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Book Review of Renewing Presidential Policies: Campaigns, Media, and the Public Interest by Bruce Buchanan

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are unable to evaluate them in the context of a one-year panel study. Consequently, they can only speculate about the possible impact of long-term changes in coverage. In the prominent case of network television, their data indicate the news media failed to satisfy the need for intelligent fare in 1996 among the loyal segment of the news audience that remained throughout the election year. One can only wonder about the reasons for the drop-off of one-time viewers who gave up on the networks long before the panel study began.

What is certain is that their departure did not precipitate movement away from the personalized horserace news panel members found objectionable. So when the authors suggest that mainstream outlets experiment with issue-centered coverage in an effort to improve customer satisfaction, it is with the realization that they have not done so in the past despite a long-term decline in their audience and widespread criticism of their product. Apparently, producers and political reporters do not regard declining audiences as a vote against horserace-heavy, personality-centered election news. The authors may be correct in their assertion that substantive changes in format and approach are the best way for mainstream media to remain competitive in an increasingly fragmented news environment, but it is a message that thus far has held little currency for those who would have to implement change.

Overall, this book is thin on recommendations for improvements even as it identifies key problems with the political information environment. Although the subtitle promises a discussion of remedies and consequences along with a discussion of how the media disappoint voters, the book's true strength is in analyzing the contours of media use and the dimensions of public disaffection. On that score, it provides a bridge between content-based analyses of media performance and the musings of media critics.

Perhaps its most ominous finding is the preference among respondents for more unmediated events, like debate coverage without reporter commentary. This stands out as a glaring vote of no confidence in those whose job it is to provide context for such events, suggesting a public predilection for media over journalism, and pointing to a future where, aided by the Internet, information-seeking may replace reporting. For those like Dautrich and Hartley who are concerned about the problematic nature of political news, it is a clear warning of the challenges that lie ahead. Anyone else concerned with this issue and interested in the particulars of how Americans experience political coverage will find value in this work.

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Renewing Presidential Politics: Campaigns, Media, and the Public Interest. By Bruce Buchanan. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1996; pp.viii + 207. \$60.50 cloth; \$20.95 paper.

Rarely does one hear a positive comment about the way Americans select their presidents. Campaigns, so the critique goes, are too long, too costly, too negative, too superficial, too horse-race oriented; candidates are too glib, pander too much to voter tastes, and fail to address the important issues facing the future of the nation. Is it any wonder that voting in presidential contests hovers dismally around the 52 percent mark?

The method used to select leaders cannot be neutral. Any set of rules rewards some and punishes others. These rules impact the type of person who seeks (or avoids) the contest, the way issues are presented to the public, the level of public debate, and the way governments are legitimized or delegitimized. Bruce Buchanan, the highly respected expert on presidential politics, takes a hard look at the presidential selection process: the good, the bad, and the ugly.

Buchanan uses a comparison between the 1988 and 1992 elections as a jumping off point, arguing that the 1988 election was rather disappointing (negative, not very issue oriented, etc.) but that the 1992 race was closer to what a functional process should look like (more issue discussion, less character assassination, etc.). Interestingly, Buchanan argues that the voters demanded a better and cleaner campaign in 1992, and the politicians delivered. "The leverage," Buchanan writes, "rests with the voters; that the quality [of campaigns] is better when a significant mass of voters demands it, as in 1992" (x).

While critics are accustomed to blaming the candidates, the parties, the media, big monied interests, or special interest groups for the failures of the selection process, Buchanan places responsibility (and thus praise or blame) squarely on the shoulders of the voters: when there is an aroused and interested citizenry, the politicians will usually follow their lead. That voters so rarely seem aroused and demanding is an issue of enormous importance, and one to which the author addresses much of this work.

If left to their own devices, politicians seem, Buchanan argues, to follow some variation on the "Nixon Credo." Nixon exemplifies "in word and deed, the candidate mindset," and "More than anyone else, Nixon set the standard for campaign practices still used by candidates at every level" (41). Buchanan characterizes the Nixon Credo as encompassing the following themes: a) the need for deceit; b) some ends justify extraordinary means; and c) ambition and endurance. Campaigns are about winning, and one does what one must in order to win. Only when citizens demand more of our candidates will they be forced to deliver more. Only when citizens say "enough" will candidates give the voters campaigns that reject the core of the Nixon Credo.

The author then goes into some of the more seamy aspects of the selection process, looking at manipulation versus persuasion, the high costs of presidential campaigning, and the role played by the media. He gives excellent examples of how two issues, welfare and race, are used and misused in presidential campaigns.

Buchanan concludes by returning to the central role voters play in this process, questioning why voters do not use their power to call candidates to account more often. The answer he offers is that the “civic dispositions” of the voters/citizens does not give them a sense that they are “stakeholders” in this process, and so they often fail to exercise the power at their disposal. The typical voter response is “exit, not voice.”

This “thin civic programming” leads to a minimalist, not a robust conception of the role of the citizen in a democracy, but “We are dealing here with socialization effects, not intrinsic limitations” (165). Thus, the author suggests an “alternative civic programming,” one that relies on only a relatively small number of voters “initially perhaps no more than the 5 to 10 percent that has been the typical margin of victory in recent presidential elections” (167), to reinvigorate citizen power.

This valuable and challenging book forces us to reexamine the role of the citizen in a political democracy in a way that both blames and praises the citizen. Buchanan offers hope for improving the presidential selection process by offering hope for a more meaningful form of political democracy, one in which the voter takes control and “forces” candidates to abandon the Nixon Credo in favor of more meaningful and viable forms of democratic campaigning.

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Governing with the News: The News Media as a Political Institution. By Timothy E. Cook. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998; pp. xi + 289. \$17.95 paper.

Timothy E. Cook, professor of political science at Williams College, has written an important book, making a compelling case that the news media are a political institution and that journalists are political actors. Many scholars have argued that journalists are biased, but this book carefully examines the historically close relationship between the government and the mass media and the way news organizations have consistently played a key role in governing that often has not been supportive of democracy. The argument is supported theoretically by an approach that emphasizes American political development—the comparative politics of institutions over time—and a focus on the “new institutionalism” that is receiving increased attention in political science. Cook exhibits impressive knowledge of the general literature on mass communication and the more narrowly focused literature on political communication. Too often studies that focus on political communication are not informed by theory and research of specialists in communications. In several respects this book represents a much-needed synthesis.

In the introductory chapter, Cook states that he is more interested in developing than testing an empirical theory of the news media as an institution. Theoretical development is necessary according to Cook because the narrow field of political communication has been dominated with a concern with media effects and has