OUTSIDER PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES: THE CONSEQUENCE OF A FLAWED AMERICAN ELECTORAL SYSTEM

by
Rebecca Murow Klein

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Abstract
The job description for president of the United States is limited to a short section in the United States Constitution. American voters often lack criteria on which to base their voting decisions and are left to make their best guesses about who the most effective leader of the country will be. As a result, outsider candidates become successful in presidential campaigns; and insiders, or candidates with significant government experience, may be disadvantaged.\textsuperscript{1}
This thesis examines the success of outsider candidates and evaluates if they can be effective leaders. It does so by investigating the following questions: what qualities make a presidential candidate successful with voters; why are outsider candidates successful with voters; and whether or not business experience helps presidential candidates become winners and successful presidents?

Through three different literature reviews and case studies, the thesis finds that voters often see government experience as a negative trait. Voters are attracted to outsider candidates, particularly when the historical context presents social or political crises. Finally, when attempting to find a specific set of outsider skills that could prove beneficial to presidents without significant government experience, the thesis finds that candidates with business background are not at an advantage. Ultimately, the field of government and politics does not pave the way for outsiders to be successful U.S. presidents. At least some amount of experience in politics and government should be a necessary qualification for presidential candidates. To ensure qualified candidates run for office and become president, the country needs to codify

\textsuperscript{1} For the purposes of this paper, the definition of “outsider candidate” is: an individual who is not associated with influential Washington political circles, or an individual who lacks significant political or government experience.
perquisites for candidates and better inform voters about what to look for in their presidential
nominees.

**Thesis Reviewer:** Dr. Michael Eric Siegel

**Thesis Reviewer:** Jason Linde
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Introduction

The position of President of the United States comes with a short and vague job description, and the electorate is not equipped with specific guidelines for selecting the right candidate for the role. Without required qualifications for the candidates or a rubric to follow for making decisions, the voters who are making the hiring decision for the position of president are left making their best guesses about who will be the most effective chief executive of their country.

The American presidential electoral system is flawed because the job description is limited to a short explanation in the United States Constitution; and voters are ill-informed about the candidates and the criteria on which they should base their decisions. As a result, voters pick their own criteria, ranging from their individual emotions to the candidate’s name recognition, religion, or policy stance on a particular issue. Rarely do voters consider factors such as a candidate’s ability to lead and manage others, or the impact of a candidate’s education and work experience on their aptitude for governing. Consequently, voters elect individuals who symbolize the opposite of what they think Washington represents and inexperienced outsider candidates can become the president of the United States; but the system does not typically allow for those types of candidates to succeed. Americans grow up believing anyone can become president; but proper criteria must be in place in order to best ensure the most qualified individuals ultimately serve in the powerful position. For, outsiders who ultimately become president are not always as successful in the role as those who came to the Oval Office with significant government experience. Throughout this paper, the definition of
“outsider candidate” is: an individual who is not associated with influential Washington political circles, or an individual who lacks significant political or government experience.

Government and politics may be the only industry where one’s extensive education and experience in the field could prevent them from climbing to the top of the ladder. Changes need to be made to the system in order to prepare and vet candidates, inform voters, and elect effective, capable, and equipped leaders to the presidency. While a well-rounded candidate with some amount of outside experience can certainly benefit a leader and their followers, a successful candidate should come to office with government and political knowledge and experience to lead on day one. It is important to recognize differences exist in the qualities that make a great candidate and those that make a great president. This paper places more of an emphasis on qualities of presidential candidates than those in office.

Chapter I asks the question, “What qualities make a presidential candidate successful with voters?” First, I evaluate the absence of a specific job description for the position of President of the United States and the lack of guidelines for voters to follow when attempting to select the best candidate for that role. Through a literature review, I provide background on the presidential selection process in the United States and ideal characteristics of an American president according to scholars and then to voters. I also address the need to create new standards for presidential selection in order to ensure candidates are asked the right questions throughout the process, voters are electing qualified candidates, and the electorate has a thorough understanding of who they are selecting to serve as their nation’s leader for the next four years. In a case study comparing polling results from the 2008 and 2016 elections, voters selected candidates based on their desire for change. In both elections, the candidate with less
government experience and more campaign emphasis on bringing change to Washington, won the contests.

Because the 2008 and 2016 elections highlighted outsider candidates and the electorate’s desire to bring change to Washington, Chapter II seeks to determine why voters are so attracted to outsider candidates and when history allows those candidates to be most successful.

The literature review first examines the role of the outsider in American cultural, social, and political history; then looks at the schools of thought around insider versus outsider candidates and how an outsider is perceived as a leader. The chapter uses a case study to analyze three outsider candidacies, those of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter and Donald Trump by asking key questions of each to better understand why voters would have preferred an outsider candidate in these particular elections. I ask about the political, social, and economic climates that fostered a desire for change; characteristics each of these candidates portray that are attractive to voters; and the president’s opponent in the general election.

Finally, if outsider candidates are so desirable, is there room for them to be successful in the presidency? Chapter III attempts to argue that outsider candidates with business acumen could make a positive impact on government and run the White House effectively. Perhaps business leaders could be successful outsider candidates and presidents; for, if business expertise and management skill are essential for running other organizations, why would that not hold true for running the federal government as well? Business acumen could have a positive impact on Washington and improve the way politics and government are organized.

This section reviews literature around why a candidate might choose to run for president. What
are their passions and ambitions? Understanding the characteristics that could make an effective president, the expanding role of the presidency, and the evolution of the two major political parties helps the reader further understand why outsiders might choose to become presidential candidates, and how the two parties differ in promoting insiders versus outsiders. The chapter serves as a case study of outsider candidates who come to the campaign trail with predominant background in business. I examine two party nominees and two eventual presidents who came to the contests with little or no government background but plenty of business experience. The analysis highlights a particular business strength of each candidate: Herbert Hoover’s quiet leadership style, Donald’s Trump’s ability to brand himself and his policies with marketing and messaging, Wendell Willkie’s negotiation strategies, and Mitt Romney’s business and data analytics.

Three leading schools of thought exist in the literature around the main arguments addressed in this paper. My thesis is situated in the doctrines that advocate for presidential candidates to have strong leadership skills, experience in government prior to running, and that “outsider candidates” cannot be as successful in the presidency.

Learning about the outsider trend and the flaws of the American electoral system is critical to reforming the process. This is necessary to ensure the American political system can flourish and United States presidents can be successful leading at home while earning and maintaining respect on the world stage. It is imperative to guarantee the right candidates are running – those who have the capabilities to successfully execute the goals of the office. It is also important to determine historical events do not result in a loss of trust in government, leading voters to believe they need outside leadership with little experience to attempt to bring
change to Washington, rather than electing experienced professionals to lead the way to necessary improvements. If the system does not allow for outsider candidates to be successful without significant government experience to pair with the candidate’s “outside” experience, why does the same system allow those candidates to run and voters to elect them? In order to answer this question and better understand the current American electoral process, one must examine how voters make their decisions and what qualities they find most appealing in candidates.
Chapter I: How Voters Select Presidential Candidates Without Guidelines
Rebecca Murow Klein

Professor Jacob Straus
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Introduction

One would assume that background and expertise in politics and government would elevate those experienced candidates during a campaign; but that is not always the case. Early in the 2016 election cycle, there was a large field of candidates—especially for the Republican nomination—most with vast government experience. That government experience, however, was perceived as a negative. Candidates who had spent their entire careers in politics and government were considered “insiders” and sometimes “unfit for the job.” Since the post-war era, voting for outsider candidates for president has become a trend in American politics.

Following Donald Trump’s 2016 election, more non-traditional candidates were being mentioned for 2020. But the last two presidents suggest that American voters seem to think the country needs fresh faces and ideas in government, perhaps even from individuals with little or no government experience. But should there be consistent requirements or qualifications that presidential candidates must meet, beyond what is constitutionally mandated? Should American presidents need experience in government in order to run for the highest office in the land? Or can the skills and lessons one has gained from other professional experience translate into effectively running a country? Why do voters favor certain qualities over other in a candidate? The following chapters will address some of these queries. But first, it is critical to answer the following question: What qualities make a presidential candidate successful with voters?

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4 Ibid.
Literature Review

Historically, relevant experience has been vital to success for those seeking political careers. Most Members of Congress, for example, have prior political experience, and “[...] amateurs in high public office are seen as the exception to the normal progression of political careers [...].”\(^5\) In an interview with *The Atlantic*, University of Virginia professor James Caesar said the presidency “shouldn’t be an entry level job.”\(^6\) This begs many questions: What do we look for in our elected leaders? What *should* we look for? What should we expect from them? What questions should we be asking candidates throughout the election cycle?

The Ideal Characteristics of a United States President, According to Presidential Scholars

Given the president’s evolving role and job description, one must ask what qualities are necessary in a United States president. To be effective, Richard Neustadt believes presidents need to possess several qualities. Most importantly, presidents need “the power to persuade.”\(^7\) Status and authority are critical as well.\(^8\) Neustadt writes, “The essence of a President’s persuasive task is to convince such men that what the White House wants of them is what they ought to do for their sake and on their authority.”\(^9\) Through examples from several presidents, Neustadt also emphasizes the importance of “professional reputation,” ‘influence,” and “public

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\(^8\) Ibid., 30.

\(^9\) Ibid., 30.
He believes that in addition to a president’s “professional reputation” in Washington, his rapport with the public outside of D.C. is also significant. Neustadt writes that Washingtonians “have to gauge his popular prestige. Because they think about it, public standing is a source of influence for him, another factor bearing on their willingness to give him what he wants.”

Other scholars and politicians have their own formulas that produce successful presidents. For example, another study found that in order to be effective, a president should “develop a ‘strategy’ of leadership” consisting of his vision, politics, structure, and process. He has an ideal “formulation” that can be used to

Concoct the skill set of the ultimate president: Someone who has the experience and networks of George H.W. Bush, the courage and strength of purpose of Ronald Reagan, the intellectual power and political insight of Bill Clinton, the moral integrity of Jimmy Carter, and the clarity of vision and perseverance of George W. Bush.

This description suggests that these men embody the ideal characteristics in each of the categories he describes. Perhaps these are traits voters should be looking for as they make their presidential selections.

In a 2015 Washington Post article, former Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates summarized what he believes are the important traits in the next president:

We need a president who understands the system of government bequeathed to us by the Founders—and grasps the reality that with power divided among three branches of government, building coalitions and making compromises are the only ways anything lasting can get done. ... Our next leader needs to speak truthfully to the American people. ...The next president must be resolute. ... Our new leader must be a problem-

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11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
14 Ibid., 269.
solver. Recently, we have elected presidents with a conservative agenda or a liberal agenda. This election, how about we look for one whose agenda is just making things work? ... We need a president who is restrained. [...] Finally, the most important quality for our next leader at this juncture in our history: The new president must be a true unifier of Americans.\textsuperscript{15}

Others believe the job of president is so extensive that it is nearly impossible for one to be sufficiently qualified and ready for the job.\textsuperscript{16} One study found that

The presidency of the United States, combining world military and diplomatic leadership with responsibility for domestic security and governance, is a job for which there probably could be no adequate preparation. Nonetheless, ... a review of recent incumbents suggests that American presidents come to the White House unusually ill prepared in comparison to the leaders of many other countries.\textsuperscript{17}

**The Ideal Characteristics of a United States President/Leader, According to Voters**

Of course, the voters make their own choices around how they ultimately select their candidate. Voters often make decisions purely according to party lines. Political history also shows voters are most likely to choose their candidate based on issues, experience or background, physical qualities, and religion.

**Issues**

Candidates’ stances on the issues seem to be the most important quality for a voter.\textsuperscript{18} A Pew Research Center article states, “Political pundits often focus on the ‘electability’ of candidates—how they might fare in a general election contest. But in September, majorities of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
voters in both parties said it was more important for a candidate to share their positions on the issues.”

Political scientist V.O. Key acknowledges various factors that play a role in a voter’s decision-making process, but he ultimately concludes that a candidate’s policy positions are critical. Key writes, “Analyses of the available information indicate quite marked correlations between policy attitudes and vote switching.” The authors of Democracy Despite Itself go so far as to say that even when voters are not well informed on the issues, the issues are important to them in the election.

Experience

Conflicting research surrounds the importance of a candidate’s relevant background and experience. In a Pew Research Center study, “What voters want in a president today, and how their views have changed”, the data show that in March 2015, “More voters valued a hypothetical candidate with ‘experience and a proven record’ (50%) than one who had ‘new ideas and a different approach’ (43%).” However, “Just six months later, those numbers had flipped – 55% said it was more important for a candidate to have new ideas, while 37% valued experience and a proven record.”

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The same study also found that a candidate’s experience specifically as a federal legislator could actually be harmful to the person’s standing. The research showed, “In January, 31% of the public ... said they would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate who had been an elected official in Washington for many years. In 2007, just 15% of the public...had a negative view of a candidate with longtime experience as a D.C. elected official.”

