

Mainstream Versus Reform Candidates in the New Hampshire Democratic Primary, 1968–2000

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THE MORNING OF THE 2000 New Hampshire primary was a sunny one, but not for Vice President Al Gore and his operatives. Early exit polls showed that Gore had frittered away a lead over his challenger, Bill Bradley, and now trailed the insurgent. A campaign that took months to build had just hours to redeem itself. To salvage a victory, Gore's multi-million dollar campaign depended on some decidedly low-tech devices: sound trucks, shoe leather, and knocking on doors.

For Gore, salvation on primary day did not come from the quiet, prosperous bedroom communities of southern New Hampshire or from the college towns of Durham and Hanover. Those places, by and large, belonged to Bill Bradley, who had demonstrated a lead among wealthy, educated Democrats and independents. Gore's hopes were elsewhere, in places that some say belonged to New Hampshire's past. The vice president's sound trucks and "pull teams" swarmed the streets of working-class wards, in cities such as Manchester, Somersworth, Dover, Berlin, and Nashua. "It wasn't individual voters that we were really pulling out," said Gore's New Hampshire state director, Nick Baldick. "We were pulling out a demographic"—the blue-collar, working-class voters of New Hampshire's Democratic Party.¹ As the January sun set over New Hampshire, the working-class wards carried the afternoon, and the primary,

and arguably the Democratic presidential nomination, for Al Gore.

The political storm that brewed during the 2000 New Hampshire primary had its own unique characteristics, but its occurrence should not have been a surprise. The storm was one of a series of "naturally occurring" phenomena in New Hampshire Democratic primaries over the past three decades. Comparable previous battles included those of: McGovern versus Muskie in 1972; Udall versus Carter in 1976; Hart versus Mondale in 1984; and Tsongas versus Clinton in 1992.

Two long-standing factions make up the state's Democratic voting population: working-class voters and upscale, educated reformers. Working-class voters seek to resolve bread-and-butter issues such as jobs and economic security, while so-called elite voters are attracted to candidates who buck the establishment and promise to reform the party and move it in new directions. Presidential candidates can attempt to appeal to either faction or attempt to bridge the gap between the two.

State Democratic Party Background

One reason storms arise in the state's presidential primary is because the hosting state party is itself so weak. The stronger the state political party, the less likely that disputes and differences will arise and create turmoil. For most of its history, the New Hampshire Democratic Party has been a weak minority party, often unable to reconcile its internal conflicts to present a united front against the majority Republicans.

As a result, presidential candidates campaigning in the state often have found themselves playing on a truly open field, at times resembling a rugby scrum. In New Hampshire, the Democratic primary has

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“Seven major Democratic presidential candidates prepare to make opening statements” in a debate held at New Hampshire College (now Southern New Hampshire University), in Manchester, October 29, 1983. Analysis of the candidates’ appeal to different groups of New Hampshire voters can help explain subsequent success or failure at the national level. Pictured, from left to right, are: Governor Reubin Askeu, Senator Alan Cranston, Senator John Glenn, Senator Gary Hart, Senator Fritz Hollings, Senator George McGovern, and former vice-president, Walter Mondale. UPI Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.

tended to favor the spoiler and the underdog—in part because the Democratic Party has been the minority party for so long. Democrats rarely have controlled the office of the governor; the highest elected officials have tended to be minority leaders in the state House and Senate, or sometimes an executive councilor.² Without powerful elected officials to impose discipline on the party, it is more open to “maverick runs” during presidential primary years.³ By contrast, the more “royalist” Republican primary generally has inclined toward coronation of the favorite and the frontrunner, although John McCain clearly was an exception to this rule in 2000. While Republican primaries tend to confirm the line of succession, the Democratic primaries sometimes resemble an “open brawl.”

Historically, the key split in the state Democratic party has been between city voters and town voters. The Democrats enjoyed their greatest period of success as a party of town voters. In the early nineteenth century, this party of “farmers, backwoodsmen,

and laborers” supported Andrew Jackson’s presidency and aided Franklin Pierce, the only American president born in New Hampshire, in his rise to power.⁴ The golden age of the Democrats proved a casualty, however, of the national conflict over slavery. New Hampshire Democratic leaders who had supported Pierce’s efforts to maintain the Union faced opposition from an alliance of factions that formed the foundation of the modern Republican Party.⁵

The 1850s marked the beginning of the state Democrats’ exile from power in New Hampshire, an exile that has continued (with brief but significant interruptions) until the present day. Despite being the beneficiary of the influx of two major waves of immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first the Irish and then the French-Canadians, the party remained on the outside looking in.⁶

By the 1930s, as a result of immigration and industrialization, the New Hampshire Democratic Party possessed the key elements of the New Deal coalition. Urban workers and ethnic minorities had

propelled the national Democratic Party to majority status during the Great Depression.⁷ Cities with relatively large manufacturing bases—Manchester and Nashua in Hillsborough County; Dover, Rochester, and Somersworth toward the Seacoast; Claremont and Franklin in the western half of the state; and Berlin in the North Country—provided the foundation for a potential Democratic comeback during the New Deal era of the 1930s and 1940s.⁸ But even the Democratic national high tide could not lift the fortunes of New Hampshire Democrats. At the top of the ticket, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt carried the state in three straight general elections, from 1936 to 1944. Nevertheless, New Hampshire Democrats failed to win even one of five gubernatorial elections during the height of national Democratic dominance.

The voter base of the Democratic Party, although substantial, remained divided against itself along lines of ethnicity and religion. As one state party chair put it, “every Democratic primary in New Hampshire is an Irish versus French-Canadian struggle.”⁹ As the national party’s dominance waned, New Hampshire Democrats’ golden opportunity disappeared.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the party’s rural, Protestant base continued to defect to the Republicans. All in all, ethnic and religious animosity, coupled with a “lack of effective leadership and strong candidates,” led to continued frustration for the minority party.¹¹

In the last three decades of the twentieth century, New Hampshire enjoyed sharp economic growth, which transformed the state’s landscape from one of mill towns and quiet rural life to one of white-collar suburbs and Boston bedroom communities. As a journalist during the 1976 primary pointed out: “Contrary to the impression given by picture postcards of snowy covered bridges and white church steeples, the state is heavily industrial, and growing more so each year as plants and blue-collar workers push northward from Boston and the eastern Massachusetts complex.”¹²

