

# The Unfinished Presidencies: Why Incumbent Presidents may Lose their Re-election Bids

## As Presidências Inacabadas: Por que os Presidentes em Exercício podem Perder a Reeleição

Luís da Vinha, Valley City State University  
Niklas Ernst, University of New Brunswick

**Abstract**—With the conclusion of the 2016 presidential election in the US, presidential scholars have shifted their attention not only to the Trump presidency, but also towards his possible re-election campaign. Throughout the history of the United States incumbent presidents have usually won their bid for a second term in office. The presidency offers incumbents several inherent electoral advantages – e.g., party nomination and unified party base, name recognition and political experience, access to government resources. However, some incumbent candidates have been unable to capitalize on these advantages. The current paper analyzes the electoral bids of Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush, identifying the factors that can invalidate the advantages intrinsic to holding the office of President of the United States.

**Keywords**—Incumbency Advantage, Party Nomination, Presidential Elections, “Rose Garden” Strategy.

**Resumo**—Com a conclusão das eleições presidenciais de 2016 nos EUA, os analistas têm focado a sua atenção não só na presidência de Donald Trump, mas também na sua possível reeleição. Ao longo da história dos Estados Unidos, os presidentes têm geralmente ganho sua candidatura a um segundo mandato. A presidência oferece aos titulares várias vantagens eleitorais inerentes – por exemplo, nomeação e base unificada do partido, reconhecimento e experiência política, e acesso a recursos governamentais. No entanto, alguns presidentes não conseguiram capitalizar nas vantagens inerentes ao cargo. O atual artigo analisa as candidaturas eleitorais dos presidentes Ford, Carter e Bush, identificando os fatores que invalidaram as vantagens intrínsecas à ocupação do cargo de presidente dos Estados Unidos.

**Palavras-Chave**—Vantagem do Incumbente, Nomeação Partidária, Estratégia “Rose Garden”.

**Submitted**—12-09-2017. **Accepted**—24-04-2018.



### 1 Introduction

WITH the conclusion of the 2016 presidential election in the US, presidential schol-

- *Luís Miguel da Vinha*, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Social Science Department, Valley City State University, USA. *Niklas Ernst*, graduate student in the Political Science Department at University of New Brunswick, Canada.

*E-mail: Luis.davinha@vcsu.edu and Niklas-ernst@web.de*

DOI:<http://dx.doi.org/10.21814/perspectivas.100>

ars have shifted their attention not only to the Trump presidency but also towards his possible re-election campaign. In fact, Trump has already announced his campaign slogan for the 2020 election – “Keep America Great!” – and, according to official sources, kicked off his re-election campaign in a rally held in Melbourne, Florida in February (Blake 2017; Graham 2017). The Democrats, for their part, are also setting their sights on the next presidential election and recalibrating

their strategy (de Vogue 2017). Several Democrats are currently surveying the political environment and positioning themselves to secure their party's nomination for the upcoming presidential contest (Debenedetti 2017).

Throughout the history of the United States, 20 presidents won two consecutive terms in the White House, whereas only ten lost their second presidential election. While the likelihood for an incumbent president to be re-elected is not as high as in the House or Senate races, data demonstrates that incumbent presidents usually win their bid for a second term in office. Despite some anomalies to this trend during the 1970s, over the last four decades four of the five incumbent presidents successfully secured their re-election bids. Political science has demonstrated that incumbent presidents have several advantages which they can use in order to help guarantee their re-election – e.g., party nomination and unified party base, name recognition and political experience, access to government resources. The "incumbent advantage" has been thoroughly studied and its theoretical assumptions are well developed.

However, despite these advantages, some incumbent presidents are unable to guarantee electoral victories. In the post-war years, Presidents Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and George H. W. Bush did not win their re-election bid, despite having access to many of the advantages that every other incumbent president had. The individual electoral processes have been studied by several presidential scholars and political commentators. Nevertheless, the explanation of these anomalies has yet to produce a theoretical framework which allows us to develop a sound understanding of the conditions under which the incumbent advantage is ineffective.

The current research paper analyzes what factors contributed to denying the incumbent advantage in the cases of Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush. More precisely, it employs a cross-case analysis of the factors and dynamics at work in each of these candidacies in order to try to identify a discernible pattern which may subvert the advantages that are characteristic of most incumbent candidates. The development of a theoretical framework explaining the different dynamics involving presidential re-election bids

will allow us to generalize about the relationships between the different variables and, to the extent possible, construct a general proposition about the potential success or failure of incumbent presidential candidates.

The article begins by identifying and analyzing the incumbent advantages that have received the greatest emphasis in the academic literature and are believed to offer incumbent candidates the greatest opportunities to be used as electoral assets. We then examine the presidential re-election bids of Presidents Ford, Carter, and Bush, highlighting what incumbency advantages each benefited from and which were not available or successfully exploited to their benefit. We conclude by presenting a general assessment of the importance of the different incumbency advantages, with an emphasis on the challenges that President Trump might face in his 2020 re-election bid.

## 2 The Advantages of the Incumbency

The incumbency advantage has been defined by David Mayhew (2008, 205) as "an electoral edge enjoyed by in-office persons, not by in-office parties." Over the last few decades political science has devoted considerable attention to the advantages of incumbent candidates in presidential elections. The research thus far has identified several factors that provide incumbent candidates with electoral benefits (Abramson, Aldrich, and Rohde 1998; Campbell 2008; Mayhew 2008; Wayne 2012).<sup>1</sup>

To begin with, incumbents traditionally win their party's nomination fairly easily. Therefore, they are guaranteed their party's support and resources early on in the campaign. This also provides incumbent candidates with a unified party base from the outset that can be mobilized more efficiently towards the incumbent's agenda and activities. In contrast, the challenging candidate

1. Other advantages of the provided to incumbents are offered in the thematic literature. For instance, in his list of incumbency advantages, Campbell (2008) identifies political inertia and the disadvantages of the challenger. However, we have not identified these in our characterization since they are not an advantage inherent to the Presidency, i.e., we cannot attribute this advantage directly to the institution of the Presidency.

usually has to go through a long primary campaign to get endorsed as their party's contender. The primary campaign not only requires significant amounts of financial resources, but often also damages the candidate's reputation due to infighting to obtain the delegate votes required to secure their party's nomination. During this time, the incumbent president's team can focus its time, efforts, and resources on the general election itself, leaving the challenger in an inherently weaker position.