Regarding experience serving in the military, in January 2016, “50% of Americans said they would be more likely to vote for a presidential candidate who has served in the military – the most positively viewed trait among 13 tested.” While voters also saw military experiences as a positive trait for candidates in the 2012 and 2008 presidential elections, “The 2012 election was the first in more than 80 years in which neither of the major party presidential candidates had served in the military.”

Physical Qualities

Research indicates that physical qualities play a role in the presidential selection process. A New York Times article suggests, “seemingly superficial characteristics and split-second judgments can affect voters’ decisions.” In fact, at least some studies have “found that most American presidents are taller than average, and that voters tend to choose taller candidates. In the general election, the taller of the two candidates won roughly two-thirds of

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24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
the time.”

For example, another study examined how respondents reacted to photos of candidates. In summary, it stated:

That inferences of competence based solely on facial appearance predicted the outcomes of U.S. congressional elections better than chance (e.g., 68.8% of the Senate races in 2004) and also were linearly related to the margin of victory. ... The findings suggest that rapid, unreflective trait inferences can contribute to voting choices, which are widely assumed to be based primarily on rational and deliberative considerations.

Voters can also be swayed not only by looks or other physical characteristics, but by voice. For example, one study finds that “voters prefer leaders with lower-pitched voices because they are perceived as stronger, having greater physical prowess, more competent, and having greater integrity.”

Subsequently, “male and female candidates in their 40s and 50s, the time in the lifecycle when voice pitch is at its lowest, are preferred over candidates in their 30s, 60s, and 70s.” Further research also links vocal range with competency. Therefore, voters show a “preference for leaders with lower-pitched voices correlates with the perception that speakers with lower voices are stronger, more competent, and older, but the influence of perception of age on vote choice is the weakest of the three.”

Religion

Candidates’ religious beliefs are another factor voters often consider. A Pew Research Center survey on faith and the 2016 campaign showed:

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30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
Large majorities of Americans said it would make no difference to them if a presidential candidate were Jewish (80%) or Catholic (75%). Being an evangelical Christian also is a neutral characteristic; 55% of U.S. adults said it wouldn’t matter if a candidate were an evangelical, while similar shares said it would make them more likely (22%) or less likely (20%) to vote for that person.\footnote{32 “Faith and the 2016 Campaign,” Pew Research Center, January 27, 2016, \url{http://www.pewforum.org/2016/01/27/religion-and-other-candidate-traits/}.}

However, atheism did seem to have a negative impact on voters’ enthusiasm about a candidate. The study found, “half of Americans (51%) said they would be less likely to vote for an atheist candidate, though this share has fallen from 63% in 2007.”\footnote{33 Ibid.}

The Need to Create New Standards for Presidential Selection

Voters can make their presidential selections based on whatever measures they choose, because the only guidelines around a presidential election currently include the selection of candidates by both parties, followed by an official election process. Today, the Republican and Democratic Parties choose their presidential candidates by selecting delegates to represent them and vote at the parties’ national conventions.\footnote{34 Liz Olson, “How Republicans and Democrats Choose Their Presidential Nominees,” \textit{Fortune}, March 15, 2016, \url{http://fortune.com/2016/03/15/how-republicans-and-democrats-choose-their-presidential-nominees/}.} Next, “the candidates then campaign across the country to explain their views and plans to voters and participate in debates with candidates from other parties. During the general election, Americans head to the polls to cast their vote for President. [...]”\footnote{35 “Overview of the Presidential Election Process,” \url{https://www.usa.gov/election}.} The current process lacks explicit standards for which voters can, or should, follow regarding how to make their selection, as the party process is not mandated by the Constitution or law.

\footnote{33 Ibid.}
\footnote{35 “Overview of the Presidential Election Process,” \url{https://www.usa.gov/election}.}
American voters can and do select candidates based on whatever criterion they want.\textsuperscript{36} But if presidential campaigns were treated more like job interviews, where parties required candidates to provide answers to certain questions in order to receive delegates’ support, voters could have a better grasp on candidates’ leadership styles. If parties asked candidates questions about their management and leadership styles and how they would accomplish their goals in office, rather than blindly supporting candidates who shared similar views on policy issues and committed to party-line talking points, voters would learn much more about candidates’ abilities to get the job done. Instead of the usual questions around policy positions and political platforms, one wonders how a voter could learn more about a candidate’s ability to lead if a different line of questioning were used at points throughout the campaign. The literature does not highlight studies on this, but it is certainly an area for further research.

In his article, “What We Should Be Asking the Candidates,” Michael Siegel suggests that rather than asking presidential candidates questions about policy, we need to be asking them certain questions to better understand their leadership and management styles.\textsuperscript{37} Siegel argues, “The questions routinely asked of our presidential candidates are insufficient for assessing their potential ability to lead the nation.”\textsuperscript{38} He recommends asking them questions in the areas of vision/purpose (e.g., “Does the candidate embrace a strong vision or compelling view of the nation’s future?”), strategy/execution (e.g., “Does the candidate comprehend or possess the specific political skills needed to translate vision into reality?”),

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
management/structure (e.g., “Does the candidate understand basic management principles and the requirements of managing a substantial White House operation and a sprawling federal workforce of some 2 million people? Does he know the functions and operations of the cabinet agencies, or can he at least name them?”), and process/decision-making (e.g., “Is the candidate comfortable making tough decisions? More importantly, does he understand how to create an environment where good decisions can be made?”).39

In 2012, Slate imagined what would happen if “we approached presidential campaigns the way a large corporation approaches its search for a new chief executive.”40 The writer says, in this case, “the purpose of the campaign would be to test for the skills and attributes actually required for the job. […] Applicants are asked questions like ‘Tell us about a conflict at work you helped resolve’ and ‘What’s the biggest obstacle you overcame?’”41 This would serve to help voters understand how their president would handle a crisis situation or manage the Executive Branch. After all, the president’s job consists of more than taking policy positions.

In April 2015, Slate published another article that proposed asking presidential candidates questions similar to those that would be asked in a corporate job interview.42 These questions include inquiries into how a candidate has handled a crisis in his or her personal and professional life, his or her greatest governing triumph, past experience that will serve the

41 Ibid.
candidate well as president, and even asking them to tell a joke. Along the same lines, in the midst of the 2008 presidential primary cycle, a *Harvard Business Review* writer noticed, “The presidential candidates haven’t yet answered crucial questions about their leadership abilities, styles, and philosophies.”

Former Chief of Staff to President George W. Bush, Andrew Card, suggested asking presidential candidates questions about decision making, amongst other questions relevant to leadership style. He recommended, “Many of the hardest decisions in the White House won’t be consensus decisions. What will inform your decision making? How will you spend quiet time in anticipation of a tough decision?”

A representative from the private sector, Kevin Sharer, CEO and chairman of Amgen Pharmaceuticals, has shared his perspective as well. He would want to know about a high-performing team the candidate has created, “What could cause you to fail as the President?,” “What is your negotiating style/approach/philosophy?, and “Tell us about a time when your judgment has been tested in crisis. What do you want us to appreciate about your judgment?”

A 2008 *Washington Post* article attempts to answer the question of “What Does a President Really Do All Day?” It highlights the critical point that American voters tend not to

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
discuss what the role of president actually entails, but rather, on “hot-button issues, the latest
gaffe, the new sound bite, the polls, the electoral map.” The article also draws on experts’
analyses of presidential qualifications, and finds they agree on one thing: “A president needs to
to be good at making decisions, lots of them, on complicated matters.” The article’s experts also
question how voters could know if a presidential candidate would be good at decision-making,
since that is not a question that is typically asked during the course of a campaign.

Data and Methodology

The methodology includes a comparison of two case studies. Case study literature
encourages this type of methodology in order to learn from cases that are similar with different
outcomes. Louise White notes, “A lot can be learned from comparing two cases, especially
when they differ in some interesting ways. The key issue is selecting two or more cases that are
comparsible in some interesting way—similar circumstances but different results.” Data from
the 2008 and 2016 presidential elections will attempt to show how voters made their decisions
in two impassioned United States presidential campaigns that both highlighted the need for
change and fresh, new leadership. In both cases, the candidate with less government
experience won the election, but the main factors voters considered in making their selections
differed.

48 Joel Achenbach, “What Does a President Really Do All Day?,” The Washington Post (April 27, 2008),
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Louise G. White, Political Analysis Technique and Practice (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998),
117.
In both races, voters ultimately selected candidates who did not possess the most experience. In 2008, eventual Democratic nominee Barack Obama had only served in the U.S. Senate for two years and in the Illinois State Senate for three terms. Yet, he was able to beat competitors like Senators Joe Biden (D-DE) and John McCain (R-AZ) who boasted decades of experience as federal lawmakers. Similarly, in 2016, Donald Trump, a businessman and reality television star with no previous experience in government or elected office, defeated candidates with years of political experience in both the primaries and general election.

**Action**

**2008 Election Data**

Polling data was collected from the 2008 presidential election between United States Senator Barack Obama (D-IL) and United States Senator John McCain (R-AZ). Polls from Gallup and the Pew Research Center show several factors voters consider when selecting their preferred presidential candidate.

In a September 2008 Gallup poll, candidates who were known to have a preferred candidate were asked, “What would you say are the one or two most important reasons why you lean toward voting for [preferred candidate]?” The results are table 1 below.\(^{52}\)

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Table 1. GALLUP POLL RESULTS ON REASONS WHY VOTERS PREFERRED A SPECIFIC CANDIDATE
Based on 944 adults with a candidate preference or leaning; ±4 pct. pts.
2008 Sept. 8-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>National Adults (%)</th>
<th>Obama Voters (%)</th>
<th>McCain Voters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Want change/Fresh approach</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced/Qualified</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always support that party</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy/His economic plan</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honest/Has integrity/Good character</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree with his values/views (nonspecific)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National security/Terrorism issue</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq war/Plans for handling it</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For the working/Middle class</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Like his choice of running mate</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy/Trust him</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military background/Service to country</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smart/Intelligent/Knowledgeable</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>International affairs/Foreign policy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favors smaller government</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent/Goes against party/A maverick</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative/More conservative candidate</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare reform</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy/His energy plan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes/His tax plan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education/His education plan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment/Global warming</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No reason in particular (vol.)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>--</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Less than 0.5%
(vol.) = Volunteered response
^Based on 448 Obama voters, ±5pct. pts.
^^Based on 446 McCain voters, ±5 pct. pts.
In sum, Table 1 shows that Gallup finds the main reasons voters supported McCain were his experience and “ability to handle terrorism and national security”.\textsuperscript{53} His supporters also appreciated his running mate selection, commitment to the Republican Party, and military background and service.\textsuperscript{54}

Immediately following the election, the Pew Research Center found that voters made their selections based on issue positions, leadership and personal qualities, judgment and background, change, and race. Of the issues of most importance to voters, the economy, health care, energy, and foreign affairs hovered at the top of the list. The economy was found to be a top priority for 63\% of all voters.\textsuperscript{55} While both Obama and McCain supporters felt this way, the Pew Research Center discovered, “Economic issues and personal financial concerns consistently cut in Obama’s favor.”\textsuperscript{56} Of those who expressed serious concern about the economy, more voted for Obama than McCain.\textsuperscript{57}

Health care was another issue important to voters, and again, those with concerns in this area preferred Obama to McCain. The Pew Research Center found, “One-in-three voters said they are very worried about being able to afford the health care services they need, and these voters backed Obama by a 65\%-to-32\% margin.”\textsuperscript{58}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Frank Newport, “For Obama’s Voters, It’s Change; for McCain’s, Experience”, \textit{Gallup}, September 16, 2008, \url{https://news.gallup.com/poll/110374/obamas-voters-its-change-mccains-experience.aspx}.
\item Ibid.
\item “Inside Obama’s Sweeping Victory”, \textit{Pew Research Center}, November 5, 2008, \url{http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/05/inside-obamas-sweeping-victory/}.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\item Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Voters also looked at the candidates’ positions on energy policy. Sixty-eight percent of voters noted they were supportive of offshore drilling where it is now prohibited. The Pew Research Center found, “McCain won by a large margin among voters who support offshore drilling (59% to 39% for Obama). Yet his margin came from those who strongly favor drilling; Obama won among voters who only somewhat favor drilling in currently protected areas, as well as among the minority of voters who oppose this proposal.”

Some respondents made their presidential selections on the basis of foreign affairs. According to the Pew Research Center, 9% of the electorate ranked terrorism as the top issue affecting the country. Those voters “favored McCain by greater than six-to-one (86% to 13%).” However, of the 70% of voters who noted fear about another terrorist attack on the United States, 48% preferred Obama; and 50% favored McCain.

Overall, respondents who voted for Obama said they chose him on the basis of his issue positions (68%) rather than his leadership and personal qualities (30%). However, of those who voted for McCain, “49% [said] his leadership and personal qualities mattered most to them, rather than his positions on the issues (48%).”

