

Reviews



By Other Means, For Other Ends? Bush's Re-election Reassessed

Imtiaz Hussain and José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, eds.
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PURPOSEFUL DECEPTION?

Re-electing George W. Bush raises questions. Lying to the people, constraining their civil rights, substituting welfare with military expenditures and a first term more riddled with deficits than surpluses may not be “rational” reasons to re-elect a chief executive. Yet, more Americans than ever still voted Bush in.

So much has been said about this phenomenon, it becomes hard to distinguish what is relevant from what is not. Were American citizens deceived into voting for someone they did not want to? Or did they want to vote for Bush because he truly represented “American interests” or “American values”? At what point can interests/values be shaped by misinformation, manipulation and deception? Such questions underlie *By Other Means, For Other Ends?*

By recognizing politics by “other means” during the 2004 election, the authors collectively establish what could be a new paradigm for analyzing U.S. electoral politics. Four factors stand out in the analysis: fear, religion (in its evangelical form), deception and values.

Not one of them represents a breakthrough in American political science or in international relations analysis. Yet, the book still brings them together into one coherent analytical framework. From the different contributions to this book, one can identify, to a greater or lesser degree, the presence of all four factors. More than just being independent factors, they both constitute a multifaceted whole and go beyond summing up these four parts.

As one of the editors of the book, Imtiaz Hussain traces the influence of evangelism

in the Bush administration to being more than a temporary union of church and state. He believes that it ushers in a new “realignment,” a term first used by V. O. Key to refer to a substantial alteration of agreements and alliances between groups and individuals. In his view, a new realignment could occur if Bush institutionalizes evangelism. Curiously, it is possible that the first steps toward evangelical institutionalization were taken even before the Iraqi invasion began. Ian Hemphill’s analysis of the 2002 National Security Strategy and its focus on pre-emptive attack, rather than containment or deterrence, suggests why such a process is already underway.

Even though Bush deliberately deceived the American electorate in invading Iraq, Lowell Gustafson points out that there is little consensus behind the purpose for doing so. Obviously, it helped Bush’s re-election, thus creating one of the first elections—if not the first—since the end of the Cold War when foreign considerations received greater priority from U.S. voters than domestic. Yet, the Iraq deception began a long time before the elections and in a very unexpected way if we consider how in 2000 Bush’s main foreign issue was the relationship with Mexico. Gustafson suspects the interest lying behind the Iraq “mass deception” was to protect Israel’s security, advocated by administrative neo-conservatives, a theme Hussain reduces to the “Vulcans” formulating foreign policy: Dick Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Paul Wolfowitz, among others. Merely the will to exercise power, Thucydides style, prevailed “behind the curtain,” Gustafson contends.

Whatever the reason for deception, it undermined the predictability inherent in traditional approaches. Satya Pattanayak shows how, at a time perceived as critical, voting is not influenced as much by tangible interests (particularly economics) as intangible, such as religion and moral values. Central to this shift is the “double threat syndrome”:

threats posed not just by terrorists, but also “immoral” issues like gay marriage, abortion, and so forth.

Michael Twomey’s “comparative values assessment” expands the concept of “values.” Although unconventional, his system complements the more traditional explanations of electoral outcomes. Once again, the focus on the fear factor (caused by misinformation and deception) emerges as a public values modeler.

Still, the most important questions remain: What are the global and regional implications? How will this affect U.S.-Mexico relations? José Luis Valdés-Ugalde, the other editor of the book, portrays the pessimistic aftermath of global and local instability. The U.S.’s ethnocentric conception of society and politics, partially derived from its *insulata fortunata* condition, favors greater intolerance and more intensive interventionism. In such a context, it is ingenuous to expect U.S.-Mexico bilateral relations to improve, let alone achieve a satisfactory agreement on undocumented migration.

Gustavo Acua sustains that not only was the presidential election relevant, but the composition of Congress must also be understood to predict policy outcomes, in this case, hemispheric trade preferences. The most likely strategy of “hub and spokes” (characterized by separate bilateral agreements with the U.S.) puts every country at a disadvantage except the U.S. A worse-worse situation is expected domestically and internationally.

Only a year after a seemingly paradoxical re-election, Bush’s overall job rating is falling to precipitously low levels. Abroad, the U.S. has lost most of its “soft power”. It becomes more relevant than ever to reflect “where did it all go wrong”? *By Other Means, For Other Ends?* may help find an answer. ■■■

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