In the 1970s, New Hampshire boasted the thirteenth-fastest-growing economy in the nation

and, as development accelerated in the 1980s, it became the sixth-fastest-growing state.¹³ Much of this expansion resulted from an economic shift toward both non-traditional and high-technology industries. This led to a corresponding increase in population and a change in the state’s character, as more and more Massachusetts residents migrated across the state line.¹⁴ In addition to the noticeable development along the border, towns in central New Hampshire experienced smaller but significant population increases as individuals and families sought a more rural way of life.¹⁵

Economic and demographic developments have reshaped the state Democratic Party as well, and reinforced the old divisions between town and city in new ways. Ethnic and religious divisions have slowly faded into memory, as migration from other states, as well as the passing of generations, drastically changed the state’s population. The split between rural and urban areas within the Democratic Party remains, although now the lines of division are along tiers of socioeconomic status: social class, income, occupation, and education. For the most part, New Hampshire’s manufacturing centers have remained the stronghold of working-class Democrats, economically liberal, though relatively conservative on social issues. Meanwhile, towns surrounding these cities—the “suburbs” of New Hampshire, as well as once-rural areas experiencing development—have been centers for another important constituency: well-educated, prosperous, and culturally liberal Democrats, who are friendlier to business than their traditional counterparts.

The result, in recent years, has been that liberal Democrats and centrist Democrats have fought a series of battles for control of the party. Moderate Democrats, such as Governors Hugh Gallen in the 1970s and Jeanne Shaheen and Congressman Dick Swett in the 1990s, have enjoyed electoral success—but at a cost, party liberals charge, of abandoning or severely compromising core Democratic principles. Moderate Democrats, unsurprisingly, disagree with the liberals’ assessment.

Reform versus Establishment Candidates

Candidates in the Democratic primary come to New Hampshire with national ambitions, which they know will be affected by their performance in the Granite State. Each candidate must choose a strategy to appeal to a highly informed voting population, which is keenly aware that it is in the national spotlight. Broadly speaking, presidential primary candidates have fallen into one of two camps: establishment or reform.

Reformist candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination, most recently represented by the insurgent Bill Bradley, have placed themselves outside of the party mainstream by centering their campaign around non-traditional issues for Democrats. One of Bradley's main themes, for example, was campaign finance reform; Paul Tsongas and Paul Simon called for fiscal reform

in 1992 and 1988; Gary Hart proclaimed himself the candidate of "New Ideas" in 1984; Morris Udall preached environmental protection in 1976; and George McGovern campaigned against the Vietnam War in 1972.

Secondly, reformist candidates for the Democratic presidential nomination have attempted to single themselves out by asserting that their party—more specifically, the reigning party leadership—was in need of reform and new direction. In 2000, Bradley's pitch for campaign finance reform was combined with a subtle (and sometimes not-so-subtle) attack on the integrity of Gore and the Clinton administration. In 1992, Tsongas proclaimed the virtues of fiscal responsibility as the way to return Democrats to responsible governance. In 1984, Hart portrayed



"Presidential candidate Sen. Al Gore of Tenn. listens to Lyn Wellman and her son Ralph at the Nashua Soup Kitchen," December 18, 1987. Some Democratic candidates find their greatest following among the blue-collar population of the state's mill towns and cities. These candidates tend to focus their campaigns on the party's traditional bread-and-butter issues of jobs, economic security, and relief. UPI Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.



"U.S. Sen. Bill Bradley (D-NJ) receives an honorary Doctor of Law degree at Dartmouth College's 217th commencement," June 14, 1987. Since the late 1960s, a relatively new group of Democratic candidates have sought, in one way or another, to reform the party. Their base of support tends to be in college towns and rural areas, as well as in the capital city. UPI Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.

himself as a catalyst for the renewal of the party, and Walter Mondale as the candidate of the doomed status quo. Udall took up the banner of progressivism in 1976. And in 1972, McGovern campaigned under a whole new system of rules, designed to democratize the primary process within his party, which he himself had co-authored in an effort to wrest power away from traditional Democratic bosses.

Most recently, in 2000, Vice President Al Gore represented the other major group of candidates to enter the race in New Hampshire. After a shaky start to his campaign for the party nomination, Gore made a dramatic shift in image during the months before the New Hampshire primary, especially when Bradley ran even with him in early-autumn polls. Shedding his image of a cool-minded, unfeeling technocrat, Gore took on the role of an aggressive

populist, a fighter who would do battle for working families. Although Gore often faced the mocking of the national press for his efforts, data from exit polls of New Hampshire Democratic primary voters indicate that the vice president persuaded voters that he truly would fight for them.

By taking on the role of the populist, Gore joined a second series of candidates who have campaigned on similar themes in the Granite State. In 1992, Bill Clinton campaigned on a platform he eventually summed up as "Putting People First." In 1988, Richard Gephardt was a fierce proponent of protecting American workers from the ravages of free trade. Labor unions were the chief backers of Walter Mondale's 1984 nomination. Jimmy Carter's promise to restore honesty and morality to government appealed to socially conservative working-class Democrats in

1976. And in 1972, the Democratic establishment put all its eggs in what turned out to be the fragile basket of Edmund Muskie's campaign to unify the Democrats and defeat Republican President Richard Nixon.

Battles between reformer and establishment candidates have reinforced the old divides between town and city Democrats in New Hampshire. Reformer candidates typically have found New Hampshire's towns, particularly those populated by well-educated, upscale Democrats, to be friendly territory for their insurgent movements. Historically, the state's university centers, such as Keene, Durham, and Hanover; Concord, the state capital; and the Seacoast and Massachusetts border communities have formed the base for the left, or what may be called the elite, wing of the party.

Establishment candidates, in contrast, have largely relied on working-class areas for their support, particularly the state's old manufacturing cities—including Rochester, Somersworth, Manchester, Claremont, and Berlin, where levels of income, education, and occupation tend to be lower.

In both the elite and working-class communities, New Hampshire Democrats have behaved in consistent, predictable patterns over the past three decades in presidential primary politics. Working-class voters have consistently supported "mainstream Democrats," candidates who had the blessing of the national and state party establishment, and who focused on bread-and-butter issues such as jobs and economic security. In contrast, elite voters have consistently backed "insurgent Democrats," candidates who emphasized their desire to change the direction of the party, and who advocated reform.

The Elite Factor

Typically, candidates who appeal to a high socioeconomic constituency, or what might be called the elite voter, are likely to do relatively well in New Hampshire. Although the strategy of appealing to the elite voter had proven payoffs in New

Hampshire, it often failed to reach the working-class. The more a candidate relied on and appealed to the elite segment of the population, the less likely he was to succeed in the remaining primaries. An insurgent's hopes, raised by success in New Hampshire, were deflated time and again in other primary states.¹⁶ With the exception of McGovern in 1972, no candidate whose appeal was disproportionately elite went on to win the party nomination. In contrast, candidates who succeeded in appealing to both elite and working-class Democrats may not have won New Hampshire, but their balanced performance was more likely to augur success in subsequent primaries.