Recognition of the incumbent's brand name and what he stands for also works as an advantage. Research has demonstrated that voters traditionally tend to value the experience and the knowledge acquired by incumbents during their time in office (Campbell 2008). This perception benefits the president as "stability and predictability satisfy the public's psychological needs; the certainty of four more years with a known quantity is likely to be more appealing than the uncertainty of the next four years with an unknown one, provided the incumbent's performance in the office during the past four years has been viewed as generally favorably" (Wayne 2012, 226). Strategically, the president can use the public's familiarity and comfort with incumbents by running a re-election campaign highlighting the opponent's lack of experience and leadership skills. Because of his previous work, the incumbent already had the chance to prove that he possesses the characteristics needed to be a successful president.

Moreover, the experience acquired by the incumbent also extends to the campaign. In other words, they have already steered a successful campaign and know what the determinant factors for guaranteeing an electoral victory are (Weeks 2012). Incumbents by this time have forged a "winning electoral coalition" and possess a working campaign apparatus which led them to victory in the previous election. The people and the experience are still there as are many of the donors which supported the president in the previous campaign. Some of the topics in the election might differ, but the campaign "machine" is still operational and the incumbent can rely on its proven track-record (Abrahamson, Aldrich and Rohde 1998). Additionally, incumbent campaigns have

learned "from experience in terms of both how to wage a successful campaign and what works politically in office" to effectively run a campaign from within the White House (quoted in Weisberg 2002, 343).

Due to his role as head of state and head of government, the incumbent also has access to various government resources which can be used to maximize the incumbency advantage. More precisely, the president can "make news, affect news, and dispense the spoils of government" (Wayne 2012, 226). The so-called "Rose Garden strategy" allows the president to promote his agenda and remain in the spotlight by commanding the media attention without overtly campaigning (Weisberg 2002). As Wayne (2012, 226) has made clear, "All recent presidents who have campaigned for reelection have tried to utilize the symbolic and ceremonial presidency, signing legislation into law in the Rose Garden of the White House, meeting heads of state in Washington or their own capitals, making speeches and announcements, holding press conferences, honoring military and civilians for their accomplishments while standing at a podium featuring the presidential seal." In this sense, the public views the incumbent foremost as their president and not just as simple one candidate amongst all the others.

In addition, incumbents are able to consider the political effects of governmental decisions and their actions can actually influence and control events – e.g. trying to stimulate the economy in election years. American voters give significant relevance to the state of the economy when casting their ballot (Vavreck 2009). According to Campbell (2008) the economy is just as important as the incumbency status of the candidates in effecting voting behavior. Retrospective accountability in US presidential elections is real and voters tend to reward or punish presidential incumbents for the perceived growth or decline in their income (Achen and Bartels 2016). However, voters tend to focus on their income growth in the months prior to the election and generally disregard the performance of the economy over the entire course of a president's term. Considering that the US economy and income has been generally characterized by steady growth, we can assume that, all other things being equal, the state of

the economy helps an incumbent candidate more often than it hurts him. In addition, a healthy economy leads to a more positive perception of incumbents as trust in government rises and the country as a whole is perceived to be heading in the right direction (Sides, Tesler, and Vavreck 2016).

Therefore, all other things being equal, the impact of these advantages on a presidential election is expected to increase the success for the incumbent. However, despite the repeated claims supporting the incumbent advantage, several post-war presidential incumbents failed to win their re-election bid – i.e., Ford, Carter, Bush. What were the reasons for the failure of the incumbency advantages in these cases? More precisely, what distinguished these re-election bids from their successful post-war counterparts? The following sections will provide a comparative case study of the Ford, Carter, and Bush re-election campaigns to understand why these incumbents' electoral bids were unsuccessful.

### 3 Gerald R. Ford: The Unelected Incumbent

In October 1973 President Nixon nominated House minority leader Gerald Ford to be vice-president after then vice-president Spiro Agnew resigned amid corruption charges. In August 1974, he became president when Nixon resigned the office due to his role in the Watergate controversy. Ford is therefore the only president to not have won the election to the presidency or vice-presidency. Nevertheless, he disposed of and utilized the advantages of incumbency and, therefore, his presidency can be used to explain the failings of a presidential re-election bid.

Only months before the November 1976 election, Ford was down over 30% in opinion polls against his opponent, former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter. However, the president nearly pulled off a successful comeback, losing by only two percentage points (48% to Carter's 50%) in the national vote (Mieczkowski 2008). The Electoral College proved to be even narrower as Carter won by just 57 votes, making the 1976 election the closest electoral vote since 1916. Just four thousand votes to Ford in Ohio and Hawaii would

have given President Ford a second term in office (Melusky 1981). However, the most pertinent question was why was Ford forced to start his campaign with such a disadvantage in the polls and what factors or events led to him to come short of winning a White House term on his own?

In 1976, the American public was still shaken up by the Watergate controversy and Nixon's resignation failed to soothe the public's resentment and mistrust of government (Anslover 2016). Political scientists detect a direct link between Watergate and Jimmy Carter's victory: "Politically, the squalid business of Watergate had significant partisan results, at least in the short run, Democrats scored major triumphs in the 1974 election and sent Jimmy Carter to the White House in 1976" (Patterson 1996, 781). When Ford shocked the nation and issued a full and unconditional pardon for any crimes Nixon may have committed while president, his approval ratings dropped within a day from 66% to 49% (Mieczkowski 2008). While the president may have intended to save the American people from of a lengthy trial in which the US would have been "unable to heal as a nation", the American public disagreed (Anslover 2016, 223). In fact, 61% of Americans disapproved of the pardon, making it the single most important factor which cost Ford the election (Miller 1978). Jimmy Carter capitalized on this and was able to utilize the public's distrust and anger to his advantage. He used "honesty and trust" as his major campaign themes and branded himself as an outsider who would not succumb to the corruption in Washington. Americans bought into Carter's campaign message since they desired a president "whom they could trust and who would make them feel good about themselves and their country" (Anslover 2016, 211).

Due to Ford's unpopularity some Republican Party officials tried to convince him not to run for a second term in office. But when the president decided to run challengers quickly arose. The most formidable was former California Governor Ronald Reagan. Even though Ford won the initial primaries in New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Vermont, and Florida, Reagan refused to quit and bounced back with a surprise victory in North Carolina. After all the primaries were held, the president had won 15 states while Rea-

gan triumphed in 12 states and both candidates went into the convention without having secured enough delegates to guarantee the party's nomination. Therefore, the 1976 convention turned into one of the most divided Republican Conventions on record (Mieczkowski 2008). Even though Ford was able to win the nomination at the convention held in Kansas City on the first ballot, he was only able to secure 1187 delegates to Reagan's 1070. Accordingly, as Snyder (2010, 92) notes, "Ford's fight with Reagan badly damaged his prospects, and he began the general election down twenty points in the polls."