Other factors, like judgment and background, played a role in voters’ decision making as well. A majority of voters (57.5%) thought Obama showed the right judgment for a president,

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60 Ibid.
61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
whereas 49% thought that about McCain.\textsuperscript{64} Over half of respondents (57%) felt that Obama is “in touch with people like them”, and 39% of voters said so about McCain.\textsuperscript{65}

Obama ran his campaign on the idea that America needed change, and his supporters appreciated this sentiment. The Pew Research Center findings show, “Thirty-seven percent of his supporters cite ‘change’ as the reason for their support, by far the largest single response category for his voters.”\textsuperscript{66}

McCain, however, was not able to “escape the shadow of George W. Bush.”\textsuperscript{67} The poll indicates:

71% of voters said they disapprove of the job George W. Bush is doing as president, and 48% of voters said they thought if McCain were elected, he would mainly continue Bush’s policies. Among voters who said that McCain would continue bush’s policies, the vast majority (90%) favored Obama.\textsuperscript{68}

Race was another relevant factor in this campaign. The Pew Research Center believes, “If anything, the race factor favored Obama.”\textsuperscript{69} Seventy-five percent of white voters indicated that race factored into their decision; those voters selected McCain 66%-to-33%.\textsuperscript{70} However, 92% of white voters said race was not a significant factor.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{64} “Inside Obama’s Sweeping Victory”, Pew Research Center, November 5, 2008, \url{http://www.pewresearch.org/2008/11/05/inside-obamas-sweeping-victory/}.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
2016 Election Data

The 2016 election was a contest between Democratic candidate Secretary Hillary Clinton, a seasoned politician and government official, and Republican candidate Donald Trump, a businessman and reality television star. Polling data was gathered from this presidential election to analyze voters’ feelings toward both their preferred candidates.

In a September 2016 Gallup poll, respondents were asked, “In your own words, why are you most likely to vote for [Hillary Clinton/Donald Trump]? The full set of responses can be found in the table 2 below.\textsuperscript{72}

Table 2. SUMMARY OF REASONS VOTERS SUPPORT HILLARY CLINTON OR DONALD TRUMP
Based on U.S. registered voters who plan to vote for either Clinton or Trump.
2016 Sept. 14-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>All voters (%)</th>
<th>Clinton voters (%)</th>
<th>Trump voters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative assessment of opponent</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualifications/Experience</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Issues/Policies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal qualities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Partisanship</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want change</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No opinion</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results indicated that the main reason voters were inclined to make their presidential selections in 2016 was due to a negative impression of the opposing candidate.

Twenty-eight percent of voters, both Clinton and Trump supporters, found the opposing

\textsuperscript{72} Lydia Saad, “Aversion to Other Candidate Key Factor in 2016 Vote Choice”, \textit{Gallup}, October 6, 2016, \url{https://news.gallup.com/poll/196172/aversion-candidate-key-factor-2016-vote-choice.aspx}. 
candidate to be “dishonest, unqualified, or of poor temperament.” Voters’ reasons for not liking the opposing candidates can be found in the table 3 below.

Table 3. “ANTI-VOTE” REASONS VOTERS SUPPORT HILLARY CLINTON OR DONALD TRUMP
Based on U.S. registered voters who plan to vote for either Clinton or Trump.
2016 Sept. 14-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>All voters (%)</th>
<th>Clinton voters (%)</th>
<th>Trump voters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative assessment of opponent (Total)</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t trust other candidate/Dishonest/Lack of integrity</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesser of two evils</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not like other candidate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voting against other candidate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other does not have temperament to be president</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not favor other’s agenda, ideas, platform</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other is not qualified to be president/Not a good candidate</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other has not done his/her job/Done a poor job</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other is too liberal</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These results show support for a candidate based on a negative association with the opposing candidate. The voter’s feeling that his or her selection was not ideal but the less of two evils (6%), distrust of the other candidate (4%), or the voter simply did not like the other candidate (4%) were the main reasons respondents provided. Other voters provided issue-

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74 Ibid.
based and quality-based reasons for thinking positively about their own candidates. The results for issue-based reasons are the table 4 below, and the results for quality-related reasons are the table 5 below.⁷⁵

Table 4. ISSUE-RELATED REASONS VOTERS SUPPORT HILLARY CLINTON OR DONALD TRUMP
Based on U.S. registered voters who plan to vote for either Clinton or Trump.
2016 Sept. 14-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issues/Policies (Total)</th>
<th>All voters (%)</th>
<th>Clinton voters (%)</th>
<th>Trump voters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Favor his/her agenda, ideas, platform</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cares about poor, old, middle class, average person</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative policies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defense/Military issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign policy issues</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduce spending</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create jobs/Lower unemployment</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Want less government/Reduce government</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare issues</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of voters who made positive candidate selections, they predominantly preferred their candidate because of his or her policy platform (10%). The economy and terrorism were found to be the two most important issues for voters prior to the election.⁷⁶

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⁷⁵ Ibid.
Table 5. QUALITY-RELATED REASONS VOTERS SUPPORT HILLARY CLINTON OR DONALD TRUMP
Based on U.S. registered voters who plan to vote for either Clinton or Trump.
2016 Sept. 14-18

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal qualities (Total)</th>
<th>All voters (%)</th>
<th>Clinton voters (%)</th>
<th>Trump voters (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Like him/her</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good morals, ethics, values</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credible/Reliable/Keeps promises</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy/Honest/Integrity</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership qualities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Represents women/Favor woman for president</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The voters who selected their candidates for positive reasons cared about “their own
candidate’s qualifications (24%), policy stances (17%), personal qualities (14%) or party
affiliation (9%).

**Analysis**

In both the 2008 and 2016 presidential campaigns, voters elected the candidates with
less government experience, but their reasons for making those decisions were based on
different factors in both elections. The literature indicates that voters generally make their
decisions based on physical qualities, relevant experience, religious beliefs, and policy positions.
An analysis of the data shows voters in 2008 and 2016 did make decisions in three of these four
areas, while also considering some additional factors.

The literature highlighted physical qualities as significant, but the polls presented in this
research did not specifically ask about a candidate’s physical qualities. Perhaps it is now
considered uncouth to ask questions about candidates’ physical qualities, particularly in 2016.
when American voters saw their first female presidential candidate. However, the polls did ask respondents about candidates’ personalities and other characteristics.

The literature review emphasizes that relevant experience has historically been important to the success of candidates; but in some cases, experience as a federal legislator can taint a candidate’s image. In 2008 and 2016, the candidates who ultimately won the presidency did not have a great deal (if any) of federal government experience. In 2008, only 12% of national voters preferred a candidate for his experience. In this case, McCain’s experience did not prove to elevate his candidacy, for, “while 59% said McCain has the right experience to be president, 51% said the same about Obama.”77 Voters who supported McCain did so due to his experience, but voters who preferred Obama cared less about experience and more about issues and the candidate’s desire for change.

In 2016, data shows “Clinton’s voters are about twice as likely as Trump’s to cite their candidate’s experience and qualifications to be president.”78 But interestingly, Clinton voters did not indicate experience as a determining factor in their decision.79 Voters clearly are not very concerned about their candidate’s relevant experience as one might expect.

The literature anticipates voters will consider candidates’ religious beliefs, but it also suggests those beliefs do not make a strong impact on how the voter will cast his or her ballot. The 2008 and 2016 polls illustrated here did not ask questions about candidates’ religions, which may lead one to assume religion was not a major factor in voters’ decision-making.

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79 Ibid.
processes in 2008 and 2016. This is surprising, as President Obama’s religion was certainly a major focus of attention throughout the 2008 campaign.

Literature on this topic suggests voters will support presidential candidates on the basis of their issue positions. The 2008 data shows that Obama voters were interested in him as a candidate because of his issue positions, while McCain supporters were generally more interested in his leadership and personal qualities and less interested in the positions, he took on specific policies. During the 2008 presidential campaign, the country was in the midst of a recession, so voters were very concerned about the economy. Clearly, that weighed heavily on their voting decisions, as it was a top priority for 63% of all voters. McCain voters who did care about issues, however, were more interested in foreign policy issues than domestic; and those who supported Obama on the issues seemed to do so in favor of his domestic policy positions.

While in 2016, 28% of voters made selections based on negative associations with the opposing candidate, those who did proactively select a preferred candidate did so because of that candidate’s policy positions. The data presented additional factors that were not forecasted in the literature. These included Obama’s and Trump’s campaigns for change, party loyalty, and a negative association with the opposing candidate. Data showed that Obama and Trump supporters favored their candidates’ desires to change the status quo. Gallup highlights that the voters’ selections for their respective candidates in 2008 mirror the political party divides on domestic and

international priorities. The trend has been for Republicans to prioritize international priorities and Democrats to prioritize domestic ones. The 2016 case explored here does not focus on decisions based on party alignment.

2016 polling found voters were selecting candidates simply because they did not care for the candidate’s opponent. Rather than making positive decisions about candidates they did like, voters selected their candidates based on a dislike for the opposing candidate. The fact that voters would make their selections because they disliked the opposition more than they liked their own candidate, or simply felt they were selecting the lesser of two evils, indicates a lack of excitement about the candidates both major parties presented. This voting trend is the electorate’s passive critique of the job of the incumbent.

Finally, an analysis of the 2016 election must include a mention of the fact that one of the major party candidates in the general election was the first woman selected by a major party. Only 2% of Clinton voters claimed they selected her for this reason, and perhaps her other supporters chose her for her experience and ability to do the job. However, plenty of studies and literature exist around the idea that Clinton’s opponents voted for Trump because, for a variety of reasons, they did not want to elect a woman to the presidency.

Conclusion

Voters consider many factors when deciding which presidential candidate to support in a given election. Qualities such as policy positions, religion, personal and physical traits, and

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even dislike of the opponent are under consideration. Though one might assume prior
government experience is important to voters, that is not always the case. In an article arguing
that an up-and-coming captivating politician should spend more time governing before running
for higher office, Politico writes, “And yes, sometimes people, like Obama and Trump, become
president because they catch lightning in a bottle. But others become president after years of
toil at the job of governing, like Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton. Even John F. Kennedy,
America’s youngest elected president, first accumulated more than a decade of service in
Congress.”83

While creating standards for American voters to consider before arriving at their polling
place could help ensure voters select qualified candidates, ultimately, the voters choose their
preferred candidates according to their own criteria. This often leads the electorate to select
change, or an outsider candidate, with little government experience.

83 Bill Scher, “How the Beto Bubble Could Burst,” Politico, November 20, 2018,
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Chapter II: Why Outsider Candidates Are Successful With Voters and When History Allows Them to Succeed
Rebecca Murow Klein

Professor Benjamin Ginsberg
AS.470.800.52.SU20 Research and Thesis III: MA in Government
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Introduction

While presidential scholars value the importance of strong leadership skills and a thorough understanding of government, the American electorate does not necessarily base its voting decisions on these characteristics. The American electoral system allows candidates to select whichever presidential candidate they want, but voters do not always make good, or informed, choices in the voting booth. Instead, voters choose their preferred candidates on the basis of qualities such as candidates’ stances on a particular issue of importance to the voter; experience in government, often preferring a lack of experience; physical qualities, and/or religion. Without a specific job description for the role of president of the United States, and lacking any guidelines for presidential selection, American voters are left guessing about who will be the best fit for the job. They make decisions founded in their emotions,\(^8\) desire for change in Washington, frustration with the status quo, or perhaps even psychological desires for certain types of leadership. If voters are feeling frustrated with the way Washington is handling a particular political, social, and/or economic issue, they are likely to favor the outsider candidate, or the individual who is promising to bring change to Washington.

Voters often prioritize characteristics of candidates that do not place enough weight on that individual’s experience in government or elected office. Often times, voters prefer outsider candidates with little or no governing experience. It is curious that voters would not want the candidate with the skills and background necessary to thoroughly understand, and succeed at, the job. This is divergent from what happens in other industries. An individual on trial would

not choose a court representative who has not graduated from law school, passed the bar
exam, and spent significant time practicing law. So why would that same individual select a
presidential candidate with no experience in government to lead their country’s
administration? Somehow, as Jonathan Rauch wrote in *The Atlantic*, “Increasingly, American
voters view being qualified for the presidency as a disqualification.”\(^8^5\) One is left attempting to
answer the following questions: Why are outsider candidates successful with voters? And when
does history allow for presidential candidates to be successful in general elections?

**Literature Review**

An outsider candidate can be someone who is not associated with influential
Washington political circles, or an individual who lacks significant political or government
experience. The trend of electing outsiders has even driven experienced candidates—who are
not as ingrained in the goings on of the Washington elite as the incumbent—to bill themselves
as “outsiders”.

