THE POLITICAL ARITHMETIC
OF THE NAFTA VOTE

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Electoral Mathematics

Have President Clinton's strenuous efforts on behalf of **NAFTA** hurt or helped him politically? In particular, has there been any damage to the political coalition Clinton needs for re-election in **1996?**

Some argue that Clinton's **NAFTA** stance helped him in Washington and that little damage has been done to his potential electoral base in the country. The logic here is that Clinton is siding with "forward-looking" elements of his party based in the suburban middle class, rather than the urban poor and organized labor. And, since the suburban middle class is on the rise and numerically predominant, Clinton's fight for NAFI'A should produce more, not fewer, votes for a Democratic president.

Others argue that Clinton's all-out effort to pass NAFI'A has angered large segments of the political base he needs to maintain support for his policies and to be re-elected. Moreover, they say, it has angered swing voters. If this point is true, the fight for **NAFTA** has hurt Clinton and will hamper his ability to put together a winning coalition in 1996.

An analysis looking at members who voted for and against NAFTA and the characteristics of their districts (based on US. Census and other data) supports the second, negative interpretation of the long-term political fallout from the vote.

Let's look at the numbers.

Start with the obvious fact that Clinton's NAFTA was repudiated by a strong majority of his own party -- three-fifths of congressional Democrats. Thus, passage of NAFTA depended on

Another way of looking at the state patterns is in terms of the "Rust Belt" (the Midwest and industrial Northeast) and the Sunbelt. The Rust Belt overlaps heavily with the Clinton coalition, including the four swing Clinton states, outside of California, with the most electoral votes. The Sunbelt, on the other hand, includes the states that provided Bush with the bulk (three-quarters) of his electoral votes. But the NAFTA vote reverses this relationship -- the Clinton-identified trade deal did very well in the Sunbelt and very poorly in the Rust Belt (particularly among Democrats). It is hard to see how this relationship will help build the Clinton coalition for 1996.

What about the union angle? Were large contributions from labor political action committees responsible for all those Democratic anti-NAFTA votes? According to the data, a better case can be made the other way.

Among anti-NAFTA Democrats, labor **PACs** provided 20.7 percent of total campaign receipts, compared to 25.7 percent from business **PACs** (Table 1). Among pro-NAFTA Democrats, the dominance of business PAC money is quite striking (33.2 percent versus 12.1 percent from labor **PACs**). Thus, if anyone was voting his or her PAC money, it was **pro-NAFTA** Democrats, not anti-NAFTA Democrats. (It is also worth noting that pro-NAFTA Republicans received the highest proportion of all of business PAC money -- 34.7 percent).

The greater importance of business rather than labor PAC money on NAFTA voting is further suggested by looking at the votes of members receiving at least 30 percent of their funds from labor or business (Table 2). Nearly half of the House of Representatives (215 members) received at least 30 percent of their campaign funds from business in 1992, and this group provided a net vote gain for NAFTA of 61 (four from Democrats, 57 from Republicans). In contrast, only 34 members received at least 30 percent of their funds from labor **PACs** in 1992, and they provided a net vote of 30 against NAFTA. In this light, more extensive contributions from business could be said to have provided the margin of victory for NAFTA.

Overall, the analysis of the **NAFTA** vote by congressional district does not sustain an optimistic interpretation of NAFTA's political fallout for Clinton. The evidence points in the other direction: Clinton has alienated his base, including voters in the suburbs, in the middle class, and in swing states.

The underlying reasons for this phenomenon may be discerned in the polling data that have been collected around the NAFTA issue. Voters see NAFTA as a job-loser and a wage-cutter, and

these negative views remained entrenched even while overall sentiment fluctuated on the treaty. For example, a Washington *Post*-ABC poll, taken on the eve of the vote, showed that voters thought NAFTA would encourage U.S. companies to move to Mexico (60 percent to 33 percent), hold down wages in the U.S. (58 percent to 32 percent), and eliminate jobs (48 percent to 32 percent).

Whom will these sentiments about jobs and wages tend to affect? The most likely possibility is Clinton and Perot voters, particularly the non-college-educated middle-class voters who have been hit the hardest by recent economic trends. For example, the non-college-educated,[3] who provided almost three-quarters[4] of Clinton's support, opposed NAFTA 43 percent to 34 percent in a Gallup poll taken on the eve of the vote. In contrast, the college-educated -- just 27 percent of Clinton's support -- favored NAFI'A by 54 percent to 34 percent.