New Hampshire primary voting patterns, then, tell us a good deal about a presidential candidate's potential for success in ensuing nomination contests. Historically, results in the Granite State offer a first, often definitive, look at how candidates will do among three constituencies: the suburbs, the college towns, and the mill towns.¹⁷ For the purpose of this study, college towns and well-to-do suburbs are grouped together into "elite communities," as distinct from "working-class communities," often mill towns, where the remnants of New Hampshire's blue-collar population live.¹⁸

The relative appeal of presidential candidates to these various constituencies can be represented statistically by a comparison of their individual "elite scores." The percentage of a candidate's vote in elite communities divided by the percentage of his vote in working-class communities provides a figure useful for comparing candidates and analyzing the primary results. The principle behind the elite score is straightforward: it is not only the quantity of votes that matters to a candidate but also the source(s) of those votes.

The higher an elite score is above 1.00, the better a candidate did among elite communities; the lower the score below 1.00, the better the candidate fared among working-class communities. The closer an elite score is to 1.00, the more evenly the candidate performed in elite and working-class communities—

DEMOCRATIC		REPUBLICAN	
PAUL SIMON	3	JACK KEMP	5
BRUCE BABBITT		PAT ROBERTSON	1
MICHAEL S. DUKAKIS		GEORGE BUSH	11
DICK GEPHARDT	4	BOB DOLE	6
AL GORE		PETE DU PONT	2
GARY HART		ALEXANDER M. HAIG	2
JESSE JACKSON			

“Selectman Stephen Barba posts the results of the Nation’s first presidential primary [in the] tiny hamlet” of Dixville Notch, February 16, 1988. Through a careful study of primary voting patterns, a candidate’s appeal can be identified as either primarily mainstream, primarily reform, or at some point in between. UPI Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.

and thus, the greater a candidate’s potential to succeed in forging a coalition among the various factions of the party and the better his chances at national success. Comparison of the Democratic contenders’ elite scores, election by election through the decades, can help our understanding of both New Hampshire primary and national election results.

1968: Thunder from the Left

As allegedly unrepresentative as the New Hampshire electorate is of the entire nation, the demographic bases of the two main candidates—President Lyndon Baines Johnson and Senator Eugene McCarthy of Minnesota—in the state’s 1968 primary clearly point toward the tumult to come during that extraordinary year. In New Hampshire, neither candidate came close to achieving a coalition; instead, each candidate gathered what votes he could on his side of the cleavage within the party over the United States’ involvement in the Vietnam War.

Johnson’s elite score was 0.62, a number that indicates his vote came mainly from working-class areas in New Hampshire, where he carried roughly

55 percent of the vote. In elite areas of New Hampshire, Johnson ran far behind McCarthy, winning only 34 percent of the vote. Taking into account that Johnson did not campaign in person in New Hampshire, the defections of elite voters to the insurgent cannot be ignored. A comparison of Johnson’s elite score to those of two subsequent Democratic incumbents (President Jimmy Carter in 1980, and Vice President Al Gore in 2000) suggests the difficulties that the president would have had in uniting the party, had he stayed in the race:

Johnson	0.62
Gore	0.76
Carter	0.91

Shortly after the primary, Johnson abandoned his bid for reelection, and his vice president, Hubert Humphrey, took his place as the candidate of the party establishment.

Support for Gene McCarthy, whose candidacy centered on opposition to American involvement in Vietnam, was even more skewed toward one faction of the party. With an elite score of 1.62, McCarthy did far better in elite areas than in working-class areas, though he did succeed in narrowly carrying working-class Berlin and Rochester.¹⁹ The media often described McCarthy’s campaign as a “children’s crusade,” referring to the thousands of students who descended on New Hampshire to work for the senator’s election.²⁰ The point of the spear of the McCarthy movement, however, was not the college student, but the well-educated elite. By the spring of 1967, “political action groups,” comprised of religious, academic, and even some business elites,



Senator Eugene McCarthy on primary election day, 1968. Senator McCarthy was one of the first in a long series of Democratic candidates to oppose the party establishment. His serious objections to the war in Vietnam and his recognition of the need for political reform appealed not only to college students but also to well-educated adults. Bill Finney Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.

were slowly bringing into the mainstream what had been “fringe dissent” in 1966.²¹

1972: The Center Does Not Hold

Four years later, New Hampshire saw a virtual replay of the 1968 primary. Again, a candidate from the left wing of the party captured the hearts and minds of New Hampshire’s Democratic elite, who spurned the choice of the party establishment, in favor of a reformer. Yet, while the support of the elite was again not enough to put that candidate over the top in New Hampshire, it was enough to secure his status as the alternate when the establishment choice faltered.

This time, the reformer was Senator George McGovern of South Dakota, whose campaign began in the single digits in preliminary straw polls and ended with an unexpected but respectable 37 percent showing on primary day.²² McGovern’s call for reform was also an indictment of the political establishment

that had led the country into the Vietnam War, which he termed “a moral and political disaster—a terrible cancer eating away the soul of the nation.”²³ McGovern also stood for amnesty for those who illegally evaded the draft, took a pro-choice position on abortion, advocated reducing criminal penalties for marijuana use, and supported school integration by mandatory busing of students.²⁴

In contrast, Senator Edmund Muskie of Maine, Hubert Humphrey’s running mate in 1968, was the very model of moderation, a candidate who advocated the “politics of trust” in a speech on the eve of the 1970 mid-term elections. In opposition to the “politics of fear” of President Richard Nixon and the Republican Party, Muskie claimed, “I’m a man of the center, but the center gradually moves left, and it’s the Democratic Party that does it.”²⁵ While Muskie wanted to end American military action in Vietnam, and took liberal positions on a variety of issues, including the environment, consumer protection, and national health insurance, the main pillar of his candidacy was his ability to beat Nixon in the fall.²⁶

Muskie planned to showcase his electability by running in every primary.²⁷ The strategy derailed in New Hampshire, though, when the “Man from Maine” managed to carry only 46 percent of the vote in the state bordering his own; McGovern finished within 10 points of Muskie, at 37 percent. Muskie’s elite score of 0.81, however, indicated that he indeed had far more potential to assemble a coalition of elites and working-class voters than his main competitor. McGovern’s elite score of 1.57 indicates that his support in New Hampshire came overwhelmingly from elites.

