

THREE'S A CROWD: JIMMY CARTER, RONALD REAGAN AND THE INVISIBILITY OF JOHN ANDERSON

Steven R. Brown
Kent State University

A Q-technique study of the 1980 presidential campaign serves to underscore the importance of certain psychological phenomena which support political institutions and practices in such a way as to inhibit successful challenges by third party and independent candidates. In particular, the inherently dyadic nature of political and other rivalries makes it difficult for third parties to find a niche at the same time that oppositions are becoming increasingly preoccupied with one another.

As is typical in Q studies of public opinion and political attitudes (Stephenson, 1965), depth interviews produced a concourse from which a Q sample ($N = 44$) was taken, and the 48 Q sorts eventually administered resulted in the four factors shown in Table 1.¹ The Q sorts were collected by the middle of September, almost two months before the general election and at a time when the undecided vote was judged to be high. Even so, the political lines had already been drawn.

Factor A was the view of those persons generally

1. Only purely-defining variates are shown. Five additional variates were mixed; four were null.

Table 1
Q SORTS DEFINING CANDIDATE-PREFERENCE FACTORS

	A	B	C	D	party	age	sex	ideology
1	(84)	-24	-13	13	Dem	20	m	lib
2	(82)	01	02	01	Dem	53	f	mod
3	(76)	-15	-06	04	Dem	41	f	mod
4	(74)	11	-12	-06	Dem	50	f	lib
5	(73)	-19	09	22	Dem	20	m	lib-mod
6	(72)	08	15	03	Dem	21	m	con
7	(68)	-18	28	00	Dem	20	f	mod
8	(68)	01	31	12	Dem	28	m	mod
9	(66)	04	12	05	Dem	50	m	mod
10	(62)	00	-12	-18	---	19	f	mod
11	(62)	04	03	10	Rep	49	f	mod
12	(60)	06	29	10	Dem	29	f	lib
13	(59)	04	28	23	Dem	34	m	mod
14	(50)	-03	-07	-10	Dem	30	f	mod
15	(49)	-08	-11	36	Ind	20	m	lib
16	(49)	-11	05	-27	Dem	25	f	lib
17	(48)	33	31	-18	Dem	32	m	mod
18	(48)	-03	22	21	Dem	42	f	mod
19	(47)	-20	37	30	Dem	23	f	lib
20	(47)	-26	05	35	Dem	25	f	lib
21	-16	(70)	-02	09	Rep	34	f	con
22	12	(69)	14	27	Dem	47	f	mod
23	04	(60)	-13	01	Rep	24	m	con
24	-27	(51)	-33	-05	Dem	36	m	lib
25	05	04	(65)	33	---	20	f	---
26	16	09	(64)	24	Rep	40	f	mod
27	-05	-22	(58)	21	---	21	f	mod
28	26	04	(58)	-10	Dem	32	m	lib
29	19	-17	(57)	-05	---	19	m	lib
30	-09	-16	(56)	00	Ind	20	f	lib
31	10	14	(51)	20	Dem	21	m	mod
32	-25	29	(45)	-13	Rep	45	f	mod
33	21	33	(43)	-18	Rep	54	m	mod
34	09	21	-06	(58)	Ind	20	m	lib
35	-31	-10	30	(57)	Rep	19	m	con
36	-06	32	25	(50)	Rep	78	m	---
37	-36	08	-19	(45)	Rep	69	m	con
38	02	-16	36	(43)	Rep	46	m	con
39	24	05	37	(-41)	Dem	20	f	lib

in support of Jimmy Carter (scores in parentheses for factors A through D, respectively):

1. (+5 +3 +1 -1) Carter's not as bad as the situation makes him out to be. He may be indecisive at times, but at least he's honest.
6. (+5 -5 0 0) Ronald Reagan is not really a politician: He's an actor who is playing the part of a presidential candidate.
44. (+5 -3 +2 +3) Ronald Reagan lacks the background to handle the position. He may be good at making 10-second answers, but what's he going to do when he becomes involved in real person-to-person talks?
43. (+4 -1 +1 +2) Carter hasn't done that bad a job, and look at the problems he's had--Iran, the economy, not to mention having a moron for a brother. I must admit, I feel sympathy for him.
25. (+3 -4 0 -3) Reagan's too old to be President.
34. (+3 -5 -1 -4) If Reagan became President, I'd be tempted to leave the country. He's so damned unpredictable--I think he'd get us into war within six months.
39. (+3 -4 0 -2) Carter is basically a good man, just inept. Reagan, on the other hand, is stupid: He actually believes in a winnable nuclear war. I'll take ineptitude over stupidity any day.
12. (+2 -3 -5 -3) I don't want my vote to be thrown away, and if I vote for Anderson it's going to be wasted.

Factor A is literally the party line, and it is clear from the factor scores that the Democratic loyalists, as early as mid-September, were already preoccupied with defending Carter and attacking Reagan: Only statement 12 (score +2), at a relatively low level of salience, addresses Anderson, and it is apparent from the other factor scores for that statement that it was not a viewpoint accepted outside the circle of Carter supporters. Parenthetically, the scores for

statements 34 and 39 provided an early indication of the lack of success which Carter would experience in trying to associate Reagan with a warlike position, a strategy which was so effective for Lyndon Johnson in his 1964 victory over Barry Goldwater.

