

November 1993

## The 1992 Elections in Virginia: A Status Quo State in the Year of Change

Larry J. Sabato

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Sabato, Larry J. (1993) "The 1992 Elections in Virginia: A Status Quo State in the Year of Change," *Journal of Political Science*: Vol. 21 : No. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.coastal.edu/jops/vol21/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Politics at CCU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Political Science by an authorized editor of CCU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@coastal.edu](mailto:commons@coastal.edu).

## THE 1992 ELECTIONS IN VIRGINIA: A STATUS QUO STATE IN THE YEAR OF CHANGE

Larry J. Sabato  
*University of Virginia*

### THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

The 1992 election, full of upheaval and transformation around the country, was more traditional in the Old Dominion. While the nation was ousting White House incumbent George Bush, Virginia voted to reelect him by a percentage that was Bush's sixth-best of the 50 states.<sup>1</sup> And in a year when many scandal-tainted congressional incumbents stepped aside, voluntarily or through defeat, the only changes in Virginia's U. S. House line-up were forced by redistricting and one age-related retirement. Much as in 1976, when southern Democrat Jimmy Carter won the presidency, Virginia resisted both regionalism and the call for change—and this time the Commonwealth was joined by most other states of the South.<sup>2</sup> Democrats last won Virginia's Electoral votes 28 years ago, in 1964.

The 1992 presidential contest did generate one Virginia-based bit of history, though it became nothing more than a footnote. Virginia Governor L. Douglas Wilder threw his hat into the Democratic ring in September 1991, only to withdraw the following January before the contest began in earnest. Wilder explained that conducting a campaign for the White House proved incompatible with attending to the statehouse,

---

This article is adapted from the January and February 1993 issues of the *University of Virginia News Letter* (vol. 69): "The 1992 Elections in Virginia: A Status Quo State in the Year of Change (Parts 1 and 2)." Reprinted with permission from the Center for Public Service, University of Virginia. Copyright ©1993 by the Rectors and Board of Visitors of the University of Virginia.

but it was also clear that his candidacy had attracted relatively little support.

### *Presidential Nominating Process in Virginia*

In 1992 Virginia reverted to form and held its traditional party caucuses, abandoning the Super Tuesday primary initiated for the 1988 contests.<sup>3</sup> Party leaders were generally pleased to return to the caucus method of nomination. Republicans had always favored caucuses and only participated in "Super Tuesday" under protest, while moderate-conservative Democrats remembered that Jesse Jackson had easily won the 1988 primary and hoped to be able to exercise more control over a caucus outcome.

As it happened, virtually no presidential campaign was conducted in Virginia, where the contest was a mere footnote in both parties. President Bush, who had long since vanquished challenger Pat Buchanan (a Northern Virginia resident), scooped up almost all the state's delegates (52 of 54) in GOP local caucuses scattered from March through April. Neither Bush nor Buchanan campaigned in the state. By the time Virginia Democrats held their local caucuses on April 11 and 13, only Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton and former California Governor Jerry Brown remained in the contest.<sup>4</sup> Brown was the only one to campaign in Virginia, mainly at college campuses in urban areas. Clinton was nursing strained vocal chords and under doctor's orders to rest at home in Arkansas. The April 7 primaries in New York, Wisconsin, Kansas, and Minnesota had fully occupied the candidates and left only three full days for visits to Virginia before the caucuses.

Brown's campaigning helped him in a few places (like Richmond city, the Charlottesville area, and Virginia Beach), but overall he proved to have little appeal in Virginia.<sup>5</sup> With especially strong backing in Northern Virginia, Clinton managed to win 52.1 percent of the delegates elected at the local caucuses, to just 11.6 percent for Brown. Even uncommitted



slates won far more delegates (36.3 percent) than the Californian. (Some Wilder backers chose the uncommitted route, especially since Wilder personally was known to dislike Clinton.)

Virginia thus joined all other southerners in the Democratic presidential race, though Clinton's proportion in Virginia was well below the levels of most sister southern states. Clinton eventually received the votes of 94 of Virginia's 97 delegates to the Democratic National Convention, with 3 for Brown.

Turnout in the caucuses was minuscule, as usual. Rough estimates suggest perhaps 40,000 voters participated in the Democratic contest, and considerably fewer on the Republican side. Taken together, the two parties' caucuses involved less than 3 percent of the state's 2.73 million registered voters.

### *General Election*

The most unusual aspect of the fall 1992 presidential campaign in Virginia was that there was even a campaign. In most modern election years Virginia has been written off early by the Democrats, in recognition of the long lead usually enjoyed by the GOP nominee. But in 1992 even Virginia was in play for much of the general election, a testament to Bush's weakness almost everywhere. Despite the fact that the Clinton-Gore campaign spent virtually no money in the Old Dominion, Republicans were forced to work hard to keep Virginia in the GOP column. Repeated visits by the president, vice president, Mrs. Bush, and cabinet officers kept Virginians attuned to the White House slugfest, as did the second of three presidential debates held at the University of Richmond on October 15.