Despite Muskie’s problems in Manchester, where *Union Leader* editor William Loeb launched a barrage of attacks against him, McGovern did not come close to challenging the frontrunner among working-class Democrats. McGovern’s play to a specific group within the highly polarized electorate served him well in New Hampshire, and this strategy helped him to fill the vacuum in the contest when Muskie’s campaign fell apart in the following Florida primary. McGovern’s

high elite score, however, cost him—and the Democrats—dearly in the presidential campaign that followed, as Richard Nixon’s landslide was one of the most sweeping in American history.

1976: Breaking from the Pack

By 1976, the Democrats had been out of the White House for eight years. The emotional divisions that had marked the 1972 campaign had diminished with the end of the Vietnam War. In addition, the legacy of Richard Nixon’s impeachment and resignation in the wake of the Watergate scandal created a desire for change among American voters. With President Ford appearing vulnerable, the opportunities for the Democrats seemed considerable. Although such an environment could have led the party to consolidate behind one candidate, the open field instead drew six contenders to New Hampshire seeking to stake a position and to start gaining ground.

From this pack emerged the former governor of Georgia, Jimmy Carter. With a clean reputation and a plainness that spoke of integrity, Carter positioned himself as a counter to the tarnished politicians of Washington. No New Hampshire winner has ever done more with less than Jimmy Carter did in 1976. In a crowded field, Carter did not get three out of ten voters, yet his six-point victory helped to propel him to his party’s nomination.

Every campaign talks about “getting out their vote,” and Carter’s campaign in New Hampshire followed this simple motto to the letter. If the field is fairly crowded with contenders, a candidate does not necessarily need the support of multiple groups or factions to win. Facing a host of liberal candidates, Carter’s strategy was to position himself as pro-reform, but in a conservative, or traditional, fashion. Carter was the only moderate-to-conservative candidate running in New Hampshire, since Henry “Scoop” Jackson, the conservative Democratic Senator from Washington, had decided to sit out New Hampshire and focus his efforts on later primaries—a tactical mistake that would come back to haunt him. Carter

forged connections with blue-collar workers—“the rank-and-file, the shoe shop workers, the working stiff.”²⁸ He appealed to traditional Democrats who, after Watergate, wanted the country to go back to a normal routine.

With a small but dedicated corps in New Hampshire, Carter’s campaign was based not on volume, but on precision targeting of likely voters, followed by frequent, high-quality contact. One Carter volunteer canvassed the towns of Allenstown and Pembroke door to door, visiting each voter at least three times. “She was at the polls on election day. They knew her. When they went in to vote, they had to walk by her and know that they’d seen her at their house, they liked her. . . . To them, it was her [and not so much Carter]. In a lot of towns, that was the thing.”²⁹

Carter carried the working-class vote by almost a two-to-one margin over his nearest competitor. Following Carter was Arizona Congressman Mo Udall, whose base of support was the elite. In those areas with a higher percentage of elite voters, Udall did substantially better than Carter. This was not enough, however, for him to win the primary and it bode poorly for his future prospects. A comparison of the candidates’ elite scores indicates that Carter, with a score of .82, was better able to create a coalition than Udall, whose score was a lopsided 2.26.

Carter’s victory was the last hurrah for the blue-collar vote in New Hampshire. He was the last candidate to win an “open primary”—one in which no incumbent was running—while losing in the elite areas of the state. In subsequent primary cycles, New Hampshire’s increasing prosperity became the catalyst for an ever-expanding pool of elite voters and a shrinking pool of working-class voters.

1980: The Incumbent Tested

Traditional wisdom has it that an incumbent president has overwhelming advantages when running for a second term, so serious challengers are unlikely to spend resources on a futile contest that only saps a

party's strength going into the presidential campaign. But in the primaries leading to the nomination for the 1980 candidate, Carter was susceptible: the economy was weak, inflation was high, and the hostage crisis in Iran generated discontent and a perception of weak leadership.

As the first testing ground, New Hampshire has often been a rocky ride for incumbents, but its ability, or willingness, to upset the apple cart should not be overstated. Democratic incumbents have always managed to hold off insurgencies and claim an actual victory in New Hampshire, though national victory has not usually ensued. In 1968, Lyndon Johnson defeated Gene McCarthy by more than four thousand votes (and eight percentage points). In 2000, Vice President Al Gore held off a strong challenge from Bill Bradley to win a four-point victory. The 1980 primary is another example of the staying power of the incumbency.

Carter's main opposition in the Democratic primaries was not a reformer, but rather an icon of the liberal Democratic establishment, Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts. Kennedy had flirted with running for his party's presidential nomination in the past, but had repeatedly declined to take the plunge, in part because of the shadow cast by the Chappaquiddick incident. The third candidate in the race was former California governor Jerry Brown, who four years earlier had posted a late challenge to Carter from the left wing of the party.

The incumbent and the icon both showed a broad base of support among New Hampshire Democrats, but Carter's ace in the hole was the backing of Democratic Governor Hugh Gallen. Both Kennedy and Carter proved successful in garnering support from working class and elite alike: Carter's elite score was .91, and Kennedy's was an almost perfectly balanced 1.04. Surviving Kennedy's challenge with his coalition intact, Carter reeled off a series of primary victories, and won twenty-four of the thirty-four primaries held on his way to the nomination.³⁰ But Carter's weaknesses on the economy and foreign

affairs, which the primary races had illustrated, gave an opening to the winning campaign of Republican candidate Ronald Reagan.

1984: New Ideas for New Hampshire

As a result, the Democrats were out of power as they geared up for the primaries leading to the 1984 elections. While the recession of 1981 to 1982 had revived Democratic hopes of defeating President Ronald Reagan, a subsequent economic recovery had positioned the Republicans as the party presiding over peace and prosperity. Despite the apparent uphill battle against a popular incumbent, the Democratic field of prospective presidential nominees was crowded.

Gary Hart, one of McGovern's main campaign operatives in 1972 and now a United States senator from Colorado, ran as the candidate of "new ideas." He became the standard-bearer for a new breed of Democrat already making its mark in Congress: the neo-liberal who took more conservative stances on economic issues than the typical Democrat, while at the same time taking more liberal positions on cultural matters. In some ways, however, Hart's candidacy was not new at all, but the newest model in a line of reform-minded insurgencies dating back to that of Senator Eugene McCarthy in 1968.

