Why did John McCain win the Republican primaries in 2008?

Thesis

Supervisor

Edward Ashbee
Department of International Culture and Communication Studies

Made by

Lina Vedsted
Master of Arts in International Business Communication
Copenhagen Business School
Number of characters: 127.868
Number of pages: 71
Written in American English Language
February 2010


Min undersøgelse viser, at følgende tre eksterne faktorer var tilstede under valgkampen. McCains afstandstagen til præsident Bush var en positiv faktor, da Bush’s popularitet var faldet gevaldigt de seneste år, og endvidere var det en faktor, at det militære fremstød, McCain havde efterspurgt, var

Afhandlingen konkluderer, at det i udpræget grad var de eksterne faktorer, der blev afgørende for McCains valgsejr. Det var især modstandernes svagheder, der blev den mest tungtvejende faktor for hans sejr. De andre kandidater magtede ikke at leve op til de forventninger, der var blevet stillet dem i valgkampen.
# Table of Content

Resumé.........................................................................................1

Table of Content.............................................................................3

Chapter 1: Introduction....................................................................5

Chapter 2: Previous Republican Primaries.................................6
  2.1 Recruiting of strategists.............................................................7
  2.2 Developing image........................................................................8
  2.3 Developing campaign strategy....................................................9
  2.4 Accumulating funds .....................................................................10
  2.5 Receiving endorsements.............................................................10
  2.6 Being the frontrunner.................................................................10
  2.7 Incumbent president.................................................................11
  2.8 Changing Republican demographic.........................................11
  2.9 The strongest challenger............................................................12
  2.10 Trends in Previous Republican primaries.................................13

Chapter 3: Political theories............................................................14
  3.1 Resource mobilization theory.....................................................14
  3.2 Political opportunity structure...................................................18
  3.3 Combining the two theories.......................................................18

Chapter 4: McCain mobilize resources.........................................20
  4.1 Recruiting strategists.................................................................20
  4.2 Developing McCain’s image.......................................................21
    4.2.1 Relating to the Christian Right.................................................23
    4.2.2 Accentuating social issues......................................................23
    4.2.3 Reforming immigration .........................................................25
    4.2.4 Reforming campaign finance...............................................26
4.2.5 Preserving national security
4.2.6 Changing climates
4.2.7 Reducing earmarks
4.2.8 Using the military
4.2.9 Learning from the past
4.2.10 Maverick?
4.3 Employing McCain’s strategy
4.3.1 Altering tax cuts position
4.3.2 Maintaining national security
4.3.3 Developing campaign strategy
4.4 Discussion

Chapter 5: Influence of external structures
5.1 McCain’s Challengers
5.1.1 The initial frontrunner
5.1.2 Frontrunner defeated
5.1.3 Two social conservatives
5.1.4 Romney and Huckabee’s failure
5.1.5 An alleged genuine Conservative
5.1.6 First to withdraw
5.2 Impact of the surge
5.3 Bush’s unpopularity
5.4 Discussion

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Bibliography


Chapter 1: Introduction

The 2008 Republican primaries were quite different from previous Republican primaries. The race to win the nomination seemed wide open up until the early primaries and consisted of five candidates. Former Senator of Arizona John McCain won the nomination despite the fact that his campaign seemed to be over six months before the early primaries. Previous nominated candidates were the leading candidates in the invisible primary\(^1\), however, Former Mayor of New York Rudy Giuliani was the leading candidate in 2007 but he eventually lost the nomination (Cook, 2004:87). McCain had also run for the Republican nomination against Bush in 2000. McCain was a strong challenger but eventually lost the nomination. Bush managed to obtain substantial support from the Evangelical voter segment, whereas McCain drew his support mainly from independents and moderates. Seven year later when McCain initiated his campaign for the nomination, he had momentum from the 2000 primaries only to find that he was competing with four other candidates. This basically resulted in decreasing public support during most of 2007. On this basis this thesis will explore:

*Why did John McCain win the Republican primaries in 2008?*

To introduce this dissertation, chapter two will examine which factors had an influence on the nomination of previous candidates. In chapter three, the theory *political opportunity structure* and *resource mobilization theory* will be introduced along with the mythology and the research question. In order to answer the research question, the two theories will be applied to two different approaches to the research question. Chapter four will identify John McCain’s resources and how he utilized them by applying the resource mobilization theory. Finally, chapter five will identify the external factors that influenced John McCain’s changes of winning the nomination by applying the theory of political opportunity structure. The discussion in chapter four and five will assess whether McCain won the nomination because of how he mobilized his resources or whether the impact of the various external factors created the opportunity for him to win. Chapter six will conclude on the analysis and provide a perspective of future Republican primaries.
Chapter 2: Previous Republican primaries

The democratic process of electing the president of the United States has evolved a great deal since George Washington was chosen as the first head of state in 1789. One of the most dramatic changes has been the development of political parties to reflect the social, economic, and political concerns of American voters. As the parties have changed during the past two centuries, they have also divided against themselves on major issues facing the United States. In order for the political parties to offer a single candidate for the presidency, it has become necessary for the parties to conduct preliminary elections, or primaries, to determine which individual will lead the party into the national presidential campaign.

In the past century, Republican presidential candidates have had different political backgrounds, but many have been state governors. Since 1900 eight governors were selected to head the Republican Party, but only four senators and two congressmen were selected as presidential candidates2 (Gregg II, 2005:531-532). One of the most popular leaders of the Republican Party, who also became the 40th President of the United States in 1980, was former governor Ronald Reagan. In his attempt to secure the Republican nomination in 1976, he lost to the incumbent president. Nonetheless, the effort was enough to gain the significant support of the Republican right-wing, which allowed Reagan to concentrate on the moderate voter segment in 1980 (Gregg II, 2005:302). George W. Bush was also well-known and to some extent an established candidate in the 2000 primaries because of his past. He was the son of former President George H.W. Bush and incumbent governor of Texas. This combined with his down-to-earth personality made him an early frontrunner in the race to secure the 2000 presidential nomination (Economist.com, 2000a).

Other Republican presidential candidates were nominated while serving as vice-presidents. Some were more successful than others. Both Richard Nixon and George H.W. Bush were incumbent vice presidents when they were nominated in 1968 and 1988 respectively, both went on to become presidents of the United States. Other nominated Republican candidates were not as fortunate. Incumbent President Gerald Ford, while undertaking the office after the resignation of Nixon in 1974, could not attain the presidential election two year later (Gregg II, 2005:532). In 1976 there was also a change in the process of electing the presidential candidates. The primaries that were

2 Four Republican presidential candidates had not previously held a major political office, like Dwight Eisenhower, who was a five-star general in the U.S. Army before his nomination.
initiated by a few states in the 1960s grew slowly in numbers until 1976. That year primaries and caucuses grew significantly and started a change in the presidential nomination campaigns. Now registered Republican voters could vote for the delegates, who supported their favorite candidate (Pomper, 1979:785). The 1976 primaries was the beginning of the presidential primaries of today, and since then there have been several similarities between the winners and how they won the Republican nominations.

2.1 Recruitment of strategists

The term talent primary refers to the different candidates’ ability to assemble a strong organization before the primaries are initiated. A strong organization can prove a significant asset in winning the Republican primaries, because there will be a lot of obstacles to overcome that requires very qualified advisors. In January 1987, when George H.W. Bush began campaigning for the 1988 primaries, he was leading the talent primary. He had served as vice-president for the popular Former Governor of California Ronald Reagan eight years prior, and at the beginning of 1987 40 percent of the Republican voters supported him perhaps for this reason (Barrett, 1987a). In the 2000 primaries, Governor of Texas George W. Bush had managed to assemble and strong team to challenge Senator of Arizona John McCain, who turned out to be resilient competition to the governor. McCain was also a significant contender in the talent primary, but his organization could not match Bush’s team, which primarily consists of the so-called ‘Iron Triangle’. Of the three advisors, whom have all been a part of Bush’s team since his governor campaign, one who stood out as the most notable strategist was Karl Rove because of his highly developed strategic intellect, as noted by Bush’s media adviser Mark McKinnon: “Karl plays politics like Bobby Fischer plays chess. He looks at the whole board and thinks 20 moves ahead” (Duffy & Carney, 1999).

2.2 Developing image

In politics a general image plays a significant part in the success of politicians. In primaries and general elections this significance greatly increases and becomes one of the major reasons for the outcome. One of the most popular presidents in the past century according to most Republicans is President Ronald Reagan, and one of his strongest assets was his image. In 1980, Washington

---

3 For this reason this thesis will only concentrate on the previous primaries from 1976 and onwards, except for 1984 and 2004 because there were no serious challengers to the incumbent president in those primaries.
Bureau Chief Robert Ajemian of TIME⁴ Washington Bureau noted: “To many people, Reagan is reassuring, almost parental. He is too fatalistic and too modest to be a crusader” (TIME, 1980c). Florida National Committeewoman Paula Hawkins regarded Mr. Reagan as decorous and competent under pressure and when attacked he reacted well and was not afraid of using humor when dealing with the press. The former Governor of California had served two terms, but he was deemed an outsider of Washington (IBID). This meant that he was not tangled up in a lot of politics and could take the office from the outside with a clean slate. Another presidential candidate for the Republican nomination seemed to step into character fairly late in his campaign for the primaries in 1996. Robert Dole had according to the New York Times showed strong “leadership, personal values and his visions for the country” (Berke, 1996b). Then there is the conflicting image of George W. Bush in the 2000 Republican primaries. Bush was viewed as a likable and very grounded person. This meant that people could identify with him. However at times the team behind Mr. Bush claimed he was an outsider in Washington and in other circumstances amplifying that 38 senators had endorsed him (Economist.com, 2000c). This suggested that he was depicted as both an insider and outsider of Washington. However this was not necessarily a negative aspect of his image because one or the other could be applied depending on the nature of the argument.

### 2.3 Developing Campaign strategy

A sufficient campaign strategy is crucial in order to win a presidential nomination. Unexpected situations will occur throughout any campaign and the strategy may need to be adjusted several times. Nonetheless, the goal must be the main focus. In 1976 after Gerald Ford lost the presidency to Jimmy Carter, there were speculations about Ronald Reagan’s strategy in the following primary in 1980. In order to win the next presidential election, the future Republican nominee had to work through the dividing issues between the conservative wing and the moderate Republicans, and also find a way to capture the ethnic minorities, urban citizens and young people (TIME, 1976c). These voter segments had not previously been typical Republican voters. Nevertheless, Mr. Reagan actually achieved this goal initially in the primaries and eventually at the presidential election in 1980. Part of his strategy was to render the voters plain solutions to complicated problems such as the bad economy that had been a problem in the previous years. He also showed a determination to follow this strategy after the election, which appealed to the younger voter segment. With no experience with national problems and with the politics of Washington he managed to convince the

---

⁴ American newsmagazines with a weekly circulation of more than 3 billion worldwide.
public that he would be capable of administering the presidential office (Barrett, 1987b; TIME, 1980c).

In 1988, when George H.W. Bush wanted to win the Republican primaries, he was the incumbent vice-president of an unpopular president in fiscal matters. In spite of the platform he ran on eight years prior, he was undeniably identified with the fiscal policies of Ronald Reagan. This was the reason Bush attempted to present himself as an individual and not the pawn of Reagan: “I like what’s real. I’m not for the airy and the abstract. I like what works” (Barrett, 1987c). This sounded a little like Reagan just a little less dramatic. His advisers had asked him to distance himself from Ronald Reagan on certain issues, but Bush waited until the 1988 Republican Convention in January to follow this advice. During the Reagan presidency the Republican Party had moved further to the right and Bush was aware of this, so he made sure to reach out the conservative groups as well by proclaiming: “no new taxes” (IBID; Duffy, 1992b). Four years later, the incumbent President Bush once again sought the Republican nomination, and this time he used a different strategy. As incumbent president he chose to accentuate some of his past accomplishments during his time in office more than his plans for the next four years (Duffy, 1992b).