In contrast, Democrats united quickly behind Jimmy Carter who ensured his nomination with a convincing victory in Ohio a month before the convention (Williams and Wilson 1977). Therefore, in 1976 the incumbent advantage of guaranteeing the party nomination while the challenger faced a tough and long primary season was reversed. In contrast to Carter, whose party rallied behind him, Ford was unable to lead a unified party into the general election.

In addition, in late 1974 the US economy slipped into the largest recession since the 1930s. As inflation and unemployment skyrocketed, President Ford tried to stimulate the economy by abandoning his anti-inflation initiatives (Miller 1978; Mieczkowski 2008). Carter tried to seize on the detrimental economic situation and in the third and last televised presidential debate personally blamed Ford for the highest unemployment rate since the Great Depression (Mieczkowski 2008).<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, in months before the election the American economy finally began to recover, as did public optimism regarding their future economic prospects (Miller 1978). Thus, the state of the economy was only a minor issue in the 1976 presidential election and did not by itself lead to Ford's defeat.

Ford's campaign also had to manage the political scandals of previous administration. Even though the secret bombings of Cambodia, the release of the Pentagon Papers, and the shocking news of the My Lai massacre all happened before Ford's presidency, he had to manage the

aftershock which "severely hampered his bid to win in the 1976 election" (Anslover 2016, 215). When Communist North Vietnam overran South Vietnam in April 1975, Ford also ordered the evacuation of all Americans in Saigon. It ended the Vietnam War, but also branded the image of a weak superpower in retreat (Mieczkowski 2008). This turn of events helped change the perception of many voters since "the US public was used to winning, and Ford was in office when they suffered a very real loss" (Anslover 2016, 216).

In addition, Ford's signature of the Helsinki Accords in 1975 was followed by an immediate political backlash making the agreement "a lasting and damaging issue for his presidency" which damaged his electoral chances (Snyder 2010, 87). Not only were the majority of Americans opposed to Ford's continuation of détente and the signing of the agreement, his failure to defend his position also raised serious concerns about his leadership capabilities, particularly regarding foreign policy issues (Snyder 2010). The Helsinki Accords were a prominent issue throughout the election that left Ford vulnerable to attacks from the left and the right as both Ronald Reagan and Jimmy Carter criticized the agreement (Snyder 2010).

When asked about the Helsinki Accords and the United States relationship with the Soviet Union by New York Times associate editor Max Frankel during the second presidential debate, the president once again came off as inept on international issues. He responded: "Now what has been accomplished by the Helsinki agreement? Number one, we have an agreement where they notify us and we notify them of any military maneuvers that are to be undertaken. They have done it in both cases where they've done so. There is no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe, and there never will be under the Ford administration" (DeFrank 2007, 143). After being provided with an opportunity to clarify, Ford insisted: "I don't believe, Mr. Frankel, that the Yugoslavians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe the Rumanians consider themselves dominated by the Soviet Union. I don't believe that the Poles believe themselves dominated by the Soviet Union" (DeFrank 2007, 143). Ford's comments were controversial and damaging to his campaign and according to pollster George

2. The unemployment in October 1976 was 7.8% (Mieczkowski 2008, 46-47).

Gallup the comments constituted the “most decisive moment in the campaign” (Thomas 2002, 33). Opinion polls after the debate show Catholics of East European ancestry moved towards Carter (Broh 1980) and according to many observers cost him the election (Snyder 2010).

Ford was able to utilize many of the advantages of incumbency during his campaign. For example, he tried using the Rose Garden strategy and realized that as an incumbent president he could campaign without actually campaigning. His campaign team chose to leave him at the White House to act presidential, leaving the ground game of the campaign to his running mate Senator Bob Dole (Mieczkowski 2008). He tried his best to strengthen his image as chief executive but, as Broh (1980, 515) recalls, “the press presented Gerald Ford as a candidate prone to falls and spills, an image supported by a film clip of the president slipping on the stairs of Air Force One.” However, Ford’s campaign strategy was not a key factor in his defeat of the 1976 election. We must remember that he had such a large deficit in the polls at the start of the general election campaign and still only narrowly lost to Carter. Nevertheless, his presidency and campaign did not inspire the public, and therefore most Americans ignored the fact that the economy was improving and the nation was finally disengaged from its military conflict in Southeast Asia (Anslover 2016).

Conclusively, Ford’s untimely pardon of Nixon (which dragged him into the Watergate controversy), his near defeat by Ronald Reagan in the Republican primaries, an economic recession that occurred shortly after he took office, and his public image as a weak foreign policy leader “all worked to undermine Ford’s advantage as incumbent” (Miller 1978, 145). In addition, the odds were stacked against Ford during the 1976 election. Since World War II, no party had yet been successful in holding the White House for longer than eight years. The fact that Gerald Ford the first post-war incumbent president to lose a presidential election highlights that a “political rhythm almost directs voters to turn the party in power out after two terms” (Mieczkowski 2005, 341).

## 4 Jimmy Carter’s Defeat: The Beginning of a Political Realignment

Despite a campaign in which the two major candidates seemed to run neck and neck, former California Governor Ronald Reagan won the presidential election in 1980 against incumbent President Jimmy Carter in a landslide. Reagan won 51% of the national vote, while Carter won 41%, and Illinois Congressman John Anderson finished with 7%. The electoral win was even more decisive as Reagan won all but six states and the District of Columbia, allocating 489 electoral votes compared to Carter’s 49 (Busch 2016). Carter’s devastating defeat in 1980 raises questions regarding the causes of his electoral collapse, especially as an incumbent. Did international crises and the state of the economy lead to the president’s defeat? Did his campaign strategy fail miserably or was the 1980 election the culmination of a political realignment brought on by a general shift in America towards conservatism as suggested by White and Gill (1981).

