



Missed Opportunity: Gore, Incumbency, and Television in Election 2000

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While the 2000 presidential election had a number of unique features, including the decisive role of the Supreme Court, it actually was quite similar to three earlier television-age campaigns. For the fourth time since 1960, an incumbent president retired and his party nominated the vice president as a potential successor. The nomination of the vice president has become so commonplace that we now expect it. Unfortunately, we lack theoretical explanations of why vice presidents win nominations while often losing the general election. Dover seeks to advance this needed theory.

Dover looks at the recurring features of television-age elections with surrogate incumbents and applies them to a description of the leading events of Election 2000. The emphasis is on mediated incumbency, a phenomenon that occurs when mass media, particularly television, exert enormous influence in defining the context and meaning of politics for most voters. The first topics considered are the growth of the modern vice presidency and the nature of surrogate incumbent elections. The outcome of such elections often turns on how effectively the vice president and his opponent overcome dilemmas unique to their strategic positions as incumbent or challenger. Dover then describes the campaign from January 1999 through December 2000, from the perspective of television news media, and shows how Gore failed to overcome his dilemma during a time marked by peace and prosperity. The text is an important resource for scholars, students, and other researchers involved with American elections, political communication, and the American presidency.

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