When Robert Dole was running in the 1996 Republican primaries, he was aware of not alienating the growing Christian Right. Abortion was one of the issues brought forward in the campaign by the outspoken Patrick Buchanan, but Dole made sure not to retaliate in strong opposition to the issue. Bob Dole did support a constitutional ban on abortion with a few exceptions, but he did not stress it in his campaign (Berke, 1996a). The constitutional prohibition on abortion became more important in the 2000 Republican primaries, where George W. Bush announced that he supported this without exceptions in an attempt to secure the support of the Christian Right. George W. Bush’s advisers were also aware of his limitations, so they strategized to press issues such as large tax-cuts to compensate for his less strong character (Economist.com, 2000a; Economist.com, 2000b).

2.4 Accumulating funds
One of the most important factors in winning the nomination, Great Poll ratings of any candidate will automatically generate more and sometimes bigger donations from supporters, but political capital contributes to this as well. However even to enter the race for the Republican nomination requires a sizable capital and that can be hard to obtain even if the politician is prominent and
familiar to the public. The *Federal Election Campaign Act* amendments of 1974 were created to help candidates to raise enough money. The act would match contributions of 250 dollars and lower from individuals. Acceptance of the federal funds were conditional and this meant that the candidates had to stay under a certain spending limit (Cook, 2004:86-87; Polsby & Wildavsky, 2004:53). Nevertheless, there are other examples of attaining funds; by having a large personal fortune. George W. Bush was one of them. He did however not have to use too much of it since he was able to obtain great support in the form of money throughout his campaign in 2000 primaries (Economist.com, 2000d). Furthermore, the Bush campaign declined federal funding in order to raise more funds for his campaign. This resulted in the first 100 million dollar campaign in the history of American presidential primaries that was privately funded (Miller & Miller, 2000).

### 2.5 Receiving endorsements

Elite support in Republican primaries can be a great asset to frontrunners as well as contenders. The term refers to a candidate that receives endorsement from a prominent politician, who is not necessarily member of the respective party. George W. Bush experienced in the 2000 primaries the more negative aspect of this particular honor. Following the New Hampshire primaries that year, former Vice-president Dan Quayle endorsed him. Dan Quayle had, while he served under President George H.W. Bush, become known for inappropriate and confusing statements such as: “I don’t live in this century” as well as misspelling the word *potato* (Economist.com, 2000a; Economist.com, 1999). The endorsement from the former vice-president did not really help George W. Bush, but it’s didn’t seem to hurt him either. Nonetheless, throughout the primaries there were a total of 24 Republican governors that endorsed the future president of the United States. One of these governors was Jane Hall of Arizona, who chose not to support John McCain from her home state (Prah, 2008).

### 2.6 Being the frontrunner

When a candidate is front-runner it usually induce substantial support from the Republican base, which brings the candidate in a very good position from the beginning to obtain the Republican nomination. Following the 1976 presidential election and Gerald Ford’s defeat to the Democratic President Jimmy Carter, there were already speculations of who would run for the Republican nomination in 1980. Because Ronald Reagan had proved a strong contender to Gerald Ford, he was considered the frontrunner in the invisible primary in case Ford decided not to run again. His
position as frontrunner was so strong that he waited until November of 1979 to officially enter the race (Sidey, 1978; TIME, 1979). Robert Dole had become a familiar Republican when he ran against George W. Bush in the 1988 Republican primaries as the only real competitor. Though he had not been a top candidate four years later in the primaries, he entered the 1996 primaries campaign as the leading candidate (TIME, 1987; Kramer et al., 1995). Another method to become the initial leading candidate was seen by George W. Bush, whom ran for the nomination twelve years later, According to one of his father’s senior campaign advisors: “Everybody knows that the way to defeat an incumbent president is with a challenge from the ideological wing of the party” (TIME, 1992). This would also turn out to be true without an incumbent president in the race. George W. Bush was also a frontrunner from the beginning. His support was boosted even further by the growing interest from the Christian Right. Even though he later began to distance himself from this particular group to appeal to other Republican voter segments, he was still the strongest contender (Economist.com, 2000d).

2.7 Incumbent president
Challenging an incumbent president or vice-president can be very difficult and since 1976 no contender has ever achieved this goal. When Gerald Ford was still in office though not elected, Ronald Reagan was a strong contender to the job. It turned out to be a close race between the two, but since President Ford was the front-runner he managed to win the nomination for the Republican Party. Almost the same thing happened when George H.W. Bush was challenged in 1988 and 1992. Though he was only the vice-president in 1988, from the beginning of his campaign he had an advantage over Robert Dole in that he was well known to a greater extent than Mr. Dole. Bush had gained a lot of experience in his work with President Reagan George H.W. Bush was fortunate to have 61 percent of the Republican voter segment. In 1992 however, Mr. Bush was the incumbent president and he could rest to some extent on his past achievements in office. Patrick Buchanan did not have this advantage (Duffy, 1992a; Duffy, 1992b; Dionne Jr., 1987; Stanley, 1988b).

2.8 Changing Republican demographic
The Republican Party has been through changes especially right before the primaries were initiated. During the 1960s a lot of changes occurred in the United States. The Vietnam War had just begun that caused anti-war demonstrations to break out, and the civil rights movement led to city riots created a counter-culture. This initiated a change in the American society but also in the political
demography. They were gradual changes and took several decades to reach their full extent in the mid-1990s (Economist.com, 2004b; Economist.com, 2005). However the counter-culture of the 1960s caused a backlash especially in the South among conservatives and born-again Christians. They were discontented with the decline in moral values across the nation and this resulted in a political realignment, where they abandoned the Democratic Party for the pro-life and anti-homosexual GOP (Economist.com, 2003). According to the book *Grand New Party*, the reason why a lot of Southern working class voters went against Democratic Party was because of the initiatives that followed the Civil Rights Movement such as affirmative action and the increased violent crime rate, which grew with 367 percent in just two decades starting in 1960 (Douthat & Salam, 2008:46-47). In 1976 Evangelicals supported the Democratic Jimmy Carter, but then turned to the GOP after they became unsatisfied with his performance. Evangelist Jerry Falwell then started the *Moral Majority* in 1979, an interest group that fought for better moral values. The Christian Coalition succeeded this organization at the end of the 1980s, which was founded by Televangelist Pat Robertson after he had lost the Republican primaries in 1988. The two organizations emerged from the growing *Christian Right* that supported the Republican Party (Jenkins, 2003:288; Economist.com 2007c). In the 2000 primaries the Christian Right once again became involved in a national election campaign, when they decided to support George W. Bush. However, the reason was not that Bush was the perfect candidate with his compassionate conservatism’, but rather that the Christian Right was opposed to John McCain obtaining the Republican nomination (Reaves, 2000).

**2.9 The strongest challenger**

Competition can be both positive but also have a negative influence on the outcome of the primaries. Since 1976, in most of the Republican primaries except for the one in 1980, there has only been one strong competitor that could threaten the chances of the initial frontrunner in the race. Ronald Reagan was close to winning the primaries over the incumbent President Ford in 1976, who seemed to struggle in the summer of 1976. Reagan was running as a reformer of economic policies and that he would rectify the bad economy. He was also a natural performer that spoke of issues that touched emotions in the audience, according to President Ford. Nonetheless, Reagan did not win the nomination, but he was commended for the strong contender he was (TIME, 1976a; TIME, 1976b; Sidey, 1976). In 1980 Ronald Reagan was challenged by George H.W. Bush and Illinois Representative John Anderson, who had served ten terms in the House of Representatives. While
Anderson attracted mostly the independent voter segment, Bush secured enough of the moderate votes that that Ronald Reagan remained in the lead throughout the entire period. Even speculations and expectations of Gerald Ford entering the race at some point help split the vote to Mr. Reagan’s advantage (TIME, 1980a; TIME, 1980b).

The most common reason why the initial frontrunner wins over their competition in the Republican primaries since 1976 was that their strongest competitors were not strong enough. When Robert Dole challenged the incumbent Vice-president Bush in 1988, he seemed to exude negativity, he lagged a message in his speeches, and he did not acquire a strong organization (Barrett, 1987b; Stanley, 1987; Stanley, 1988a). Patrick Buchanan made the same attempt to win over Bush in 1992, whom now was the incumbent president. Buchanan had very strong opinions and he was not afraid to loudly express this fact: “Real men got to say what they mean and what they say” (San Antonio & Traver, 1992). Buchanan managed to gain significant support mainly from discontented Caucasian men, but that was only sufficient to become first runner-up (IBID). In 1996 Robert Dole was the frontrunner, but Buchanan had the same problems as four years prior. He did not have the capacity to get the amount of support he needed (Berke, 1996a). John McCain was also the only contender to seriously threaten George W. Bush’s presidential nomination. McCain was able to capture a large number of independent votes as well as moderate Republican votes to a greater extent than Patrick Buchanan. However, he could not contrive enough support from the Republican base that suspected him of being to lax in economic and fiscal matters (Economist.com 2000b).

2.10 Previous Republican primaries

In order to win a Republican presidential nomination, previous Republican primaries gives an indication of what is required to achieve the nomination. Candidates can influence the outcome of the primaries by their own actions. Some candidates such as George W. Bush acquired talented strategists and advisors that could help him adapt his campaign strategy to defeat his strongest challenger John McCain. Great financed primary campaigns have always been a vital tool to win the primaries, and the amount of funds required increases as the years go by. Image also seems to play a part in winning the nomination. Several nominated candidates such as Ronald Reagan presented themselves as outsiders in Washington. This suggests that governors, as they are not a part of the United States Congress, have an advantage over senators and congressmen. There are other factors that can influence the outcome of Republican primaries and may even determine the
result. These factors are outside the candidates influence, and most often challengers to the frontrunner. Their successes and failures and successes can sometimes determine the outcome of the primaries. Nonetheless since 1976 no incumbent president or vice president in the primaries has been defeated, though Ronald Reagan seriously threatened President Gerald Ford in 1976.

There are some commonalities that all the nominated candidates in past primaries share. They were all the initial leading candidates amongst the frontrunners, and most of them had only one serious challenger. This suggests that the 2008 primaries should have a clear leading candidate that was nominated and one main challenger throughout most of the race. Several years before the 2008 primaries began, there were speculations of who would be the frontrunners and leading candidate in the race. Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani was identified as the candidate in the lead. However Giuliani did not win the 2008 primaries, and there were multiple challengers to the nomination.

**Chapter 3: Political Theories**

To date, there is no consensus among political scholars as to how to analyze election results. This chapter suggests two potential theories that may be applied for that purpose. Though Political Opportunity Structure and the Resource Mobilization Theory have for the most part been used in connection with the study of political interest groups and social movements, this chapter will demonstrate that these theories may also be used to explain what caused John McCain to win the Republican presidential nomination in 2008. As will be explained in the chapters to follow, the resources available to interest groups and social movements, and the means by which outside political structures affect those groups, closely resemble the resources available to John McCain during the 2008 primary campaign, and the impact political structures had on that campaign.