If Hart positioned himself as the reform candidate, that of the establishment was Walter Mondale, who had been Carter's vice-president. Mondale was a loyal member of the Minnesota Democratic-Farmer-Labor party and had served as his state's attorney general in the early 1960s. In 1964, Mondale was appointed to fill Hubert Humphrey's seat in the United States Senate when Humphrey was elected to be Lyndon Johnson's vice president. Having been a party loyalist, Mondale was sound, stable, and a bit staid, whereas Hart was young, handsome, and energetic.

Aided by a second-place finish to Mondale in the Iowa caucuses, Hart had crafted a message targeted to appeal to New Hampshire's well-heeled Democrats. At



Senator Gary Hart and former vice president, Walter Mondale, c.1984. Like several other pairs of New Hampshire primary opponents, Hart and Mondale represented the insurgent reformer versus the establishment frontrunner. While Hart succeeded in New Hampshire, Mondale eventually won the nomination. New Hampshire Historical Society.

the same time, his strong grass-roots organization (his campaign team included future Governor Jeanne Shaheen) and attention from the media, as the New Democrat alternative to the conventional frontrunner, generated interest across the board.

Mondale, like other Democratic frontrunners before him, hoped that his support among the party elite would propel him through the primaries to the nomination as a candidate of sobriety and moderation. His expectations of a smooth trip to the nomination, however, literally disappeared in a New Hampshire blizzard.

Hart's nine-point victory in New Hampshire was the textbook example of how an under-the-radar primary campaign can quickly gain that mysterious quality known as "momentum." In addition, his support was surprisingly well balanced. His elite score of 1.20 indicated far more coalition potential than other insurgents who had performed well in New Hampshire.³¹ While Hart did extremely well among the New Hampshire elite (defeating Mondale by almost two-to-one), he also defeated Mondale

among the former vice president's core constituency, winning more of the working-class vote. Only a depleted core of working-class support remained loyal to Mondale, as his elite score of 0.69 confirms.

There was a "battle going on for the soul of the party."³² Mondale represented the old, liberal Democratic Party of labor and special interests. Yet, in a New Hampshire that was de-industrializing and gentrifying, the traditional Democratic issues had lost much of their appeal. Gary Hart, on the other hand, talked about a "new generation of leadership," attracting people not previously involved in politics. He also called for the Democratic Party to follow a more moderate path, with policies that did not necessarily take into account the desires of each special-interest group allied with the party.³³

Hart's demonstration in New Hampshire that he could form a coalition among elite and working-class voters boded well for his performance in future primaries. Sure enough, Hart battled with Mondale until the very last days of the primary season, finally losing the nomination to the establishment candidate.

1988: The Boy Next Door

Heading into the primary season for the 1988 presidential elections, the Democrats' prospects might have been promising, given that Ronald Reagan had served his two terms. It is not surprising then that the New Hampshire primary was crowded with candidates seeking either to make a serious run at the nomination or at least to make a symbolic point by using the platform to raise issues. Of the seven Democratic candidates, including such national figures as Al Gore, Jesse Jackson, and Gary Hart, only Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis had the natural advantage of being the nearest thing to a "favorite son," coming from a state adjacent to the first-in-the-nation primary state.

Being a "favorite son" is something of a mixed blessing, but being a "boy next door" is generally helpful to a New England candidate. Ted Kennedy was the only one who lost among the four candidates from neighboring states who have run in New

Hampshire since 1972 (Muskie in 1972; Kennedy in 1980; Dukakis in 1988; and Paul Tsongas in 1992), and Kennedy faced an incumbent president. New England candidates are expected to win in New Hampshire, the only question being the margin of victory. As a result, candidates who do not measure up in the expectations game, such as Edmund Muskie, find out that a win is actually a loss. And other candidates who finish second to a New England candidate, such as George McGovern, find that a loss is actually a win.

What distinguished Dukakis was his ability to put together a balanced coalition, indicated by his near-perfect elite score of 1.04. As governor of Massachusetts, Dukakis had gained a reputation as a liberal who governed in a pragmatic, businesslike fashion; his campaign made much of the so-called “Massachusetts miracle,” a revitalization of the state economy that had occurred under Dukakis’s watch.

In contrast, Dukakis’s main competitors were unable to reach voters beyond their core niche of supporters. Missouri Congressman Richard Gephardt’s populist message of protecting American companies from foreign trade appealed mainly to working-class voters. Illinois Senator Paul Simon, who mixed

old-fashioned New Deal liberalism with a fiscally conservative call for a balanced budget, attracted reform-minded liberals. Gephardt’s message of protectionism and “fair trade” resonated in the blue-collar areas of the Granite State. Given that he was a little-known, under-funded candidate who came out of the House of Representatives, he did very well.³⁴ But, considering Gephardt’s score of 0.69, it is not surprising that his appeal did not extend further. Dukakis actually drew more working-class votes than Gephardt in New Hampshire. Simon’s appeal was limited to the elite, as shown by his score of 1.43. Only Dukakis’s campaign had coalitional appeal.

Dukakis’s balanced victory in the New Hampshire primary helped jump-start his campaign and eventually resulted in his nomination. Yet, like so many Democrats before him, he lost the presidential election to Vice President George H. W. Bush.

1992: Eating Your Spinach

As the Democrats prepared for the 1992 elections, they again faced an incumbent president, one who had led the United States in the successful Gulf War evicting Iraq from Kuwait. The rally-around-the-flag effect that had led to George H. W. Bush’s extraordinarily high popularity ratings was fading, however, considering the economic doldrums of the time. Again, a large field of candidates entered the Democratic primary in New Hampshire. Early betting was on a heavyweight contender, such as New York Governor Mario Cuomo, entering the fray, but Democrats waited in vain for him and other luminaries to join the race. Instead, breaking fast and late from the outside was a man from Hope, Arkansas: Bill Clinton.

Clinton arrived in the state during a period of economic hard times, with the collapse of the housing market, bank closings, high unemployment, and the New England technology industry in a depression.

The top two candidates in the primary both focused on the faltering economy. Clinton’s populist economic message, featuring a tax cut for the middle class, worked especially well in the working-class



Campaign button promoting Governor Michael Dukakis of Massachusetts, 1988. Candidates from neighboring states are likely to win in New Hampshire, regardless of where they stand on the establishment/reform continuum. Courtesy of the New Hampshire Political Library.



“Democratic presidential candidate and Congressman from Missouri Richard Gephardt talks with Raymond Auprey, 58, of Penacook, who, after working at the Allied Leather Co. . . . for the past 31 years, will be out of a job when the plant closes for good later this year,” 1987. Gephardt’s protectionist foreign trade policies appealed primarily to voters in the more heavily blue-collar communities. UPI Collection, New Hampshire Historical Society.

areas, where he out-pollled the eventual winner, Paul Tsongas, a former senator from Massachusetts. Clinton’s elite score of 0.78 left him well positioned, however, to establish himself as the coalition candidate in subsequent primaries, despite allegations of improper personal conduct.