**The Outsider in American Cultural and Social History**

To better understand the background of the outsider candidate trend, one must first
look at American cultural and social history. Historian Grace Elizabeth Hale places the outsider
issue in the broader cultural and social context of 1960s-1980s America.\(^8^6\) Hale focuses her

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\(^8^5\) Jonathan Rauch. “Amateurs in the Oval Office”. *The Atlantic*. November 2015,

research on outsiders in American culture and society in the second half of the 20th century, which coincides with the timing believed to be associated with baby boomers’ separation from the mainstream electorate due to the events surrounding the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal around approximately the same time.\footnote{Hale, Grace Elizabeth. \textit{A Nation of Outsiders}. Oxford University Press: New York, 2011.} This timeframe also aligns with the shift to voter preferences for the outsider candidate in presidential elections.

Hale points to the expansion of both media and leisure travel during this time as two outlets that allowed for a new display of people who were not white middle-class Americans to be observed by white middle-class Americans in U.S. culture.\footnote{Ibid., 3.} This finally showcased diversity and began to attract white middle-class Americans to an outsider point of view. Hale references the impact of film, literature, and music’s outsider qualities, reflecting the ethos of the time. She explains this newfound attraction to outside cultures in coining the term “romance of the outsider.”\footnote{Ibid., 1.} She defines this as “the belief that people somehow marginal to society possess cultural resources and values missing among other Americans.”\footnote{Ibid.} Hale acknowledges the concept of outsider popularity as “not new”\footnote{Ibid., 4.}—pointing to “earlier oppositional modes and expressive traditions” dating back to the early 19th century and through the first part of the 20th century.\footnote{Ibid.} Of course, the fascination with outsiders during this time period was an attraction to peoples who were not white Americans. The paradoxical mass culture of the post-war era Hale describes, that both enforced conformity while spreading diversity, seems to closely parallel the
infusion of technology into 21st century American culture. With the advent of the 24-hour news cycle and social media, the information space still allows plenty of room for people who want to embrace conformity and block out diversity. But yet, the attraction to outsider candidates still exists.

The Outsider in Political History

A review of the literature around political history of outsider candidates shows that anti-insider sentiment dates back to the late 19th century. According to Stewart, the electorate’s attraction to outsiders stems from “the American populism of the late 1890s” when “Debates over the invasive role of government and the control of political power by wealthy elites drove presidential candidates such as William Jennings Bryan to criticize federal government action.” Electing outsider candidates to the presidency goes back as far as Andrew Jackson and Zachary Taylor; but outsider politics also has roots in American culture and society of post-war America. In modern times, the shift of voters’ preference for outsider candidates can be attributed to events of the 1960s and 1970s surrounding Vietnam and Watergate.

Specifically, baby boomers’ lack of trust in government stems from Watergate and Vietnam, and members of that generation still carry that distrust with them today. In an NPR report, Don Gonyea concludes: “But there has been one constant for the members of this iconic

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generation, going back to the time of Watergate and Vietnam. They expressed a deep lack of trust in government back then—and that lack of trust persists today.”

Brown writes, “The boomers went overboard. They became infatuated with the idea that outsiders were the only politicians pure and authentic enough to be trusted. And that all others who tried to work within the system or sought compromises were sellouts who had been coopted by the establishment.” He concludes, “That belief had profound political consequences.” Still today, voters who lack trust in Washington also lack “a sense of strong, civic confidence, so they look elsewhere—beyond Washington—for leadership in the White House.”

According to J.T. Young’s definition of “outsider”, “Stretching back to 1960, Washington outsiders have won 10 presidential elections and lost two when facing Washington insiders.” This aligns with Stewart’s argument that “History in fact shows that it is good to be perceived as a Washington outsider when running for president of the United States.” Young provides additional analysis on the outsider attraction:

Today’s anti-Washington mood fits both the prevailing Washington outsider presidential trend of the past five decades and America’s inherent suspicion of central power. The ultimate check on Washington remains the electorate itself. As voters continue to overwhelmingly choose non-Washington presidents, voters appear to be at least

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97 Ibid.
100 Jared Alan Stewart, “In Through the Out Door: Examining the Use of Outsider Appeals in Presidential Debates”. Presidential Studies Quarterly 48, no. 1, March 1, 2018, 93.
implicitly attempting to exercise their check on Washington. Since 1972, there has not been an election without a Washington outsider on the ballot.101

Brown explained that “up-and-coming politicians in both parties played and preyed on this [voter] discontent, which over time grew to include a paranoid assumption that all politicians were corrupt and politics was never about public service, but rapacious self-interest.”102 It is important to remember that the outsider trend is not about the left or right side of the political spectrum, but rather the movement has contributed to the creation and evolution of factions of the two major parties. According to Hale, “outsiders and rebels created the spaces where political resistance emerged and left emancipatory politics began.”103 She emphasizes that “the romance of the outsider proved as useful in building the New Right as in building the New Left”, arguing, “This is how American conservatism was rebuilt.”104

Brown also finds that “for all but four of the past 40 years, we’ve gotten the ‘outsiders’ we said we wanted in the White House.”105 Rauch adds, “Starting in 1996, the candidate with more experience begins consistently losing.”106 He finds an “inexperience premium” that has continued to grow and reasons that “As voters have grown angrier with government, they have become more receptive to outsiders.”107

104 Ibid., 7.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
During the 2016 cycle, in December 2015, a Pennsylvania newspaper interviewed political scientists to discuss the fate of political outsiders in a presidential campaign. Experts explained that candidates who have never been elected to office tend to make commitments to the electorate without understanding what those promises entail. For example, a political science professor explained, “If Donald Trump gets elected, he can’t fire Congress. It doesn’t work like that.” In other words, while even insider politicians and government officials would tell you that Washington could benefit from some changes, for better or for worse there is a bureaucracy that stands in the way of quick fixes. The writers also found, “The candidate without experience appears knightly before reaching office […]. ‘The mantra is evident – ‘I’m not part of the sordid politics of the moment. I bring business expertise to government,’ etc.’” But then, “The knight’s shining armor then corrodes over time.” This is because, as one expert wrote, “Leading as an outsider is impossible, because when you are the most important person in the free world, you’re a politician,’ […] ‘That’s your job description.’”

**Insider vs. Outsider Candidates**

It is a widely recognized trend that “Washington outsiders win.” Young’s definition of a “Washington outsider” is: “being accepted by the voters as apart from the Washington

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109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.
111 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
culture – particularly in comparison with the opponent.”114 He writes, “This trend has trumped party, age, region, ideology, experience and ethnicity.”115 Stewart also concludes, “The win-loss record of outsider candidates in presidential elections reflects a clear advantage for those who can effectively separate themselves from the politics of Washington, D.C.”116 While it may be true that outsiders have proven their ability to win general elections, that does not mean they become the most successful presidents. A review of the literature shows little evidence that outsiders can be, and have been, successful in changing Washington; while many scholars favor insiders, or candidates and presidents with government experience.

There is little scholarship in support of outsider candidates, but Senator David Perdue (R-GA), a self-proclaimed “outsider businessman campaigning for the first time” in the Georgia Senate race in 2014, believes outsiders are necessary to fix Washington politics and that the outsider movement should be welcomed.117 He writes, “For too long, career politicians have over-promised and under-delivered. The constant gridlock and lack of results in Washington is unacceptable. We have a political system that protects those in power and leaves the American people behind.”118 Senator Perdue believed he challenged the Republican Party’s feeling that he “hadn’t paid [his] political dues and that voting for [him] would be risky” by asserting “I had spent my career running major companies and creating jobs, versus running for political office

115 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
as a full-time job.”119 Again, this begs the question: why is it a problem that someone who has been running for political office throughout his or her career, and therefore learning about, and becoming immersed in, politics, the very field in which they are aiming to climb the ladder, wants to reach the top?

In defense of politicians with experience, political scientist Lara Brown writes, “For more than 40 years, candidates on both sides of the aisle have sold variants of the same cynical snake oil to the American public: ‘Washington is broken, and only an outsider can fix it.’”120 She continues to explain that the outsider strategy works because “Voters buy into the promise of outsiders without recognizing the reality: The dysfunction in Washington is more a consequence of a political system run by inexperienced amateurs than of one manipulated by corrupt insiders.” (Brown) She claims that politicians with experience understand “that policy fights are winnable” but it takes time and significant work.121 Brown asserts, “The problem in Washington is not political insiders […] but the political amateurs, and the persistent belief that we need more of them to stop the dysfunction and end gridlock.”122

Brown argues the outsiders are not successful, as evidenced by the fact that public trust and approval of government “‘remains close to a historic low,’ with only about 18 percent of Americans saying they ‘trust the federal government to do the right thing just about always or

121Ibid.
122Ibid.
most of the time.”123 Political science scholar Barbara Trish adds that while outsider politicians are a commonality, “the true outsider seldom remakes the political sphere.”124 She also emphasizes that outsiders attempt to invent themselves as unique and different from all other candidates, when in reality, all outsiders follow the same template.125

Rauch agrees with the significance of experience, acknowledging, “I am of the old-fashioned belief that it’s helpful for the world’s most powerful leader to know the ropes a bit.”126 Rauch argues outsiders can only slightly benefit the system.127 On the Republican side specifically, he notes, “Not only do amateur-dominated primaries drive Republican candidates way to the right of the general electorate, complicating the task of winning general elections, but they also force experienced and impressive Republican candidates to campaign against their own strengths.”128 Rauch also pointed to James Q. Wilson’s book, The Amateur Democrat, for support of the insider. Wilson predicted in 1962, “‘Political conflict will be intensified, social cleavages will be exaggerated, party leaders will tend to be men skilled in the rhetorical arts, and the party’s ability to produce agreement by trading issue-free resources will be reduced.’”129 This is quite prophetic, given the trajectory of presidential politics following Wilson’s statement.

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125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
129 Ibid.
The Outsider as Leader

Digging deeper into voters’ desire for outsider leadership, Jerrold Post expands on Hale’s discussion of the outsider emerging in a social and cultural context, specifically pointing to leadership needs in “moments of societal crisis.”\(^\text{130}\) In these instances, Post notes that “otherwise mature and psychologically healthy individuals may temporarily come to feel overwhelmed and in need of a strong and self-assured leader. But when the historical moment passes, so, too, does this need.”\(^\text{131}\) Post recognizes the significance of a “special historical moment.”\(^\text{132}\) in the creation of a particular type of leader-follower relationship, noting “they are particularly apt to occur at those times when the ranks of dependent followers are swollen by normally self-sufficient individuals who have temporarily been rendered psychologically vulnerable by external events.”\(^\text{133}\)

American studies scholar Robert Schmuhl posits that when voters are feeling pessimistic about the country’s leadership, they are holding out hope for an outsider with a “put-others-first soul” to “slay the forces of evil arrayed against good.”\(^\text{134}\) He notes that some see that evil as the “infested and polluted ‘swamp’ of the nation’s capital.”\(^\text{135}\) Professor Jean Lipman-Blumen says this would not happen, however, suggesting that politicians cannot be saints because, “Saints rarely seek elected or appointed office.”\(^\text{136}\)

\(^{131}\) Ibid.
\(^{132}\) Ibid., 79-80.
\(^{133}\) Ibid., p 80.
\(^{135}\) Ibid.
As a result, candidates choose to run on outsider strategies. Stewart also acknowledges the impact of political context on this decision. He suggests, “It could possibly be that if the public distrusts government or the economy is doing poorly, candidates will see an opportunity to run against the system to benefit their campaign. If the public generally feels disenfranchised, candidates will be more likely to run against the government, acting as a warrior of the people against the system.”  

Candidates know the outsider appeal is attractive to voters, and they often yearn for a different type of leader in challenging times. When voters believe something in Washington needs fixing, or during particular instances in history, such as what occurred with the baby boomers following Watergate and Vietnam, they look for change in leadership to respond to unsettled crises. Presidential candidates exploit this and find ways to emphasize outsider rhetoric in their campaigns.

Stewart offers a variety of other reasons why presidential candidates choose to emphasize their outsider status. Perhaps most importantly, he finds, “As skepticism about the elitist workings of politics has grown and candidates’ communication with voters has expanded, the opportunities for presidential challengers to espouse outsider rhetoric have likewise manifested.”  

In addition, some candidates’ resumes show proof of outsider status, governors attempt to utilize outsider rhetoric because they have non-Washington experience, and those with experience in the private sector or other non-government background highlight their outsider status to bring change to government.  

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138 Ibid., 107.
139 Ibid., 96-97.
they utilize the outsider strategy, Stewart believes, “most candidates for the presidency will be likely to exercise an anti-Washington populism and utilize outsider appeals to position themselves as the best representative for the people, regardless of their seemingly credible claim to such a title or external political factors.”140 One wonders, though, how these candidates can establish the necessary credibility if they are starting their campaigns with potential fabrications, merely as a way to attempt to appeal to the electorate. For, as the *The Washington Post* writes, “sometimes outsider status is more image than reality.”141

The literature leads one to question why voters value outsider status in this particular industry but not in others. Why would a voter prefer a candidate with no experience in government to one who has prepared her whole career to excel in the role of president of the United States; but when that same voter needs brain surgery, he would only choose a surgeon who has attended medical school and excelled in her residency and specialized training? American students are told that anyone born in this country can grow up to be president of the United States. While a commendable aspiration, should there not be more specific expectations of the person who will lead our country?