**3.1 Resource mobilization theory**

The theory of resource mobilization emerged in the 1970s, at a time where there was an increasing interest in the study of social movements. Perhaps this perspective was inspired by the unconventional increase in political participation that emerged between the 1960s and the mid-1970s. During this period of time, protest demonstrations rose drastically from around 30

---

5 Except for the 1980 primaries, where both Anderson and H.W. Bush were frontrunners.
demonstrations a year at the end of the 1950s to about 260 in 1972, and those protests spurred urban riots that peaked by the end of the 1960s (Jenkins, 1983:534).

Resource mobilization theorized that the social movements used the means available to them to achieve success. While the concept varies among students of social movements, John D. McCarthy and Mayer N. Zald use it to examine groups of people that share the same desire to change aspects of and/or organization of their society. These scholars created a broad definition in order to bring social movement organizations, which are referred to as organizations that share one or several of the same views as a respective social movement, within the theory (McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1217-1218). However, resource mobilization theory has not only concentrated on social movements, which can be quite extensive and diversified, but also on examining the different interest groups that operate within a social movement.

McCarthy and Zald refer to an interest group as a social movement organization, which they define as “a complex or formal organization, which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (IBID). Their study tries to isolate the resources that social movement organizations manipulate in order to achieve success. In order for those organizations to achieve their goals, for example, McCarthy and Zald have noted that they need to have substantial power and momentum. This requires labor, facilities, and capital, which can be obtained through a range of different initiatives. Some organizations have an extensive professional workforce, while other organizations rely mostly on volunteers to perform the necessary labor. Facilities are also very important since any organization, simple or complex, needs material and organizational structure to perform its mission. Finally, capital is needed to fund the labor and facilities, and also to spread the message of and membership within the organization, which can be achieved though the media and advertising (McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1225-1231). The latter is usually very expensive, and was therefore not widely used in the 1960s and 70s. However technological developments since that era have made it much easier and more cost-effective for social movement organizations to reach potential supporters.
The National Rifle Association (NRA) provides a helpful application of resource mobilization theory. Founded in 1871, the NRA claims to be the oldest civil rights organization in the United States, and considers itself to be “America's foremost defender of Second Amendment rights” (NRA.org, 2009). It is regarded one of the largest interest groups in terms of membership, and is therefore a very powerful force in the political spectrum, and has very much used the Internet to its advantage. Today, most every group and organization will have a detailed website that contains almost all the information that any potential member would want to know. Still more interest groups will take advantage of free pages available through online social networking sites. One of the largest and most popular of these forums is Facebook, where just about anyone can create a group page or a fan page. There are more than 20 fan pages supporting and opposing the NRA, as well as one official group with nearly 220,000 members and hundreds of unofficial and related groups with countless supporters (Facebook, 2009). However, the organization does not seem to attract the majority of their new members on Facebook, and that might be because they are a well-established and well-known organization, which core-members might become interested in through their local community.

It can also be very fruitful for social movement organizations to use the news media to gain exposure. An organization may plan an interesting or unique event, or take a public stand on an issue of national importance to gain media coverage. For example, at the beginning of the 1970s several different environmental groups claimed they were involved in the deferment of the Alaskan pipeline, in an effort to take credit for the environmental victory. Another popular means by which social movement organizations gain media attention is through elite support. Attaching a celebrity’s name to an organization makes it seem more legitimate and interesting to potential members, and the organization thus becomes more exposed to a larger segment of the population. For example, during the Vietnam era, Jane Fonda became known for her work with the peace movement. More recently former Vice President Al Gore has popularized the movement against global warming, and UNICEF, a social movement organization, has adopted former Princess of Denmark Alexandra as one of its protectors (McCarthy & Zald 1977:1229-1231; UNICEF, 2002).

---

*The Second Amendment to the United States Constitution establishes the right of the people to keep and bear arms.*
Theorists such as Joseph Tamney and Stephen Johnson provide another useful application of resource mobilization theory by applying it to explain why the Moral Majority\textsuperscript{7} had a significant increase in supporters between 1981 and 1984. Tamney and Johnson argue that the success of that social movement organization was in part a result of the mobilization of Christian televangelists\textsuperscript{8} and “the existing network of fundamentalist churches” and especially the Baptist churches (Tamney & Johnson 1988:236).

Despite the many and various uses of resource mobilization to explore social movement phenomena, the theory is not precisely defined and no consensus exists as to how and when it should be applied. Rather, the concept of social movements and the resources upon which they rely differ from analyst to analyst. For example, J. Freeman’s concept of the theory carefully defines resources and categorizes them as tangible assets, such as financial capital, facilities and different sources of communication, and intangible assets, such as employee and volunteer labor, and professional resources specializing in organizational work and legal advice, among other areas. In contrast, McCarthy and Zald regard their application as a partial theory in which several objectives, like the actions of authorities, are assumed to be a constant (Jenkins, 1983:527-533; McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1216-1217). This assumption by McCarthy and Zald underscores the one major inadequacy of resource mobilization theory: Because the theory focuses only on the actions of the social movements, it fails to consider the structural frames and boundaries within which the social movements must operate. The theory simply fails to account for certain aspects of society because, even though the very definition of a social movement is a collective act against a government policy, such movements are always restricted by the terms and conditions set by the controlling government. Therefore, the usefulness of resource mobilization theory is limited by its inability to explore factors outside of a social movement that may seriously affect the development and success of that movement. However, the theory’s usefulness may be increased by joining it with another analytical framework that addresses the areas ignored by the resource mobilization theory as McLauglin and Khawaja do in their analysis of the U.S. environmental movement’s organization (2000:422).

\textsuperscript{7}Moral Majority was significant political organization in the 1970s lead by Evangelicals.

\textsuperscript{8}Televangelists are religious leaders who use television to preach the Christian faith.
3.2 Political opportunity structure

Like resource mobilization, the theory of political opportunity structure has been applied to a number of different issues connected to social movements. The concept was initiated in 1968 by M. Lipsky in *Protest as a Political Resource*, and later it was developed further in 1973 by P.K. Eisinger in his publication *The Conditions of Protest Behavior in American Cities* (Tarrow, 1988:429). Eisinger relied on the ‘structure of political opportunities’ as a collection of variables to clarify why some urban political systems were more exposed to riots at the end of the 1960s (Meyer & Imig, 1993).

Since its introduction, political opportunity structure has been applied to a variety of different issues, but its broad use has also made the theory difficult to define for students of social movements. The most common perception of the political opportunity structure according to McLaughlin and Khawaja is an analysis of “the degree of openness or vulnerability of the political system to challenges below” (2000:426). However this definition of the theory is so broad that it could include every aspect of the political world that influences social movements. Another very prominent scholar, Sidney Tarrow, has a slightly different definition of the theory. He believes that the concept is not so much a single, all-inclusive variable, but rather as “a cluster of variables” that can be useful to explore the difference in the strategies, organizational structures, and successes or failures of similar groups that emerge in different locations. Tarrow has extended the theory by classifying five variables that other students of political opportunity structure have examined individually. He refers to them as “the degree of openness or of closure in a polity, the stability or instability of political alignments, the presence or absence of allies and support groups, divisions within the elite or its tolerance to protest and the policy-making capacity of the government” (McAdam et al. 1996:275; Tarrow, 1988:429-430).

Just as social movements and interest groups were influenced by opportunity structures of the political sphere, so are political candidates like John McCain influenced by external political opportunity structures. In their paper *Movements, Countermovements and the Structure of Political Opportunity*, David S. Meyer and Suzanne Staggenborg distinguish between two different kinds of movements. For Meyer and Staggenborg, a movement is a group with a collective cause that continuously challenges leaders, adversaries and public authorities, while countermovements are defined as those that “make contrary claims simultaneously to those of the original movement”
(Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996:1631). One of the examples upon which Meyer and Staggenborg rely is the controversial 1973 ruling of the United States Supreme Court in *Roe v Wade*, which recognized a woman’s constitutional right to legally have an abortion. While the ruling was a victory for the pro-choice movement, it actually mobilized the anti-abortion countermovement, by forcing supporters to take a stand on the issue and give voice to their opinions. As a result, the countermovement gained a political opportunity that it had not initiated (Meyer & Staggenborg, 1996:1636-1637). The movement-countermovement phenomenon can also be used to interpret events at the beginning of the 1980s, when the Reagan Administration implemented certain environmental policies that created a significant rise of members joining environmental groups. Another employment of the theory connects the Watergate scandal in the mid 1970s with the subsequent dramatic increase in financial donations to *Common Cause*, an organization that seeks to hold the government accountable for its actions (Meyer & Imig, 1993).

There are some problematic issues that arise in connection with political opportunity structure theory. Tarrow has outlined three of the most important inadequacies of the theory. First, because it has been applied to social movements that exist under different forms of government and political systems, it may sometimes fail to account for differences in the elector and political processes. Second, political opportunities are not clearly defined as objective or subjective influences within the theory. The term *structure* implies that the opportunities exist and occur without human involvement; however, in order for actors to embrace the political opportunities, the actors must recognize and understand the opportunities presented. If the theory is subjective scholars must analyze the actors’ perception of the political opportunities in order to apply this theory. The third inadequacy of political opportunity structure theory is that scholars may fail to point out the distinctness of the different social movements and interest groups, and how they operate. While social movements are no longer conceived of as strange, exceptional and illogical collective actions, such movements are also not uniform or identical in their development or operation (Tarrow, 1988:430).
3.3 Combining the two theories

Though it is recognized that both resource mobilization and political opportunity structure theory have inadequacies that are addressed by scholars such as Jenkins (1983:527), a joint application of both theories to the study of social movements as McLauglin and Zald have done (2000:422) creates a more comprehensive analytical framework that is capable of analyzing the most complex of social organizations, including political campaigns. This is because the strengths of resource mobilization theory as organization-focused compensates for the weaknesses of political opportunity structure, which examines the impact of external influences on organizations. The reverse is also true. A combination of the two theories, will seek to examine the interplay between internal organizational goals and actions, and external influences and limitations.

The chapters that follow employ the theories to empirical data concerning the 2008 Republican Primaries and John McCain’s victory in that campaign. The data relied on has been obtained mainly from newspapers and news magazines such as The New York Times,9 The Economist,10 and polls from Gallup11 and the PEW Research Center12. Of course, the data selected for analysis represents only a small cross-section of all of the available information. The 2008 Republican Primaries were arguably one of the most complex primary seasons the United States has ever experienced. The extensive coverage in the news media combined with the length of the informal campaigning that preceded the official primary campaigns, produced more information than can fully be explored in this thesis. However, by relying on updated reports from well-respected news sources, an effort has been made to analyze relevant content as it was available to the American voters. In addition, it is taken into account in this analysis that some issues of the campaigns did receive sufficient media coverage.

---

9 It was founded in 1851 and is considered the largest metropolitan newspaper in the US.
10 The Economist is an English news magazine with a weekly circulation of 1.3 million.
12 PEW Research Center is an American think tank. It provides information on issues, attitudes and trends worldwide.
Chapter 4: McCain mobilize resources

Resource mobilization theory has most commonly been applied to the study of social movements and interest groups, but is equally applicable to an examination of a candidate’s campaign for elected office. To demonstrate the usefulness of resource mobilization theory in analyzing the outcome of an election, this chapter will focus on the nomination of Senator John McCain as the Republican candidate for the president following the 2008 Republican primaries. More specifically, this chapter will explore the resources that were available to Senator McCain during his campaign, and will look at his management of those resources to determine the impact they had on his victory in the primaries. This examination will apply resource mobilization theory to empirical data gathered from various news sources within the United States concerning McCain’s public image and the details of his campaign.