In the end, both parties achieved their goals for Virginia. The Democrats induced the Republicans to spend some of their limited resources in what should have been a safe GOP state. For their part, the Republicans finally won Virginia's 13 electoral votes. On November 3, George Bush secured 45.0 percent of the state's voters, to 40.6 percent for Bill Clinton

**TABLE 1**  
**Results in Virginia, 1992 General Election for President**

Candidate (Party)	Total Number of Votes	Percent
George Bush (R)	1,150,517	45.0
Bill Clinton (D)	1,038,650	40.6
Ross Perot (I)	348,639	13.6
Lyndon LaRouche (I)	11,937	0.5
Andre Marrou (Libertarian)	5,730	0.2
Lenora Fulani (I)	3,192	0.1
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>2,558,665</b>	<b>100.00</b>

SOURCE: Official election results from the State Board of Elections.

NOTE: Party affiliations are abbreviated as D=Democrat; R=Republican; I=Independent.

and 13.6 percent for Ross Perot (see Table 1). In his comfortable but hardly overwhelming victory, Bush carried 73 of 95 counties and 21 of 41 cities. Clinton won the remaining 22 counties and 20 cities, while Perot achieved a plurality in no Virginia locality.

Compared to 1988, Clinton managed to improve upon Michael Dukakis's dismal performance by only 1.4 percentage points. But the contest was close because Bush's support plunged 14.7 percentage points; instead of winning by 20 percent as in 1988, the president's plurality was a mere 4 percent in 1992. Bush's posting was a far cry from the healthy Virginia majorities usually achieved by Republican presidential nominees, and it was the closest contest since 1976.

### *Congressional District Breakdown*

Bush won a majority in only one congressional district, the heavily Republican Piedmont 7th; but he came close to the 50 percent mark in the Newport News- Northern Neck 1st, the Norfolk-Virginia Beach 2nd, the Roanoke 6th, and the Northern Virginia 10th districts. The president also carried the Tidewater 4th, the Southside 5th, and—very narrowly—the new Northern Virginia 11th District.

Clinton garnered majorities in two of the three congressional districts he won. The new black-majority 3rd turned in a massive 65 percent of its votes for Clinton, and the Northern Virginia 8th gave Clinton a 51.2 percent majority. Clinton also triumphed by a small margin in Virginia's Southwest "Fighting 9th" District, which shares a border with Albert Gore's Tennessee.

Turnout among registered voters, which was almost uniformly high across the state, set a modern record. Fully 84.5 percent of those registered cast a ballot in 1992—well above the 77.6 percent recorded in 1988, and also higher than the 81.5 percent of 1984 and the 81.4 percent of 1980. When the entire voting-age population (those aged 18 and up, registered and unregistered) is considered, 54.5 percent of Virgin-



ians participated in the 1992 election—by far the highest proportion in the modern era. Virginia came very close to matching the 55 percent national turnout, which itself was the largest since 1972.

### *Urban Vote*

As has been true throughout Virginia's two-party era, the suburbs were the mainstay of 1992's statewide GOP victory (see Table 2). With the suburbs casting 60 percent of the statewide vote—up from 52.6 percent in 1988—George Bush was the clear favorite of suburbanites, winning 47.1 percent to 38 percent for Bill Clinton. Bush amassed a similar margin in the rural areas, where he defeated Clinton by 46.2 percent to 39.0 percent. Only in the central cities, which regularly favor Democrats by wide margins, did Clinton run well, with 55.4 percent to Bush's 33.1 percent. Overall, Bush captured narrow pluralities in both the Urban Corridor and Virginia's Metropolitan Statistical Areas, margins that closely tracked his statewide showing.

The growth of the urban areas again was apparent in the statewide vote. For example, the Metropolitan Statistical Areas comprised 73.7 percent of the statewide vote total in 1992, a gain of more than 6 percentage points in four years. All of the increase came in the suburbs; the central city vote declined from 15 percent to 13.7 percent of the statewide total, while the rural vote dropped even more, from 28.2 percent of the total in 1988 to 23.8 percent in 1992.

### *Black Vote*

As expected and as usual, the black vote went solidly to the Democratic nominee. Bill Clinton received 88.8 percent of the votes in the sample black precincts shown in Table 3. George Bush won 7 percent and Ross Perot got 3.4 percent. (The Democratic U. S. House candidates fared even better than their ticket-leader, with 93.7 percent, mainly because of a nearly

**TABLE 2**  
**Urban Vote in Virginia, 1992 General Election for President**

Urban Measure Vote	Percent of Total Clinton (D)	Percent of Votes Cast			
		Bush (R)	Perot (I)	Others	
Urban Corridor 63.0%	41.4%	44.1%	14.0%	0.5%	
Metropolitan Statistical Areas	73.7	41.2	44.5	13.6	0.7
Central Cities	13.7	55.4	33.1	10.7	0.8
Suburbs	60.0	38.0	47.1	14.3	0.6
Rural Areas	23.8	39.0	46.2	13.5	1.3

SOURCE: Compiled from official election results of the State Board of Elections.

NOTES: Party affiliations are abbreviated as D=Democrat, R=Republican; I=Independent.

The Urban Corridor includes the cities of Alexandria, Chesapeake, Colonial Heights, Fairfax, Falls Church, Fredericksburg, Hampton, Hopewell, Manassas, Manassas Park, Newport News, Norfolk, Petersburg, Poquoson, Portsmouth, Richmond, Virginia Beach, and Williamsburg; and the counties of Arlington, Caroline, Charles City, Chesterfield, Clark, Dinwiddie, Fairfax, Fanquier, Hanover, Henrico, James City, Loudoun, New Kent, Prince George, Prince William, Spotsylvania, Stafford, and York.

