

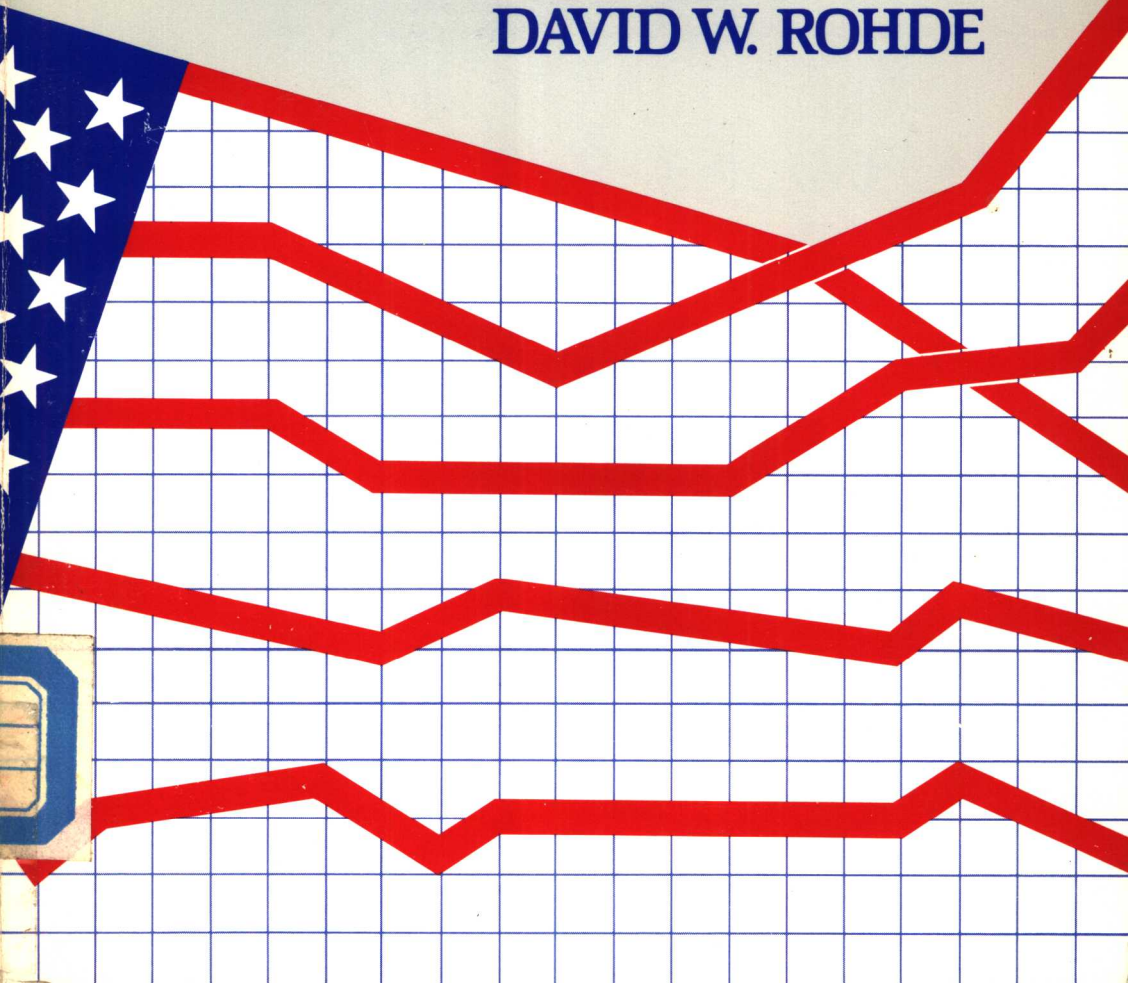
# Change and Continuity IN THE 1984 Elections

REVISED EDITION

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*Revised Edition*

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**CQ**  
PRESS

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To  
David  
Heather and Lee  
Jennifer and Margaret

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## Preface to the Revised Edition

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After the 1984 elections many Republicans were predicting bright prospects for their party. They realized, however, that the 1986 midterm elections would be dangerous, for Republican control of the Senate was in jeopardy. The GOP had only a 53-47 seat margin in the 99th Congress, and a loss of just four seats would give the Democrats control. Moreover, the Republicans had 22 Senate seats to defend; the Democrats had only 12. Even so, Republican leaders believed they had a good chance to retain control, and a few days before the election some Republican pollsters were still predicting that the GOP would hold the Senate.

In fact, the Republicans suffered a net loss of 8 Senate seats, giving the Democrats a 55-45 margin and control of the Senate for the first time since the 1980 election. This very substantial loss was surprising and was seen as the most dramatic result of the 1986 contest. For the first time during his presidency Ronald Reagan would have to face a Congress in which both chambers were controlled by the Democrats. Still, the 1986 elections provided considerable encouragement for the Republicans on other fronts. Although the GOP sustained a net loss of five House seats, this was a far smaller loss than usual for the president's party in a midterm election. Moreover, the Republicans scored a net gain of eight governorships.