Factor B, by the same token, is the position of the Reagan supporters who are as preoccupied as factor A with the Carter-Reagan dichotomy (scores for factors A to D, respectively):

11. (-3 +5 -4 +3) Ronald Reagan has an irresistible urge to "tell it like he feels," whether or not the American public agrees with it. This kind of honesty sometimes hurts him, but I admire him for it.
20. (+2 +5 0 +4) People say Jimmy Carter is too wishy-washy, that he flip-flops, but it takes courage for anyone (especially the President) to admit he was wrong, and to change his mind.
31. (-3 +5 +3 -4) Jimmy Carter lacks the courage of his own convictions. If Sadat yells and screams he'll do one thing; then Begin cries and he tries to please him, too. He hasn't learned that he can't satisfy everyone.
28. (-3 +4 -2 +1) Reagan is not like Carter: He isn't afraid to make decisions.

Statement 20 might at first blush be interpreted as a friendly defense of Carter (as factor A no doubt intends it to be), but such an interpretation would then conflict with statements 31 and 28. Factor B apparently draws a distinction between flip-flopping (indecisiveness) and courageously changing one's mind, and it is in light of this distinction that statement 20 must be read as being critical of Carter. Once again, however, Anderson is a victim of selective inattention.

Factors C and D are John Anderson factors generally: the former is probably the factor with which Anderson himself would have been saturated had he participated in the study, for it supports his programmatic views as well as his candidacy, whereas factor D's traditionalism prevents ready acceptance of

Anderson's stands on progressive measures:

16. (-2 +1 +5 +4) If Anderson wins, maybe it will give the two-party system a little competition, and maybe then they will straighten up a little.
42. (-1 -1 +4 +4) Anderson is the only candidate who is being realistic about his promises and not going wild with plans he knows won't work.
32. (0 -1 +3 +3) How can Anderson be called a spoiler when there's nothing to spoil? After all, Ronald Reagan is not Teddy Roosevelt, and Jimmy Carter is not FDR.
37. (+1 +1 -5 -5) I just can't take John Anderson's campaign seriously: He looks too much like an older "Dennis the Menace." Besides, we don't need another inexperienced President.
5. (-1 -4 +4 0) I admire Anderson's stands on abortion, ERA, and the 50-cent gas tax.

Factors C and D have a certain disdain for the major party candidates (no. 32) and are interested in "shaking up the system," and Anderson is seen as a vehicle for accomplishing this; however, D is less certain about Anderson's platform (no. 5). In evidence again is the tendency by factors A and B to assign relatively low importance to statements associated with Anderson.

Factor D also differs from C by virtue of the fact that D manifests a partial identification with Reagan and seems embittered toward Carter:

17. (-5 +2 -3 +5) Reagan will keep the Soviets guessing and that's what we need. They've already guessed that Carter is incompetent.
35. (-4 +2 -4 +5) At least Reagan doesn't look shifty, and I don't think he's ever been caught in a lie. And he didn't drown anybody off Chappquidick Island, either.
7. (-5 -2 -3 +4) Carter is a traitor to the cause. What we need is a President who will help our country's situation, and by voting for Carter we're only doubling our problems.

The evidence indicates that D blames Jimmy Carter for our problems and is prepared to vote *against* him; who D would vote *for* was apparently not yet established in mid-September.²

In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre (1956:270) observes that "for me the Other is...the being *through whom* I gain my object-ness." Seen through the eyes of their followers, Jimmy Carter and Ronald Reagan validate one another, each responding to the other-as-opponent, each thereby gaining stature as an important political object in the eyes of the other, perceptions that are adopted (through identification) by their followers. John Anderson, by way of contrast, does not occupy the center of attention of an opponent, hence has legitimacy and object-ness only in the eyes of his followers on factors C and D:

21. (+2 +1 -5 -4) It's really weird: I watch Anderson on TV, but I don't really *see* him, and I don't *hear* him when he talks. He's really not in the race as far as I'm concerned.

In sum, the previous statement scores in A and B, doubtless the more populous factors, demonstrate a symbiotic tie between the Carter and Reagan constituencies which served to render Anderson comparatively anonymous and invisible for large segments of the American electorate. In the polarized world of poli-

2. "Don't know" survey responses often conceal firm decisions behind a surface impression of open-mindedness and independence. Subject 13 (Table 1), for example, claimed in mid-September to be in the process of making up his mind, although the outcome of his personal decision-making could be easily foreseen. Similarly, subject 32, whose Q sort defines Anderson factor C, stated her intention to vote for Reagan, but she switched on the morning of election day and voted for Anderson, i.e., voted in congruence with those factor C sentiments which were already obvious six weeks previously. The utility of Q technique for social and political forecasting of this kind deserves exploration.

tics, as has been noted elsewhere (Brown, 1974), third positions are screened out and rendered inaudible.

Political parties have historically been delegated the task of recruiting and training future rulers and of narrowing policy alternatives to a point that the public can choose between them. Despite the decline in party strength in recent decades, there remains the need (maintained, perhaps, by a certain mental laziness) to choose between the most visible ideas and individuals who gain visibility in view of their being in competition with one another. Although institutional constraints have lessened, therefore, it can be surmised that the Anderson candidacy ran up against a persistent psychological constraint--the tendency to see politics in dyadic terms--a psychosocial limitation with which other mavericks will have to continue to deal into at least the near future.

*Steven R. Brown, Department of Political Science,
Kent State University, Kent, OH 44242*

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*...what we must aim at is not so much to ascertain resemblances and differences, as to discover similarities hidden under apparent discrepancies.
(H. Poincaré)*