The 9 Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSAs) for Virginia (as established by the U.S. Census Bureau) are Charlottesville, Danville, Lynchburg, Washington, D.C., Newport News-Hampton, Norfolk-Portsmouth, Petersburg-Colonial Heights, Richmond, and Roanoke. Central cities and suburbs are included in the MSA figures. The Charlottesville and Danville MSAs were first designated after the 1980 census.

Rural areas include all Virginia localities not included in either an MSA or the Urban Corridor.



**TABLE 3**  
**Voting in Selected Predominantly Black Precincts in Virginia Cities,**  
**1992 General Election for President**

	Number of Precincts	Total Votes	Percent of Registered Voting	Candidate		
				Clinton	Bush	Perot
<b>Black Precincts</b>						
Charlottesville <sup>a</sup>	1	860	75.8%	81.0%	12.8%	5.2%
Chesapeake <sup>b</sup>	1	762	73.6	90.6	6.4	2.8
Hampton <sup>c</sup>	2	3,478	78.1	77.8	15.4	5.6
Newport News <sup>d</sup>	8	6,695	70.1	90.4	5.7	3.1
Norfolk <sup>e</sup>	10	11,909	67.3	90.7	5.6	3.3
Portsmouth <sup>f</sup>	2	3,156	79.8	92.0	5.6	2.0
Richmond <sup>g</sup>	15	14,510	73.1	88.6	6.9	3.4
Emporia <sup>h</sup>	1	229	75.1	77.6	16.6	4.9
Petersburg <sup>i</sup>	4	2,962	76.2	91.2	5.3	2.7
Totals	44	44,561				
Average of All Precincts			72.0%	88.8%	7.0%	3.4%

SOURCE: Official election results of the State Board of Elections.

NOTES: Presidential percentages do not always total 100% since scattered votes were cast for the other independent candidates on the ballot.

<sup>a</sup>Firehouse precinct

<sup>b</sup>South Norfolk precinct

<sup>c</sup>Phenix and Pembroke precincts

<sup>d</sup>Dunbar, Magruder, Marshall, Chestnut, Jefferson, Huntington, Washington, and Newsome Park precincts

<sup>e</sup>Park Place, Bowling Park, Monroe, Rosemont, Union Chapel, Berkley, Brambleton, Campostella, Chesterfield, and Young Park precincts

<sup>f</sup>Precincts 26 and 27

<sup>g</sup>Precincts 301, 303, 304, 306, 602, 203, 604, 606, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 707, 802

<sup>h</sup>Precinct 2

<sup>i</sup>5th Ward: 1st precinct; 5th Ward: 2nd precinct; 6th Ward: 1st precinct; and 6th Ward: 2nd precinct

unanimous vote for 3rd District nominee Bobby Scott, now Virginia's first African-American congressman this century.) However, black turnout was relatively low in 1992—just 72 percent of the registered voters in Table 3's sample precincts, compared to the 84.5 percent statewide turnout. Black turnout has been lower than the overall turnout in recent presidential contests, yet blacks frequently vote at a higher rate in some statewide elections. For instance, the 1989 gubernatorial battle, with its history-making election of Douglas Wilder, spurred black turnout; the 1989 rate of black voter participation exceeded even that of 1992 by a small margin.

### *Exit Poll Results*

In the so-called 'Year of the Woman,' when a record number of women were elected to the U. S. Congress, it is perhaps appropriate that women were the key to victory in the presidential race. In fact, their contradictory choices in Virginia versus the nation produced the Clinton victory in the country and the Bush win in Virginia (see Table 4). Women comprised a healthy 53 percent of the total electorate both in the state and nation, but Virginia women preferred Bush by a large margin (50 percent to 39 percent for Clinton). Nationally the reverse was true: women chose Clinton by 45 percent to 37 percent for Bush. In both cases, the women's vote was enough to swing the election because men were closely divided between Clinton and Bush. In Virginia and the nation, the Perot voters were disproportionately male—and especially so in the Old Dominion, where men gave 17 percent of their votes to Perot while just 11 percent of women did so.

Bush's margin among white voters was paper-thin nationally, but in Virginia he amassed a 20 percentage point margin. By contrast, African-Americans in Virginia matched the black voting pattern across the U. S.—a 73 percentage point victory for Clinton over Bush. Perot's vote everywhere was overwhelmingly white.

**TABLE 4 -- Demographic Breakdown of Voters, 1992 Presidential Election in Virginia & Nation**

Grouping	VIRGINIA				NATION			
	Overall Sample	Clinton	Bush	Perot	Overall Sample	Clinton	Bush	Perot
<b>SEX</b>								
Men	47%	41%	42%	17%	47%	41%	38%	21%
Women	53	39	50	11	53	45	37	17
<b>RACE</b>								
White	79	32	52	16	87	39	40	20
Black	17	85	12	3	8	83	10	7
Other <sup>a</sup>	4	NA	NA	NA	4	53	32	15
<b>AGE</b>								
18-29	18	43	40	16	21	43	34	22
30-44	37	38	48	14	36	41	38	21
45-59	26	40	44	16	23	41	40	19
60+	18	46	47	7	20	50	38	12
<b>PARTY</b>								
Democrat	34	84	9	7	38	77	10	13
Republican	35	9	79	12	35	10	73	17
Independent	31	29	48	23	27	38	32	30
<b>INCOME</b>								
<\$15,000	10	59	30	12	14	58	23	19
\$15-29,999	20	40	46	14	24	45	35	20
\$30-49,999	31	37	47	16	30	41	38	21
\$50-75,000	25	43	41	16	20	40	41	18
>\$75,000	14	34	59	7	12	36	48	16
<b>FAMILY FINANCIAL SITUATION (Compared to Four Years Ago)</b>								
Better	25	21	73	6	24	24	61	14
Worse	31	60	19	21	34	61	14	25
Same	43	37	51	12	41	41	42	17