The 1986 elections therefore provided a mixed message, which raises some interesting questions. Were there national issues on the minds of voters or is former Speaker of the House, Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, Jr., correct in saying, "All politics is local"? Were there patterns to the 1986 outcomes that can be understood by social science analysis? What are the implications for the 1988 congressional and presidential elections? Can we understand the process by which some politicians choose to seek the presidency, while most do not? Is realignment dead, or have the Republicans merely suffered a temporary setback?

In Part V, 1986 Election Update, we address these questions. In some cases, we think we can provide solid answers, although in other instances we must speculate because the picture is constantly changing. The Iran-contra scandal suggests there is considerable truth to an observation by former British prime minister Harold Wilson that "a week

is a long time in politics.” Of course, we cannot predict the specific political events that will affect the 1988 elections; however, we can discern patterns in the 1986 election results that will help us put future events into proper perspective.

This book is a collective enterprise, for which we take collective responsibility. As in the first edition of this book, however, we divided the labor. David Rohde had the primary responsibility for Chapter 12, John Aldrich for the first two sections of Chapter 13, and Paul Abramson for the last section.

We are grateful to Joseph A. Schlesinger for his suggestions. Iris Dunn provided valuable secretarial assistance. We also thank Joanne Daniels of CQ Press for her advice and encouragement and Carolyn Goldinger for helping us with the speedy editing and production of this updated edition.

*Paul R. Abramson*  
*John H. Aldrich*  
*David W. Rohde*

## Preface

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Ronald Reagan's 1984 reelection victory was a landslide of historic proportions, but the long-term significance of his win remains controversial. Although the president carried 49 states, the Republican party made only a modest gain of 14 seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and lost 2 seats in the Senate. This mixed pattern led many analysts to view the 1984 contest as merely a personal triumph for the president. Following this initial reaction, commentators more often emphasized the overall pattern of Republican success in postwar presidential elections and argued that the 1984 elections marked the beginning, or perhaps even the continuation, of a pro-Republican realignment.

The Republicans, some argue, are going to be the new majority party, a view shared by Reagan. Speaking to former campaign aides celebrating the first anniversary of his reelection, he declared, "We stand poised to become the party of a new governing coalition—the party of the future."

Have the Republicans become, or are they about to become, the dominant party in presidential elections? Can they translate their presidential victories into control of both houses of the U.S. Congress? To answer these questions, one cannot view the 1984 elections as isolated events, but must place them in a broad historical context. To do this, we have examined a broad range of evidence, from past election results to public opinion surveys of the electorate conducted over the past four decades.

Our goal in writing this book was to provide a solid social-scientific analysis of the 1984 elections using the best data available to study voting behavior. We employ many sources, but rely primarily on the 1984 survey of the American electorate conducted by the Survey Research Center—Center for Political Studies of the University of Michigan as part of an ongoing project funded by the National Science Foundation. In the course of our analysis, we use every one of the 17 election studies conducted by the Michigan SRC-CPS, a series often referred to as the National Election Studies.

These surveys can be analyzed by scholars throughout the United States because they are disseminated by the Inter-University Consortium

for Political and Social Research. The ICPSR provided a preliminary version of the data for the 1984 election survey to scholars in late April 1985; another version, which included a study to determine whether respondents actually voted, was provided in late July 1985. Unless otherwise indicated, all the tables and figures in Chapters 1 and 2, 4 through 8, and 10 are based upon data from the ICPSR. The standard disclaimer holds: the consortium is not responsible for our analyses or interpretations.

We are grateful to Harriet Dhanak of the Politometrics Laboratory at Michigan State University for helping us analyze these surveys. Michael J. Keefe of Michigan State University and Tom Trump and John Williams of the University of Minnesota assisted with the data analysis. Several of our colleagues gave us helpful suggestions and we are grateful to Ada W. Finifter, Jack H. Knott, and Joseph A. Schlesinger for their comments. Walter Dean Burnham of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology provided us with unpublished estimates of turnout as well as comments on Chapter 4. Richard G. Niemi of the University of Rochester provided extensive and helpful comments on the entire manuscript. We also thank Joanne Daniels, Carolyn Goldinger, and Carolyn McGovern of CQ Press for their help and encouragement.

This book was a collective enterprise, but we divided the labor. Paul Abramson had primary responsibility for Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 11, John Aldrich for Chapters 1, 6, 7, and 8, and David Rohde for Chapters 2, 9, and 10. None of us is responsible for the presidential election result, although one of us contributed to the 3,761-vote Mondale margin in Minnesota that denied Reagan a 50-state sweep. While we disagreed about the most appropriate electoral choice, we share our interpretation of the elections. The 1984 elections, in our view, raised fundamental questions about the future of American politics that cannot yet be answered. But a thorough analysis of the data at hand can help us understand the changes these elections may produce and gain a broader appreciation of current American politics.

Paul R. Abramson  
John H. Aldrich  
David W. Rohde

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## **PART I**

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# **The 1984 Presidential Election Contest**

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