To begin with, President Carter did not win the nomination of the Democratic Party as easily as it would be expected for an incumbent president. He was challenged by Senator Edward “Ted” Kennedy who forced Carter to spend a significant amount of resources in a long primary campaign. This hard-fought campaign hurt both candidates’ image significantly and revealed an incontestable lack of party unity. Even after Carter won the majority of the delegates required to ensure his nomination for the general election, the 1980 Democratic National Convention became one of the most disputed on record. Kennedy tried to release delegates from their voting commitments and gave speeches against Carter at the beginning of the convention. Ted Kennedy’s campaign strategist Harold Ickes called it a “brutal political fistfight” in which their campaign employed a “win at all cost strategy” to make up President Carter’s 700 delegate lead (D’Aprile 2009). After Carter won the nomination Senator Kennedy endorsed Carter but the damage to the president’s image and campaign was done. In his memoirs, Carter describes Kennedy’s primary run and his reluctance to embrace the president on the closing night of the Convention as “quite damaging to our

campaign” (Carter 1982, 553).

In contrast to Carter’s nomination campaign, Ronald Reagan won the nomination of the Republican Party fairly easily. He gathered the party’s support early in the race and did not receive as many attacks and headwind as Carter. In other words, as Pomper has stated:

*The major parties’ nominations reversed past patterns and contemporary expectations. Contests for the presidential designation typically occur in the party out of power, while the party holding the Presidency is expected to confirm its leadership ritualistically. Although they held the White House in 1980, the Democrats engaged in a vigorous contest that continued in one form or another until the convention balloting. For their part, after surveying an initially crowded field, the Republicans gave Reagan the consensual support commonly granted to an incumbent president.* (Quoted in Busch 2016, 480)

The disputed nomination process within the Democratic Party is one of the reasons why Jimmy Carter lost a significant amount of the Democratic voter base. He was not only missing the support of elected officials and the party establishment, but also of registered Democratic voters. In the 1976 presidential election against incumbent President Ford, 80% of the registered voters of the Democratic Party and 48% of independent voters cast ballots for Jimmy Carter. These numbers dropped to 67% of Democrats and 31% of independents in 1980 (Roper Center 1980).

The 1980 election was not just a showdown between Carter and Reagan; it also indicated a general shift on the American political landscape. From 1933 to 1980, the United States generally showed a consistent and stabilized Democratic trend. In this time frame spanning nearly five decades, Republican presidents served four terms, and the House of Representatives and the Senate were only held by the Republican Party for four years (1947-1949 and 1953-1955). But in the election of 1980, the Senate went Republican for the first time since 1952 (gaining 12 additional seats), and the GOP won 33 additional seats in the House of Representatives – i.e., while short of a partisan

majority, enough to provide, in concert with conservative Democrats, a working majority (Busch 2016). This data suggests a general political shift towards the Republican Party after the decades of secure reign of the Democratic Party. Therefore, it leads to the assertion that in 1980 the American people might have voted for a general party shift and did not vote primarily against the incumbent president. To run on a Democratic ticket was a general disadvantage in the 1980 election – from the local level all the way up to the presidency.

In addition, the voter turnout in the 1980 presidential election was extremely low. Only 52.6% of the voting age population actually cast their ballots, revealing the lowest voter turnout since 1924. Even the consistent historical trend of a declining voter turnout cannot be used as an explanation since the turnout in five of the eight following presidential elections were higher than in 1980 (The American Presidency Project 2016). A low voter turnout in any US election favors the Republican Party due to the fact that their party members are more reliable to vote and show up on Election Day in greater numbers than their Democratic counterparts. For decades, the Democratic Party has revealed greater difficulty in mobilizing voters because of the demographic make-up of their target groups (youth/ ethnic minorities/ low income families). Considering the party affiliation of eligible voters in 1980, the low voter turnout hurt Carter even more. In general, 43% of Americans identified themselves as Democrats while only 28% identified themselves as Republicans and 23% as independent (Roper Center 1980). Carter lost support from disappointed Democratic Party voters, who stayed home on Election Day causing the drop in voter turnout. However, a significant number of voters affiliated with the Democratic Party actually voted for Ronald Reagan. The so called “Reagan-Democrats” were traditionally Democratic voters, especially white middle class men, who voted for Ronald Reagan in the presidential elections in 1980 and 1984. While not agreeing with many of Reagan’s policies and opinions, this shift of votes in such massive numbers is a phenomenon that political scientists have so far failed to explain. Even if the exact number and influence of the “Reagan-Democrats” can only be estimated, it was an unexpected phe-

nomenon for Carter's campaign and had a major impact on his defeat (Busch 2016).

However, it was President Carter's public image which led to his low approval ratings and which was the major factor contributing to his defeat in the election. Carter had numerous opportunities to demonstrate he possessed the skills and characteristics to be a successful president, but failed to do so. Carter's four-year term was marked by a struggling economy at home and several international crises. During the Carter years, energy prices rose, interest rates soared, inflation increased, and unemployment was high. More precisely, "in 1980, inflation reached 13.5 percent and the economy tumbled into another recession, with unemployment hitting 8.5 percent. The prime interest rate hovered around 20 percent throughout the year" (Busch 2016, 473). Carter appeared to be powerless and unable to fix any of the problems the average US citizen experienced at the time. As most people in 1980 identified the state of the economy as the most important issue in their decision on whom to vote for, odds for a second Carter term were meager come Election Day (Brinkley 1998).

The president also seemed to be helpless and inactive in dealing with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the Iran Hostage Crisis. Nevertheless, both events led to a short "rally-round-the-flag" effect, which significantly increase the popularity rating of presidents confronted with extraordinary international events. Within a month of the Iran Hostage Crisis, Carter's popularity rose from 32% to 58% (Callaghan and Virtanen 1993). Yet, because of Carter's inability to resolve the crisis in the long run, the "rally-round-the-flag" effect ceased. Carter was unable to prove himself a strong leader and people started to view him as a weak president who was unworthy of staying in office. In addition, the US strategy of *détente* with the Soviet Union was perceived to be a naïve failure by most Americans (Busch 2016). Both Ronald Reagan and Ted Kennedy emphasized Carter's weakness and vulnerability on foreign policy issues throughout their campaigns. The attacks from the political right and left damaged the president's image and contributed to a significant decrease of public support for the president. According to a Gallup poll, months before

the election, Carter had an approval rating of 31% (Newport 1998). Consequently, the majority of the American people refused to vote for President Carter on 4 November and elected Reagan as their next president largely because he was not the unpopular incumbent.

