

PERSPECTIVES ON THE 1992 ELECTION

SIX VIEWS OF THE UPCOMING PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION— AS OF OCTOBER 1991

Editor's Note: As part of its on-going coverage of public sentiment bearing on the 1992 elections, Public Perspective asked six leading analysts to describe the presidential race they see shaping up. They responded in mid-October. PERSPECTIVE will provide a range of perspectives throughout the campaign. Specifically, each of our commentators was asked to address the following:

The convention political wisdom on the 1992 presidential election goes something like this: *Of course, we're still a year away from the voting and something might happen. But for now George Bush looks like a shoo-in.*

First, do you for the most part accept or reject this conventional wisdom?

Second, is there a potential Democratic candidate whom you think could beat Bush, or at least give him a tough race? Who, and why?

Third, whom do you see as the most likely Democratic nominee? If you don't expect the party to nominate its strongest contender, why not?

Finally, does the 1992 contest at this stage seem to resemble any past election? That is, is there any historical precedent that may give us insight into how the '92 race is likely to unfold?

“THE NEXT ELECTION IS MOST LIKE THE LAST ONE”

By Richard J. Cattani, Editor
The Christian Science Monitor

The “best” Democratic candidate has to come from among those who choose to run. If the question were: “Who is the Democratic politician of the greatest stature today?”—in presence, argument, and energy—I would pick Mario Cuomo of New York. In four years, Cuomo will be more formidable, not less; his career curve is still rising.

I can't see how Bush can lose. So the Democratic contenders must have reasons to run other than winning.

The argument that every Democratic congressman is running for himself, that the party is not dedicated to winning the White House, is persuasive. This is a major handicap.

The next election is most like the last one, when Bush first won the presidency. The context remains the Reagan conservative movement, which itself contained a global expansionist element, embracing the Pacific Rim, but which had no inkling of what was to come in Europe.

Politics for the new global world is up for grabs. The Democrats would be mistaken to make it an isolationist game and concede expansionism to the GOP.

“THE BIG QUESTION IS WHETHER THE ECONOMY WILL BE STRONG ENOUGH FOR...BUSH TO HAVE LONG COATTAILS”

By Richard L. Leshner, President
Chamber of Commerce of the United States

1. I accept the conventional wisdom.
2. No potential Democratic candidate could beat Bush or even give him a tough race.
3. I have no idea who the Democratic nominee will be, but it certainly will not be the strongest candidate, because the strongest candidates will be smart enough to wait until 1996.

Finally, I do not know of any good parallel from past elections.

It seems to me that the above queries miss the real question of the '92 presidential election: Will the economy be strong enough for President Bush to have long coattails? It is my opinion that if the economy was very solid, the Republican party could pick up many seats in both the House and Senate. Without a strong economy, that big opportunity will be lost.

“MY FEELING...IS THAT WITHIN A SHORT TIME FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES WILL GET CROWDED OFF THE SCENE”

**By Daniel Yankelovich, Chairman
DYG, Inc.**

The conventional wisdom I reject. Nothing at the moment is predictive of what things will be like a year from now. And my feeling is that George Bush is vulnerable—because he has to run out of easy foreign policy victories. Sadaam Hussein was almost a villain sent by central casting: Very threatening, yet easy to defeat. And, the end of the cold war can happen only once every seventy years. These events are so extraordinary that it’s hard to see anything comparable occurring in the next 12 months that Bush could get credit for and take voters’ minds off what bad shape the country is in. My feeling, then, is that within a short time foreign policy issues will get crowded off the scene and the country is going to become preoccupied with its domestic state.

The US is in bad shape domestically—in the area of economic competitiveness, and with regard to social equity. Millions of people are experiencing downward mobility, which is always a formula for instability and unrest. Health care costs are out of control. There is a failure of community—a real moral crisis. The educational system is a mess. It’s hard to remember a time when so little was being done about so many serious problems. It seems to me, then, that if the Democrats are able to put up a credible candidate—which is a big *if*—it could be a real horserace.