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Data and Methodology

To help understand when and why voters tend to prefer outsider candidates for the presidency, this paper includes a case study of three outsider candidates who became president: Dwight D. Eisenhower, Jimmy Carter, and Donald Trump.

President Eisenhower was considered an outsider because he lacked elected experience. However, many would not describe him as an outsider due to his laudable experience in the United States military and familiarity with Washington. Eisenhower “had held no political office before running for president, but he was hardly an outlier, having served the previous administrations of Herbert C Hoover, Roosevelt, and Truman and worked in DC for significant periods in his career.”

Eisenhower was certainly an outsider to elected office, but he was no stranger to Washington.

As a candidate, President Carter was unknown around the country and came to the presidential campaign as a true outsider. He gained executive experience from one term as Georgia governor, but “was all but ignored and his national profile was almost non-existent.”

Political scientist Robert Strong argues, “Carter’s anonymity turned out to give him an advantage in the 1976 election.”

President Trump was the ultimate outsider candidate who changed his party affiliation several times before becoming a presidential candidate. During his election and as the president, Trump has not shown an interest in being associated with Washington. Trump came

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144 Ibid.
to his candidacy with no experience in state or federal government or the military. Instead, he was known to Americans as a celebrity.

To better understand when and why voters select outsider candidates, the answers to the following three questions will be examined in the context of each of these presidents’ candidacies:

1. What political and social climate fostered an environment for the electorate’s desire for change, and an outsider in the White House?
2. What characteristics did each of these candidates portray that were attractive to voters?
3. Who was the individual’s opponent in the general election, and to what extent can it be determined that the opponent’s “insider status” was detrimental to their campaign?

**Action and Analysis**

**Dwight D. Eisenhower**

*What political and social climate fostered an environment for the electorate’s desire for change, and an outsider in the White House?*

After almost two decades of Democrats in the White House, in the immediate aftermath of the Great Depression and World War II, and in the midst of another war, it is no wonder the electorate desired change in 1952. Rather than elect an intellectual politician, Governor Adlai Stevenson (D-IL), the electorate desired a celebrated war hero who helped end World War II to also stop the Korean War. As political historian Mark Shanahan wrote, “Dwight D. Eisenhower
was elected as a hero. The man who defeated Hitler was regarded as the firm hand on the tiller who could keep Communism at bay and ensure the continuance of the American Dream.”

What characteristics did President Eisenhower portray as a candidate that were attractive to voters?

Eisenhower’s popularity from his military experience carried him through his first election. He was a natural campaigner, down-to-earth, and likable; “The slogan ‘I like Ike’ quickly became part of the political language of America.” Shanahan believes an individual must have “motivation, opportunity and appeal” to become a president and that Eisenhower “firmly believed he had the knowledge and personality to be president.” Eisenhower thought his “intellect, outlook and character” would help his campaign as well as his presidential leadership style. New to the political field, Eisenhower used unique campaigning tactics such as advertising on television and avoiding the use of his opponent’s name, instead campaigning as the opposition to the sitting president, Truman.

In addition, Eisenhower was able to emphasize a distinctive type of management style learned from his years in the military. Shanahan wrote, “What he also had on his side was a complete mastery of the logistics of war. Ike was no battlefield general but was astute in

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148 Ibid., 11.
collecting the forces and material necessary to prosecute war effectively. If he could apply that ‘master logistician’ aptitude in peace, he would offer the country a level of management experience unmatched by any other emerging candidate.”

Shanahan referred to Eisenhower as a “political general, a man with an innate sense of how to manage difficult – and often competing – egos among both the military and political commands.”

Though President Truman assumed that President Eisenhower would sit at his desk in the Oval Office “and he’ll say do this, do that! And nothing will happen. Poor Ike – it won’t be a bit like the Army. He’ll find it very frustrating.”

His military experience also gave Eisenhower access to world leaders with whom he created strong relationships, and ultimately popularity abroad as well as at home. In the aftermath of a European tour, speeches in the United States, and addressing a joint session of Congress, “the acclaim he enjoyed from the massed ranks of politicians as well as the nation’s outpouring of gratitude in every city he visited was evidence to be stored up that he had the appeal to be a successful presidential candidate if he still had the motivation when the opportunity occurred.”

Prior to his first presidential campaign, Eisenhower had never voted or identified with a political party. In fact, Democratic President Harry Truman was lobbying Eisenhower to be on his ticket before Eisenhower declared himself a Republican and ran on that party’s ballot.

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151 Ibid., 13.


Perhaps a result of his noncommittal attitude toward partisan politics prior to his presidency, Eisenhower was not always particularly partisan in the White House. For example, the right wing of his party wanted to see a repeal of Roosevelt and Truman-era New Deal and Fair Deal programs; but Eisenhower did not follow through on that. Perhaps his nonpartisan approach is an example of successful outsider politics. Eisenhower focused on his own agenda without playing partisan political games, which, ironically, often happens with insider politicians. Eisenhower’s ability to work across party lines, or at least avoid them, could be one reason why he was more successful than other outsider candidates who became president.

Who was President Eisenhower’s opponent in the general election, and to what extent can it be determined that the opponent’s “insider status” was detrimental to their campaign?

On November 2, 1952, The New York Times published responses from the candidates on the “major issues”, which included: the Korean War, foreign policy, prosperity, internal communism, captive candidate, and corruption.\(^\text{154}\) The main issues mostly revolved around wars and foreign policy, suggesting this campaign was less about an outsider candidate, and more about the right candidate. The presidency needed someone who had the appropriate experience, which in this historical context was military experience, rather than leading a state government, as Governor Stevenson had. So it may be difficult to argue that Stevenson lost because he was an insider; but rather, he lost because as a governor, he was not in tune – nor experienced – with the electorate’s foreign policy concerns.

Nevertheless, Eisenhower did capitalize on an outsider strategy during the campaign. While Stevenson highlighted the benefits of his own experience, Eisenhower claimed outsider status by calling Washington a “mess”, saying “The only clean-up that will do the job is a wholesale clean-out of the political bosses in Washington.”155 Eisenhower told The New York Times, “It is my purpose to clean out every vestige of crookedness from every nook and cranny of the Federal Government.”156

Eisenhower’s natural campaigning abilities, combined with his military expertise and lack of partisanship, made him a successful outsider candidate.

**Jimmy Carter**

What political and social climate fostered an environment for the electorate’s desire for change, and an outsider in the White House?

The timing of Carter’s candidacy was exactly aligned with the cultural phenomena discussed in the literature review about cultural divisions and Baby Boomer concerns around Vietnam and Watergate. After the scandalous Nixon presidency, voters were obviously ready for a change in leadership; and someone with no ties to Washington was their preferred choice. As a Washington outsider, Carter was able to successfully distance himself from “everything that smacked of Nixon’s ‘imperial presidency.’”157

156 ibid.
Four years prior to his presidential race, one of Carter’s advisors wrote a lengthy memo to him advising Carter to “run against Washington.” Carter was the perfect outsider candidate at the time. He did not have ties to Washington circles, was a one-term governor who was not very well known in his own state of Georgia, and prior to serving in the state government, he spent the early part of his career as a peanut farmer. Carter made a conscious decision to remain an outsider throughout his candidacy, transition, and presidency. He hired staff members who also had few connections to, and knowledge of, Washington; but rather had spent significant time by Carter’s side and knew him, and his approach to the presidency, well. President Carter infamously did not appoint a chief of staff at the beginning of his administration, showing that he would continue to remove himself from Washington and its traditional, established ways, even once his candidacy was over.

What characteristics did President Carter portray as a candidate that were attractive to voters?

Most importantly, voters saw Carter as an outsider. As a governor who was “not associated with the received currents of politics in Washington”, Carter was seen as having “a freer hand as [a] candidates to condemn current national policies.” Weeks after the general election, The New York Times analyzed Carter’s win with an explanation that despite Carter’s stance on some controversial issues, the electorate had “a strong underlying desire for change.” Writer and pollster Michael Barone emphasized that “for the first time in years,

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surveys showed that most Americans preferred new, if untested, leadership to what they had.\textsuperscript{161} He cites a New York Times/CBS pre-election poll that indicated voters favored new ideas over experience, which Barone calls “a marked departure from the traditional desire for experienced Presidential candidates.”\textsuperscript{162}

Not only was Carter a Washington outsider, he was considered a major contrast to his opponent, President Ford. American studies scholar Robert Schmuhl writes, “Carter was the opposite of Ford in both background and approach.”\textsuperscript{163} He goes on to explain that the outsider trend means “the less direct experience one has the better.”\textsuperscript{164} So, voters seemed satisfied enough with the fact that Carter had no network in Washington; they were less interested in other characteristics. The fact that Carter was not victorious in his reelection campaign in 1980 suggests that once Americans learned more about him, the outsider appeal disappeared.

A necessary characteristic Carter lacked was management skill. White House Aide David Rubenstein said about Carter: “He wasn’t good at managing people; he had no skill set in that.”\textsuperscript{165} While voters do not necessarily consider a candidate’s management and leadership ability, it is something that should certainly be required of individuals who wish to lead the executive branch. If the electorate was aware of this flaw, perhaps it only contributed to Carter’s “outsider” status and voters’ desire for a different type of candidate.


\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.


\textsuperscript{164} Ibid., 11.

Who was President Carter’s opponent in the general election, and to what extent can it be determined that the opponent’s “insider status” was detrimental to their campaign?

Running against an incumbent, President Gerald Ford, who was an extension of the scandalous Nixon presidency and the very events that broke the electorate’s trust in Washington, would have likely resulted in a victorious election for any opposing candidate. In the case of President Ford, his insider status was indeed a deterrent to his campaign. Despite Ford’s attempts to distance himself from the Nixon presidency, he had many insider-related “liabilities”, like pardoning Nixon, and negative media portrayals of his time as vice president and president.¹⁶⁶ This, Strong notes, “made it difficult for Ford to command respect from pundits and voters alike.”¹⁶⁷ Though Carter faced obstacles of his own throughout the campaign, his ultimate victory can certainly be attributed to his outsider status, particularly at a time of national strife when voters were looking for anything but the usual Washington insiders.

President Carter’s win was not a landslide, but a connection exists between his outsider status and ultimate win. He emerged victorious from a large pool of primary candidates with plenty of government experience, and he did not offer many other characteristics necessary for leadership or particularly pleasing to voters. The fact that he symbolized a stark contrast to the Washington status quo during a particularly tumultuous era in American history was enough to carry Carter to the presidency.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.
Donald Trump

What political and social climate fostered an environment for the electorate’s desire for change, and an outsider in the White House?

After eight years with a Democratic president, a subsection of the American electorate certainly wanted to see a party change in the White House. After all, in the elections following World War II, the presidency switched back and forth from Democratic to Republican and back again every eight years seven times. President Obama promised change during his 2008 campaign, and many would say he delivered on that promise; but enacting policies such as health care reform with the Affordable Care Act left some feeling like that change only meant unwanted government intervention in their personal lives. That population desired a different kind of change in 2016. Public trust in government wavered from 26% immediately following President Obama’s election, in December 2008, to 19% in October 2015, with dips as low as 10% in October 2011 and 14% in July 2014.

Political scientist and journalist Fareed Zakaria wrote that Trump’s victory was the result of what he calls the “four Cs”, amongst which Americans have been divided: capitalism, culture, class, and communication. In essence, he explained that the demise of the middle class – more specifically the broken link between economic growth and expansion – has left Americans behind. Regarding culture, he pointed to the influx of immigration in the United States, as well as increased rights for gay Americans, as a worry for certain older, white Americans that

171 Ibid.
sees this cultural change as harmful to the country they grew up with. Trump, an elite himself, was able to gain the trust of the working class that despised the elites. Finally, the distribution of information through the media has gone from even objectivity to a choose-your-own adventure, where “everyone can pick their own channel, message, and now even their own facts.” Trump was able to stoke voters’ fears around the four Cs and show that as an outsider he could eliminate those anxieties.

What characteristics did President Trump portray as a candidate that were attractive to voters?

Somehow, Trump managed to separate himself from a crowded field of experienced primary candidates, and then in the general election, as a narcissistic celebrity. Shanahan wrote, “Trump entered not as a hero but as a change maker determined to Make America Great Again. His brash narcissism has ensured his White House grates on many and a year in, the focus is definitely on soap opera rather than Citadel on the Hill.” His confident egotistical traits as an individual, as well as his “America First” rhetoric for the nation, placing the country above all others around the globe, were popular with an electorate that longed for a new type of leader. Trump’s base also saw him as plain-spoken and authentic. As highlighted in the literature review, Post would consider this leader-follower relationship that develops when followers, or in this case, voters, are feeling particularly defenseless emotionally.