As a result, Jimmy Carter became a victim of circumstances over which he had little control and which ultimately led to his defeat in the 1980 presidential election. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Iran Hostage crisis, and a struggling economy were the major factors decreasing Carter's popularity and leading to the perception of a weak and helpless president. In addition, the missing support of the Democratic voter base and the challenge of Kennedy for the Democratic nomination caused irreparable damage to Carter's re-election campaign. However, the 1980 election was not just a referendum on Jimmy Carter's performance as president. It showed a general political shift of American society towards conservatism. This change of the political landscape occurred due to changes in the political environment which Carter failed to address. But, more importantly, the president failed in delivering the most important and most needed message of his re-election campaign: convincing the American people that despite his unpopularity, he did a good job in the Oval Office.

## 5 George H. W. Bush: The Unbeatable Incumbent?

The defeat of President Bush in the 1992 presidential election was surprising and shocked observers considering that just a year earlier he looked like an unbeatable incumbent. Following the dispatching of American troops to the Persian Gulf in March 1991, President Bush's approval rating topped 89%, the highest approval rating for an American president on record. But his public support witnessed a record decline in the following year due to an economic recession and broad voter dissatisfaction. In the electoral year his approval rating plunged to 39% in February and 34% in mid-October (Cummings 1996). Due to a campaign which was unable to develop a winning strategy and to effectively address the issues most important to the American public, in



little over a year, President Bush lost his second term in the White House.

On Election Day, 44.9 million people cast their ballots for Clinton, 39.1 million for Bush, and 19.7 million for Perot. President Bush received 168 electoral votes, while Clinton received 370. In 1992, 13 million more Americans voted than in the previous presidential election, indicating the highest voter turnout since 1972 (55.2% of eligible voters). A large turnout often helps the pro change candidate and signals that he was able to mobilize his own partisans as well as independent voters better than the incumbent. This is certainly true in the 1992 election as the Democrats were able to mobilize a higher percentage of their supporters than Republicans for the first time since Lyndon Johnson's 1964 landslide victory over Goldwater. Moreover, the Democratic Party candidate also won the independent vote for the first time since 1964 (Cummings 1996).

For Betty Glad (1995, 17), "at the most basic level Bush's loss was due to changes in the political situation in which he operated and his failure to respond appropriately to those changes." Presidential election outcomes are determined by three factors: the state of the economy, the positions of the candidates and voters on the issues, and the effectiveness of the candidates' campaign (Alvarez and Nagler 1995). None of these factors played in favor of President Bush and are therefore able to explain his defeat.

The single most important issue of the 1992 election was the state of the economy, particularly the voters' perception of the state of the economy (Cummings 1996). In a 1 November poll, just days before election night, 37% perceived the state of the economy as very bad and 40% as fairly bad (Cummings 1996). Unfortunately for Bush, the election fell on the "end of the worst four-year stretch of economic performance in most voters' memories" and became a *de facto* referendum on the performance of the economy under President Bush (Alvarez and Nagler 1995, 715). Moreover, the American public also strongly distrusted Bush on economic and fiscal policies after he famously broke his 1988 campaign promise not to raise taxes during the 1990 budget negotiations (Glad 1995). In addition, the public's opinion on the state of the American economy was considerable

different than it was in 1988 (Alvarez and Nagler 1995). A voter who felt the national economy had improved was 35% more likely to vote for Bush than Clinton, but was 25% more likely to vote for Clinton than Bush if he/she felt the economy had worsened. Clinton won the battle for the economically dissatisfied and estimates indicate that economic change from 1988 to 1992 cost Bush an electoral share of 8.5% relative to Clinton. Projections suggest that under 1988 economic conditions Bush should have won 51.8% to 48.2% in 1992 (Alvarez and Nagler 1995). However, Bush won the 1988 presidential election against Michael Dukakis with an even bigger margin (53.8% to 46.2%) which indicates that there are additional components that led to the 1992 election outcome. Even though the state of the economy might have been the most important component in the election, it does not by itself explain Bush's defeat.

Bush was unable to recognize the fact that the American people suffered due to an underperforming economy and that this issue would decide the election. Instead of focusing on domestic policy and the state of the economy he ran on a record of military victories in Panama and Iraq and the end of the Cold War. More precisely, Bush ran on his reputation as a foreign policy leader, but chose to ignore the economy as much as possible (Glad 1995). For decades, voters had greater confidence in Republican candidates on the "maintenance of a strong national defense, and the provision of competent leadership in foreign policy" (Cummings 1996, 82). Even in 1992, voters for whom foreign policy mattered the most in deciding how to vote picked Bush over Clinton 87% to 8%. Nevertheless, only 8% of voters in 1992 cited foreign policy and national defense as the most prominent issue, compared to 23% in 1988 (Cummings 1996). President Bush did not realize the impact that the end of the Cold War had on the voting behavior of Americans and that his foreign policy efforts would not guarantee him a second term in the White House. In the end, Bush's fate resembled that of Winston Churchill – i.e., both lost power when voters turned from war to peace (Popkin 2012).

Complicating things even more, Bush did not have the advantage of leading a unified party. An unexpected challenge within his own party arose

as Pat Buchanan decided to run for the Republican presidential ticket. While Buchanan did not win any of the primary or caucus elections, his presence weakened the president. Buchanan's criticism of the president damaged Bush's image compelling Bush to allocate greater resources towards his nomination campaign (Cummings 1996). Even though Bush was not the incumbent in 1988, he had an easier time securing the Republican nomination. While all five candidates in 1988 suspended their campaign early in the primaries, Buchanan maintained his candidacy to the end, drawing over 26% of the vote in the 2 June California contest (Cummings 1996). Buchanan was never a serious contender but rather offered a protest vote against the president. In the Georgia Republican primary 81% of Buchanan's voters said they had voted for him to send a message to Bush, whereas only 15% thought he would make a good president (Glad 1995). Consequently, the 1992 nomination process hurt Bush and he was unable to lead a unified party into the general election (Popkin 2012).

In contrast, Clinton was able to establish himself as the Democratic presidential nominee fairly early in the primaries, making it easier for the Democrats to unify their party and to begin preparing for the upcoming fall campaign (Cummings 1996). In addition, Clinton was a strong candidate who presented Bush with problems to which the Bush campaign was never able to respond effectively. Bill Clinton led a smart campaign, which recognized the issues important to the public, was affective in damage control, and "always stayed on the safe side of the insult line" (Glad 1995, 18). Clinton and his running mate were southern conservative Democrats and the "first all-southern presidential and vice presidential major party ticket since Andrew Jackson ran with John C. Calhoun in 1828" (Cummings 1996, 85). Therefore, Bush's campaign could not smear them as liberals as they did Dukakis in 1988 and had to expend significant resources defending their southern base (Alvarez and Nagler 1995; Cummings 1996). Nevertheless, in the 1992 election, Clinton carried Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee and came close in North Carolina and Florida, taking several southern states Bush had won with double digits four years

earlier.