The major criterion for a potential candidate would give the president a tough race would be someone who would have credibility in foreign policy. The Democrats don’t need to be seen as strong in foreign policy, but they shouldn’t be perceived as weak and inexperienced. If they are, that puts the voters in a terrible conflict, even if the party’s nominee seems strong in domestic affairs. This foreign affairs criterion sug-

gests the desirability of a candidate like Sam Nunn, or Bill Bradley, or Tom Foley.

I don’t know who’s the most likely Democratic nominee. It’s much too early to tell. I will say that I don’t expect the party to nominate its strongest contender. One reason is that the process now yields candidates who select themselves. And many of the potentially strongest candidates have opted out, for a variety of reasons. A second factor involves the composition of the Democratic convention: These delegates are chosen by primarily voters who do not reflect the electorate. A candidate who can win in the primaries is less likely to be able to win in the general election.

Is there any historical precedent that may give us insight into how the ’92 race is likely to unfold? In the post-war period, the only election that has certain characteristics in common with the one upcoming is the 1972 Nixon-McGovern race, where a conservative Republican president was running for a second term. His main strength, too, was perceived as being in the foreign policy arena. We don’t know whether history will repeat itself in the sad performance of George McGovern. It will, I think, if the Democrats pick a candidate weak as McGovern was.

There is in the country today a very strong concern about “special interests,” and many of the Democrats’ constituencies are seen as special interests—which is ironic but it is the case. Also the country is not liberal, and the Democratic convention is likely to favor a liberal that would be two strikes against him. A traditional liberal might find himself susceptible on the race issue which the Republicans have been playing rather skillfully though not very admirably. Finding the surefooted way through racial politics in 1992 is going to take a very thoughtful person, and it requires more of a centrist than a liberal.

You can see that I think everything comes down to the choice of the Democratic nominee. For the Democratic candidate to put up a strong race, he would have to have everything going for him.

RE-ELECT THE PRESIDENT?

Question: If the 1992 election were being held today, would you be inclined to vote for George Bush or for the Democratic nominee for president?

George Bush	47%
Democratic nominee	37
Neither (vol.)	4
DK/No opinion	12

Source: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 16-21, 1991.

Question: If the election for President were held today, would you probably vote for George Bush or would you probably vote for the Democratic candidate?

Bush	49%
Democrat	28
Can’t say until chosen (vol.)	19
DK/Other responses	4

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, October 15-18, 1991.

"BUSH HAS HAD THE LUXURY OF NOT HAVING BEEN SEVERELY TESTED POLITICALLY IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS"

**By Will Marshall, President
Progressive Policy Institute**

The conventional wisdom is certainly an accurate assessment of where things stand as of November 1991. Nonetheless, conditions are ripe for a serious challenge to George Bush. A key factor is the softness in the economy. Also, Bush has had the luxury of not having been severely tested politically in the last several years. His high ratings are in large part a reflection of that. So, there really is a chance for us to win this one.

I have to admit it's a long shot. Bush is an incumbent president—they usually win. His record, by no means all to my liking, clearly isn't one of abject failure. Bush has real accomplishments in the foreign policy realm. He was tested by a major crisis—the Gulf War—and that represents a lot of political capital for him going into '92. It's not only a foreign

policy accomplishment, and it's not only that he has astronomically high ratings for his management of national security affairs. It's that his leadership and character have been tested and have passed in the Persian Gulf crisis. It's hard to overstate the value of this as a political asset.

Presidential races are not, however, decided entirely on foreign policy matters, although I think Democrats traditionally have underestimated their impact. Two other broad collections of issues are always pivotal in presidential elections. One is the economy—not only the question of how the country is doing overall vis-a-vis foreign competition, but how the middle class, comprising the bulk of the electorate, are doing. Democrats are shrewdly pitching their appeals to the anxieties of the middle class. The second collection is what I would call cultural politics: issues of race, morality, religion, national identity, citizenship, gender, sexuality. Such issues, as Michael Barone argued in his book, *Our Country*, often trump economic issues in national campaigns—curiously, both parties have traditionally been blind to their power, and have overestimated the centrality of economic issues. On both the economic and cultural fronts there are grounds for a serious challenge to George Bush, and I think we'll see this challenge made effectively by a couple of the first tier Democratic candidates.