In contrast, Tsongas abandoned the traditional Democratic economic agenda in favor of a strong, pro-business stance that focused on rebuilding America’s industrial base. In 1992, Tsongas’s message was that voters must bear down in tough times and take responsibility for turning around the economy in a state suffering severely from the recession of the early 1990s. Tsongas’s message of economic austerity was in tune with the attitudes and sensibilities of New Hampshire Democrats, described at the time as culturally liberal and pro-environment, yet more pro-business than most in the national party.

Democrats in New Hampshire take their job very seriously. We’re going to fix it, we’re going to pay

for it. If it takes taxes, we’re going to do it. If you look at the Democrats in New Hampshire, that’s exactly how they are: They’re “eat your spinach” Democrats.³⁵

Tsongas won the primary, but by appealing mainly to upscale, prosperous Democrats, as his score of 1.80 makes clear. But it was Clinton who captured the middle, whose message drew balanced support. This was a strong indication of his future prospects: he won both the Democratic nomination and the presidency.

2000: Departure from the Status Quo

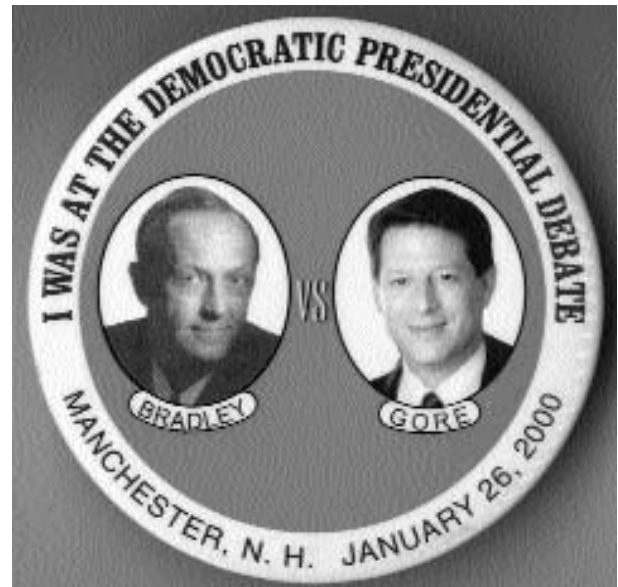
Clinton’s eight-year presidency was marked by many achievements—most notably, economic growth. New Hampshire bounced back from recession and continued on the path of quiet prosperity. Unlike Lyndon Johnson or Jimmy Carter, Clinton managed to avoid a primary challenge in 1996, in part because of the diligent attention he paid to New Hampshire and the state party.

As popular as Clinton may have been, the last years of his presidency were marred by scandals. The association with Clinton may not have tarnished Vice-President Al Gore, but he clearly sought to separate himself from Clinton's problems yet at the same time to claim the benefits of incumbency and economic strength. Whether because of a desire to maintain party unity, so as to keep the White House, or because of the impression that Gore was unstoppable, most major Democratic politicians bowed out of the primary campaign. The entry of Bill Bradley, the former senator from New Jersey, into the race, however, transformed what had seemed a foregone conclusion into a contest.

Bradley quickly established himself as an insurgent reformer, promising a new and better kind of politics, obliquely referring to the scandals of the Clinton-Gore administration. As such, he became a magnet for those New Hampshire Democrats discontented with the Clinton legacy. Gore, entering the primary as the establishment candidate, quickly sought to position himself as the friend of the working people. He portrayed himself as a fighter, identifying himself with the rank and file of the Democratic working class. In addition, the Gore campaign portrayed Bradley's proposal on expanding health care as insensitive to the needs of working people.

Bradley, on the other hand, came across as intellectual and showed less adeptness at connecting to people than the famously stiff Al Gore. Bradley sought to identify himself as one in a long line of reformist candidates to jump-start a candidacy in New Hampshire. This was achieved in part through the endorsement of Niki Tsongas, Paul's widow, who said, in a Bradley advertisement, that "like my husband, Paul, Bill Bradley is a passionate supporter of working people, and he, too, is challenging us with a bold vision for America. . . . On Feb. 1, let's tell the rest of the nation it's time for truth, it's time for courage, it's time for Bill Bradley."³⁶

In the closely contested campaign, Gore won with 49.8 percent of the vote to Bradley's 45.7 percent.



Button commemorating the 2000 primary. The Bill Bradley versus Al Gore struggle represented the latest in a long series of contests between reform and mainstream elements both within the Democratic Party and within the state. Courtesy of the New Hampshire Political Library.

Bradley's support, like that of Tsongas, came heavily from elite areas of New Hampshire Democrats—his elite score was 1.56, slightly lower than Tsongas's 1.80, but hardly indicative of a campaign that could weld together a coalition. In contrast, Gore ran a more balanced campaign, with an elite score of 0.76. But while his strong base among the working classes may have positioned Gore to win the Democratic primary—Bradley having effectively conceded in early March—strategists questioned the broader viability of his populist message, to which he adhered throughout his general election campaign.

Changing Ideology of the State's Electorate

Because of presumed local idiosyncrasies, New Hampshire's place at the beginning of the presidential primary calendar has long been criticized as an unfortunate eccentricity of the nomination process. According to traditional wisdom, New Hampshire is conservative, more so for both parties than the nation generally. Manchester, the largest city in the state and host of long-closed textile mills, was long the center of working-class conservatism. Its newspaper, the *Union Leader*, was notorious for the blistering

editorials of its publisher, William Loeb. As late as 1984, Democratic candidates were sizing up the state's electorate as moderate-to-conservative.³⁷

Recent exit-poll surveys of New Hampshire Democrats, however, give cause for significant correction of this image. According to a recent, comprehensive review of primary exit polling in New Hampshire, only 17 percent of voters in the 1984 Democratic primary described themselves as conservatives—a smaller percentage than was found in Massachusetts, Illinois, Maryland, Ohio, and New Jersey.³⁸ A majority of the primary vote that year consisted of self-described moderates. In 1992, only 14 percent of all voters casting ballots in the Democratic primary described themselves as conservatives; that figure dropped to 7 percent among strong party identifiers. In contrast, six of ten strong party identifiers described themselves as liberal, and that label was adopted by 43 percent of all Democratic primary voters. Moderates were also quite prominent, representing 32 percent of strong party identifiers, 50 percent of independents, and 42 percent of all primary voters.

