those respondents in the four media category have a higher tendency to float than those in the three media category because that extra medium they employed was not employed by those in the three media category? Or, was the difference due to some unique behavior characteristic resulting from a combination of all four media? In addition, there are also different points of view expressed in the high-effort media (newspapers and magazines). How does a respondent who reads Newsweek differ, in terms of voting stability, from a respondent who reads National Review? It should be possible to structure a survey questionnaire to take these questions into account. After gathering the information on both the quantity and quality of the media, more refined categories of media use could then be established. Each could then be analyzed against candidate choice to determine levels of stability.

The analysis of sub-categories of floaters--converters, waverers and crystallizers--in terms of media use could also shed some light on the nature of the floating voter. However, this procedure would call for a sample size much larger than the one employed in this study.[6] After establishing these sub-categories, an analysis of the media habits of each could be conducted to ascertain whatever similarities or unique characteristics each may possess.

These recommendations suggest the need for a more detailed analysis of the floating voter. It should be noted, though, that once a

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[6] This problem of sample size is dealt with in Chapter II, pp. 42-44.

methodology is formulated to analyze the floating voter, it runs the

risk of becoming obsolete. In this connection, V. O. Key has alluded

to the need for careful and precise study over long periods of time.

> In the short run, the hazard of the snapshot view is that
> we take the finding of the moment to represent a truth not
> time-bound. As surveys are conducted under more and
> differing conditions, it becomes evident that many of the
> variables once thought to be determinative of individual
> voting behavior are determinative only under particular
> conditions, which have not been specified with precision.
> The marked changes in the relevance of socio-economic
> status for the vote since 1940 perhaps best illustrate
> the point.[7]

Dreyer concedes that Converse's reformulated floating voter hypothesis

accurately reflected the relationship between stability and information

flow during an era of relatively weak political communication. However,

changes in technology and the nature of the media made the hypothesis

a captive of the era in which it was formulated.

Assessment

This paper has been concerned primarily with analyzing the con-

flict between two intra-election hypotheses. Having analyzed this

incompatability, it would perhaps be appropriate to put the question of

the relationship between the mass media and the floating voter into

perspective. First, how important is this relationship; and second, to

what extent can it explain the overall behavior of the electorate

during a campaign? Any attempt to respond to the first question would

obviously be value-laden. Keeping this in mind, an attempt will none-

the less be made.

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[7]V. O. Key, Jr., "The Politically Relevant in Surveys," Public
Opinion Quarterly, XXIV (Fall, 1960), p. 56.

In addition to the reasons outlined in the rationale for this study[8], another factor relating to the importance of the relationship between the mass media and the floating voter emerged during analysis of the tests. The importance of this factor is, for the most part, conjectural. Converse concedes that his reformulated floating voter hypothesis "may appear to be of limited significance, simply because of the meager proportions of voters who fall in the 'no media' cell where presidential campaigns are concerned."[9] Dreyer interpreted this problem to be the result of increased media-use. If Dreyer is correct in assuming that the increasing use of the media is contributing to increasing electoral instability, the significance of the relationship would be enhanced. Instead of the vast majority of voters being committed during the campaign, more and more would be susceptible to campaign appeals via the media. Although this sitution was discussed in the conclusions of this study, it was by no means confirmed. To do so would require lengthy study over a long period of time. Aside from the possibility just discussed, the importance of the relationship between the mass media and the floating voter, at the present time, rests with the ability of the mass media to generate short-term forces among that minority of the electorate which is uncommitted during a campaign. This minority is large enough to swing an election one way or the other.

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[8]See pages 1-5 in Chapter I.

[9]Philip E. Converse, "Information Flow and the Stability of Partisan Attitudes," in Augus Campbell, et al., Elections and the Political Order (New York, 1966), p. 149.

In responding to the second question, it should be noted that the

mass media are but one of several factors which influence the overall

behavior of the electorate during a campaign. Dan Nimmo, in referring

to the limiting conditions in the communication setting, states that

"mass communications, including those in a political campaign, are but

one set of influences contributing to attitude-change; any message is

but one stimulus working amid others in a total situation."[10] Among

these other stimuli, according to Nimmo, are the personal predisposi-

tions and personalities of individuals, their social ties, the credi-

bility of sources of information, and the form of a communicated

message. All of these "limit the independent effectiveness of commu-

nications in changing attitudes and, through attitudes, behavior."[11]

Although the precise impact of the mass media in this overall context

is not known, its importance is clear. No politician contesting high

public office would allow his opponent to monopolize the mass media.

We tend to consider the mass media important without knowing precisely

why. It is hoped that this study of the floating voter, might at

least in a small way, aid in answering that question.

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[10]Dan Nimmo, The Political Persuaders (Englewood Cliffs, New
Jersey, 1970), p. 168.