4.1 Recruiting Strategists

As any candidate in an election knows, and as McCain learned himself during his previous election experience, securing a strong team of strategists and advisors in the talent primary that occurs before the campaign officially begins is a vital step toward winning the Republican presidential nomination. In the 2008 primaries, Senator McCain assembled a strong team of advisor-resources to help him succeed in his bid for the White House. McCain’s chief political strategist, Steve Schmidt, had previously helped Arnold Schwarzenegger with his campaign for governor in California. Charlie Black, an experienced and noted advisor in the White House under Ronald Reagan, George Bush and George W. Bush, and part of George W. Bush’s team in the 2000 primaries, also joined forces with McCain. Marc Salter, who authored the book Faith of My Fathers with McCain, acted as his speechwriter during the 2008 primaries. The final two members of McCain’s team were Marc McKinnon, who was expected to assist with political advertising that was blamed, in part, for McCain’s loss in the 2000 primaries, and a very successful Washington lobbyist, Rick Davis (Cox, 2008; Fineman, 2008).

While a lead in the talent primary is an important part of winning the primaries, McCain not only sought qualified strategists to advise him as needed, but he also made sure that his group of advisors were friends as well. The commitment of the McCain team proved invaluable during the summer of 2007 when the campaign was failing financially: his advisors chose to continue working without
pay. While his friendship with his advisors worked to his advantage in that instance, it occasionally hurt the campaign as well. For instance, Marc McKinnon has implied that McCain did not always take advice that was offered, partly because McCain viewed his campaign team members as friends as well as advisors (Cox, 2008).

4.2 Developing McCain’s image

Ask any American to describe John McCain in one word, and a likely response will be “maverick.” The term “maverick,” or a “someone who is determined to be different or act differently from the rest of their group,” (Longman, 1998:841) became a common nickname for McCain in the 2000 primaries. The image as a maverick was mainly derived from the 2000 primaries, where he was a strong challenger to George W. Bush. At that primary the Republican Party moved considerably in a conservative direction, and the Christian Right emerged as a strong and powerful force within the party. That group chose to rally around Bush, which made it impossible for McCain to win the nomination though he received considerable support from moderates and independents.

Several years later, and by the time McCain initiated his campaign for the 2008 primaries, he was already dubbed a frontrunner and a possible prospect as the ‘next in line’ to represent the Republican Party. So was McCain still a maverick? There seem to be two sides to John McCain. On the one hand he repeatedly voted against his party on several issues including tax cuts, global warming, and campaign finance reform since 2000. On the other, he consistently supported President Bush in the war on terror, and in the Iraq war, and endorsed Bush during his bid for reelection in 2004 (Berman, 2005; Barnes; 2006).

The reality is that McCain seems to have encouraged his own maverick image to have broader appeal to moderate voters, while maintaining some commonality on some issues with even the most conservative members of his party. As Scott Reed, a Republican lobbyist who was part of Bob Dole’s campaign in 1996, observed “McCain has to keep up his high-wire act of dominating the Senate with his agenda while focusing on appealing to Republican primary voters” (Barnes, 2006). Because McCain refused to define himself in line with any one recognized segment of the Republican Party, voters could either accept his description of himself as a maverick, or could try to figure out who he was by looking critically at his platform. It is not surprising that many voters, perhaps concerned that McCain would be unpredictable once in office, chose to look closely at his
stance on the issues. This paper will adopt a similar critical approach; what follows is a description of Senator McCain’s stance on many of the concerns that drove voters during the 2008 primaries, as well as a brief exploration of his Senate voting history on those issues, where relevant. After McCain’s platform has been described, the validity of McCain’s maverick identity will be considered.

4.2.1 Relating to the Christian Right
McCain made a serious misstep to alienate the Christian conservative members of the Republican Party during his 2000 primary campaign. At that time, McCain was running against George W. Bush whose campaign was focused on the Religious Right and centered on family values in order to gain their support. McCain was a serious contender, and he seemed to have a chance to win the nomination. In seeking to distinguish himself from Bush’s born-again Christian image, however, he launched attacks on leaders of the Religious Right including Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. On one occasion McCain called them "agents of intolerance" (McCAIN, 2000) While McCain no doubt achieved his goal of distancing himself from the Religious Right, and it seems clear that he underestimated the significance and importance of that voter population. The Christian conservatives were largely credited with Bush’s subsequent victory in the 2000 primaries.

Having lost his 2000 bid for the nomination, McCain began a personal campaign to change the Christian conservative opinion of him. In May 2006 the senator went to Falwell’s Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, to speak at the university’s commencement (Economist.com, 2006; Balz, 2006). By accepting the invitation, he most likely intended to apologize to Falwell for the “agents of intolerance” remark he made six years earlier, and to mend the wounds caused by his acts in 2000 in the hope of obtaining support from the Religious Right in the upcoming 2008 primaries.

4.2.2 Accentuating social issues
Due in part to the growing influence of Christian conservative groups, certain family-related issues became important topics for debate in the 2000 and 2008 primaries. These topics, which included abortion and gay marriage, have been embraced as religious issues by certain Republican populations, and have become very important considerations for those groups in elections at every level of government.
During both the 2000 and 2008 primaries, McCain has said that he is against most forms of abortion, including partial-birth abortion, unless the pregnant woman’s life is in danger or when the pregnancy is a result of incest or rape. According to his voting record, McCain has not agreed with Planned Parenthood on any abortion issue between 1993 and 2008 (Votesmart.org, 2008e; CNN.com, 2008d). In contrast, he has voted in accordance with anti-abortion interest groups between 60 and 86 percent of the time between 1996 and 2008.\(^\text{13}\)

In the case of same-sex marriage, John McCain expressed his belief in the definition of the marital union by conservative Christian groups: That a marriage should be between two people of the opposite sex. Nevertheless, Senator McCain voted against the *Federal Marriage Amendment*, which would have limited marriage in the United States to one man and one woman, because he believed this decision should be left to the states (Votesmart.org, 2008e; CNN.com, 2008d). He has indicated that he would reconsider his position on the matter if state courts begin to overturn state legislations that regulate marriage (CNN, 2008c).

In the presidential elections of 2000 and 2004 social issues such as abortion and same-sex marriage were very important to those who elected George W. Bush- A survey conducted by the PEW Research Center in August 2007 suggested that voters in the approaching 2008 primary elections were similarly concerned. That study revealed that social issues were “very important” for 43 percent of the Republican voters. Another 31 percent indicated that such issues were “somewhat important.” Clearly with 74 percent of Republican voters concerned about abortion and same sex marriage, McCain’s position on those topics was an important consideration for primary voters (Cox & Smith et al., 2007).

\(^\text{13}\) In fact, McCain may have agreed with the anti-abortion groups one hundred percent of the time. In this case, the missing percentage points could arise from votes in which McCain did not participate.
Figure 1: Republican and social issue voters

![Chart showing more than 4 in 10 Republicans are social-issue voters]

Source: Cox & Smith et al., 2007

The same 2007 survey revealed that a surprising 41 percent of Republican voters believed that abortion should be illegal in all cases. It also showed that 91 percent were against same-sex marriage, while 70 percent described themselves as strongly against it. Only 68 percent of the voters surveyed said they would vote for McCain, while 90 percent would support Fred Thompson, and 78 and 73 percent would vote for Rudy Giuliani and Mitt Romney respectively as the Republican candidate (IBID). Nevertheless, there seems to have been a change in attitudes toward abortion in the past couple of years. According to General Social Survey, 78 percent of Republicans with strong ties to the party were against abortion for any reason in 2006. The same group had fallen to 73 percent in 2008 (GSS, 2008). These data suggest that the importance of social issues such as abortion have decreased in the past couple of years.

4.2.3 Reforming immigration

During the 2008 primaries, one of the most controversial issues was the question of immigration reform. The reform was a result of a bipartisan collaboration between Senator McCain and Ted Kennedy from the Democratic Party as well as five other members of his own party. The Comprehensive Immigration Reform Act of 2006 was passed by the Senate in May that same year and it would enable immigrants that have lived in the United States for five years to be eligible to
become citizens if they met certain standards (votesmart.org, 2006; National Immigration Law Center). This was not popular in a nation that has had a considerable problem with illegal immigration from mostly Mexico for many years.

As a result, several experts expected that McCain’s immigration reform would have a negative impact on his campaign. Immigration reform could be part of the reason McCain’s campaign almost came to a halt for the better part of 2007 according to conservative journalist George Will14 (2007). However, the effects of the campaign immigration reform on McCain’s campaign seem to fade at the end of 2007, just in time for the primaries (Economist.com, 2008a). Working together with a team of one democrat and five other Republicans does not seem to be the work of an independent politician and a maverick; in fact, whenever the joint immigration reform effort was discussed in the media, it was always Ted Kennedy who received attention for his participation.

4.2.4 Reforming campaign finance
Another issue that could have caused Senator McCain to attract negative attention in his campaign during 2007, was his stance on campaign finance reform, expressed in the McC-order-Feingold bill. The official name of the act according to Project Smart Vote is the Campaign Reform Act of 2001, which is intended to reform and regulate how politicians can raise money and how much they can receive from unions and political parties. The act was a new version of the Federal Election Campaign Act of 1971 and it provided a bipartisan bill that limited the financial contributions to running candidates. McCain and Democrat Russ Feingold worked together to create this new version. The act was passed in the Senate on March 20th 2002 but was criticized by the media leading up to the election of the Republican presidential nominee. Dennis Prager from Real Clear Politics believed the new act would be worse for candidates without an extensive personal fortune. The limited amount of $2,000 that individuals could donate to candidates would make it more attractive for very rich politicians to spend their extensive fortunes on themselves (votesmart.org, 2002a; Prager, 2007).

Nonetheless, campaign finance reform did not seem to have a significant effect on John McCain’s campaign during 2007 and 2008. Members of the media simply mentioned the reform in articles but the Republican voters did not seem affected by it when McCain’s campaign began to gain

14 Pulitzer prize winner in 1976 and syndicated in more than 400 newspapers worldwide.
momentum in the fall of 2007. Twenty-seven Republicans voted against the act, and only eight Republicans including McCain voted in its favor (votesmart.org, 2002b). While Senator McCain voted against the majority of his party, this action does not contribute significantly to his image as a maverick because McCain did not act independently but rather acted in concert with a small group within his party.

4.2.5 Preserving national security
One of the issues that McCain consistently supported since the 2000 primaries was national security. The USA Patriot Act of 2001 was a comprehensive and controversial act that greatly extended the authority of the United States government (votesmart.org, 2001a). The act gave the police the authority to tap any phone in the United States without a court order, and also encouraged the citizens to report to the government any person they suspected of terror activity. Though the bill was passed in the Senate by a vote of 98 to 1, it was not likely read by many members of Congress, as it would be virtually impossible to read all the proposals that are presented in the U.S. Congress (FinCen, 2001). Nevertheless, McCain voted in line with the rest of his co-senators on this issue. In fact, his stance on national security issues seems generally aligned with the stance of the conservative base of the Republican Party.

In only one national security issue since the 2000 primaries did McCain distinguish himself from George W. Bush. Together with fellow Republican Lindsey Graham and Democrat Maria Cantwell, McCain wrote a 2003 letter to Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. The letter followed a visit to Guantanamo Bay Navel Base, and criticized the base for the long detentions without the legal right to a trial and the poor treatment of the detainees by employees of the base (Levin, 2006). President Bush and his Republican supporters were responsible for the extensive use of Guantanamo Bay as a prison for suspects in the war against terrorism, but McCain stood up against this.