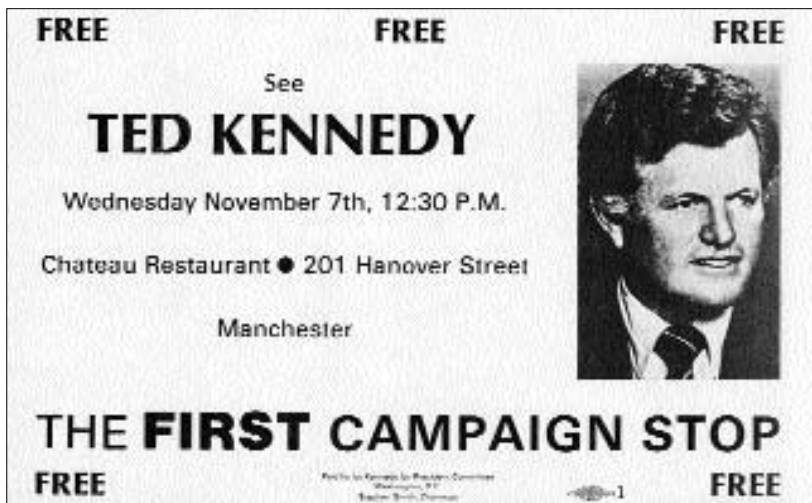
Exit polls from the 2000 Democratic primary reinforced the profile of New Hampshire voters as liberal-to-moderate. An outright majority of Democratic primary voters identified themselves as liberals, 38 percent as moderates, and just 8 percent as conservative. Independents remained a significant factor, representing three of ten primary voters. New Hampshire's primary electorate is also noteworthy for its large number of upscale voters, both well educated and financially successful.³⁹

The ideological movement of New Hampshire Democrats has corresponded with an equally significant geographic movement. The balance of power within the New Hampshire Democratic Party (and thus, within the New Hampshire Democratic presidential primary), firmly ensconced in the cities for most of the twentieth century, now has moved back toward the once-rural towns where the party started in the nineteenth century.

An examination of the number of votes cast in New Hampshire's urban areas provides confirmation of the declining influence of the cities and of the working-class voters who inhabit them. Back in 1976, the year Carter ran a campaign explicitly targeting the working-class vote, the state's nine cities with a significant manufacturing base produced 48.5 percent of the Democratic primary vote.⁴⁰ By 1984, the year Hart defeated Mondale, voters in these cities cast just 38 percent of the total vote. Eight years later, when Tsongas defeated Clinton, voters in the cities accounted for 31.5 percent of the vote. And in the latest primary, fewer than three of ten Democratic primary voters (28.4 percent) came from these nine cities—all told, a drop in voting power of more than 20 percent in a quarter-century.

In contrast, one might consider the twenty-five locales in which Bill Bradley carried 60 percent or more of the primary vote.⁴¹ All of Bradley's best performances were in towns; none in cities. (Compare this to Al Gore's best performances, which included wards in Somersworth, Manchester, Laconia, Berlin, and Nashua.) In the twenty-five towns that favored Bradley, the number of voters had more than doubled in the past quarter century, from 4,500 in 1976 to just under 11,000 in 2000.

If these trends continue, vestiges of blue-collar Manchester, which traditionally supported establishment candidates, may not exist five years from now. Manchester may go the way of surrounding towns, such as Bedford, Goffstown, and Merrimack. As viewed by 1992 Democratic gubernatorial candidate (now television/radio host) Deborah "Arnie" Arnesen, the process of gentrification is inescapable: "We're going to turn into yuppies, all of us." With its rapidly expanding airport as an engine of economic change, Manchester and its surroundings have become places where traditional appeals by Democratic primary candidates are unlikely to remain effective. "If Manchester was the place that a lot of Democrats had to go because they thought that this was the traditional base, they're going to have to play a different song," according to Arnesen.⁴²



Promotional flier for Senator Edward Kennedy's "First Campaign Stop," Manchester, November 7, 1979. With the growth of a significant block of reform-minded Democrats elsewhere in the state and a relative decline in the voting power of working-class, urban Democrats, Manchester may not always continue to serve as the first stop on the Democratic campaign trail. New Hampshire Historical Society.

Meanwhile, rural areas of New Hampshire are becoming increasingly important to the state Democratic Party and to candidates seeking votes in the presidential primary. Rural areas used to be bastions of Republicanism. The rule used to be that the greater the population in a town or city, the better Democrats did in that area. Migration patterns are undermining that formula, however, as urban and suburban residents pursuing quality of life are choosing to relocate into rural areas. A town like Randolph in Coos, New Hampshire's northernmost county, "used to be just a place where you'd have a cabin in the woods." It is now a place for full-time residents. As a result, Democrats today have a strong presence there.⁴³

The movement of votes away from cities, dispersed among the towns, means that candidates must change the way they allocate their valuable campaign time. Candidates once could devote their attention to the large cities like Manchester, sending volunteers door-to-door. Now, the geographical scope of a campaign has to broaden.

It used to be that the candidates would come in and they would spend their time in Manchester

and Nashua, Dover, Portsmouth, and many times some of these small towns would never see a candidate. And now, when those neighborhood house parties are being held, you see that there are parties in Amherst and Goffstown, and that's a clear indication that the vote has spread out, and . . . the candidate's time and resources have to spread out too.⁴⁴

For example, in the 2000 primary, when only a few thousand votes separated Gore and Bradley, both candidates spent time in towns known as Republican strongholds, in the hope of capturing Democratic votes there. Furthermore, those towns have a large number of independent voters, who can vote in either of the party primaries.

It used to be primary elections were for the most loyal of the party. That tended to be the people who came out to vote. . . . And, while that's still a factor, it's changed because of the independents, and the independents could very easily walk in and take either ballot on Election Day. So, there's a new fight for those more undecided, open-minded independents.⁴⁵

With change seemingly always in store, candidates in New Hampshire primaries to come will continue to set sail into stormy seas. Ongoing demographic shifts indicate the growth of a significant block of elite, reform-minded Democrats, while there has been a decline in the relative voting power of people from the gritty mill cities, once the hallmark of New Hampshire Democratic politics. Notwithstanding this decline, the interests and concerns of this group of voters remains a force to reckon with, and no candidate can ignore it. Together, these two blocs of voters are the Scylla and Charybdis, between which Democratic contenders in the Granite State must successfully navigate.