RELIGION								
Protestant	53	36	52	12	42	36	45	18
Catholic	17	37	47	16	27	44	35	20
Christian	17	50	35	15	15	39	38	23
Jewish	1	NA	NA	NA	4	80	11	9
Other	7	NA	NA	NA	6	53	26	21
None	6	NA	NA	NA	7	62	18	20
1988 VOTE								
Bush	60	19	65	16	53	21	59	20
Dukakis	21	85	7	8	27	83	5	12
Non-voter	13	48	34	18	15	48	26	26
OTHER DESIGNATIONS								
First-time Voters	11	36	48	16	11	55	25	21
White Born-again Christians	18	24	65	11	17	23	62	15
Military Veterans	22	39	45	16	18	41	37	22
Labor Union Households	10	57	24	19	19	55	24	21
White Native Southerners	39	41	48	11	NA	NA	NA	NA
People with Children at home <sup>b</sup>	39	38	45	17	36	40	38	22
People married currently	63	38	49	13	66	40	41	20
People Who Once Leaned Perot	41	38	37	25	41	38	29	33

SOURCE: Exit polls conducted and adjusted by Voter Research and Surveys, a consortium created by NBC, ABC, CBS, and CNN. For Virginia, a total of 897 voters were interviewed outside their polling places on Election Day at 20 sample precincts. Nationally, 15,232 voters were similarly interviewed at 300 precincts. The margin of error for the Virginia sample is plus or minus 5 percent, and for the national sample is plus or minus 2 percent.

NOTES: Totals do not always add to 100 percent since some respondents refused to answer or gave other answers to individual questions.

NA=Not Available. Sample size was too small to produce reliable results in some subcategories.

<sup>a</sup>Nationally, Clinton carried Hispanics by a wide margin, while Bush won a sizeable majority of Asian-Americans.

<sup>b</sup>One or more children under age 18 are living at home.

<sup>c</sup>Respondents who agreed that they had "once thought that I would vote for Ross Perot."

Young voters in Virginia, ages 18-29, were the only age group to support Clinton, by a narrow margin of 43 percent to 40 percent for Bush. Clinton nearly tied Bush among those over age 60, and lost those between ages 45 and 59 by 4 percentage points. Interestingly, Clinton ran worst with his fellow post-World War II "baby boom" generation, losing to Bush by 10 percentage points among those ages 30-44. In the nation as a whole, Clinton drew better among all age groups than he did in Virginia—and especially among those ages 60 and older, who gave the Democrat a 12 percentage point lead nationally but favored Bush narrowly in Virginia. Perot's support was relatively steady through the age groups until those over 60 are considered; the independent candidate attracted just 7 percent of older voters in Virginia, and 12 percent nationally.

Perot's damaging electoral effect on Bush can be seen in the pattern of party support for the candidates. In Virginia both Clinton and Bush lost only 9 percent of their party's voters to the other. However, 12 percent of the Republicans defected to Perot, while only 7 percent of the Democrats did so. A somewhat similar pattern was observed nationally. Virginia's independent voters sharply diverged from their brethren across the country. Bush won Virginia because nearly half the independents chose him, with 29 percent for Clinton and 23 percent for Perot. Nationally, independents gave the edge to Clinton by 38 percent, compared to 32 percent for Bush and 30 percent for Perot.

In Virginia, Clinton carried only two income groups: those with annual incomes under \$15,000, by a wide margin, and those between \$50,000 and \$75,000, narrowly. Nationally, Clinton captured the support of all annual income groups below \$50,000, with Bush clearly winning only those above \$75,000. These wealthiest voters were also least likely to support Perot.

The economy's influence on the presidential election became obvious when voters were asked whether their family's financial situation was better, worse, or the same compared to four years ago. Both in Virginia and the nation, those who

answered "better" gave Bush a large majority of the vote; those who responded "worse" gave Clinton a landslide, and Perot his largest proportion. But in Virginia, those whose economic situation was unchanged went heavily for Bush, while the same group nationally was split between Clinton and Bush.

Protestants in both Virginia and the nation favored Bush substantially. But Virginia Catholics chose Bush decisively, while Catholics across the U. S. preferred Clinton. Nationally, Jewish voters and those with no religion were overwhelmingly for Clinton. (No comparable data on these groups exist for Virginia.)

A comparison of the 1988 and 1992 presidential votes demonstrates the extent of President Bush's defections. In Virginia Bush kept only 65 percent of his 1988 voters, losing 19 percent of them to Clinton and 16 percent to Perot. By contrast, Clinton won 85 percent of the 1988 Dukakis voters; and among those who didn't vote in 1988, Clinton captured nearly half. Bush won about a third and Perot about a fifth of the 1988 non-voters.

Some similarities and other differences exist between Virginia and the nation. *Similarities* include the following:

- White born-again Christians preferred Bush by a huge margin, about 40 percentage points both in Virginia and the nation.
- Labor union households were pro-Clinton by more than 30 percentage points in both the state and nation.
- Married voters were in the Bush column, substantially in Virginia and narrowly in the country. Those who were single or divorced were far more likely to back Clinton.