4.2.6 Changing climates
The Republican Party, and especially its conservative base, has never embraced global warming as a favorite subject. The 2008 primaries were no different. For a long time, conservative Republicans refused to recognize the concept of global warming for reasons that are not very clear. However, it appears that some Republicans did not accept a connection between the increasing levels of carbon dioxide that combined with deforestation to increase the global temperature, and impact the sea
level, the amount of crops and wildlife around the world. McCain supported efforts to stop global warming for several years before the Bush Administration began to discuss the matter publicly. Perhaps building from the shift in Republican perspectives that occurred during President Bush’s time in office, McCain spoke out against global warming during his campaign to become the Republican Presidential Nominee in 2008 (Pooley, 2008).

4.2.7 Reducing earmarks

Another issue that McCain worked against before the 2008 primaries was the amount of ‘pork barrel spending’ in the government. Through this process, every bill presented to the US Congress has ‘earmarks’ attached to it. These earmarks are certain deals that only benefit a few people or groups, and they are generally included in bills in order to gain the support of certain politicians (McLean & McMillan, 2003:427). McCain co-sponsored an earmark moratorium that was introduced to the Senate in March 2008. It was “a motion to waive the budget act, if adopted, temporarily sets aside a specific provision of the budget Act of 1974, so that an amendment that violates the act can be considered” (votesmart.org 2008). The motion was rejected by the Senate by a vote of 71 against 29 (IBID). The majority of the Senate voted against this attempt to reduce earmarks in amendments presented to the Senate because they felt it could not be considered as an amendment to the existing law. Still, McCain’s suggestion of the bill demonstrates his willingness to work according to his convictions and that he did not abandon his position on tough issues even though he was in the middle of a presidential campaign.

4.2.8 Using the military

John McCain’s military background has been a strength throughout his political career, and never more so than in the 2008 primaries. But this may not be a coincidence. He was born into a family with strong military traditions. His father as well as his grandfather had been four-star admirals in the military. When McCain graduated in 1958 from the United States Academy in Annapolis, he began his military career as an aviator for the US Navy. No doubt affected by his family’s past military actions in the two great wars, it is likely McCain wished to experience the same, and fully supported the United States military: “I believed that militarily we could prevail in whatever conflict we were involved in” (Judis, 2006). McCain was sent to Vietnam where his plane was shot down over Hanoi and he broke both arms and legs in the process. McCain was captured by the Vietcong and incarcerated for five and a half years, during which he was tortured and isolated from
other prisoners. McCain has expressed that he was granted the opportunity to go free, but he did not want to leave without his fellow American prisoners of war. In the end his imprisonment and the failure of the Vietnam War had an impact on McCain’s previous opinion of the power of the US armed forces (Gibbs & Dickerson, 1999).

When McCain began his national political career in Washington, he had a realist approach to United States military in that he believed that the armed forces should defend national security. However, by the end of the 1990s he was working together with neoconservatives to bring down undemocratic governments that were hostile towards the United States, and felt that the armed forces could be used for this purpose if necessary. Contrary to many of his Republican colleagues, McCain supported President Bill Clinton when he intervened in the Kosovo conflict, and he urged the United States government to go after Saddam Hussein several years before the attack on the World Trade Center in New York City. McCain’s life experiences combined with his twenty years of service in Congress changed his view of the U.S. military’s place in the world and in armed conflicts. He transformed from a young naval aviator with a conviction that the United States military could win all military conflicts, to a congressman with a more nuanced and realist approach. Then after gaining political experience in Washington, McCain joined neoconservatives in the realization that the United States needed to use more troops to win military conflicts (Judis, 2006).

McCain’s image as a Maverick and as a politician that acts according to his own beliefs in the 2008 primaries brought some unexpected propositions in the past. When John Kerry ran as the Democratic Nominee in 2004 he asked the controversial senator from Arizona to be his running mate in the 2004 presidential election. The reason for asking McCain was a reaction to Bush’s attack on John Kerry’s military background. The offer was turned down by John McCain after several talks about the vice-presidency with John Kerry (Yen, 2008). Another reason could be that McCain could gain the support of independents and the moderate Republicans that resented the conservative views of George W. Bush.
4.2.9 Learning from past

In the 2000 primaries, John McCain ran against George W. Bush for the Republican presidential nomination, and portrayed himself as very different from his opponent. He continued to maintain this distance in his 2008 campaign by emphasizing issues on which he disagreed with Bush. For example, McCain was outspoken against the treatment of the detainees in Guantanamo Bay. He also did not agree with Bush on global warming, stem cell research, or campaign finance reform, and he voted against Bush’s same-sex marriage amendment. McCain initially voted against tax cuts proposed in 2001 and 2003, but he eventually agreed to support them. As congressional expert Jack Pitney from Claremont McKenna College has acknowledged: “If he had remained a strong critic of tax cuts, it's quite possible he wouldn't have won the Republican nomination in the first place . . . There are a lot of economic conservatives who regard his earlier position as a deal breaker” (Welna, 2008). 

McCain also learned a lesson from alienating the Christian Right during the 2000 primaries. His negative statements about certain religious leaders on both the far left and the far right of the political spectrum has yet to be forgotten. Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell were not satisfied with McCain’s moderate views back then, and the candidate’s approach to religion did not change significantly before the 2008 primary. Raised as an Episcopalian, McCain started attending services in a Baptist church in his home state of Arizona. During the 2008 Republican primaries campaign, McCain did not seem to speak much about religion. He mentioned that God helped him through the trials of his imprisonment in Hanoi, but he did not want to refer to himself as a born-again Christian (Feldmann, 2007). While McCain made an effort to reconcile with Jerry Falwell and thereby showed an interest in obtaining the support of the Christian Right, he made no effort to apologize to Pat Robertson. Instead Robertson, who had first managed to establish evangelical voters as a significant voting segment in the 1988 Primaries when he ran as a Republican presidential nominee, endorsed Rudy Giuliani.

Nonetheless, McCain did receive other elite endorsements from religious leaders. Former Senator Sam Brownback from Kansas, a significant Christian conservative in the U.S. Senate and a former contender in the 2008 campaign, gave his endorsement to McCain. Senator Brownback’s endorsement was not surprising since the two senators were good friends; nevertheless because the race was so close, any support from the Christian Right was important. Brownback provided the
following explanation for his support of McCain: “Here is a pro-life leader who will appoint strict-constructionist judges so that I believe we can end this night of wrong and have Roe v. Wade overturned” (Steinhauser, 2007; Bailey, 2007).

Another endorsement came from Charlie Crist, the Republican governor of Florida, who had worked with McCain on previous occasions and was popular in the Republican Party. And, just a month before the primaries in Texas, McCain was endorsed by former President George H.W. Bush. While Bush was not revered by social conservatives, he remained a respected statesman among other segments of the Republican Party following his time in the White House. February also brought an endorsement from Mitt Romney not long after his withdrawal from the primary campaign, and gave McCain hope that Romney’s own supporters would follow suit and vote for McCain (Carney, 2008; CNN.com, 2008a; Cox, 2008b).

4.2.10 Maverick?
Having contemplated McCain’s stance on various political and social issues, it seems clear that the perception of McCain as an independent thinker and a maverick during the 2008 primaries was mistaken. On many issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, McCain fell in line with the conservative members of his party. By refusing to vote for Bush’s constitutional amendment prohibiting same-sex marriage, which would prohibit any state from legitimizing a union between a homosexual couple, McCain diverged slightly from conservatives, and acted according to his own conscience. This affirms the image of him as an independent politician. He is also not afraid of bipartisanship, if it can help him achieve his goals.

4.3 Employing McCain’s strategy
When McCain initiated his campaign for the 2008 Republican nomination, he had gained significant experience from the 2000 primaries. He had become aware of the substantial conservative forces that had emerged at that time. This meant that he had to change direction on some issues in his campaign platform such as tax cuts, while accentuating other issues like national security. The policy platform, McCain had initiated before entering the invisible primary, could prove a significant resource in his campaign.
4.3.1 Altering tax cuts position

Within the Republican Party, there are several groups that are vitally important if a candidate wants to win the presidential nomination. In 2008, economic conservatives had grown in importance because of the state of the United States economy. Since the 2000 primaries, McCain had distanced himself from George W. Bush, who wanted to cut taxes early in the century. John McCain disagreed with this position, and voted against the Economic Growth and Tax Reconciliation Act in May of 2001. He also voted against the Jobs and Economic Bill in May 2003 (votesmart.org, 2008e). The two bills implemented a cut in income tax in order to increase consumer spending and thereby stimulate the economy (votesmart.org, 2003b; votesmart.org, 2001b). McCain’s objection to the tax cuts in 2003 centered on his fear of the cost of the Iraq war, and the added expense of rebuilding that nation. He was also concerned about the high budget deficit the United States had at that time (votesmart.org, 2003a).

In the primaries it is essential to have support on certain issues before campaigning for the Republican nomination. Since 1995 the organizations featured on the Project Smart Vote website seem to agree with McCain’s overall voting record. The website shows approval ratings of McCain’s voting record on economic issues from eight different organizations that support lower taxes. From 1995 until 2008 McCain has voted in line with these organizations between 48 percent and 100 percent of the time. For example, McCain voted in line with Americans for Tax Reform (ATR) 86 percent of the time from 1995-1996 to 100 percent of the time in 2007-2008.

Early in this century, McCain’s voting record was not so in-line with these organizations. For instance, in 2001 McCain voted between 50 percent and 67 percent in the interests of these organization’s (though Concord Coalition agreed with him 97 percent of the time in 2001-2002) (votesmart.org, 2008a). However, as is shown by his voting record between 2001 and 2003, McCain’s opinion on tax reduction has changed. He would like to greatly decrease taxes on income less than $150,000 and slightly decrease corporate and gasoline taxes. According to Project Smart Vote and The Economist he does not oppose extending Bush’s tax cuts when they are due to expire (Smartvote.org, 2008f; Economist.com, 2008e). This change of position followed McCain’s defeat

---

15 Some of the organizations do rate according to a specific rating system.
16 ATR is a nonprofit organization that supports the idea of laissez faire, or a hands off relationship between government and business that includes little or no taxation.
in the 2000 primaries, and was likely designed to gain support from a broader base of economic conservatives in the 2008 primaries, particularly as the economic forecast darkened.

4.3.2 Maintaining national security
McCain’s biggest asset is arguably his honorable military background, which really began to help his campaign in the fall of 2007. McCain supported both the war against terrorism in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq from the beginning. However, the Iraq War was not popular in the United States in 2006 and 2007. In October 2006, 38 percent of the American people supported the war; by June 2007, that number decreased to 30 percent (Pollingreport.com, 2008a). McCain’s popularity also decreased from March 2007, at which time 22 percent of the Republicans supported him while 35 percent preferred Rudy Giuliani, to the beginning of September 2007, when 24 percent supported Giuliani, 19 percent preferred Fred Thompson and only 15 percent would vote for John McCain (Pollingreport.com, 2008c).