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173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
Overall, Trump used his ego and his celebrity to prove his outsider status, which was extremely attractive to his base. Trump’s promise to “drain the swamp” of Washington insiders once elected was an obvious way to further distance himself from the nation’s capital. While appealing to those who despised the Washington status quo, it is incredibly problematic for a candidate to claim they will completely empty the political system of people who have trained and worked their whole lives to learn how Washington runs and work in government. Using Carter’s failures to better understand Washington politics, and attempting to arm Trump with lessons learned, White House correspondent Kenneth Walsh writes that Trump “needs to learn how to succeed in the conventional world of the capital.\textsuperscript{176} He needs to show flexibility when circumstances change, as they often do, or when his policies get too unpopular but at the same time not abandon his principles. He needs to get help from talented advisers and action officers and delegate responsibility to them.”\textsuperscript{177} As of the time this article was written in August 2017, Walsh notes Trump had not shown much of enthusiasm to follow any of these suggestions.\textsuperscript{178}

Chris Whipple, author of \textit{The Gatekeepers}, a book about White House chiefs of staff, said about Trump in 2017, “‘The fundamental problem is that Donald Trump is an outsider president who has shown he has no idea how to govern – who, more than any of his predecessors, desperately needs to empower a chief of staff as first among equals to execute his agenda and tell him hard truths.’ [...] ‘But does anyone believe that this president wants

\textsuperscript{177} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{178} Ibid.
such a person around?”

One would assume that a Washington outsider would want help from someone on the inside, with experience governing, to learn the ropes. Instead, Trump believed he could run the country by ignoring processes and structures that had been in place for decades. Journalist Matthew Continetti wrote, “If President Trump wants to avoid Mr. Carter’s fate, he might start by recognizing that a war on every front is a war he is likely to lose, and that victory in war requires allies. Some even live in the swamp.”

Who was President Trump’s opponent in the general election, and to what extent can it be determined that the opponent’s “insider status” was detrimental to their campaign?

As much as Trump was the ultimate outsider candidate, his opponent, Hillary Clinton, was the ultimate insider. An involved First Lady for eight years, United States Senator, two-time presidential candidate, and United States Secretary of State, Clinton showed the necessary government experience to lead the country. She had certainly worked toward the role for much of her career. However, many voters saw Clinton’s insider status as detrimental to her campaign. Some thought Clinton felt the presidency was owed to her and did not want to see another Clinton hold the office.

Voters who yearned for change in 2016 were disillusioned with the government intervention they believed occurred during the Obama administration. For example, many saw the passage of President Obama’s health care reform initiative, the Affordable Care Act, as

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government encroachment on individuals’ lives and wanted smaller government. Voters saw Hillary Clinton as an extension of this, through her role as one of Obama’s cabinet members. They also held her to be an elite Washington insider who was part of a political dynasty and wanted something completely different.

Trump was the opposite of Clinton in terms of time and experience in Washington. But, of course, other factors contribute to an analysis of Trump’s victory. For instance, some voters were hesitant to elect a woman, and the fact that he did not actually win the popular vote shows that a majority of the voting population was not interested in the outsider candidate. Regardless, Trump’s outsider status and strategy was unquestionable and certainly served him well in his first presidential race.

**Conclusion**

Some personality traits proved favorable for Eisenhower, Carter, and Trump; others were less appealing to voters. But these three candidates were each able to win as Washington outsiders because the historical context paved the way for outsiders in each scenario. The fact that each candidate’s opponent was considered a Washington insider also contributed to the winning candidate’s ability to succeed in the race.

While this paper does not address whether or not outsiders are successful in the presidency, Eisenhower’s election to a second term shows at least some semblance of success, if not simply approval from the electorate. This, in comparison to Carter’s inability to win a second general election shows Eisenhower’s ability to succeed as an outsider, at least in his first term.
And at present time, July 2020, this writer would argue Trump still refuses to take the necessary steps for presidential success. He has not shown effective leadership, spreading misinformation to the public and ignoring the rules of Washington and politics. Continetti wrote about Trump: “Not only is he politically incorrect, but his manner, habits and language run against everything Washington professionals [...] have been taught to believe is right and good.” The rules of Washington are difficult to change. And while the system certainly does not work perfectly, there is structure in place for a reason.

Future research should address the success of outsider presidents. Once outsiders reach the Oval Office, one wonders whether or not they are actually able to make effective changes to Washington during their tenure. Do outsider presidents who embrace Washington fare better than those who do not? Future voters would benefit from weighing the success of both types of candidates.

American studies scholar, Robert Schmuhl, hits the nail on the head when discussing the outsider candidate trend: “Amazingly, indeed troublingly, the Oval Office has become the nation’s most visible workplace for on-the-job training.” Though some outsider candidates have been successful in their campaigns, the winner of a presidential race should be prepared for the most powerful job in the country on day one.

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Chapter III: The Effect of Business Experience on Presidential Candidates’ Success
Rebecca Murow Klein
**Introduction**

Since voters are strongly attracted to outsider candidates, one wonders why those candidates do not always have an outlet to succeed in presidential politics. Many, including the author of this paper, assume outsider candidates with business experience could contribute positively to government. Through their business education and background, business leaders presumably learn critical skills related to strategy, negotiation, economics, marketing, leadership, and management. They may also be more inclined to possess inherent personality traits that contribute to their success in networking with colleagues or innovating company goals and processes. While traditionally thought of as business skills, these proficiencies are transferable to, and necessary in, government as well. Candidates with business experience bring skills and perspectives from outside of traditional Washington circles that continues to appeal to voters. This paper will seek to determine whether a business background does, in fact, enhance a presidential candidate’s campaign. How does business experience help presidential candidates become winners and successful presidents? Or does it prove to be an obstacle in some ways?

**Literature Review**

To answer these questions, one must review the literature to learn about why a candidate might desire to run for president. Scholars have outlined major categories of common skill and personality that presidential candidates possess. These include passion, ambition, political proficiency, government experience, management ability, persuasiveness, and temperament.
Motivations such as passion or ambition are important for a successful candidate. The passion to lead may suggest an individual's previous career – whether in government, business, or elsewhere – was not satisfying enough. One would be hard pressed to find a successful presidential candidate who lacks ambition. From the arduous campaign to the public scrutiny, it seems that ambition must propel a person to put forth the time, effort, energy, and resources required for a successful campaign. Perhaps it cannot be the only motivator, but it must be among the list.

Political scholar Joseph Schlesinger has written extensively on ambition in politics. He opens his book *Ambition and Politics: Political Careers in the United States*, with, “Ambition lies at the heart of politics. Politics thrive on the hope of preferment and the drive for office.”183 He argues competition is what motivates candidates’ ambition.184 Schlesinger believes, “No man is likely to obtain a major political office unless he wants it.”185 The main tenet of his ambition theory is, “a politician's behavior is a response to his office goals. Or, to put it another way, the politician as officeseeker engages in political acts and makes decisions appropriate to gaining office.”186 In analyzing the motivator of ambition, Schlesinger posits, “Politicians are no more driven by the single motive of office than businessmen are guided solely by the desire for profit or doctors by the urge to heal.”187

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186 Ibid., 6.
187 Ibid., 6.
Management researcher Jim Collins created a “hierarchy of executive capabilities” indicating the differences in between traits of five levels of corporate leaders.\textsuperscript{188} The highest level, “Level 5 Executive”, is defined as a leader who “builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will.”\textsuperscript{189} Collins finds ambition paramount in personalities of business leaders as well. He clearly differentiates the drive for the company ahead of one’s drive for personal, or self-serving, goals. Collins explains, “Level 5 leaders channel their ego needs away from themselves and into the larger goal of building a great company. It’s not that Level 5 leaders have no ego or self-interest. Indeed, they are incredibly ambitious – \textit{but their ambition is first and foremost for the institution, not themselves}.\textsuperscript{190} This is an important distinction and one that should apply to presidential leadership as well. When the wellbeing and security of the entire nation is in one’s hands, surely ambition should be for the country. Of course, that is not always the case.

Collins calls Level 5 leaders “modest and willful, humble and fearless” and describes Lincoln as “one of the few Level 5 presidents in United States history, who never let his ego get in the way of his primary ambition for the larger cause of an enduring great nation.”\textsuperscript{191}

Dan Balz of \textit{The Washington Post} suggests a grouping of characteristics exists for a certain period of time, and then rotates, depending on the particular needs of the country and its voters. He argues that history provides cycles which show their own critical attributes for a successful presidential candidate. He notes that the country’s first presidents had “diplomatic

\textsuperscript{189} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid., 21.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 22.
experience, as ambassadors abroad or service as secretaries of state.” Next, experience working in government seemed critical. Following the second World War, voters appeared to favor the security they found in candidates who possessed significant experience in Washington. Though of course the previous chapter showed this was not the case in 1952 when President Eisenhower was elected without that Washington background. In the last quarter of the 20th Century, however, through the beginning of the 21st, Balz found “most of the successful candidates (George H.W. Bush being the exception) shared two qualities: state government experience and the claim of being a Washington outsider.” And finally, in the most recent cycle to date, celebrity appeal is paramount. While this is merely a collection of examples explained in hindsight, and not mandatory requirements or scientific predictions of future cycles, this theory offers an outline of historic occurrences. The significant appeal of Washington outsider status is worth highlighting for the purposes of examining candidates with the outlier business background.

_Slate_ disagrees slightly with Balz and suggests the following four qualities make a good president and leader: political skill, management ability, persuasiveness, and temperament – all adding up to leadership. These are all traits that one might expect

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193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
to find in a successful businessperson as well. Political skill is surely not the same as legislative skill, as it focuses less on governing and more on one’s ability to communicate with others, build relationships, and negotiate, among other things. Management ability is certainly a skill one would hope to find in a leader, and persuasiveness and temperament support the development of good management. While this may be a strong package for a leader, one might wonder how voters would receive this candidate. The first chapter of this thesis addresses that question.

Balz concludes that legislative or political background is no longer seen as a positive feature for voters. He writes, “the qualifications that were once considered assets now can carry liabilities. At a time of gridlock and constant partisan warfare, legislative experience in Washington has been devalued. The baggage of thousands of votes can easily become a burden to a longtime incumbent.”

It is unfortunate that the very ladder a career politician climbs does not always land him or her at the top. What kind of experience and skill, then, must one accumulate and succeed at to prepare him or herself for the role of president? Perhaps it is important to consider additional qualifications, but it is difficult to believe candidates should avoid government and political experiences on their journey to a presidential run. Past presidential elections prove that Republicans and Democrats weight legislative and political experience differently. To understand why Republicans favor business as a qualification more

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than Democrats do, one must look at the history of the two major modern American political parties.

The Progressive Era was a pivotal time for defining the role of the president and the two major political parties. Democrats “opposed such business-friendly policies as national banking and high tariffs”, while Republicans “inherited a concern for business and propertied interests” from the Whig Party.\textsuperscript{198} The Progressive Era brought new challenges and changes that led President Theodore Roosevelt to expand the role of president.\textsuperscript{199} And President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s extensive New Deal reforms “altered the way government responsibilities were viewed in the United States.”\textsuperscript{200}

Democrats favored this expansive federal government, and Republicans wanted Americans to control their own futures with a limited government role. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s first inaugural address explained his intention to expand the power of the federal government.\textsuperscript{201} In contrast, President Ronald Reagan’s first inaugural address emphasized government as the problem facing Americans, not the solution.\textsuperscript{202}

As a result, the Democrats have generally valued government and elected experience in their candidates. Presumably that experience would help a president

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\textsuperscript{201} “FDR's First Inaugural Address Declaring 'War' on the Great Depression.” \textit{National Archives}, https://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/fdr-inaugural.
\end{flushleft}
achieve the goals of a broad federal government. Democrats tend to be anti-private sector, assuming a candidate cannot be pro-business or pro-corporate profits while also supporting an agenda that favors strengthening the middle class and helping the poor. Of course, some Democratic candidates and presidents have held pro-business sentiments; but historically that belief has been stronger in the Republican party.

Republicans are more open to newcomer or outsider candidates for president, as their goal is to limit government reach. Instead, they want to infuse the role with tactics to reduce government’s influence in private life. Republicans’ attacks on what they view as a broad overreach of power and government regulation and intervention make them more likely to look outside the box for candidates to fill the role of president.

Data and Methodology

To further explore the impact of business experience on a presidential campaign and candidacy, one must look at the cases of successful candidates who possessed such a background. Success in this case merely means that an individual has attained his party’s presidential nomination or ultimately went on to win the general election. Republicans presidents Herbert Hoover and Donald Trump came to office with a significant amount of business experience, and Wendell Willkie and Mitt Romney boasted business acumen throughout their respective campaigns for the Republican Party nomination. This paper will explore if and how these men’s business backgrounds contributed to their success.