BUSH'S APPROVAL SCORES IN OCTOBER

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?...

Approve	65%
Disapprove	31
DK/No opinion	5

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling his job as president?

Approve	67%
Disapprove	24
DK/NA	9

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling foreign affairs?

Approve	69%
Disapprove	27
DK/No opinion	4

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling foreign policy?

Approve	69%
Disapprove	22
DK/NA	9

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Bush is handling the nation's economy?

Approve	37%
Disapprove	60
DK/No opinion	4

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way George Bush is handling the economy?

Approve	33%
Disapprove	57
DK/NA	10

Source: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 16-21, 1991.

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, October 15-18, 1991.

REPUBLICANS OR DEMOCRATS?

Question: Overall, which party, the Democrats or the Republicans, do you trust to do a better job in coping with the main problems the nation faces over the next few years?

Democrats	39%
Republicans	40
Both equally (vol.)	3
Neither (vol.)	13
DK/No opinion	5

Source: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 16-21, 1991.

Question: Which political party do you think could do a better job of handling the problem you just mentioned (as the most important problem facing the country)—the Republican party or the Democratic party?

Republican	29%
Democratic	30
Both equal (vol.)	4
Neither (vol.)	15
DK/NA	15

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, October 15-18, 1991.

Several Democrats would give George Bush a tough race. Sam Nunn is one of them; he's the only one who would be Bush's equal on national security and defense questions. Nunn would largely neutralize Bush's edge on those issues. He is not someone who could be caricatured as naive or uninformed in this area. The country would be comfortable thinking about Sam Nunn as a potential commander-in-chief. Mario Cuomo would give Bush a tough race, because he's a tough campaigner, but I don't honestly think he would be our strongest challenger.

The most likely nominee is either Bill Clinton or Bob Kerrey. Either can challenge the president effectively. Both represent a new generation of post-ideological candidates whereas Harkin, who might be considered the other first-tier candidate, really represents the old Democratic politics, the old liberal politics, and therefore I don't think is a realistic shot to unseat a fairly popular incumbent. Clinton, though, has a well articulated progressive reform agenda that is distinctly different from what Democrats have offered in past elections, and it goes to many of the front-line worries of the American people. Clinton also is strong because he carries a strong values message, which goes to the cultural issues I referred to. He can speak the moral language of mainstream America better than any of the other Democrats in the race. He'll talk about families and the responsibilities of parents to their children; about the centrality of work; about individual responsibility, that is, looking after one's self and taking responsibility for one's own acts; of staying out of crime and drugs and getting an education; civic responsibility, in terms of giving something back to the country.

Kerrey is also a highly attractive figure, but he's a little less known. He is yet to give voice to his message. He's sounded a few themes, and they're intriguing, but he needs to define

himself a lot more clearly than he has thus far. But he is a member of the new generation...of Vietnam as opposed to the World War II generation. He is a Medal of Honor winner, and he's unconventional in his approach to politics, which I think will stand him in good stead at a time when almost every indication is that the public is deeply disenchanted with politics-as-usual in Washington.

The universe of Democratic voters in the primary season is strongly tilted not simply to the left—because it's not entirely an ideological story—but it's tilted toward the activists and the old-line constituency groups whose influence has been waning everywhere but in the Democratic party. Because these groups dominate the primary season, and because working class or lower middle class Democrats have been dropping out of the primaries in really dramatic numbers, the results are badly skewed. Let me give you one example: In Florida in 1976, 20% of the voting age population participated in the Democratic primary, which was won by Jimmy Carter; he also carried Florida in the general election. In 1988, only 13% of the voting age population participated in the primary won by Michael Dukakis, who never had a realistic chance of beating Bush in Florida and of course didn't. What we're seeing is declining participation—particularly among white, working-class, Southern voters, and white ethnic voters in the North and Midwest. This has skewed the outcome in favor of people who are willing to toe the activist line. Of course this presents terrible problems for us when we go into the general election.