*Differences* between Virginia and the rest of the nation were also apparent. For example:



- First-time voters in Virginia picked Bush by a wide margin (48 percent to 36 percent), while the same group chose Clinton overwhelmingly in the entire nation (55 percent to 25 percent).
- Military veterans in Virginia may have been more influenced by Clinton's Vietnam-era draft evasion than veterans elsewhere. They chose Bush by 6 percentage points, compared to Clinton's 4-point edge among veterans nationally.
- Voters with children at home favored Bush in Virginia by 7 percentage points, but nationally Clinton had a 2-point lead among the same group.

### *Factors Affecting Election Outcome*

Even hard times and the 'double Bubba' ticket of southerners Bill Clinton and Albert Gore could not persuade Virginians to vote Democratic for president in 1992. That is no great surprise, given the state's modern electoral history. To win Virginia, a presidential Democrat probably must sweep to a nearly irresistible landslide—and such was not the case with Clinton's national 43 percent victory.

Nonetheless, Clinton accomplished what only one other Democrat has done since 1968 and even in Virginia, the Republican coalition showed signs of strain and defection. Bush's margins among a host of demographic groups, as just reviewed, were greatly diminished from 1988, and nationally the Reagan-Bush majority coalition that had triumphed for twelve years buckled under the weight of its accumulated burdens. How did it happen, and why did Bush's support evaporate to a dangerous extent in Virginia and a fatal degree across the nation?

Without question, Bill Clinton ran a technically superb campaign; his strategy, television advertising, use of the media, and energetic stumping (frequently on a bus) were on target and exceptionally clever. But it is also true that any election involving an incumbent president becomes essentially a refer-

endum on the occupant of the White House. In that sense, George Bush lost the election every bit as much as Bill Clinton won it. Bush forfeited his second term in several ways.

*The Economy.* The most basic of all forces in presidential elections, the economy suffered a serious recession in 1990-91 and recovered only fitfully and painfully in the months leading up to the election. In many ways relating to their pocketbook, voters simply did not believe they were better off than four years ago, and that predisposed them to change the status quo.

*Presidential Domestic Inaction and End of the Cold War.* Bush was already known as a 'foreign-policy president' because of his love of international relations, and he often seemed disinterested in domestic affairs. His repeated declarations that the economy was improving—designed to increase consumer confidence—instead made it appear Bush was out of touch. Meanwhile, festering problems across America (decaying inner cities, infrastructure deterioration, a perceived decline in the quality of health care and education, among others) caused many to yearn for a candidate who placed domestic matters at the top of his agenda. The end of the Cold War and the collapse of Communism also focused the election squarely on domestic policy, with Bush's strong suit of foreign affairs on the periphery.

*Vice-Presidential Candidates.* Bush's vice president, Dan Quayle, was certainly more competent than the news media and the late-night comics portrayed him, but his public image was so negative that he undoubtedly hurt Bush. By contrast, Clinton's vice-presidential pick, Albert Gore, was widely viewed as an asset, and the news media gave him extremely positive reviews.

*The Perot Factor.* The billionaire independent had an intense hatred for his fellow Texan Bush. Consequently, Perot aimed most of his fire at Bush even charging late in the campaign (with absolutely no evidence) that the GOP had planned to disrupt his daughter's wedding. Most of Perot's support was drawn from the white, suburban upper-middle class, a predominantly Republican constituency, and Bush likely suffered



disproportionately.

*A Lackluster GOP Campaign.* Slow to organize and even slower to focus on consistent themes, George Bush's campaign hopped, skipped, and jumped among topics as diverse as "family values," experience, trust, Clinton's draft evasion and antiwar demonstrating, and his Arkansas record. Bush's staff also poorly planned the GOP National Convention, allowing the right wing to dominate it and thus alienating many moderates. Meanwhile, Bill Clinton was projecting a moderate image and fielding the best Democratic campaign team in a generation. Even Republicans admitted that their party had rarely, if ever, mismanaged a presidential campaign so badly. It reminded most observers of the inept effort made by Democrat Michael Dukakis in 1988—the same year that a finely crafted and executed campaign by George Bush won him the presidency.

*Scandals.* Two scandals haunted Bush's reelection effort: Iran-contra and Iraqgate. The Iran-contra scandal, which had originated in the Reagan administration, involved the illegal sale of U.S. arms to Iran, with some of the profits improperly diverted to fund the anti-Communist "contras" fighting a civil war in the Central American country of Nicaragua. Bush had already claimed he was "out of the loop" in this decision-making. But the release of a memorandum written by Reagan Defense Secretary Casper Weinberger just days before the election suggested that then-Vice President Bush was very much in the loop. This revelation cost Bush the last-minute campaign momentum he had generated and ended any chance he had of catching Clinton before Election Day. The Iraqgate scandal dogged Bush as well, and took some of the luster off his victory in the Persian Gulf War. It referred to the U. S. policy of arming Iraq's leader, Saddam Hussein, in the years leading up to his invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and the possible postwar coverup of the Bush administration's decisions in this matter. Iran-contra and Iraqgate made it more difficult for the Bush campaign to keep the public focused on Clinton's personal scandals (marital infidelity, youthful marijuana usage,



and draft evasion).