Ross Perot's 19.7 million votes (18.9%) was the largest percentage received by a minor party or independent candidate since Theodore Roosevelt ran for the Progressive party in 1912. It was also the largest percentage ever received by a third party or independent candidate who had not previously served as president (Cummings 1996). His criticism of the economy and the status quo were more harmful to Bush than Clinton and helped to focus extensive media attention on the state of the economy (Cummings 1996). Perot's presence in the election cycle damaged Bush's image and benefited Clinton's campaign. In particular, his announcement, which he backtracked on 1 October, to withdraw from the presidential race on the last day of the July Democratic convention provided the Clinton campaign with a renewed impetus (Glad 1995). On Election Day, Perot drew more deeply from Bush's voters than from Clinton's. Overall, 18% of voters identifying as Republicans cast their ballot for him while only 13% of Democrats voted for Perot (Cummings 1996). Nevertheless, estimates show that Clinton would have beaten president Bush in a two-candidate race as well as "Perot's presence inflated Clinton's margin over Bush by 4%", not enough to overcome the 6% margin of the 1992 election (Alvarez and Nagler 1995, 738).

Ultimately, President Bush lost in 1992 due to a failing campaign which had no effective strategy and in which the president lacked the will to prepare for a long and harsh campaign. According to Glad (1995, 21-22), "He was slow in getting out of the White House and onto the campaign trail and slow and low-key in describing what he would do during a second term in office." No efforts were made to prepare for the reelection campaign until December 1991 (Glad 1995) and, even then, Bush never developed a vision for his next term that could unify his party and create a contrast to his opponents that would justify four more years (Popkin 2012). Since 1980 the Republican Party relied on the message of "maintaining a strong national defense and lowering taxes" but Bush's campaign failed to recognize that the issues in the 1992 election were domestic policy and the economy (Popkin 2012, 163-164). The presidential election was "a battle between

competing economic programs ... and Bush had none” (Popkin 2012, 184). That is just one reason why Clinton and Gore often dominated the terms of the campaign dialogue. It seemed that the Bush campaign was reacting to, rather than managing political events throughout the campaign (Cumings 1996).

In addition, Bush’s campaign was sabotaged by leaks within the White House and unresolved internal conflicts. More precisely, his chief of staff was criticized for “spending more time on his own survival than the president’s” (Popkin 2012, 173). Thus, the Bush campaign lacked someone in the White House to concentrate full-time on political strategy and with a sophisticated understanding of public opinion. It also failed to coordinate legislative politics and political communications (Popkin 2012). Bush’s re-election bid failed to capitalize on the advantages offered by the Rose Garden strategy because it “failed to distinguish the way a campaign in the White House differs from a campaign for the White House” (Popkin 2012, 189).

Ultimately, President Bush lost the 1992 presidential election due to three reasons: the state of the economy and his failure to respond to changes in the political situation, the circumstances of a presidential election featuring a three-candidate race (as well as a southern conservative Democrat), and a failed election campaign resulting from a lack of strategy and a candidate who was too tired and unwilling to campaign. Like an athlete still wanting to compete but having lost the desire to train for it, “Bush had lost the hunger and drive to prepare. He believed he was entitled to remain president on the basis of his international efforts” (Popkin 2012, 188).

## 6 Final Considerations

The failed re-election campaigns of incumbent presidents in post-war American presidential elections reveal several similarities, but also highlight some features which are unique to each respective election. All three election bids analyzed were highlighted by a combination of a hard-fought primary campaign, a struggling US economy, an unusually strong challenger in the general election, and a president weary of campaigning.

None of the post-war incumbent presidents were guaranteed their party’s nomination as it is expected for a sitting president. Ford had to go through a contested convention in which he narrowly won, Carter was challenged by one of the most prominent Democrats of his generation, and Bush’s nomination was never seriously contested but his public image suffered irreparable damage during the primary campaign. The level of resistance the presidents faced within their own party differs, but nevertheless their campaigns were significantly tarnished during the nomination process and they were never fully capable of uniting their respective parties behind their candidacies. In addition, in all three cases, the challenger facing the president in the general election had an easier time winning his party’s nomination and was able to lead a unified party into the general election. This reversed pattern of the contemporary expectation that consensual support within the party is commonly granted to an incumbent is one of the main reasons that can explain the failing of an incumbent presidential bid. An analysis of the postwar primary electoral results for incumbents clearly attests to this fact. More precisely, all the successful incumbents won their party’s nomination with at least a 30% advantage over their adversaries.

A presidential election is often a referendum on the performance of the economy. If the state of the economy is not promising, it is expected that the voters will punish the party in power. This is especially true for an election containing an incumbent president who can be personally blamed for a struggling economy. In 1976, 1980, and 1992 unemployment was particularly high, interest rates soared, and high inflation had an unnerving effect on the American people. The degree to which the economy struggled in these years might have differed, especially in 1976 when the economy was already recovering in the months before the election. Nevertheless, voters perceived the state of the economy equally negative in all three presidential elections and voted the presidents out of office due to the perception of a struggling US economy.

However, while the study seems to identify a correlation between the state of the economy and the defeat of the incumbent candidates, some

caution is recommended. As Campbell (2013, 20) has pointed out, in 2012 “President Obama had an economic record during his term and into the election year that appeared to make him unelectable.” Nevertheless, Obama was able to secure his re-election bid with over 51% of the popular vote and 332 electoral votes. In a similar vein, George W. Bush was able to win his 2004 re-election bid and improve his electoral score (obtaining more than 10 million popular votes and 15 more electoral votes than in the 2000 election) despite the less than robust economic situation facing the nation. According to Abramowitz (2004, 745), “the estimated 3.75% growth rate of the US economy during the first half of 2004 is below the average of 4.5% for all presidential election years since World War II.” Even though economic performance improved somewhat in months preceding the election, public perceptions of the economy favored John Kerry in multiple polls on the verge of the election (Campbell 2005). This attests to Vavreck’s (2009, 159) assertion that while the nation’s economic performance is important, a “candidates’ discourse about the economy matters, too.” Therefore, while public economic perception is an unquestionable and important factor in presidential elections, incumbent candidates who can successfully define and manage the issues and the messaging that dominate the campaign are more likely to triumph.