In the same poll, those with $20,000-$50,000 in family income -- the heart of the middle class -- opposed NAFT'A by 47 percent to 32 percent. In contrast, affluent voters -- those with over $50,000 in family income -- favored NAFTA by 51 percent to 36 percent. Yet those affluent voters provided Clinton with only 12 percent of his support.[5]

The picture gets worse when Perot voters -- the swing vote in presidential politics -- are added in. These voters are similarly dominated by the non-college-educated middle class and have easily been the strongest and most consistent opponents of NAFTA (63 percent to 18 percent in the same poll[6]). Since Clinton will probably have to put together a coalition in 1996 that includes a substantial proportion of those Perot voters, NAFTA will clearly hurt him here.

The bottom line is clear: NAFTA as a policy appeals strongly to only a very elite group, consisting of (a) Republicans in Congress, (b) the college-educated and (c) the affluent. These elements are unlikely to make up a winning combination for the Democrats in 1996.

Detailed Results

Perot Votes

Table 1 presents the average characteristics of districts broken down by how their members voted (data sources are detailed in the Appendix). The top two sections show political characteristics, that is, the 1992 presidential vote and the percentage of the members' campaign

receipts derived from labor and business political action committees. There are two ways one could categorize the concentration of Perot voters. On the one hand, there was a substantial number of them (at least 16 percent of the electorate) in all the districts, suggesting that most members were conscious of the Perot electorate when making their decisions on NAFTA. On the other hand, within each party there was a somewhat greater concentration of Perot voters in the districts of pro-NAFTA members, and more Perot voters in Republican than in Democratic districts. This suggests that it is highly unlikely that Perot and his constituency were any special threat in the districts of anti-NAFTA Democrats who, on average, had the lowest concentration of Perot voters in their districts. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that most of the Democrats voting against NAFTA (excluding new members) had voted against the "fast track" provisions in 1991, at least a year before Perot's candidacy.

PAC Funding

Democrats who voted against NAFTA did enjoy the greatest amount of labor funding in the last election cycle, about 20.7 percent of their funds (Table 1). However, as mentioned above, these Democrats received an even higher (25.7 percent) share of their funds from business PACs, suggesting that, if money talks, business had as loud a voice with these members as did unions.

The fact that business is a major funder (giving at least 30 percent of a member's funds) of half of Congress appears to have been a more important factor in the NAFTA vote than the power of labor PACs (Table 2). Of the members with large business funding (215), there were 138 votes for NAFTA and 77 votes against, a net gain of 61 votes for NAFTA. In contrast, the large labor funding of 34 members was associated with a net gain of 30 votes against NAFTA.

Emulovment Characteristics

Contrary to the unsupported assertions of some political analysts, pro-NAFTA Democrats do not come from heavily white-collar districts, and anti-NAFTA members do not come from blue-collar districts. In fact, there is a slightly lower concentration of white-collar employment and a greater concentration of blue-collar employment in the districts of pro-NAFTA compared to anti-NAFTA Democrats (Table 1). Among Democrats, at least, the occupational composition and the presence of manufacturing employment are similar in both pro-NAFTA and anti-NAFTA districts

and are probably not the driving force behind members' decisions on NAFTA. Among Republicans, however, the pro-NAFTA districts are more white-collar and less blue-collar than the anti-NAFTA districts.

Education and Income

As with employment, the income and education characteristics of pro- and anti-NAFTA Democrats are not much different. Table 1 shows that the percentage of the electorate with college degrees is slightly higher in pro-NAFTA Democratic districts, and the concentration of people with no more than a high school education is slightly higher in anti-NAFTA Democratic districts. Again, the larger differences are between Republicans, with the pro-NAFTA Republicans being from educationally upscale districts.

The pattern of differences in income characteristic mirrors that of education. Democrats in each NAFTA camp come from districts with similar median family incomes ($34,485 among those opposed and $33,247 among those for) and are about equally likely to have low-income voters (family income less than $20,000) and high-income voters (family income over $75,000). In contrast, the districts of pro-NAFTA Republicans have significantly higher incomes, fewer low-income voters, and more high-income voters than the districts of either anti-NAFTA Republicans or Democrats.