*News Media Bias.* Republicans claimed that the national media, particularly the networks, the Washington Post, and the New York Times, were tilting heavily to Clinton and putting Bush and the economy in the worst possible light. Judging by studies of media coverage in 1992, as well as the opinions of many neutral observers, there is considerable truth to the criticism. A near-consensus existed among top journalists, editors, and producers that Bush should lose and Clinton should win, and undoubtedly this bias affected the tone and shape of coverage. But it is questionable how much this affected the final election outcome. In all probability, the other factors discussed here had more to do with Bush's defeat.

## U.S. HOUSE ELECTIONS

The elections for the U.S. House of Representatives had an unusually active nomination season, a result of redistricting, retirements, and a renewed commitment by Republicans to competition. A constitutional amendment and three general obligation bond issues for capital projects completed Virginia's 1992 ballot.

Redistricting dramatically changed the face of Virginia's congressional map. The creation of the majority-black 3rd District, which meanders from Hampton Roads to Richmond, nearly guaranteed the election of the state's first African-American congressman since John Mercer Langston served part of a single term from a Southside district from 1890 to 1891. At the same time, the black voters that the 3rd District annexed from the surrounding Northern Neck 1st, Norfolk-Virginia Beach 2nd, and Tidewater 4th districts made all three of them more white and Republican in nature.

The Southside 5th became somewhat more Democratic with the addition of the Charlottesville area and the loss of Carroll County and the City of Galax, while the Roanoke area 6th and Southwest 9th changed relatively little. The radically redesigned 7th, like its numerical predecessor, was heavily

Republican. While the old 7th was Piedmont-based, however, the new 7th had its population roots in Richmond.

In 1992 Northern Virginia could boast of three districts rather than its previous two, and the new 11th was considered closely balanced between the two major parties. The other two Northern Virginia districts were now tilted in a partisan direction, the 8th toward the Democrats and the 10th to the GOP.

In politics, geography is often destiny, and so the contours of the districts helped to determine the shape of the House contests. One Republican incumbent, the 7th's George F. Allen, Jr., was forced to retire after only a year in Congress he won a special 1991 election to fill a vacancy because he was paired with senior GOP U.S. Representative Thomas J. Bliley, Jr. After considering a move into the 5th, 6th, or 10th district, Allen decided to defer to Bliley and instead run for governor in 1993. Allen was the most conspicuous target of the Democratic governor and legislature, which for the first time since the 1960s were able to control the redistricting process without Republican input.<sup>6</sup> Thus, Democrats were able to make the most out of their 1992 redistricting opportunity, nearly guaranteeing that their party would be able to maintain its majority in the congressional delegation.<sup>7</sup>

### *House Nominations*

The Republican party made the best of its weakened position, nominating a complete slate of House candidates for the first time since 1968. This was a commendable recovery from its abysmal 1990 decision to leave all 5 incumbent Democratic congressmen unopposed. In 1992 only the Democrats took a bye on a House race, permitting GOP incumbent Thomas Bliley of the 7th to run unopposed.

Not only did the parties nearly fill the 1992 November ballot, but they also sponsored an extraordinarily large number of intraparty contests for House nominations. This was especially true for the GOP. There were 5 district convention battles and 2 district primaries on the Republican side, while

**TABLE 5 -- Elections Results and Campaign Spending**  
**1992 Virginia General Election for U.S. House of Representative**

<u>District</u>	<u>Candidates</u>	<u>Total Campaign Expenditures</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>Percent of Votes</u>
1	Andrew H. 'Andy' Fox (D)	\$415,703	89,814	38.7%
	Herbert H. 'Herb' Bateman (R)*	733,851	133,537	57.6
	Donald L. Macleay, Jr. (I)	7,728	8,677	38.7
	Write-ins		23	
	District total		232,051	100.0%
2	Owen B. Pickett (D)*	\$368,310	99,253	56.0
	J. L. 'Jim' Chapman IV (R)	183,781	77,797	44.0
	Write-ins		83	
	District total		177,183	100.0%
3	Robert C. 'Bobby' Scott (D)	\$488,041	132,432	78.6
	Daniel 'Dan' Jenkins (R)	16,318	35,780	21.2
	Write-ins		261	0.2
	District total		168,473	100.0%
4	Norman Sisisky (D)*	\$464,168	147,649	68.4
	A. J. 'Tony' Zevgolis (R)	74,621	68,286	31.6
	Write-ins		25	
	District total		215,960	100.0%
5	L. F. Payne, Jr. (D)*	\$319,699	133,031	68.9
	W. A. 'Bill' Hurlburt (R)	53,069	60,030	31.1
	Write-ins		23	
	District total		193,084	100.0%
6	Stephen Alan Musselwhite (D)	\$594,405	84,618	39.9
	Robert W. 'Bob' Goodlatte (R)	428,279	127,309	60.0
	Write-ins		160	0.1
	District total		212,087	100.0%