Prior to becoming president in 1928, Herbert Hoover found success as an engineer, businessman, and humanitarian. He also held appointed positions in the federal government.
Hoover’s career began in engineering and finance; and once he found financial success, he looked for something more meaningful, leading him to public service.\textsuperscript{203} Donald Trump was elected to office in 2016 as the first president without prior military or government background. Instead, his experience was as a CEO, real estate mogul, and television celebrity.

Wendell Willkie was an executive who became interested in and involved with politics, ran for president, and won the Republican Party nominating contest. His negotiations with President Roosevelt throughout the Tennessee Valley Authority implementation led to his interest in politics and aspiration to achieve the presidency.

Mitt Romney came to public service with a background in business. He earned a Master’s in Business Administration and Juris Doctorate from Harvard University and gained experience in the corporate sector as a management consultant and private equity firm chief executive officer. Romney was elected to the governorship of Massachusetts and did not seek reelection in order to focus on his presidential campaign. It is significant to note that Romney’s father was also an elected official after a successful career as an automobile executive.

\textbf{Action and Analysis}

One might expect successful candidates with business experience to bring a certain set of honed business skills to the campaign field. Perhaps they would bring a

style of leadership that would help manage the federal workforce and delegate responsibilities. Maybe this type of candidate would instill a corporate-style strategy or process in his or her campaign. Candidates with a business background might negotiate well or have better luck managing the federal budget.

Louis Koenig writes, “The voters hold the Chief Executive responsible for the plight of their jobs and their pocketbooks above all else.” Should it not then follow that voters would also wish to elect business-savvy candidates? Presumably, individuals with significant business experience have a strong understanding of finance and economics, thereby helping the nation’s economy and employment. While one might assume CEO experience could help a candidate run a campaign (or the country) more effectively, history actually shows businessmen have not been “good” presidents. In 2012, The Washington Post reported that the following presidents with business backgrounds were all voted out of office after one term: Hoover, Carter, and H.W. Bush. Additionally, George W. Bush (Harvard Business School MBA), served as president during the Great Recession. All four of these presidents had the “worst records in terms of gross domestic product performance.”

But just as political experience is not one-size-fits-all, neither is a business background. Each case studied here highlights a particular business strength of the candidate. Herbert Hoover demonstrated a quiet leadership style that allowed him to obey the Constitutional separation of powers and delegate responsibilities. While Hoover avoided attention, Donald

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Trump strives to be in the spotlight. His business strength is his ability to brand himself and his policies with marketing and messaging. Donald Trump wrote a book on negotiation, but it was Wendell Willkie who applied business negotiation strategies to his political career. Mitt Romney emphasized business tactics like the use of data analytics in his campaign.

Isolating business experience in these cases is difficult, as it cannot be determined that one’s business background, or any other characteristic for that matter, is the sole reason a candidate has risen to the top of his or her field. However, an analysis of each candidate’s business background can highlight ways in which it helps or hinders candidates.

**Herbert Hoover**

The Great Depression occurred during Hoover’s presidency; but one would assume a president with a background as an executive would be able to lead a country toward economic growth, not the opposite. This paper does not attempt to blame Hoover for the Great Depression, but a simple assumption could be made that Hoover’s business background was not particularly beneficial to his presidency.

Sidney Milkis provides many reasons for Hoover’s strong presidential candidacy, including his efforts to emphasize his business background in deference to his party’s inclination toward business. He writes, “Dedicated to his Republican predecessors’ pro-business policies, and confident that knowledgeable and efficient administration in Washington could build a strong foundation for national prosperity, Hoover seemed
perfectly qualified to consolidate the gains of the postwar economic recovery.” While any economics or finance skills did not seem to benefit his presidency, the main business tactic Hoover brought to the table was his quiet and introverted leadership style.

This is not the type of leadership style one would expect to be successful in the presidency or in business. But Harvard Business School professor Joseph Badaracco says quiet leaders “are acting quietly, effectively, with political astuteness, to basically make things somewhat better, sometimes much better than they would otherwise be.” He adds, “If you look behind lots of great heroic leaders, you find them doing lots of quiet, patient work themselves.”

Hoover biographer Eugene Lyons says Hoover shied away from the spotlight. Milkis blames Hoover’s difficulty with public leadership skills on his “constitutional principles”, saying they “kept him from exerting public leadership” and “were reinforced by personal qualities that ill suited him for the tasks of legislative, party, and popular leadership as well.” Sure, Hoover was missing some essential leadership skills that perhaps can only be gained from extensive elected experience. He could have done more as President to inspire further action; but consider the possibility that he may have in fact been exercising strong leadership that resulted from his business experience. Instead, Hoover pointed to the Constitution: “I had felt deeply that no President should undermine the independence of the legislative and judicial branches

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208 Ibid.
by seeking to discredit them. The constitutional division of powers is the bastion of our liberties and was not designed as a battleground to display the prowess of presidents.”

Hoover was delegating this job to the legislative and judicial branches, actively choosing not to overstep. This idea counters the common criticism that Hoover failed to employ executive leadership in the aftermath of the Great Depression. By employing his introverted leadership style and strictly following the Constitution, Hoover refused to lead a special session of Congress in 1929 and failed to push Congress to create necessary laws to get the country out of the economic disaster it was experiencing.

Hoover also was not a typical politician. Milks calls him “uncomfortable with politics and politicians”; and in his biography of Hoover, Lyons notes, “Yet the one thing on which Hoover’s devoted friends and ardent enemies were in substantial agreement was that he was ‘no politician’.” Lyons indicates that even in the early 20th Century, voters were at a tug of war over whether to elect a candidate with more political experience or an outsider. Lyons writes, “In the mouths of detractors the allegation sounded like an important item in the inventory of his shortcomings. In the mouths of admirers it sounded like clinching proof of a lofty character far removed from the political market place, beyond its vulgar trickeries, compromises, and public posturings.” This gives credence to the idea that Hoover’s electability was based more

211 Ibid., 281.
212 Ibid.
213 Ibid., 282.
215 Ibid.
on his limited government involvement prior to the presidency, his humanitarian activity, and his good judge of character; rather than his business experience.216

Perhaps Hoover’s relative outsider status, morality, and humanitarianism were enough to differentiate him. His introverted leadership was not strong enough for the nation at the time, and Badaracco acknowledges pitfalls that exist in a quiet leadership style.217 Balz reminds, “Through much of the 20th century, governmental experience marked the resumes of presidents. Herbert Hoover had earned a reputation as a skilled executive by organizing humanitarian relief efforts in Europe after World War I and later distinguished himself as a commerce secretary with outsize influence.”218

Donald Trump

Opposite Hoover’s aversion to the spotlight is Donald Trump, an outspoken celebrity who seeks power and attention. Throughout the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump boasted about his business background, despite the fact that his business endeavors did not always prove successful. In The Art of the Deal, the writers highlight Trump’s negotiation tactics that led to glamorous real estate transactions; but most of them failed years later. Trump writes, “I’m a great believer in asking everyone for an opinion before I make a decision. It's a natural reflex.”219 Reports from within his own Administration would leave one to believe this is not in

216 Ibid., 185.
fact how Trump negotiates or leads as president. The book also suggests Trump’s negotiation tactics include “convince the other guy it’s in his interest to make the deal” and always utilizing leverage in deal-making.\textsuperscript{220}

Presidential scholar Richard Neustadt says the president needs the power to persuade, a political ability similar to the business skill of negotiation. Neustadt describes persuasive power as, “amounts to more than charm or reasoned argument” and “a two-way street”.\textsuperscript{221} Trump may indicate his compliance with this theory in his book, but he does not always transfer it to successful implementation in a political realm.

Trump writes, “You want your best customers to feel special.”\textsuperscript{222} If one transfers this statement to governing, “customers” become “citizens of the country a President leads”; and one wonders whether President Trump has followed that mantra. His supporters will certainly say he has, but his opponents will surely say he has not. Maybe Trump voters even chose him over Secretary Clinton because they felt a businessman would be better suited to grow the economy. But this might not have been a legitimate choice, as businessmen-turned-presidents have not tended to have such success. Sides argues the economy was not a relevant factor in Trump’s election.\textsuperscript{223}

It might be the case that Trump’s voters believe he has shown evidence of a successful businessman, and that he has carried that with him into the presidency. As such, perhaps his business tactics helped Trump win his supporters. Sure, he was a

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\item \textsuperscript{220} Ibid., 53-54.
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businessman, but that was not necessarily the main trait that defined him. It is more likely that Trump’s celebrity status appealed to his base. Balz argued, “Trump’s celebrity proved to be one of the most important assets in 2016. Though he was a well-known businessman, he could not claim the executive skills of the head of a company with tens of thousands of employees. Instead, his background as a reality TV star distinguished him from other candidates for the GOP nomination - and allowed him to use media to his advantage.”

Trump used the business skill of marketing to brand himself and advertise to his voters. In *The Art of the Deal*, Trump wrote, “But I’m a businessman, and I learned a lesson from that experience: good publicity is preferable to bad, but from a bottom-line perspective, bad publicity is sometimes better than no publicity at all. Controversy, in short, sells.”

This quote is incredibly telling from a reality television star who has always prioritized celebrity, ego, and power. All politicians must fine-tune their messaging strategies in order to succinctly share their campaign platforms and connect with voters. Trump knew how to market himself to court voters and successfully branded himself as an outsider who would listen to them and fix Washington. His experience with business and the media helped him do this.

**Wendell Willkie**

Wendell Willkie was able to use negotiation to his advantage prior to, and throughout, his candidacy. In his book *The Improbable Wendell Willkie*, David Lewis follows Willkie’s life in

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business as a lawyer for, and ultimate president of, Commonwealth & Southern utility company. Lewis foreshadows Willkie’s political career, tracing his relationship with President Roosevelt throughout the Tennessee Valley Authority implementation. This New Deal program enactment was a pivotal turning point in Willkie’s career.

Utilizing business skill and negotiation tactics, Willkie “debated, testified, and litigated against the TVA’s existence.” In line with early Republican Party policies, Willkie disapproved of Roosevelt’s “regulatory overreach” shown in his New Deal policies, and this was a major factor in his decision to run against Roosevelt. He called the New Deal the “New Fear”, referring to a fear of government intervention. Throughout his book, Lewis outlines Willkie’s frustrations around the competing forces of the public versus private sector. It seems as though this anti-business rhetoric and feeling from the Roosevelt White House is what led Willkie to want to pursue higher political goals and ambitions. Willkie’s ability to go head-to-head with Roosevelt helped him gain the authority and recognition he would need to run against him.

Willkie’s path to the Republican nomination has been called “astonishing”. Willkie looked at politics through the eyes of a businessman, backing a candidate in 1932 who would be most likely to protect his utilities interests. Then, disappointed in how the New Deal was impacting his business, particularly the amount of regulatory overreach coming from the White

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228 Ibid., 100.
House, Willkie took action.\textsuperscript{230} Like Hoover, some saw Willkie as a “movement”.\textsuperscript{231} He was also considered an “outsider”. Lewis writes, “In the euphoria of the moment, however, there was scant analysis, except among stunned strategists of some of the defeated contenders, that they had selected as standard-bearer a political neophyte who had been virtually unknown to party regulars twelve months earlier.”\textsuperscript{232}

It was his negotiation skill that started Willkie on this political path and his overall business acumen that made him attractive to the Republican Party. But ultimately, a newcomer to federal elected office was no match for a third-term president during a time of extreme domestic and international uncertainty.

\textbf{Mitt Romney}

Like Willkie, Romney has been clear in his desire for limited government involvement in private life. Throughout his presidential campaign, Romney touted his business background as evidence of this value, and as a necessary experience for a president. In his acceptance speech at the 2012 Republican National Convention, Romney accused President Obama of lacking the “basic qualification that most Americans have and one that was essential to his task. He had almost no experience working in a business. Jobs to him are about government.”\textsuperscript{233} This shows how Romney prioritized business experience as a critical qualification for the role of president. His speech went on to emphasize Romney’s own background in business, highlighting what a

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{230} Ibid., 93.
  \item \textsuperscript{231} Ibid., 139.
  \item \textsuperscript{232} Ibid., 150.
  \item \textsuperscript{233} “RNC 2012: Mitt Romney Speech to GOP Convention (Full Text).” The Washington Post, \url{https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/rnc-2012-mitt-romney-speech-to-gop-convention-excerpts/2012/08/30/7d575ee6-f2ec-11e1-a612-3cfc842a6d89_story.html}.
\end{itemize}
businessperson can learn about “taking risk, sometimes failing, sometimes succeeding, but always striving.”

Romney’s business strategies and focus on data and analytics certainly helped him to an extent. They gave him the confidence to message his economic reforms and emphasize his fiscal responsibility. Other business themes permeate throughout his book about his vision for America, No Apology. Romney’s business acumen is present throughout his decision-making processes in government.