By August 2007, it was believed that Senator McCain’s campaign was over. Former mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani was leading the Republican race for the nomination and Fred Thompson, who entered the race in the summer of 2007, gathered substantial support that did not help McCain (Economist.com, 2007g). As early as March 2007, it was believed that McCain could not survive the campaign longer than the early primaries. There were three reasons cited for this outlook: his Republican opponents in the race; the beginning of the Democratic race; and the Iraq War. In light of the decreasing public support for the Iraq War, McCain’s position on the War was particularly damaging. McCain did not believe that the Bush Administration made enough of an effort in the Iraq War, and he actually called for a troop surge in Iraq at a time when it was incredibly unpopular to do so. When Bush ultimately decided to send more American troops to Iraq, McCain was compelled to support the decision. Bush’s adoption of McCain’s approach actually destroyed some of the distance McCain tried to create between his own policies and those of the incumbent president (Baker, 2007).
4.3.3. Developing campaign strategy

John McCain went from running a campaign with great prospect to a near stand still in the first six months of the invisible primary. It seemed the American people had adjusted to the fact that the Maverick from the 2000 primaries was back, but he was not the only prospect as the Republican nominee, In April 2007 McCain only managed to raise $12.5 million compared to Mitt Romney, who raised $21 million and Rudy Giuliani with his $15 million in fundraising. One poll from Bloomberg/Los Angeles Times survey from April showed the support for McCain had diminished into 12 percent behind Giuliani with 29 percent and Fred Thompson with 15 percent (Walsh, 2007). Gallup polls showed a slightly smaller decrease in poll numbers from January till April, where he went from 27 percent in the middle of January to only 18 percent at the beginning of April to only 16 percentage points at the beginning of July (Saad, 2007c). McCain’s policies did not seem to please the voters, and since 2000, the senator had aged significantly. If he was elected president in 2008, he would be 72 years old by the time of the inauguration. But McCain did not give up, though his poll ratings did not look good. But he didn’t seem as a threat to his challenger, and he could emerge from under the radar.

**Figure 2: Republican Preference for 2008 GOP Presidential Nomination**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidates/date</th>
<th>Jan 12-14</th>
<th>Apr 2-5</th>
<th>Jul 6-8</th>
<th>Aug 13-16</th>
<th>Sep 14-16</th>
<th>Nov 14-16</th>
<th>Dec 14-16</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rudy Giuliani</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>42%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John McCain</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fred Thompson</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitt Romney</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mike Huckabee</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N/A: Not asked

Source: Saad, 2007c

McCain’s low poll ratings six months just before the 2008 primaries represented an obstacle few believed he could overcome. But McCain did not give up and little by little, his poll ratings started to improve. In August they reached a low of 11 percent, but a month later his poll ratings had increased by 7 percentage points to 18 percent. From then on his support decreased to 14 percentage points leveling him the other major candidates. Rudy Giuliani was still leading the race with a 13 point margin at the end of 2007 (IBID). However according to Gallup studies, a victory in primary
elections in early states like Iowa and New Hampshire has had a significant effect on national polls since the 1980 primaries\textsuperscript{17}. For example, during the 2000 primaries, George W. Bush was leading the race with 64 percent of Republicans supporting him just before the Iowa primaries. John McCain was far behind with only 15 percentage points. After McCain won in New Hampshire, he was supported by 33 percent of Americans, while Bush’s support had fallen to 56 percent (Jones, 2008).

A similar trend emerged in the 2008 primaries as well. Following the Iowa primaries, Giuliani, with 20 percentage points, was no longer leading the race. Huckabee’s surge began at this time as he led with 25 percent of Republicans supporting him, while McCain had 19 percentage points. These numbers would change even more after McCain won the New Hampshire primaries. Since November of 2007, McCain had focused much of his attention on New Hampshire, and the result was a significant increase in his poll ratings there. McCain managed to win the state, and following the primary, his New Hampshire poll rating according to Gallup.com had increased to 34 percent, ahead of Mitt Romney with 30 percent and Mike Huckabee with 13 percent (Carney, 2008a; Newport, 2008). This put him in the lead with a third of Republicans wanting to vote for him, thus creating a 14 point lead (Saad, 2008a).

4.4 Discussion

Like candidates in primaries since 1976, Senator McCain had several different resources available to him in his pursuit to win the Republican presidential nomination. For McCain, his first resource was his image as a war hero and a maverick that had developed during the 2000 primaries. However, this image was challenged in the 2008 race when McCain changed his mind and became a supporter of Bush’s tax cuts, and joined the Bush Administration in supporting the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Following the events of September 11, 2001, McCain joined in supporting his party in national security matters such as the controversial USA Patriot Act of 2001, which was overwhelmingly approved by 99 percent of the senate.

He also sought to alter his relationship with the Christian Right, which he alienated in the 2000 primaries in an attempt to distance himself from Bush. By 2006, McCain seemed to have changed his mind, and he reached out to the religious leaders he so harshly criticized in 2000, because he

\textsuperscript{17} Except from the 1988 primaries, where these polls were not conducted.
realized the significant power conservative Christians had over the Republican primaries. At the same time, John McCain’s stance on important social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage had not changed since the 2000 primaries. While he received some support from Christian conservatives as a result of his change in perspective, many members of that group continued to dislike McCain and his policies.

On the other hand, his image as a maverick was supported by his bipartisan collaboration with Democrats on immigration and campaign finance reforms, which demonstrated that he was not afraid of going outside his own party to find support for his positions. McCain also refused to be a team player if he opposed something, and he went against President Bush in several areas like Guantanamo, stem cell research, global warming and earmarks.

McCain’s efforts to distinguish himself from President Bush who was unpopular with many Americans also backfired when Bush adopted a suggestion McCain made about increasing the number of American troops involved in the Iraq War. While McCain called for a surge for years before it happened, he appeared to be following and agreeing with the president rather than taking an independent path. Overall, and though McCain seemed to enjoy and encourage the public perception of him as a maverick, his change of direction between 2000 and 2008 on several key issues demonstrates that he was more of a follower of Republican politics than a maverick. While his identity as a war hero was always a source of respect for McCain, it is not likely that the image he presented (however untrue) as an unpredictable independent earned him the nomination. However, it seems McCain made a wise choice in changing his politics in an effort to mobilize some of the substantial resources available from conservative Christian Republicans.

In addition to a candidates image, previous Republican primaries since 1976 demonstrate other resources that have played a part when candidates have been nominated. Campaign finance is always important, as shown by George W. Bush who managed to raise more than 100 million dollars in the 2000 primaries. But in order to raise significant money for a campaign, a candidate must be one of the frontrunners, which draws attention and contributions. Though McCain’s campaign was out of money in the summer of 2007, he ultimately managed to accumulate the most financial resources in the 2008 primaries, because his contributions increased in relation to his
positive poll ratings. However, the increase in funds was the effect, not the cause, of McCain’s success. That is, his contributions improved because his polls improved.

Talented strategists and advisors are another resource upon which Republican candidates for the presidential nomination have always relied. In the 2008 primaries, John McCain, not eager to repeat his loss in 2000, gathered a very strong team of advisors to guide him in the electoral process. By the time McCain announced his candidacy for the 2008 Republican nomination, he was already one of the frontrunners, but Giuliani was the leading candidate according to poll ratings. In fact, McCain’s campaign did worse before it did better, and, by the summer of 2007 he had been written off by most of the media. It seems unlikely that his success in procuring the nomination was due to the same strategists who had failed to guide his campaign in its early days.

Endorsements by other politicians have also been assets to the winners of Republican nominations. However, McCain did not receive many prominent endorsements during the 2008 primary campaign. McCain’s apology to Jerry Falwell, and the endorsement of Christian Senator Brownback, were important to some extent, but did not make the majority of evangelical Christians vote for McCain. Those voters seemed to be more interested in another candidate, who appealed to them because of his history as a Baptist preacher. As several important candidates began to withdraw from the 2008 primaries race, McCain managed to obtain more endorsements, including one from former President George H.W. Bush and another from former challenger Mitt Romney. While these endorsements did not likely harm McCain’s campaign, however, they were simply too few, and too late to have caused his victory.

Primary candidates also rely on campaign strategy as a resource toward success. McCain’s opposition to Bush’s tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 displeased the economic conservatives of the Republican Party. In the invisible primary that preceded the official campaign, McCain changed this position and adjusted his strategy to gain the support of powerful groups in the Republican Party. According to Congressional Expert Jack Pitney, John McCain would not have won the nomination if he had kept his opposition to Bush’s tax cuts. Yet, this alone could not have accounted for his victory. According to a survey conducted by Pew Research center, 43 percent of Republicans believe that social issues are very important, and influence their votes. Therefore, McCain’s position on taxes may have helped his campaign, but could not be credited for his victory.
What is clear is that McCain’s poll ratings went from 27 percent to 11 percent in seven months, and his campaign could not seem to strategize a way to improve his ratings. Suddenly, in November before the 2008 primaries, his popularity increased in New Hampshire, and McCain threw many resources into continuing the improvement, because a victory in New Hampshire would increase his support nationally. While McCain surely had mobilized a great deal of resources for his campaign, it is also clear that those resources did not help him hold the lead in the early part of the campaign.

Furthermore, McCain did not significantly change his platform from the start of the campaign to its conclusion. This leads to the conclusion that other factors -- factors outside McCain’s individual control -- must have changed during the course of his campaign and impacted his ultimate victory. Those external factors will be explored in the next chapter.

**Chapter 5: Influence of external structures**

The theory of political opportunity structure mainly concern the structure of society, social movements and interest groups within these movements operate within. It aims to identify the outside influences and obstacles to social movements and how they effect the operations of the movements. The theory can also be applied to the study of external factors that influence the outcome of primaries and elections. This chapter will apply the theory of political opportunity structure in order to explore the external structures that influenced John McCain’s nomination, and further more examine how extensive this influence was by applying the theory to empirical data from a range of different news sources.

**5.1 McCain’s challengers**

One of the deciding factors in McCain’s victory in the 2008 primaries was his competition. For most of 2007 it seemed to be an open race with four frontrunners, who could threaten Senator McCain’s nomination, which has not occurred before in the Republican primaries.\(^{18}\) McCain was joined in the race for the primaries by Rudy Giuliani, Fred Thompson, Mitt Romney and eventually Mike Huckabee. What made them frontrunners in the race for the 2008 Republican nomination and how did they threaten McCain’s campaign?

\(^{18}\) Since 1976
5.1.1 The initial frontrunner

Following the 2004 presidential elections, Giuliani was expected to become a candidate in the primaries four years later, from the beginning of the invisible primary, Rudy Giuliani was considered as the most likely candidate to win the Republican nomination. When he entered the race in February 2007, he was well renowned as a man with strong leadership skills, which had become obvious in his efforts to help New York City in the wake of September 11, 2001, and this helped him to the top of the field (Panagopoulos, 2008; CNN.com, 2006).

The Iraq war’s impact on the United States increased during 2007, and the Republican voters searched for a leader to find a solution to the military situation. McCain was not the only candidate to emphasize national security. This was also one of Rudy Giuliani’s strongpoints and he basically ran his campaign on the leadership skills he had shown, when he was able to handle a major city in a time of crisis. Giuliani went to World Trade Center moments after the terrorist attack had happened and helped gather rescue workers, and his actions that day became an inspiration to a nation in shock. The former mayor was able to gain a lot of ground on his opponents because he presented himself as the leader, who could help America win the war in Iraq. The fact that he was tough on crime and that his national security policies were popular became evident in his polls early in the invisible primary. A young pro-life student, who met Giuliani in New Hampshire, did not approve of his abortion policies and multiple marriages but noted “that's outweighed by his leadership. And we need a strong leader right now” (Economist.com, 2007b). September 11, 2001 was not the only reason why Giuliani became so prominent on the American political scene, and the reason why he was the leading candidate for most of the race. His personality played a significant part in his popularity. When the former mayor entered a room he was not easily ignored because he would shake a lot of hands and pad backs of people present. However, leniency was not one of his personality traits. His hard-line politics at the time he was mayor of New York and some of his past statements suggest a somewhat black and white view of the world. He had once reprimanded a mother of a child that had been killed by the police: “Maybe you should ask yourself some questions about the way he was brought up and the things that happened to him” (Economist.com, 2007b; Edsall 2007:148).
According to Thomas B. Edsall, there are indications of a move to the left within the Republican Party in the recent past. Edsall argues that Giuliani’s popularity in the race for the Republican nomination could be a sign of a change in the previous conservative principles of the GOP toward the middle. Social issues seemed to be pushed in the background and war and terrorism had moved to the top of the list (Edsall 2007:144). This argument was a considerable part of Giuliani’s campaign strategy according to Senior Advisor Anthony Carbonetti: “It’s a different world… There is a lot more to think about today than there was before Sept. 11” (Nagourney, 2007). Polls also indicated this was true. Pew Research Center found that the importance of social issues declined significantly from 2004 to 2007. The decrease in importance of for instance abortion is eight percentage points from 47 percent to 39 percent, while the economy and the Iraq war were still at the top of the list. In previous elections especially in the last decade, abortion and gay marriage have played an important part in Republican primaries, but their importance decreased by ten and twelve percent respectively in the three years prior to 2007 (IBID; PEW Research Center, 2007c).