7	<i>Thomas J. 'Tom' Bliley, Jr. (R)*</i>	\$679,335	211,618	82.9
	Gerald E. 'Jerry' Berg (I)	N/A	43,267	16.9
	<u>Write-ins</u>		490	0.2
	<u>District total</u>		255,375	100.0%
8	<i>James P. Moran, Jr. (D)*</i>	\$880,204	138,542	56.1
	Kyle E. McSlarrow (R)	417,781	102,717	41.5
	<u>Write-ins</u>		266	0.1
	<u>District total</u>		247,126	100.0%
9	<i>Frederick C. 'Rick' Boucher (D)*</i>	\$642,637	133,284	63.1
	L. Garrett 'Gary' Weddle (R)	94,270	77,985	36.9
	<u>Write-ins</u>		26	
	<u>District total</u>		211,295	100.0%
10	Raymond E. 'Ray' Vickery, Jr. (D)	\$189,131	75,775	33.4
	<i>Frank R. Wolf (R)*</i>	424,315	144,471	63.6
	Alan R. Ogden (I) N/A	6,874	3.0	
	<u>Write-ins</u>		71	
	<u>District total</u>		227,191	100.0%
11	<i>Leslie L. Byrne (D)</i>	\$734,601	114,172	50.0
	Henry N. Butler (R)	835,816	103,119	45.2
	Perry J. Mitchell (I)	5,966	4,155	1.8
	A. T. 'Art' Narro	5,911	6,681	2.9
	<u>Write-ins</u>		145	0.1
	<u>District total</u>		228,272	100.0%
	STATE TOTAL		\$9,064,919	

SOURCE: Official election results from the State Board of Elections.

NOTES: Party affiliations are abbreviated as D=Democrat; R=Republican; I=Independent; N/A=not available. An asterisk (\*) denotes the incumbent; *italics* denotes the winner.

the Democrats witnessed 1 primary and 2 convention contests. In addition, 8 incumbents and 3 challengers were nominated without opposition. The district-by-district accounting of opposed races was as follows.

*1st District.* A rematch of the close 1990 contest between incumbent Republican Herbert Bateman and Democrat Andy Fox, a former television reporter, was slated.

*2nd District.* Democratic incumbent Owen Pickett drew Republican lawyer Jim Chapman as a November opponent when Chapman defeated a Pat Robertson-endorsed candidate, Edwin Ottinger, in a party convention.

*3rd District.* A heated primary battle among a trio of prominent black politicians on the Democratic side resulted in the June 9 nomination of state Senator Bobby Scott of Newport News. Scott won easily with 67.0 percent of the vote, to 21.5 percent for Delegate Jean Cunningham of Richmond and 11.5 percent for Richmond lawyer Jacqueline Epps. Scott, who had lost a 1986 congressional race in the old 1st District to Republican Herb Bateman, benefited from an ample treasury and overwhelming backing in his home area.<sup>8</sup> The Republicans also had a nominating contest between two African-Americans: Dan Jenkins, a Philip Morris U.S.A. technician, and Freeman McCullers, a bail bondsman. Jenkins won by a 3-to-1 margin at a May 16 convention.

*4th District.* Democrats renominated their 5-term incumbent, Norman Sisisky, while the GOP chose Hopewell City Councilman Anthony Zevgolis.

*5th District.* The incumbent Democrat, L. F. Payne matched against nursing home administrator William Hurlburt, who defeated a management consultant and Christian activist, William Tanner, in a GOP convention.

*6th District.* Incumbent Democrat Jim Olin chose to retire after serving 5 terms, setting up a fierce party competition in this marginal district. Republicans chose Roanoke attorney Robert Goodlatte, while Democrats narrowly selected a Roanoke-area insurance executive, Steve Musselwhite, in a tumultuous convention. It took 5 ballots for Musselwhite to

defeat two Roanoke attorneys, John Fishwick and John Edwards, and capture the nomination.

*8th District.* Incumbent Democrat Jim Moran was unopposed for renomination, while Republicans picked environmental lawyer Kyle McSlarrow in a June 9 primary to oppose Moran. McSlarrow won 53.9 percent of the vote to defeat Alexandria Vice Mayor William C. Cleveland, an African-American (who received 28.2 percent), and former congressional committee staffer Joseph Vasapoli (who garnered 17.9 percent). Turnout in the district was just 6 percent of the registered voters.

*9th District.* Republicans, meeting in convention, nominated Radford City Councilman Gary Weddle to challenge incumbent Democrat Rich Boucher. Weddle bested Radford University music professor Lew Sheckler in a relatively close contest.

*10th District.* Former Democrat delegate Ray Vickery emerged just before the filing deadline to challenge Republican incumbent Frank Wolf in this heavily Republican Northern Virginia district.

*11th District.* Democrats coalesced early around Delegate Leslie L. Byrne of Fairfax County, who was unopposed for nomination to the new seat and hoped to become the first Virginia woman ever elected to Congress. The GOP hosted a 5-way primary that resulted in the nomination of George Mason University law professor Henry Butler, a moderate and the son of former 6th District Congressman Caldwell Butler. The runner-up was a transplanted ex-Michigan congressman, Mark Siljander, who had the backing of hard-right conservatives. Butler received 31.8 percent to Siljander's 21.5 percent in a low turnout (10.5 percent of the district's registered voters.) The other candidates were Delegate Jack Rollison of Prince William, who won 19.3 percent of the vote; businessman Jay Khim, who received 16.2 percent; and Andy Schafly (Son of conservative activist Phyllis Schafly), who finished last with 11.2 percent.



## *House General Election*

The U. S. House races brought some cheer to both parties, but the Democrats reaped the rewards of redistricting to gain 7 of the 11 House seats their highest proportion since 1964. The Democratic party also made history, by electing the state's first African-American congressman this century (Bobby Scott in the 3rd District) and Virginia's first woman U.S. representative ever (Leslie Byrne in the 11th District). Until 1992 Virginia had been among the 10 states that had never elected a woman to either the U.S. House or Senate.