The internal dynamics of the Democratic race suggest some limited parallels to two earlier contests: 1984 and 1964. In 1984 Gary Hart made a strong challenge to liberal orthodoxy and a strong bid to move the party in a dramatically different direction. He was also a candidate of generational change. The problem with Hart was that he didn't have much beyond that

Analysts' Views/Marshall continued

problem with Hart was that he didn't have much beyond that fact. He did not have a progressive agenda that was a successor to the old liberal orthodoxies. In some respects Clinton and Kerrey are on the lineage of Gary Hart and are the challengers of the old orthodoxies. Kerrey less so...He may turn out to be much more conventional.

The reason I think that 1964 may present a parallel is that the Republican party that year—even though it was swamped—set the stage for a victory four years later. It was the beginning of a kind of an ideological ascendancy that peaked in the 1980s. It marked the beginning of a new alignment for Republicans—

that was hard to see, of course, in 1964 given the size of the Democratic victory. Yet we know now that the forces on the ground were changing and aligning in a way such that Republicans could look forward to presidential majorities for the next generation. Even should the Democrats lose in 1992—and I don't think it would be anything like a Goldwater wipeout—with fresh new candidates like Clinton and Kerrey the conditions will be such that they will lay the foundations for a different kind of coalition and for a new face on the Democratic party this will help it finally transcend the vulnerabilities which have been evident in the last 20 years. Democrats need to take the steps now that will enable the party to win in 1996.

"ANALYSTS' VIEWS" CONTINUES AFTER THE PUBLIC OPINION AND DEMOGRAPHIC REPORT

DEMOCRATS RATE THEIR PARTY'S PROSPECTIVE NOMINEES

Question: I'm going to name some public figures and ask what you think of them. If you haven't heard much about someone I name, just tell me. Is your opinion of...favorable, not favorable, undecided, or haven't you heard enough about...yet to have an opinion?

	Favorable	Not Favorable	Undecided	Haven't Heard Enough
Mario Cuomo	29%	9%	11%	49%
Jesse Jackson	29	41	26	3
Jerry Brown	18	17	16	48
Douglas Wilder	11	8	13	67
Bob Kerrey	10	4	10	74
Bill Clinton	9	4	9	76
Tom Harkin	9	4	10	76
Paul Tsongas	7	8	8	76
Dave McCurdy	6	3	9	81

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, October 15-18, 1991. Responses of registered voters who usually vote in Democratic primary elections. "Refused" omitted.

“THE DANGER TO BUSH IS GREATEST IF HE CHOOSES A PLAY-IT-SAFE CAMPAIGN SIMILAR TO REAGAN’S 1984 EFFORT”

**By Edwin J. Feulner, Jr., President
The Heritage Foundation**

I accept, for the most part, the conventional wisdom: That President Bush’s re-election is assured barring a major domestic or international catastrophe. However, it appears quite possible that the election will be of less than the landslide proportions that some now expect, and possibly significantly closer than the 1988 election. If coupled with a congressional performance similar to 1988 (the loss of a few seats), such a result would have to be counted as a vote for “none of the above”: Another rejection of the liberal philosophy, but without an endorsement of a clearly enunciated conservative path. Such a result would leave a then-lame duck Bush unable to govern.

The danger to Bush is greatest if he chooses a play-it-safe campaign similar to Reagan’s 1984 effort. Despite his strength and magnificent performance in foreign affairs, Bush’s economic

performance has been disappointing, and clearly leaves an opening for his Democratic opponent. Fortunately for Bush, he has an obvious way to pre-empt such a challenge: His own economic recovery package emulating the successful tax and spending cuts of the early 1980s. The Democrats remain too wedded to the tax and spend philosophy to effectively counter such a program.

A possibly complementary strategy is the anti-Congress campaign being considered among his advisors. For that theme to be successful, however, the President himself will have to take up the cudgel in a major way, rather than making occasional speeches and leaving the dirty work to Dan Quayle and others. No one can dominate the national agenda as the President can, and if he chooses to play it safe personally, no effort by others can make up for it.