**Figure 3: Voter Concerns in the 2008 Primaries**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very important to your vote</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health care</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>+2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jobs</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Security</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>+3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Energy</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>+11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxes</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget deficit</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>+4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moral values</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>+5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigration</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abortion</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stem cell research</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gay marriage</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>-10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on registered voters.

Source: PEW Research Center, 2007c.
Funding is very important to master in winning the Republican primaries, and at the beginning Giuliani was the best at raising funds. In 1999 Giuliani ran for the New York Senate seat against Hillary Clinton from the Democratic Party. By January he had raised a substantial amount of money for his campaign that surpassed even Clinton’s fundraising abilities at that time (Tapper, 2000). If he could manage to do the same in his campaign to become the 2008 Republican Nominee, he could keep his lead in the race. However, when running against a millionaire there are limits to what can be achieved. In the first two quarters of 2007 Giuliani raised the most funds, that is, if Romney is left out of the equation because he chose to draw on his own private multimillion-dollar fortune (Economist.com, 2007d).

Figure 4: Second Quater Fundraising

![Money talks chart](source: IBID)

5.2.4 Frontrunner defeated
In every primary since 1976, the initial frontrunner has won the Republican primaries. The better part of 2007 was a good year for Rudy Giuliani’s campaign, and it seemed he would win the Republican nomination. Then what went wrong for Giuliani? One incident that might have had an effect on the former “heroic” mayor’s campaign was a story published by The Politico that
concerned how he “billed obscure city agencies for tens of thousands of dollars in security expenses amassed during the time when he was beginning an extramarital relationship with future wife Judith Nathan in the Hamptons, according to previously undisclosed government records” (York, 2008). The implication was presented that Giuliani had made an attempt to cover up an affair by moving money around. The incident was not handled very well by Giuliani’s advisors and the initial move was to ignore it. Later he denied the whole thing without an attempt to explain it. In the end the story turned out to be only partly true, but the damage had already been done (IBID).

Another incident that might have affected his lower poll ratings in 2007 could be the indictment of Bernard Kerik on December 10 2007 “on conspiracy to commit wire and mail fraud, and substantive counts of wire and mail fraud, under a statute often used in corruption cases, according to people briefed on the vote. The panel also voted to charge him with lying on a mortgage application and his homeland security application and with several counts of tax fraud” (Cooper & Rashbaum, 2007). Kerik was a CEO of an affiliate of Giuliani Partners LLC and at that time, Giuliani’s choice as head of the Federal Department of Homeland Security. He was a long time friend of Giuliani’s and he had stood by his former driver and former business partner though a scandal that happened in 2004. This time however, he could not help him and the this might be part of the reason that during the next couple of weeks Giuliani’s poll numbers started to fall in Iowa, New Hampshire and Michigan and the future of his campaign did not look good (IBID; York, 2008).

As McCain’s greatest challenger in the race, Giuliani was losing momentum by the time of the early primaries. The major support Giuliani enjoyed in the invisible primary and through most of his campaign did not last. One reason could be that while national security issues seemed more important to Republican voters than social issues, the latter still had some importance. Less than 50 percent of Republicans voters were aware of Giuliani’s stance on abortion. The former mayor had previously been liberal on issues such as abortion, gay-rights and gun control, and traditionally most of the social issue voters are conservative Protestants and Catholics (Santora & Sussman, 2007; Edsall 2007:143 Pew Research Center, 2007f). In September and October 2007, Pew Research Center conducted a poll among White Evangelical, Mainline Protestants, and White Catholics regarding who would be their choice of candidate of the Republican Party. The poll showed that a total of 32 percent would choose Rudy Giuliani as their candidate. Giuliani was
leading by a 13 point margin to Fred Thompson (PEW Research Center, 2007f). Through most of 2007, most of the focus had been on national security and other issues seemed less important. However, as the campaign went into the final stages, so did the information about the frontrunners available to voters. The social conservatives may have influenced the Republican primaries more than expected by Giuliani’s advisors.

Figure 5: Preference for Republican Nomination Among Key Religious Constituencies

| Preferences for the Republican Nomination Among Key Religious Constituencies |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Republican Candidates...    | White Evangelical Protestants | White Mainline Protestants | White Catholics |
| Rudy Giuliani               | 32%              | 23%             | 36%             | 35%             |
| Fred Thompson               | 19               | 24              | 21              | 17              |
| John McCain                 | 17               | 19              | 15              | 17              |
| Mitt Romney                 | 10               | 9               | 8               | 7               |
| Tom Tancredi                 | 1                | 1               | 1               | 1               |
| Mike Huckabee               | 7                | 10              | 6               | 6               |
| Ron Paul                    | 2                | 2               | 2               | 3               |
| Other                       | 1                | 1               | 1               | 1               |
| None of them                | 3                | 3               | 5               | 2               |
| No opinion                  | 8                | 8               | 6               | 6               |
| **Sample size**             | **100**          | **100**         | **100**         | **100**         |

Source: IBID

Giuliani was not the first choice of social issue voters but made attempts to obtain this voter segment. In October 2007 at the Family Research Council’s Values Voter Summit, Giuliani tried to win support of the some of the core voters of the Republican base; the social conservatives. Giuliani had to play his cards right if he wished to convince them that he was the best candidate. Since the former mayor is liberal on most social issues, he was forced to emphasize the importance of his national security policies. In his speech, he managed to communicate a common goal on the abortion issue by noting: “… you and I believe all Americans share the same goal. A country without abortions” (Balz, 2007). The straw poll that consisted of 2000 conference participants and almost 4000 online voters voted Huckabee as the winner, Romney came in second place while
Giuliani became number seven behind Fred Thompson but ahead of John McCain (IBID). The reason why there was a lack of support for Rudy Giuliani could be a change in attitudes toward what is important to the voters. Suddenly, social issues became more important to more than forty percent of Republicans. More than 70 percent considered social issues to be very or somewhat important. It could therefore be argued that national security and terrorism had become less significant to Republican voters (PEW Research Center, 2007c).

In every presidential election since 1972, the winner of the Catholic voter segment was the same as the candidate that received the national popular vote. Close to 25 percent of the votes cast in the presidential elections have been Catholic and in Ohio, which is one of the swing-states\(^{19}\), the segment is even larger. This could indicate that the favorite candidate of the Catholic voters has a fairly good chance to become the next president of the United States. In the fall of 2007, the Catholic voter segment was the biggest religious group to support Giuliani. He was a frontrunner among White Catholics with 39 percentage points and was supported by 36 percent of white mainline protestant, while he was even with Fred Thompson among white evangelicals with 23 and 24 percent respectively (Pew Research Center, 2007f). Although Giuliani enjoyed the support of the Catholics for most of 2007, he could not overcome his personal life and his views on abortion and gay rights. In a column by Bishop Thomas J. Tobin of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Providence, he responded to an invitation by Giuliani to a local event to raise money for his campaign by writing: “Rudy's public proclamations on abortion are pathetic and confusing. [His] preposterous position is compounded by the fact that he professes to be a Catholic. As Catholics, we are called, indeed required, to be pro-life, to cherish and protect human life as a precious gift of God from the moment of conception until the time of natural death. As a leader, as a public official, Rudy Giuliani has a special obligation in that regard” (Schaller, 2007). This statement is likely to have had a negative impact on Giuliani’s campaign.

In November of 2007, Byron York of the *National Review*\(^{20}\) asked Giuliani about his campaign strategy for the next couple of weeks. Giuliani replied:” Our theory was to get the big states organized, try to beat everybody else to getting the big states organized, so you have them as a fallback, and then take your resources and start to expend them in the states that come up first. And

\(^{19}\) A state where no party has an extensive majority  
\(^{20}\) A biweekly conservative magazine with a circulation of 155,000.
now we’re going to do that” (York, 2008). However, something went wrong around the turn of the year. Giuliani seemed to change strategies when he saw he did not do well in the polls of the early states in the primaries. He then began to focus less on some of the early states and a little more on others, until he began to focus solely on Florida. This was one of the most important reasons why Giuliani did not become the 2008 Republican Presidential Candidate. His status as the hero of September 11 could not secure him enough votes, and he seemed to have no other political message apart from national security. His personal stands on social issues and his past did nothing to help him. Giuliani finished fourth after McCain and Huckabee (York, 2008; Economist.com, 2008a).

5.2.3 Two social conservatives

In the 2008 Republican primaries, McCain had other challengers to the nomination. Two of the other candidates and frontrunners were fighting for the same votes, and they became rivals for the same social conservatives in the race; Former Governor of Massachusetts Mitt Romney and Former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee.

A good image was important to be successful in the Republican primaries, and Mitt Romney was no exception. Former Governor Mitt Romney was a very accomplished businessman with a successfully founded venture-capital company named Bain Capital behind him, and this image was an important part of his campaign. He graduated from Harvard with a joint degree in economics and law, which made him seem capable in economic issues (Cohn, 2007:129-130). His rival, former Governor of Arkansas Mike Huckabee began to emerge by the end of 2007 as a valid Christian alternative to the other frontrunners. When Huckabee entered into the campaign on January 29, 2007, his name was not recognizable or familiar to most Americans, and he had been unable to raise substantial funds for his campaign. On the other hand Huckabee had advantages that would become some of his biggest assets. He was a Southern Baptist pastor and a gifted performer. In addition to his religious status and his public speaking abilities, he concentrated on social conservative issues and his past would most likely hold the least scandals compared to the other front-runners (The Economist, 2008; Barnett, 2007). Romney was a frontrunner from the beginning of 2007 with eight percent of support and this number would remain fairly constant. Mike Huckabee on the other hand was not a frontrunner until an unexpected development from August and onwards. Prior to August 2007, the Baptist preacher did not have more than a few percentage points. However following August, the support for Mike Huckabee increased substantially and peaked at the beginning of 2008
where he actually surpassed all the other candidates (The Economist, 2008). In the Iowa Republican straw poll from May in 2007, Romney was supported by 31.5 percent and received the most votes in this state. From the beginning of his campaign, Romney spent a substantial amount of money in Iowa and this seemed to benefit him, something that the other frontrunners had chosen not to do. (Cohn, 2007:129-130; Preston, 2007).

**Figure 6: Republican can Presidential Nominees’ Average Poll Ratings**

![Graph showing poll ratings](image)

Source: The Economist, 2008

In the 2000 primaries, Bush won the Republican nomination with the help of the Christian Right. McCain had made efforts to gain the same support in the 2008 primaries, but he was not the only one. Mike Huckabee had an important advantage in his position as a Baptist preacher, which allowed him to gain significant support from born-again Christians and Evangelicals, a voter segment which had proved to be extremely important in the 2000 Republican primaries. According to Pew Research Center, a majority of 56 percent of Evangelicals believed social issues were important in the 2008 primaries, while 43 percent of all Anglo Protestants agreed. Being raised in a working-class family also helped Huckabee appear as a normal down-to-earth American who could relate to blue-collar workers (Pew Research Center, 2007a).