The only Democratic House incumbent in Virginia to experience even a reasonably close contest was 3-term member Owen Pickett in the 2nd District. With most of the black vote in Norfolk moved to the new 3rd District, Pickett's electoral cushion was deflated. Even so, he bested Republican Jim Chapman by 56 to 44 percent. All the other incumbent Democrats won handily, as Table 5 indicates.

Not surprisingly, it was a nonincumbent, Bobby Scott, who racked up the highest Democratic winning percentage (78.6 percent) in the new black-majority district. Not far behind were Democratic congressmen L. F. Payne, Jr. of the 5th District (68.9 percent), Norman Sisisky of the 4th District (68.4 percent), and Rick Boucher of the 9th District (63.1 percent). In the 8th District, Democrat James Moran, a narrow winner in his first election in 1990, won a second term easily with 56.1 percent; Moran was another beneficiary of redistricting.

The state's closest race by far was in the new 11th District, which lived up to its billing as marginal territory. A hard-fought and bitterly personal race developed between Democrat Byrne and Republican Henry Butler. An ample warchest and negative advertising lifted Byrne to a 5 percentage point victory over Butler. She was one of 47 women elected to the U. S. House in November 1992—a record number.

Republicans also added a freshman to the Virginia delegation, Bob Goodlatte of Roanoke. An expected close race did not materialize, as Goodlatte trounced Democrat Stephen Musselwhite, by 60 percent to 39.1 percent, to take the seat of retiring Democrat Jim Olin. The GOP was also delighted by the easy victory of incumbent Herb Bateman in the 1st District. Bateman had nearly lost to an aggressive young Democrat, Andy Fox, in 1990; but this time Bateman defeated Fox by a decisive margin of 57.6 percent to 38.7 percent. Redistricting played a role by shifting reliably Democratic black voters from the 1st to the 3rd District. Two other Republican incumbents were also returned easily, Frank Wolf in the 10th District and Tom Bliley in the 7th District.

Overall, Democrats secured their first outright majority of the congressional vote in party-contested House elections (54.4 percent) since 1964. By contrast, Republicans garnered their lowest vote proportion (44.1 percent) in 15 sets of congressional elections. Only a dozen years ago the GOP controlled 9 of 10 U. S. House seats, but the Democrats have steadily chipped away at their holdings.

### *Campaign Finance*

The combustible combination of strong two-party competition, substantial redistricting, and an additional House seat produced an explosion of campaign spending in Virginia, as Table 6 shows. Over \$9 million was spent by the House candidates in 1992, a 61 percent increase over the \$5.6 million total of 1990. The 1992 dollar figure sets an all time spending record for U.S. House races in Virginia, surpassing the previous high of \$6.6 million in 1986 (see Table 6).

Not surprisingly, the most expensive district contest occurred in the new 11th, where an open seat and high television advertising costs in the D. C. market generated \$1.6 million in spending. Three other districts (1st, 6th, and 8th) saw spending top \$1 million.

**TABLE 6**  
**Total Spending, U.S. House Candidates in Virginia, 1982-1992**

Year	Total Spent (in millions)	% Increase (Decrease) from Previous Election
1992	\$9.06	+61%
1990	5.62	+19
1988	4.74	(-28)
1986	6.57	+12
1984	5.88	+45
1982	4.04	—

SOURCE: Compiled by author.



As usual, incumbent congressmen outspent their challengers in every race where an incumbent was on the ballot, and by a ratio of more than 6-to 1 in the 4th, 5th, 7th, and 9th districts. (The same was true in the open-seat 3rd District.) By contrast, the incumbents in the 1st, 2nd, 8th, and 10th districts outspent their challengers by 'only' 2-to-1 or 3-to-1.

The biggest spenders do not *always* win, as the 6th and 11th district contests demonstrated. Robert Goodlatte and Leslie Byrne triumphed despite being outspent by their opponents—though both Goodlatte and Byrne had warchests in the same general range as their rivals.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Only Alabama, Mississippi, Nebraska, South Carolina, and Utah gave Bush higher proportion of the vote than Virginia.

<sup>2</sup> In 1976 the entire South except for Virginia supported Carter in November, but in 1992 Clinton won only Arkansas, Georgia, Louisiana, and Tennessee.

<sup>3</sup> The General Assembly placed a "sunset" provision in its 1988 primary law; that is, unless the legislature reenacted the primary law before 1992, Virginia automatically reverted to caucuses. No serious effort at reenactment was even attempted. For background see Larry Sabato, *Virginia Votes 1987-1990* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, Center for Public Service, 1991), pp. 22-23.

<sup>4</sup> Each locality has the choice of holding its caucus on either a Saturday or a Monday evening. Generally, the large urban cities and counties choose Saturday, while many rural localities pick Monday.

<sup>5</sup> Brown carried Richmond, and nearly won Charlottesville and Virginia.

<sup>6</sup> In the two preceding redistrictings of 1971 and 1981, Republican governors had been able to protect their party from damage by a Democratic General Assembly.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to forcing Allen's withdrawal, which cost the GOP a seat, the Democrats fashioned in the new black-majority 3rd a district nearly certain to elect a Democrat to Congress.

<sup>8</sup> Scott spent \$270,507 to \$143,015 for Cunningham and \$127,507 for Epps, according to the July 15, 1992 disclosure reports filed with the Federal Election Commission. Scott received 86.7 percent of the vote in his home area of Newport News, where turnout was somewhat better than elsewhere in the district. (Overall, only 15 percent of the district's registered voters participated.)