Among Democrats Mario Cuomo would probably give Bush the toughest race, simply because he is the most able advocate of the Democrats’ traditional economic policies. He’s tough enough to avoid some of Dukakis’ mistakes, and he would be particularly effective if Bush fails to take charge on the economy. Of course, Cuomo insists he won’t run. A genuine moderate in the Sam Nunn/Bill Bradley mold could also give Bush difficulty, particularly if he had a credible

CRITICISM OF CONGRESS; YES TO TERM LIMITS

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way the US Congress is doing its job?

Approve	45%
Disapprove	50
DK/No opinion	5

Question: Do you favor or oppose a limit on the number of years a person could serve as a US representative in Congress?

Favor	74%
Oppose	24
DK/No opinion	3

Source: Survey by ABC News/Washington Post, October 16-21, 1991.

Question: Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?

Approve	29%
Disapprove	57
DK/NA	14

Question: Should the terms of members of Congress be limited to a total of twelve years in office, or should they be able to serve as long as they are able to get re-elected?

Limited	68%
As long as re-elected	26
DK/NA/Other	6

Source: Survey by CBS News/New York Times, October 15-18, 1991.

Six Views/Feulner Continued/Roper

economic program (perhaps including Pat Moynihan's payroll tax proposal). The liberal bias of the Democratic nominating process, however, makes it unlikely that a genuine moderate can emerge from a convention without having crippled himself for the general election.

The strongest potential Democratic contenders have chosen not to run in 1992, so they can't be nominated. The Democratic field is too diffuse to choose a likely nominee at this point, though I wouldn't count ex-Governor "Moonbeam" Brown out of the equation. Without a strong standard-bearer to rally round, moderate Democrats will have difficulty matching the muscle and numbers of the special interests who have dominated their nominating process since 1968.

Historical precedents for an opposition party so spooked are difficult to come by. For Bush the major challenge may not be winning the election but winning it in such a way as to avoid second-term problems similar to those of Reagan and Eisenhower.

In summary, these predictions depend primarily on what President Bush chooses to do. He can be the master of his own destiny. Despite the ineptitude of his opposition, however, he could be in for unexpectedly rough sailing if he fails to chart a strong course.

"...THE CHANCES ARE NO BETTER THAN 1 OUT OF 3 THAT SOMEONE OTHER THAN BUSH WILL BE PRESIDENT"

**By Burns W. Roper, Chairman
The Roper Organization**

I subscribe to the conventional wisdom—but that doesn't mean I'm convinced Bush will make it. I'd say that there's no more than a one in three chance that Bush will not be our next president. The potential Democratic candidate who would have the best chance of beating Bush is Jay Rockefeller. I don't think he has any weaknesses that Bush doesn't have. (Both suffer from "preppy" images; both were born with silver spoons in their mouths.) Rockefeller is strong on domestic issues, particularly health care. He's a fresh face. And he would certainly be seen as incorruptible.

Cuomo is another possibility. He's a great speaker, either in a formal speech or off the cuff, and I think he would be extremely effective in the debate. He knows how to deal with the liberal issue, not by walking away from it but by making it a positive factor. Still, a New York Italian Democratic liberal

is not that different from a Massachusetts Greek Democratic liberal.

As to who's the most likely Democratic nominee, I would have said up until today, Kerrey or Clinton. Why not the strongest candidates? Well, Jay Rockefeller has taken himself out and Cuomo has taken himself out up until now. We'll see what he does from here on.

Does this election resemble any prior election? Yes, there have been a number of one-term first-term presidents seeking reelection since the thirties: Roosevelt in 1936, Eisenhower in 1956, Nixon in '72, Carter in '80, Reagan in '84. Four of the five have won. And Bush is more popular in late 1991 than Carter was in late 1979.

On the other hand, it was far from clear in November of 1947 that Harry Truman would be reelected. In November of 1967 it wasn't evident that LBJ would *not* be reelected. In November of 1979 we didn't know that Carter would fail. So there can be surprises. A Kerrey or a Clinton has at least the credentials this year that Carter had in '76. So I don't rule out an upset, but I would say the chances are no better than 1 out of 3 that someone other than Bush will be president.