When incumbent presidents were defeated they often faced atypical presidential contenders who became surprisingly strong candidates due to unique circumstances. Jimmy Carter was not considered a particularly strong contender for the presidency. However, he was able to use the unique context of 1976 to his advantage. More precisely, he branded himself as a Washington outsider, understood the public mood, and exploited Ford’s pardon of Nixon and the public’s anger following Watergate. In 1980, Ronald Reagan became one of the strongest presidential candidates in history. Leading an unprecedented conservative movement and shaping America’s political landscape for at least a decade, Reagan hammered Carter for a sick economy and the mismanagement of a plethora of international crises. Carter did not find any means to cope with Reagan’s campaign and, even though he was the in-

cumbent, did not stand a chance on Election Day. Equally effective, Clinton’s campaign showed its strength by winning several Southern states and proved to have a superior campaign strategy than Bush. Bill Clinton set the agenda and the pace for the 1992 election, forcing the incumbent Bush to react rather than to dictate the agenda as would be expected from an incumbent president.

All three incumbents tried to implement a presidential campaign focused on acting presidential rather than campaigning. Nevertheless, using the Rose Garden strategy to attract voters only works if the American people approve of their president and are receptive of his initiatives and policies. The Ford, Carter, and Bush presidencies were all plagued by low approval rating in the months leading up to the election. Their campaigns failed to acknowledge that fact and missed the opportunity to change their strategies accordingly. Moreover, they failed to understand how a campaign for the White House differs from a campaign from inside the White House. After four years (with the exception of Ford) the incumbent presidents seemed tired and unmotivated, believing they were entitled to a second term in office. Their unwillingness to get back on the campaign trail can therefore explain their defeat to some extent. After being defeated in the 1980 presidential election Jimmy Carter confessed: “At least it was a relief that the political campaign was over” (Busch 2016, 477).

As we increasingly focus our attention on the 2020 presidential race we can begin to anticipate the prospect of President Trump’s electoral success. As with every incumbent, Trump will have at his disposal a wide array of assets which can propel him to a second term. In other words, he will have the incumbency advantage over his challengers and will not even be hindered by partisanship dynamics. More precisely, first party-term incumbent candidates – i.e., candidates that succeed a president of the opposite party – have a greater probability of winning their re-election bids. As Campbell has suggested:

*First party-term presidents are in the enviable position of being able to credibly campaign either advocating stability if things are going*

well or advocating change if things are going poorly. Having been in office for just four years, these incumbents can still plausibly blame their predecessor for persisting problems. They are credited for their successes, but can evade a good deal of the blame for their failures. (Campbell 2014, 302)

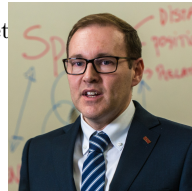
Almost two years into his presidency, Trump boasts a vigorous economy and an unorthodox style that contrasts with traditional establishment politicians. The US economy grew at 2.3% in 2017 and, despite the threats of an imminent trade war, unemployment was at 4% in mid-2018. Trump has also maintained an active campaign, consistently driving his message to the electorate and touting his achievements – regardless of their validity. He has been able to determine the political agenda by barraging the public with multiple issues and proposals. As a result, a year and a half into his presidency, Trump has been able to surpass the 40% approval rating – which he was unable to do throughout most of his first year in office (Gallup 2018). Hence, he is so far unencumbered by many of the limitations faced by the three defeated incumbents analyzed above.

If Trump can successfully guarantee his party's nomination by creating a unified party base and if he can use the political experience he acquires in the coming years to efficiently manage the government's resources to his electoral advantage the odds are in his favor. Much will depend on the 2018 midterm elections. If the Republican party can weather the recent Democratic upsurge in the state and special elections and maintain its congressional majority in November 2018, internal adversaries might be blocked. However, the loss of any of the legislative chambers might embolden some of the president's most vocal critics and create an opportunity for them to challenge him for the Republican nomination (see Cillizza 2018). This will be the most pressing challenge facing his reelection bid. Only time will tell if the self-proclaimed "master negotiator" follows his own advice and dedicates the necessary resources to prepare what will unquestionably be a fabled electoral bout (Trump 2007, 52).

## References

- [1] Aachen, Christopher, and Larry Bartels. 2016. "Democracy for Realists: Holding Up a Mirror to the Electorate." *Juncture* 22(4): 269-275.
- [2] Abramowitz, Alan. 2004. "When Good Forecasts Go Bad: The Time-for-Change Model and the 2004 Presidential Election." *Political Science Politics* 37(4): 745-746.
- [3] Abramson, Paul, John Aldrich, and David Rohde. 1998. *Change and Continuity in the 1996 Elections*. Washington DC: CQ Press.
- [4] Anslover, Nicole. 2016. "Politics and the Public Mood in 1976." In *A Companion to Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter*, edited by Scott Kaufman: 211-227. Malden, MA: John Wiley Sons.
- [5] Alvarez, Michael, and Jonathan Nagler. 1995. "Economics, Issues and the Perot Candidacy: Voter Choice in the 1992 Presidential Election." *American Journal of Political Science* 39(3): 714-744.
- [6] Blake, Aaron. 2017. "Donald Trump's New 2020 Campaign Slogan is Out, and it's Very, Well, Donald Trump." *The Washington Post*, January 12. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/01/trump-2020-campaign-slogan-233761>.
- [7] Brinkley, Douglas. 1998. *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House*. New York: Viking.
- [8] Broh, Anthony. 1980. "Horse-Race Journalism: Reporting the Polls in the 1976 Presidential Election." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 44(4): 514-529.
- [9] Busch, Andrew. 2016. "The Election of 1980." In *A Companion to Gerald R. Ford and Jimmy Carter*, edited by Scott Kaufman: 470-490. Malden, MA: John Wiley Sons.
- [10] Callaghan, Karen, and Simon Virtanen. 1993. "Revised Models of the Rally Phenomenon: The Case of the Carter Presidency." *The Journal of Politics* 55(3): 756-764.
- [11] Campbell, James. 2013. "The Miserable Presidential Election of 2012: A First Party-Term Incumbent Survives." *The Forum: A Journal of Applied Research in Contemporary Politics* 10(4): 20-28.
- [12] Campbell, James. 2008. *The American Campaign: U.S. Presidential Campaigns and the National Vote*. College Station, Texas: Texas AM University Press.
- [13] Campbell, James. 2005. "Why Bush Won the Presidential Election of 2004: Incumbency, Ideology, Terrorism, and Turnout." *Political Science Quarterly* 120(2): 219-241.
- [14] Cillizza, Chris. 2018. "5 Republicans who could challenge Donald Trump in 2020." *CNN Politics*, August 1. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/08/01/politics/2020-primary/index.html>.
- [15] Carter, Jimmy. 1982. *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President*. New York: Bantam Books.
- [16] Cummings Jr., Milton. 1996. "Political Change Since the New Deal: The 1992 Presidential Election in Historical Perspective." In *American Presidential Elections: Process, Policy, and Political Change*, edited by Harvey Schantz: 51-92. New York: State University of New York Press.
- [17] D'Aprile, Shane. 2009. "Remembering 1980: Kennedy's Brutal Political Fistfight." *Campaigns Elections*, August 25. <https://www.campaignsandelections.com/campaign-insider/remembering-1980-kennedy-s-brutal-political-fistfight>.
- [18] DeBenedetti, Gabriel. 2017. "2020 Race Lures Sprawling Democratic Field." *Politico*, February 24. <http://www.politico.com/story/2017/02/democrats-2020-presidential-field-235335>.