Electoral College Swine States

Table 4 presents the votes in the states that Bush and Clinton won in the 1992 election. The Clinton states are further broken down into the "core Democratic" states -- in which Dukakis won -- and "swing Democratic" states -- in which Clinton won but Dukakis did not. Among Democrats, the heaviest anti-NAFTA voting was in the states Clinton won, both in core and swing states. This pattern suggests that the Clinton administration's advocacy for NAFTA may hurt it throughout the states making up the Clinton coalition.

City, Suburb, and Rural Locations

Table 3 presents the vote count by party and location (city, suburb, rural). NAFTA was defeated in the cities (68-51), but won in the suburbs and rural areas. Among Democrats, NAFTA

lost badly in both the cities and the suburbs and lost narrowly in rural areas. Among Republicans, NAFTA was supported heavily in the cities, suburbs, and rural areas.

Regional Voting Patterns

Table 5 presents the voting by party in each of the nine U.S. Census divisions, with Texas and California separately tabulated. These data show that Democrats opposed NAFTA in the Midwest (consisting of the Great Lakes and the North Central Regions), the Northeast, and California, and split evenly in the South Atlantic. NAFTA was most intensely opposed in the Rust Belt areas of the Mid-Atlantic and the Great Lakes -- only 8 out of 79 Democrats in these areas voted for NAFTA. Note that these states include many of Clinton's most crucial swing states (Illinois, Michigan, Ohio, etc.).

Republican opposition to NAFTA was strongest in the South, outside of Texas, but even here there was more support than opposition. The Republican **pro-NAFTA** vote was overwhelming in Texas and the Mountain states and intense in California and every other region outside of the South.

Conclusion

The picture of the anti-NAFTA forces as traditional, hidebound, urban Democrats that the party can safely ignore clearly does not fit the facts. While urban Democrats were strongly opposed to NAFTA, so also were suburban Democrats. Moreover, NAFTA opposition was concentrated in the very states that Clinton must carry again in 1996 to retain the presidency.

The diversity of NAFTA opposition is underscored by the fact that NAFTA was unpopular both in Democratic districts that are heavily white collar and those that are heavily blue collar. Equally true, pro-NAFTA Democrats came from a cross-section of blue- and white-collar districts. In addition, though the Perot electorate has a strong presence in nearly every district, Perot voters were actually least concentrated in the districts of anti-NAFTA Democrats. The anti-NAFTA coalition among Democrats was thus broadly based and not driven by simple fear of Ross Perot.

There were strong economic differences between pro- and anti-NAFTA Republicans. Though few in number, these Republican anti-NAFTA members came from relatively downscale districts -- more heavily blue collar, lower income, and lower educational levels -- than their pro-NAFTA colleagues, and tended to be regionally based in the South (excluding Texas) and the Rust Belt.

President Clinton has managed to put together a coalition to pass NAFTA. But by doing so, he has seriously split the electoral base of the Democratic Party and has alienated swing voters. This is likely to interfere with his ability to win passage of future economic reforms, to keep control of the Congress in 1994, and, ultimately, to hold onto the White House in 1996.

November 18, 1993

Data Appendix

The data used in this analysis are based on compilations of the characteristics of the population and voters of every congressional district. The income, education, and employment data are drawn from Census data for 1990. Voting behavior and Electoral College categories are based on *Congressional Quarterly* tabulations. Campaign finance data are from the Center for Responsible Politics. Our categorization of districts into suburban, city, and rural is based on a measure of population density obtained from Election Data Services. We categorized the most dense 119 districts (about 27% of total) as city districts and the 109 least dense districts (about 25% of total) as rural, with the remaining districts considered suburban.

Endnotes

1. Defined as professional, technical, and managerial occupations.

2. Defined as operative-craft workers and laborers.

3. That is, do not have a four-year-college degree.

4. Authors' estimate, based on 1992 VRS exit poll and November 1992 Current Population Survey voter supplement.

5. Authors' estimate, based on 1992 VRS exit poll and November 1992 Current Population Survey voter supplement.

6. Operationalized as Perot supporters (Perot voters not available). Note that proportion of Perot supporters in Gallup sample (20 percent) matches up well with Perot vote in 1992 general election (19 percent).