Notes

1. Interview by the author, October 20, 2002.
2. The state's executive council is a group of elected officials that acts as a check on the governor.
3. Interview with Dayton Duncan, November 11, 2002. Duncan worked as Walter Mondale's deputy press secretary in 1984 and is the author of *Grass Roots*, an account of the 1988 New Hampshire primary.
4. William L. Dunfey, "A Short History of the Democratic Party in New Hampshire" (M.A. thesis, University of New Hampshire, 1954), 17.
5. *Ibid.*, 28–29.
6. Neal R. Peirce, *The New England States* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1976), 289.
7. Duane Lockard, *New England State Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959), 63.
8. *Ibid.*, 64.
9. *Ibid.*, 67, quoting David McKean.
10. Dunfey, *Democratic Party in New Hampshire*, 233.
11. *Ibid.*, 237.
12. Jules Witcover, *Marathon: The Pursuit of the Presidency* (New York: Viking Press, 1977), 222.
13. New Hampshire Office of State Planning, *Statistical Profile of New Hampshire, 1970–1990*, 1992, p. 1.
14. Nancy Coffey Hefferman and Ann Page Stecker, *New Hampshire: Crosscurrents in its Development* (Grantham, N.H.: Topson and Rutter, 1986), 186–87.
15. Michael Dupre and Dante Scala, "Border Crossings: The Impact of Migration on the New Hampshire House of Representatives," The New Hampshire Institute of Politics, Research Center Working Paper Series, no. 1, pp. 3–4.
16. The work of Ronald Brownstein of the *Los Angeles Times* offers much food for thought. See, for example, "To Challenge Gore, Bradley Needs to Look Beyond Volvo Democrats," *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1999.
17. Rhodes Cook, "New Hampshire Introductory Essay," http://www.rhodescook.com/analysis/presidential_primaries/nh/intro.html. This study builds on Cook's analysis, using Census Bureau data to target towns and city wards in New Hampshire where these three constituencies are most clearly dominant.
18. To ascertain whether towns and wards qualified as working-class communities or elite communities,

the author used information available from the U. S. Bureau of the Census. Three measures of socioeconomic status were considered: educational attainment, median family income, and occupational status. Towns and city wards with socioeconomic status levels significantly below the national average were classified as working-class communities; and conversely, towns and city wards with levels significantly above the national average were classified as elite communities.

For the 1968 and 1972 primaries, 1970 census data were used. For the 1976, 1980, and 1984 primaries, 1980 census data were used. For the 1988 and 1992 primaries, 1990 census data were used. Finally, for the 2000 primary, 2000 census data were used.

For a full list, decade by decade, of the communities considered working class and elite for the purposes of this study, see the author's forthcoming book, *Stormy Weather: The New Hampshire Primary and Presidential Politics* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Determining the socioeconomic status of New Hampshire's city wards proved especially difficult, because census data are not provided for these units as they are for towns. In addition, city ward boundaries change every decade and, in some cases, the number of city wards shrinks or grows. For 1990 and 2000, the following procedure was used: (1) census block groups belonging to a particular ward were identified, using the 2000 census maps available online at http://www2.census.gov/plmap/pl_blk/st33_NewHampshire; (2) demographic data on these block groups were obtained from 1990 census records; (3) block-group data were compiled and aggregated to provide an approximate demographic profile of the ward.

This procedure was not without its difficulties. First, the 2000 census maps take into account the redrawing of city wards in the early 1990s. Thus, for purposes of analyzing the 1988 and 1992 New Hampshire returns, the author made the assumption that only minor changes in city ward lines had been made since the early 1990s—in other words, that no ward changed so drastically that it would lose its identification as an elite or working-class ward. The one exception was the city of Concord, which shifted from eight wards to ten in the early 1990s; in this case, information for the later elections was obtained from the city's Community Development Department.

19. David C. Hoeh, *1968, McCarthy, New Hampshire* (Rochester, Minn.: Lone Oak Press, 1994), 493.
20. *Ibid.*, 334–37.
21. *Ibid.*, 15–16.
22. Charles Brereton, *First in the Nation: New Hampshire and the Premier Presidential Primary* (Portsmouth, N. H.: Peter E. Randall, 1987), 146.
23. Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President, 1972* (New York: Atheneum, 1973), 121.
24. *Ibid.*
25. *Ibid.*, 76.
26. *Ibid.*, 83; see also a summary of the Muskie presidential campaign briefing books, in the George J. Mitchell Papers, Bowdoin College.
27. *Ibid.*, 81.
28. Interview with activist Bill Shaheen, July 16, 2002.
29. Interview with activist Katherine Rogers, November 22, 2002.
30. Brereton, *First in the Nation*, 213.
31. Hart's score of 1.20 compares favorably with those of McGovern (1.57), Tsongas (1.80), and Bradley (1.56).
32. Interview with activist Susan Calegari, July 31, 2002.
33. As operative Susan Casey pointed out in her account of the 1984 campaign, Hart was not a candidate who was easy to pigeonhole ideologically; he was, for example, the first Democrat who stood against the war in Vietnam, yet in the 1980s he advocated a "responsible stand on national defense" that did not automatically rule out additional spending for this purpose. Susan Berry Casey, *Hart and Soul: Gary Hart's New Hampshire Odyssey . . . and Beyond* (Concord, N.H.: NHI Press, 1986), 278–79.
34. Interview with activist and lobbyist James Demers, July 22, 2002.
35. Interview with Deborah "Arnie" Arnesen, August 15, 2002.
36. John DiStaso and Michael Cousineau, "Forbes has good night, but Bradley doesn't," *Manchester Union Leader*, January 25, 2000.
37. Emmett Buell, "The Changing Face of the New Hampshire Primary," from *In Pursuit of the White House, 2000*, edited by William G. Mayer (New York: Chatham House, 2000).
38. *Ibid.*, 111–18.
39. Data from exit polls conducted at the 2000 New Hampshire primary. For further details, see http://abcnews.go.com/sections/politics/2000vote/exitpoll_nh_dem.html.
40. Berlin, Claremont, Dover, Franklin, Keene, Manchester, Nashua, Rochester, and Somersworth.
41. Those towns, in alphabetical order: Acworth, Amherst, Andover, Dublin, Durham, Easton, Eaton, Francestown, Franconia, Gilsum, Grantham, Hancock, Hanover, Hebron, Holderness, Lyme, Nelson, New London, Orford, Plainfield, Plymouth, Sandwich, Sharon, Sugar Hill, and Waterville Valley.
42. Interview with Arnesen.
43. Interview with activist Jeff Woodburn, July 17, 2002.
44. Interview with Demers.
45. *Ibid.*