- [19] DeFrank, Thomas. 2007. *Write It When I'm Gone: Remarkable Off-the-Record Conversations with Gerald R. Ford*. New York: Berkley.
- [20] De Vogue, Ariane. 2017. "Democrats Already Are Trying To Get Out the Vote for 2020." *CNN Politics*, January 14. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/01/14/politics/voting-wars-democrats-2020/>.
- [21] Gallup. 2018. "Trump Job Approval (Weekly)", *Gallup*. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/203207/trump-job-approval-weekly.aspx>.
- [22] Glad, Betty. 1995. "How George Bush Lost the Presidential Election of 1992." In *The Clinton Presidency: Campaigning, Governing, and the Psychology of Leadership*, edited by Stanley Renshon: 11-35. Colorado: Westview Press.
- [23] Graham, David. 2017. "Trump Kicks Off His 2020 Reelection Campaign on Saturday." *The Atlantic*, February 15. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/02/trump-kicks-off-his-2020-reelection-campaign-on-saturday/516909/>.
- [24] Mayhew, David. 2008. "Incumbency Advantage in US Presidential Elections: The Historical Record." *Political Science Quarterly* 123(2): 201-228.
- [25] Melusky, Joseph. 1981. "An Electoral College Fable: How the Carter-Ford Election Might have made Ronald Reagan President in 1976." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 11(3): 384-386.
- [26] Mieczkowski, Yanek. 2008. "Gerald Ford's Near Miracle of 1976." *American History* 42(6): 42-49.
- [27] Mieczkowski, Yanek. 2005. *Gerald Ford and the Challenges of the 1970s*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- [28] Miller, Arthur. 1978. "Partisanship Reinstated? A Comparison of the 1972 and 1976 U.S. Presidential Elections." *British Journal of Political Science* 8(2): 129-152.
- [29] Newport, Frank. 1998. "History Shows Presidential Job Approval Ratings Can Plummet Rapidly." *Gallup*, September 20. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/4258/history-shows-presidential-job-approval-ratings-can-plummet.aspx>.
- [30] Patterson, James. 1996. *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- [31] Pomper, Gerald. 1981. "The Nomination Contests." In *The Election of 1980: Reports and Interpretations*, edited by Marlene Pomper: 1-37. Chatham, New Jersey: Chatham House Publishers.
- [32] Popkin, Samuel. 2012. *The Candidate: What it Takes to Win – and Hold – the White House*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- [33] Roper Center. n.d. "How Groups Voted in 1980." Accessed March 10, 2017. <https://ropercenter.cornell.edu/polls/us-elections/how-groups-voted/how-groups-voted-1980/>.
- [34] Sides, John, Michael Tesler, and Lynn Vavreck. 2016. "The Electoral Landscape of 2016." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667(1): 50-71.
- [35] Snyder, Sarah. 2010. "Through the Looking Glass: The Helsinki Final Act and the 1976 Election for President." *Diplomacy Statecraft* 21(1): 87-106.
- [36] The American Presidency Project. 2016. "Voter Turnout in Presidential Elections: 1828 – 2012." Available at <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/data/turnout.php>.
- [37] Thomas, Daniel. 2002. "Boomerangs and Superpowers: International Norms, Transnational Networks and US Foreign Policy." *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 15(1): 25-34.
- [38] Trump, Donald. 2007. *Trump 101: The Way to Success*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley Sons.
- [39] Vavreck, Lynn. 2009. *The Message Matters: The Economy and Presidential Campaigns*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- [40] Wayne, Stephen. 2012. *The Road to the White House 2012: The Politics of Presidential Elections*. Boston, MA: Cengage.
- [41] Weeks, Linton. 2012. "Why It's Good To Be The Incumbent." *NPR*, June 11. <http://www.npr.org/sections/itsallpolitics/2012/06/11/154745966/why-its-good-to-be-the-incumbent>.
- [42] Weisberg, Herbert. 2002. "Partisanship and Incumbency in Presidential Elections." *Political Behavior* 24(4): 339-360.
- [43] White, F. Clifton, and William Gill. 1981. *Why Reagan Won: A Narrative History of the Conservative Movement 1964-1981*. Chicago, IL: Regnery Gateway.
- [44] Williams, Philip, and Graham Wilson. 1977. "The 1976 Election and the American Political System." *Political Studies* 25(2): 182-200.



**Luís Miguel da Vinha** is Associate Professor at Valley City State University (USA), where he is responsible for the Political Science program. He received his Doctorate in International Relations from the University of Coimbra (Portugal). He is author of *Geographic Mental Maps and Foreign Policy Change: Re-Mapping the Carter Doctrine* and has published several papers on American government and politics with Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, the Journal of Policy History, the European Journal of Geography, and *Relações Internacionais*, among others.

ORCID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7222-5095>



**Niklas Ernst** is a graduate student in the political science department at the University of New Brunswick, Canada. He earned a bachelor's degree in social science at Valley City State University, where he graduated summa cum laude as the university's valedictorian. His work on presidential reelection bids has been presented at various conferences and featured on Capitol Hill in

Washington DC, after being selected for the Posters on the Hill symposium organized by the CUR.