[11]Ibid., p. 173.

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APPENDIX A

MEDIA USE

APPENDIX A

MEDIA USE

My name is _____ from Oklahoma State University. My
class in public opinion is conducting a short survey on what kind of
things are on the Oklahoma voters minds. I would like to ask you a few
questions like:

5.   Yesterday, did you happen to:

(5) (a) read about politics, or public   Yes........1   no.........2
          affairs in a daily newspaper?   No paper...3   Not sure...4
          Which paper do you take?

          _____

(6) (a) listen to any program on about   Yes, news..1   Yes, other.2
          politics or public affairs on   No.........3   Not sure...4
          the radio?

(7) (a) watch any programs on public   Yes, news..1   Yes, other.2
          affairs or politics on tele-   No.........3   Not sure...4
          vision?

(8) (a) do you subscribe to any maga-
          zine that frequencly runs
          stories on public affairs or
          politics? If yes, which ones:

          _____

          _____

APPENDIX B

POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL

APPENDIX B

POLITICAL INFORMATION LEVEL

My name is _____ from Oklahoma State University. My class in public opinion is conducting a short survey on what kind of things are on the Oklahoma voters minds. I would like to ask you a few questions like:

18a. Now I would like to get your opinion on some of the potential presidential candidates. (Show ATTITUDE SCALE TO R). How would you rate _____ on this scale?

	Very Fav.	Fav.	Slightly Fav.	Neutral	Slightly Unfav.	Unfav.	Very Unfav.	
Hubert Humphrey	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(1)
Edmond Muskie	6	5	4	0	3	2	1 1	(2)
George McGovern	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(3)
Henry Jackson	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(4)
John Lindsey	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(5)
Edward Kennedy	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(6)
Wilbur Mills	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(7)
George Wallace	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(8)
Richard Nixon	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(9)
Ronald Reagan	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(10)
Paul McClosky	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(11)
John Ashbrook	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(12)
Spiro Agnew	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(13)
Nelson Rockefeller	6	5	4	0	3	2	1	(14)

12. Do you happen to know who is the U. S. Congressman from this (53) district? _____ If R IS CORRECT, Ask: Do you happen to know what party he belongs to? _____

13. Who is the state Representative from this district? _____ (54) _____ Party: _____

14. Who is state senator from this district? __ _____ (56) Party: _____

APPENDIX C

CANDIDATE CHOICE

APPENDIX C

CANDIDATE CHOICE

My name is _____ from Oklahoma State University.
My class in public opinion is conducting a short survey on what kind of
things are on the Oklahoma voters minds. I would like to ask you a
few questions like:

22. If the election were being held today, who would be your choice
    for President if the candidates were:
                                              FOR WALLACE VOTERS:
a. 1. Nixon 2. Muskie   3. Wallace 4. Nixon 5. Muskie   (40)
b. 1. Nixon 2. McGovern   3. Wallace 4. Nixon 5. McGovern   (41)
c. 1. Nixon 2. Humphrey   3. Wallace 4. Nixon 5. Humphrey   (42)
d. 1. Nixon 2. Jackson   3. Wallace 4. Nixon 5. Jackson   (43)
e. 1. Nixon 2. Kennedy   3. Wallace 4. Nixon 5. Kennedy   (44)

26. Who would be your first choice for Democratic nominee for U. S.
    Senator between John Rogers, Charles Nesbitt, Jed Johnson, Ed
    Edmondson, and Fred Harris? _____ (45)
    Who would be your second choice? _____ (46)

27. If the election were being held today for U. S. Senator, who
    would be your choice in a race between: (CIRCLE)

        a. Dewey Bartlett v. Fred Harris   (47)
        b. Dewey Bartlett v. Ed Edmondson   (48)
        c. Dewey Bartlett v. John Rogers   (49)
        d. Dewey Bartlett v. Jed Johnson   (50)
        e. Dewey Bartlett v. Charles Nesbitt   (51)

APPENDIX D

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

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APPENDIX D

PARTY IDENTIFICATION

My name is _____ from Oklahoma State University.
My class in public opinion is conducting a short survey on what kind
of things are on the Oklahoma voters minds. I would like to ask you a
few questions like:

17a. Generally speaking, do you usually think of your-   1. Strong Dem.
      self as a: Democrat, Republican, an Independent,   2. Weak Dem.
      or what?   3. Ind/Dem.
(32) IF DEMOCRAT OR REPUBLICAN, ASK: Would you call   4. Ind.
      yourself a strong Democrat/Republican or a not   5. Ind/Rep.
      very strong Democrat/Republican or a not very   6. Weak Rep.
      strong Democrat/Republican? If INDEPENDENT ASK: 7. Strong Rep.
      Do you think of yourself as closer to the   8. Other
      Republican or Democratic party?

∂

VITA

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