In a business school leadership course, students learn about the significance of job rotation programs. These types of efforts aim to encourage employees to contribute to the welfare of the entire organization, rather than the employees’ smaller team. Romney explained that he did this as governor: “I decided to spend a day every few weeks doing the jobs of other people in Massachusetts.” This is certainly a smart way for a politician to use a business-inspired leadership strategy to connect with voters and learn first-hand how they contribute to society.

Romney’s approach came from his time leading the private equity firm, Bain Capital, and brought that to his role as governor and then to the presidential campaign. He looked at the campaign leadership as having a chairman (candidate) and a CEO (campaign manager), recognizing that the chairman does not run the

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234 Ibid.
campaign. The New York Times noted, “Romney required a certain level of strategizing, measuring progress, and analyzing that is more often found in the private sector than the public sector.”

Romney ran his 2012 presidential campaign by bringing business strategies to the forefront. He organized his campaign with an eye toward data and analytics, two critical business competencies. Romney emphasized the importance of transferring this skill set to the political realm: “‘What concerns me about Washington is that people have answers before they’ve gathered any data, done any analysis, solicited opinions from people who disagree,’ Mr. Romney said in an interview. ‘From the business world, you look at that and you say, ‘You’ve got to be kidding.’”

This type of campaign was seen by politicos as “the best-organized operation among the Republican contenders”. According to The New York Times, Romney’s management style was based on “picking the right team, demanding data, conducting thorough analyses and making sure to have ways to measure success or failure.” However, the campaign’s ORCA Project, a voter-tracking app intended to help with get-out-the-vote efforts on Election Day, failed. So, this potentially brilliant business-based tool turned into an obstacle for the campaign.

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240 Ibid.

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.

243 Ibid.

244 Ibid.

It would seem this type of structure and management style could be used to help a candidate succeed, as it is a more controlled and organized way of delegating, unlike typical government and campaign style office structures. However, when Romney was running against Ted Kennedy for his Senate seat in 1994, Romney promoted his business experience as a major qualification; but that background did not play well with Massachusetts voters at the time. Kennedy quickly diminished business experience as a qualification by running ads against Romney that showed the negative sides of being a corporate boss: highlighting employees Romney had fired.\textsuperscript{246} This is a concrete example of Republicans attempting to bolster business skills and Democrats trying to knock them down. Democrats tend to see the pro-business image as one that is detrimental to the blue-collar voter base they work to maintain.

In his book, \textit{No Apology}, Romney argued that Americans like to work. This can easily be debunked; Romney fails to address the counterpoint that Americans work because they need the money. This may be the core of the obstacle that business experience brings to Romney’s campaign. While a business background makes Romney an outsider in a field of candidates without that experience, his time as an executive in corporate America makes him too much of an outsider. His experience has clouded his view of the reality of most Americans and makes him out of touch and lacking empathy.

At a fundraiser with wealthy donors in 2012, Romney criticized the “47% of the people

who will vote for the president no matter what.” He called this group “dependent upon government” and entitlements, showing once again that he is out of touch and lacks empathy. This further emphasizes the distinction between the two parties’ views on the role of government and business.

While the business acumen and structured, data-driven campaign in 2012 may have helped Romney to a point, it ultimately did not get him across the finish line. Perhaps he did not have the ambition, passion, ego, or empathy necessary to push further.

**Conclusion**

Each of these cases showed instances where presidential candidates utilized business tactics to enhance their political experiences. But it is also evident that a background in business is not a replacement for other relevant experiences such as those in the government or military. Perhaps more pertinent than their common business experience is the fact that three of the four candidates were considered “outsiders”. Voters have long been wanting Washington outsiders to change the ways of the federal government; and these candidates’ private sector experience helped them to stand out as “different”, bringing something new to the table.

While Romney came to the campaign with background as an elected official, Hoover, Trump, and Willkie did not. *The New York Times* called this lack of political experience “a badge of honor that shows their distance from what many Americans now consider to be a

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dysfunctional system.” By the time Romney ran for president, he had experience in elected office, disqualifying him from true “outsider” status. His business education and experience helped guide his campaign, but it was not necessarily his key to unlocking the Republican nomination.

The “outsider effect” does not need to come from business experience – only a background in something outside of politics and traditional Washington circles. Hoover was well known and respected for his humanitarian efforts, and Trump’s celebrity status brought him great name recognition and popularity. Willkie appeared on the scene as a newcomer willing to take on a two-term incumbent who was growing the federal government.

The assumption that a businessperson will bring strong leadership, management, and economic principles to the table is naïve, as each individual possesses different business strengths. Business experience will help a candidate if his or her business proficiencies are transferred correctly to the political arena. Thus, a businessperson may face obstacles in a presidential candidacy if he or she does not have requisite government or military experience to inform his or her business background.

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Conclusion

Voters are attracted to outsiders who have signaled they can handle the job of president, even if candidates have manipulated the meaning behind their own experience and voters have misinterpreted candidates’ success as applicable to the presidency. Though outsider candidates tend to be successful campaigners, they are not always the most capable of performing the duties of the job. The candidacies and elections of outsiders in presidential campaigns is a consequence of the flawed American electoral system. Without a detailed job description for the president or guidelines for voters, the electorate is drawn to outsider candidates promising to bring change to Washington. The system must change in order to emphasize the value that experienced insider candidates bring to the job. It would be rare for a job candidate to succeed in other industries, such as law or medicine, without the appropriate and necessary background to thrive in the role. So why do we accept inexperience for the job of president of the United States?

Chapter I examined the qualities voters find successful in presidential candidates while also analyzing what voters should be considering before they cast their ballots. It is imperative to first understand the role of the presidency and what characteristics will help a president to excel in the role. Recognizing these standards can help voters decide how to determine what they should be expecting from their presidents and make their selections accordingly. Research showed that voters select candidates on the basis of an assortment of factors that can often revolve around the voter’s emotions. Chapter I showed that the fact that no set guidelines are in place for how to choose an effective president underscores how voters feel enabled to make
this choice based on context and emotion, rather than a more thorough understanding of a candidate’s abilities to do well in the job.

In Chapter II, I explored the background of the outsider in social and cultural history, then in politics. This contributed to the understanding of voters’ desire for outsider candidates. The allure tends to exist more often in the face of national or global crises, or simply when voters feel dissatisfied with Washington. Of the three candidates studied, Presidents Eisenhower, Carter, and Trump, Eisenhower proved most successful, since his military background introduced him to the ins and outs of Washington. The other two candidates can be seen as less successful because they failed to embrace Washington, sacrificing any ability to make substantial change.

Chapter III evaluated a subset of outsider candidates: those with predominant background in business. The argument that business leaders could make successful candidates and presidents, as a result of their presumed strengths in management and leadership, was essentially disproven. On its own, business experience showed more of an obstacle to candidates than an advantage. Background in business cannot be a replacement for relevant experiences such as those in government or military. While a business background can be helpful, it is not enough to make a successful president. If paired with government experience, a candidate’s business background can certainly help them to achieve success.

This research led me to conclude that the field of government and politics does not allow much space for outsiders to be successful in the long run. At least some amount of experience in politics and government should be a necessary qualification for presidential candidates. Some outside experience can certainly be useful, but it cannot completely replace
familiarity with government and Washington. Voters should prioritize this qualification when making their candidate selections. But the challenge remains: the American electoral process has a problem that is not easily solved. Required qualifications for the presidency do not exist, candidates are not properly advised and vetted before throwing their hats into the ring, and voters do not have a clear rubric to guide their selections.

To fix this problem, the country needs to define prerequisites for candidates and better inform voters about what to look for in their presidential nominees. This will help ensure the most qualified and capable candidates become president. Potential solutions include looking to political parties to revive their role in the selection process by vetting candidates and publishing standards for their presidential candidates. The media can help to better inform voters by interviewing candidates about their background and their leadership abilities. Similarly, debates can be restructured to ask questions that can help highlight a candidate’s experience and abilities. The debate should be treated like a job interview with questions such as, “How would you handle a public health crisis that erupted during your presidency?” Voters need to fully understand the role of the president and the position’s significance in the United States and around the globe, while also feeling empowered in their own role of hiring the best person for the job. Insiders should be promoted as experienced and capable so that the electorate does not push them to the side in favor of inexperienced candidates seeking to change the (very difficult to change) ways of Washington.

While outsiders are often successful in a presidential campaign, this paper does not focus on whether or not outsider candidates are successful as presidents. More research is necessary to study the success of outsider presidencies. Are they effective presidents, or do
they tend to be more effective campaigners? Can scholars determine whether outsider candidates are less successful presidents than those who previously held elected office? Do outsider candidates more frequently overpromise and underdeliver (if they get elected)?

Future scholars should also look at other instances in history when an outsider candidate did not win the primary or general election. This paper studies the cases of Wendell Willkie and Mitt Romney’s candidacies; and it would be beneficial to learn about other instances of outsiders losing elections. This would create a better understanding of the circumstances surrounding outsiders’ successes and failures with voters, which in turn could help inform voters as they make their decisions.

Outsider president, Donald Trump, has faced plenty of backlash from his opposition throughout his term. As this paper is being written, just three months prior to Election Day 2020, Trump’s economy is in shambles; and he is failing to get the coronavirus pandemic under control in the United States and abroad. His opponent in the upcoming general election is an insider candidate, experienced politician Vice President Joe Biden. Historical context and social crises create opportunity for outsiders to convince the electorate they can sweep in and make change caused by Washington insiders. But what happens when outsiders have made the mess that needs cleaning? During this time of national crisis, will the electorate recognize the dire need to bring an insider back to Washington?
Curriculum Vitae

Rebecca Murow Klein

EDUCATION

Johns Hopkins Carey Business School
Master of Business Administration, Concentration in Leading Organizations
Aug 2020

Johns Hopkins Krieger School of Arts and Sciences
Master of Arts in Government
Expected Aug 2020

University of Michigan – Ann Arbor, MI
Bachelor of Arts: Double Major in Political Science and Judaic Studies
Apr 2006

The Hebrew University of Jerusalem
Rothberg International School – Jerusalem, Israel
Coursework included: Hebrew, Middle East politics, and Judaic studies
Jan-Jun 2005

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Association for Behavioral Health and Wellness (ABHW) – Washington, DC
Director, Government Affairs
Jan 2017-Mar 2019
Associate Director, Government Affairs
Aug 2013-Dec 2016
• Designed and implemented ABHW’s government affairs strategy, including lobbying on behalf of ABHW at meetings with Congressional staff, negotiating legislative language, and maintaining bipartisan relationships on Capitol Hill
• Built and grew strategic bipartisan relationships with Congressional staff and agency officials
• Created and chaired a coalition of over 40 health care stakeholder organizations committed to aligning substance use disorder privacy regulations with HIPAA
• Wrote policy and advocacy documents reflecting ABHW’s positions on topics such as health care reform and substance use disorder privacy regulations
• Directed ABHW’s Stamp Out Stigma initiative, managed a social media consultant, planned social media strategy, and regularly convened a committee of board members
• Served as Treasurer of the Mental Health Liaison Group, a national coalition of over 60 organizations that represents consumers, family members, advocates, professionals, payers, and providers

Office of United States Senator E. Benjamin Nelson (D-NE) – Washington, DC
Legislative Assistant for Health and Education Policy
May 2012-Jan 2013
Deputy Legislative Assistant for Financial Services Policy
May 2009-May 2012
• Represented the Senator before his constituencies in issue areas of health, education, labor, Social Security, appropriations, banking, budget, business and commerce, housing, and taxes
• Analyzed legislation, providing recommendations for votes and co-sponsorships
• Researched and prepared policy memoranda on topics such as the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, prescription drug user fees, and credit union member business lending
• Met with lobbyists, advocacy groups, and constituency groups to discuss policy initiatives, issues affecting Nebraskans, and legislation on the Senate floor
• Addressed constituent concerns and drafted correspondence regarding Senator Nelson’s positions on legislative issues, such as financial regulatory reform, job creation, and Social Security preservation

National Jewish Democratic Council (NJDC) – Washington, DC
Deputy Communications Director and Director of Chapter Operations. Jul 2007-Mar 2009
Communications and Development Associate May 2006-Jul 2007
• Collaborated on NJDC message strategy and implementation, wrote and edited print and online materials on domestic and foreign affairs issues
• Grew partnerships with other Jewish communal leaders and organizations
• Developed and organized ten NJDC chapters across the country
• Managed NJDC’s internship program
• Coordinated NJDC’s 2007 and 2008 annual conferences featuring presidential and vice-presidential candidates

LEADERSHIP EXPERIENCE
DC Minyan Synagogue – Washington, DC
Executive Committee Member Jan 2010-Dec 2012
Ritual Committee Member Oct 2007-Apr 2018
• Selected to sit on the four-person committee responsible for the day-to-day operations of the organization, overseeing the Leadership Council, determining the annual budget, and setting the programmatic course
• Served on several long-term committees to help shape the ritual decisions and activities of the community