TABLE 1
District Characteristics by Party and NAFTA Vote

District Characteristic	Democrats		Republicans	
	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA
Number	156	102	43	132
Voting Behavior				
% Clinton	51.2%	46.5%	**36.6%**	**36.1%**
% Perot	16.9	17.7	**20.1**	**20.6**
% Bush	31.9	35.8	**43.1**	**43.3**
Political Contributions				
% Labor PACs	20.7%	12.1%	**2.9%**	**1.4%**
% Business PACs	25.7	33.2	**26.8**	**34.7**
Emulovment				
% White-Collar	28.5%	28.4%	29.7%	31.4%
% Blue-Collar	27.4	27.5	26.7	25.1
% Manufacturing	18.3	17.2	16.5	17.9
Education Levels				
% High School or Less	58.1%	**55.6%**	55.4%	**50.8%**
% College Degree	11.7	**12.5**	12.5	**14.9**
% Graduate Degree	6.8	**6.7**	6.8	**7.8**
Income				
Median Family Income	$34,485	**$33,247**	**$36,883**	**$40,200**
% 0 - $20,000	27.2%	**28.3%**	**22.8%**	**20.1%**
% $20 - $ 50,000	44.9	**45.6**	46.4	43.9
% $75 - $100,000	5.8	**5.3**	6.6	7.6
% $100,000 +	4.8	**4.4**	5.1	7.1

TABLE 2
NAFTA Vote by Large Business
and Labor PAC Funding

PAC Type	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Net Vote for NAFTA
Democrats Receiving 30% or more from:				
Labor PACS	32		34	-30
Business PACS	57	6X	118	4
Republicans Receiving 30% or more from:				
Labor PACS	0	0	0	**0**
Business PACS	20	77	97	57
All Members Receiving 30% or more from:				
Labor PACS	32	**2**	**34**	-30
Business PACS	77	**138**	**215**	61

TABLE 3
NAFTA **Vote by Party and City**
Suburb and Rural Location

Party and Location	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
All*						
City	68	51	119	57.1%	42.9%	100.0%
Suburb	87	118	206	42.4	57.6	100.0
Rural	45	65	110	40.9	59.1	100.0
Democrats						
City	62	30	92	67.4%	32.6%	100.0%
Suburb	59	40	99	59.6	40.4	100.0
Rural	35	32	67	52.2	47.8	100.0
Republicans						
City	6	21	27	22.2%	77.8%	100.0%
Suburb	28	78	106	26.4	73.6	100.0
Rural	9	33	42	21.4	78.6	100.0

* Includes one independent.

TABLE 4
NAFTA Vote by Electoral College Outcome in 1992

Electoral College	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
Bush States*						
Democrats	36	44	80	45.0%	55.0%	100.0%
Republican	16	36	52	30.8	69.2	100.0
Total	52	80	132	39.4	60.6	100.0
Clinton States						
Democrats	120	58	178	67.4%	32.6%	100.0%
Republican	27	96	123	22.0	78.0	100.0
Independent	1	0	1	100.0	0.0	100.0
Total	148	154	302	49.0	51.0	100.0
Core Democratic States:						
States Clinton Won and Dukakis Won"						
Democrats	38	17	55	69.1%	30.9%	100.0%
Republican	6	23	29	20.7	79.3	100.0
Total	44	40	84	52.4	47.6	100.0
Swing Democratic States:						
States Clinton Won and Dukakis Lost*						
Democrats	82	41	123	66.7%	33.3%	100.0%
Republican	21	73	94	22.3	77.7	100.0
Independent	1	0	1	100.0	0.0	100.0
Total	104	114	2 1 8	47.7	32.3	100.0

* AL, AK, AZ, FL, ID, IN, KS, MS, NC, ND, NE, OK, SC, SD, TX, UT, VA, WY
** HI, IA, MA, MN, NY, OR, RI, WV, WA, WI
*** AR, CA, CO, CT, DE, GA, IL, KY, LA, ME, MD, MI, MO, MT, NV, NH, NJ, NM, OH, PA, TN, VT

TABLE 5
NAFTA Vote by Region and City, Suburban,
and Rural Location
(Page One)

Region, Party and Location-	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti- NAFTA	**Pro-** NAFTA	Total	**Anti- NAFTA**	**Pro-** NAFTA	Total

1. New England
    (ME, NH, VT, MA, CT, RI)

   Democrats

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	1	2	3	33.3	66.7	100.0
Suburb	9	2	**11**	81.8	18.2	100.0
Rural	10	4	**14**	71.4	28.6	100.0

   Republicans

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	0	1	1	0.0	100.0	100.0
Suburb	1	5	6	16.7	83.3	100.0
Rural	1	0	1	100.0	0.0	100.0

2. Mid-Atlantic (NY, PA, NJ)

   Democrats

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	23	2	25	92.0%	8.0%	100.0%
Suburb	11	0	11	100.0	0.0	100.0
Rural	0	0	0			

   Republicans

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	2	5	7	28.6%	71.4%	100.0%
Suburb	7	13	20	35.0	65.0	100.0
Rural	1	1	2	50.0	50.0	100.0

3. Great Lakes
    (OH, IN, MI, WI, IL)

   Democrats

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	13	3	16	81.3%	18.7%	100.0%
Suburb	20	2	22	90.9	9.1	100.0
Rural	4	1	5	80.0	20.0	100.0

   Republicans

	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
City	1	4	5	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Suburb	3	16	19	15.8	84.2	100.0
Rural	0	6	6	0.0	100.0	100.0

Region, Party and Location	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
4. North Central (MN, IA, MS, SD, ND, NE, KS)						
Democrats						
City	4	0	4	100.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Suburb	1	1	2	50.0	50.0	100.0
Rural	8	4	12	66.7	33.3	100.0
Republicans						
City				-	-	
Suburb	1	4	5	20.0%	80.0%	100.0%
Rural	0	8	8	0.0	100.0	100.0
5. South Atlantic (DE, MD, VA, NC, SC, GA, FL, WV)						
Democrats						
City	4	6	10	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Suburb	9	13	22	40.9	59.1	100.0
Rural	8	2	10	80.0	20.0	100.0
Republicans						
City	2	3	5	40.0%	60.0%	100.0%
Suburb	11	16	27	40.7	59.3	100.0
Rural	1	0	1	100.0	0.0	100.0
6. East South Central (KY, TN, AL, MS)						
Democrats						
City	0	2	2	**0.0%**	100.0%	100.0%
Suburb	1	4	5	20.0	80.0	100.0
Rural	7	5	12	58.3	41.7	100.0
Republicans						
City						
Suburb	1	5	6	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%
Rural	2	0	2	100.0	0.0	100.0

TABLE 5
NAFTA Vote by Region and City, Suburban,
and Rural Location
(Page Three)

Region, Party and Location	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total	Anti-NAFTA	Pro-NAFTA	Total
7. West South Central (AR, LA, OK)						
Democrats						
City	0	1	1	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Suburb	1	1	2	50.0	50.0	100.0
Rural	1	6	7	14.3	85.7	100.0
Republicans						
City						
Suburb	1	2	3	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Rural	0	4	4	0.0	100.0	100.0
8. Texas						
Democrats						
City	3	2	5	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Suburb	2	6	8	25.0	75.0	100.0
Rural	1	7	8	12.5	87.5	100.0
Republicans						
City	0	1	1	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Suburb	0	5	5	0.0	100.0	100.0
Rural	0	3	3	0.0	100.0	100.0
9. Mountain States (MT, ID, WY, CO, NM, AZ, UT, NV)						
Democrats						
City	1	2	3	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Suburb	0	2	2	0.0	100.0	100.0
Rural	3	3	6	50.0	50.0	100.0
Republicans						
City	0	1	1	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Suburb	0	3	3	0.0	100.0	100.0
Rural	2	7	9	22.2	77.8	100.0

Region, Party and Location	Vote Count			Percent of Vote		
	Anti- NAFTA	**Pro-** NAFTA	Total	**Anti-** NAFTA	**Pro-** NAFTA	Total

10. **Pacific except California** **(WA, OR, AK, HI)**

Democrats

City	1	2	3	33.3%	66.7%	100.0%
Suburb	2	5	7	28.6	71.4	100.0
Rural	2	2	4	50.0	50.0	100.0

Republicans

City						
Suburb	0	1	1	**0.0%**	**100.0%**	**100.0%**
Rural	1	1	2	50.0	50.0	100.0

11. California

Democrats

City	12	8	20	60.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Suburb	3	4	7	42.9	57.1	100.0
Rural	1	2	3	33.3	66.7	100.0

Republicans

City	1	**6**	**7**	14.3%	85.7%	100.0%
Suburb	3	8	11	27.3	72.7	100.0
Rural	1	3	4	25.0	75.0	100.0