---

21 In an attempt to get an overview of the development in poll ratings for the leading candidates, The Economist compiled the graph indicated above by using statistical data gathered by RealClearPolitics from major American media and opinion-research institutes.

22 The survey was conducted on August 1-18 in 2007.
Mitt Romney enjoyed the attention of another group of social conservatives. He performs very well on television, as he is very eloquent, which was very appealing to well educated Republicans (PEW Research Center, 2007a; The Economist, 2008). One of the strongest assets Mitt Romney possessed was his own extensive fortune. In October 2007 the former senator had managed to raise significantly more funds than his opponents specifically 44 million dollars total. This amount was 10 million dollars more than Rudy Giuliani had been able to raise at this time, and the other opponents had raised even less than this. One of the reasons for Romney’s ability to raise these kinds of funds was basically a result of his own financial contributions to his campaign (Scherer, 2007b).

5.2.4 Romney and Huckabee’s failure

For most of 2007 the Republican race had five frontrunners, and they all seemed to have a fair chance of winning the nomination at different times. However, not all the candidates had the best premises for prevailing in this race. The two former governors each had their own obstacles to overcome. Mitt Romney announced his candidacy on January 3, 2007, but just a month into the campaign the former governor was already experiencing problems with his image. In 1994 Romney ran for senator in his state against Democrat Ted Kennedy. Although personally against the right for legal abortion and legal right for homosexuals in domestic partnerships, he chose to support the issues. Later, he also decided to support stem-cell research. However in early 2004 after the state court decision to legalize same-sex marriage, Romney changed his mind to be against it. That same year, he decided to become pro-life after a meeting with Harvard stem-cell scientists (Cohn, 2007:129-130; Preston, 2007).

Economic conservatives that were not very keen on John McCain’s economic policies in his 2008 campaign for the primaries looked for another choice better suited for their wishes. Mike Huckabee did not seem like a valid alternative. According to The CATO Institute23, Huckabee was not a good choice because even though he had made 94 tax cuts during his time as governor of Arkansas, he had increased the state taxes by more than a thousand percent. His tax cuts had only decreased the Arkansas revenue with $15,000 but he had increased taxes by over $500 million (Tanner, 2007). On the other hand, Mitt Romney seemed more capable in economic matters. As an accomplished entrepreneur in business, Romney had a great deal of knowledge in macroeconomics. However, the

23 CATO Institute is a libertarian think tank in Washington D.C..
CATO Institute did not seem pleased with him as well. Romney had signed a healthcare plan for the state of Massachusetts and he planned to help the auto industry with $20 million in a bailout plan. In addition, the governor had increased corporate taxes in his home state even though he planned tax cuts if he was elected to the presidential office. These issues indicated that he would be inclined to support a big government along the lines of George W. Bush’s administration, which was not popular in 2007 (Tanner 2008a; Tanner, 2008b).

In the 2000 primaries, George W. Bush won with help of the Christian Right voters, and eight years later, McCain attempted to gain their support. However, Mike Huckabee became the favorite candidate of Evangelicals, but still he lost the nomination. Although, he was very congenial and regarded as a workingman, he seemed to alienate the majority of non-Evangelicals in the 2008 primaries campaign. The Baptist preacher had throughout his political career been a hard-line conservative and he did not compromise his religious views. His opposition to abortion and gay-marriage and his interest in creationism was not surprising. Nevertheless, the degree of his religious conviction could prove difficult for the majority of Americans to accept (Scherer, 2007a). Huckabee had not been familiar to most Americans when he entered the race. And as much as his performance abilities and his religious status as a Baptist preacher had helped him to the top of the polls, his support was mainly drawn from born-again Christians and Evangelicals. He managed to win the first primary in Iowa, where 60 percent of the voters were Evangelical. Huckabee won 47 percent of this voter segment but only managed to win 14 percent of the non-Evangelical votes. Huckabee’s victory in Iowa greatly reduced Mitt Romney’s chances (Lowry, 2008).

Mitt Romney had similar problematic issues that concerned religion in the 2008 primaries. The fact that he was a Mormon was not initially a problem at the beginning of the invisible primary, nonetheless there were speculations whether his religious beliefs would become a problem for the Republican voter segment. According to a study conducted by Pew Research Center in the fall of 2007, 53 percent of Americans regarded Mormons favorable. This indicated that a majority would not have had a problem with Mitt Romney’s religious beliefs. Nonetheless, Romney was recommended to make a speech concerning his religion in the same way John F. Kennedy did about Catholicism in 1960. In December 2007, Romney spoke about his religious view in Texas, where he

---

24 It is a religion where it is believed that life on earth, the earth and the universe were created by a supernatural being.
attempted to point out the religious views he shared with other Christian groups. The reaction to the speech was in general positive, but it could not be compared to the Kennedy speech according to Mark Davis, a Newsweek journalist and radio show host at ABC Radio Network. Kennedy’s Catholicism was a problem because of his Irish background in that Irish and other minorities were at that time still considered immigrants. Romney’s religion was simply a strange religion to some people. The background for the two speeches was distinctly very different from each other and could not be compared (National Review Online, 2007; Davis, 2007). Despite Mitt Romney’s attempt to appeal to the Christian Right and especially the Evangelical voter segment, the speech did not help him in the end. He withdrew from the race two days after Super Tuesday, where he only managed win to a few states. His social conservative rival Mike Huckabee became their first choice of candidate, and Romney had to face the fact that in the end his religion and his economic policies did affect the opinion of the majority of the Republicans (Bevan, 2008; Economist.com, 2008b).

Table 7: Views of Mormons

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Views of Mormons</th>
<th>Fav</th>
<th>Unfav</th>
<th>No opinion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Among...</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>20=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College grad</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>17=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HS or less</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>24=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>19=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White evangelical</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White mainline</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Protestant</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>30=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White non-Hispanic</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20=100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unaffiliated</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>18=100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Pew Research Center, 2007a

Mike Huckabee surpassed McCain and the other candidates in December just before the early primaries of 2008. Following the Iowa primaries, Huckabee was ready to take on McCain, who then
won New Hampshire and was rewarded in national ratings for this. Huckabee was not able to follow through and win an adequate number of delegates to secure the Republican nomination. On Super Tuesday he only won five of the Southern states and two more on February 9, 2008. The Baptist preacher could not draw much support from other voter segments than Evangelicals and born-again Christians and he withdraw from the race until March 4 2008 as the second to last serious challenger (CNN.com, 2008f; Economist.com, 2008a).

5.2.5 An alleged genuine conservative

The last serious challenger to John McCain for the Republican nomination was Former Senator of Tennessee Fred Thompson. He became involved in national politics in 1973 when he served as an assistant U. S. attorney on the Minority Council, which was assigned to the Watergate case during the Nixon administration. He then went on to become an actor, and performed in a number of popular movies such as The Hunt for Red October and Die Hard II. Nonetheless, Thompson sought back to the Republican Party and was elected Senator of Tennessee in 1994 where he remained until 2002 (fred08.com, 2007). Most of the candidates had entered the race during the winter of 2006 and 2007, but Fred Thompson announced his official campaign much later in September of 2007. This created speculations whether he had enough time to gather sufficient support for his campaign. One of the speculators was Bill Schneider who was a senior political analyst on CNN suggested in July 2007 that if the former senator chose to make a late entry into the race, it might pose a problem for him. According to Schneider, Thompson’s fame would make him more recognizable than most of the other candidates, since his past contained a relatively extensive career in movies as well as in the once popular TV show Law and Order (Haynes, 2007; Schneider, 2007). Speculations did not seem to affect Thompson initially. He believed himself to be the representative of genuine conservative values compared to the other frontrunners and was compared to former President Ronald Reagan, an indication of respect by conservative Republicans. At the beginning of his official campaign, Thompson chose to devote some time in Iowa, due to its significance as a key state caucus in the presidential primaries. He made it clear that he acknowledged the state of Iowa as an important part of his campaign. The reasoning behind this move was because the citizens of Iowa are very proud of their importance as an early primary state and it turned out to be a good start to his campaign (Spruiell, 2007).
5.2.6 First to withdraw

The announcement of another prominent candidate in the race for the 2008 primaries posed another obstacle for McCain. However, Thompson soon faced difficulties. The mainstream media did not have a good image of him in the invisible campaign. Before he initiated his official campaign, he had made indications that he would join the other Republican contenders at some point through smaller television networks such as the Fox News Channel. In addition and perhaps in connection to this, his fundraising skill was lacking and there were some complications with his staff such as disagreements as how to run his campaign. Despite these problems, the former senator managed to alter this situation, and became one of the top contenders in the Republican primaries within three weeks of his first official appearance (IBID; Hayes, 2007).

The Fred Thompson campaign was considerably distinct in comparison with the other frontrunners’. There seemed to be a lack of public appearances and far less interview in contrast to his closest contenders. It was difficult for him to make an impression, good or bad, on audiences, though there were moments where managed to surprise everyone. An example of this occurrence took place in December 2007, where he appeared at the Des Moines Register Republican Debates in Iowa. At one point an editor of Des Moines Register Carolyn Washburn posed a question on global climate change and requested a “show of hands” from the candidates if they believed that it was a result of human activity. Thompson refused to comply with this request and asked for a chance to answer the question. When he was denied his request, he did not wish to indicate an answer with his hand. The incident was regarded by the audience as a positive reaction that he stood his ground and showed some character (York, 2007).

By the end of January, Fred Thompson accepted his defeat. Following his third place in South Carolina, he was the first frontrunner to withdraw from the race. Thompson’s campaign strategy did not succeed. His late entry did not have the impact he had hoped for, because he did not manage to meet the expectations that were developed during the invisible primary in the summer of 2007. He relied on his reputation as a reliable conservative candidate with strong roots in the South, but that was not enough in the 2008 primary. Thompson did not win a single state or even one unpledged delegate. His best result was in Wyoming where he came in second, but Mitt Romney won the two delegates of this state (CNN.com, 2008c).
5.3 Impact of the surge

In the spring of 2007, Senator John McCain’s campaign did not seem to go as well as planned. His poll ratings were decreasing as the months passed and he seemed to do nothing right. His support went from 28 percent in December 2006 to a mere 16 percent in April 2007 (Newport, 2007). One of his key issues was national security and he had been a strong supporter of the Iraq War from the beginning. His call for a surge in the country throughout the entire conflict was basically ignored by then President George W. Bush (Curl, 2008). Since 2003 when the United States first attacked Iraq in an effort to find Saddam Hussein, support for the war in Iraq continuously declined from 93 percent. It reached an all-time low from 53 percent in June 2006 to only 30 percent of Americans, who believed the war was going well in February 2007 (PEW Research Center, 2007D). McCain did not give up and urged the president to send 20,000 extra soldiers to Iraq in order to get some control of the situation in Baghdad.

In July 2007, President Bush finally sent a surge into Iraq and this seemed to make the situation better. The public became aware of this fact a couple of months later. According to a Gallup poll only 22 percent of Americans believed the situation was improved by the surge in July 2007, but this number increased to 40 percentage points in December that same year (Curl, 2008; Saad, 2007b). The success of the surge in Iraq and McCain’s call for it before the event happened would eventually serve in his favor. The fact that he was steadfast on the issue when his colleges from the Democratic Party as well as many of his fellow Republican senators did not support the idea, was a credit to McCain’s image as an independent and a maverick. The proposed surge made the senator seem like an intelligent military leader, who knew how to proceed in Iraq: His favorable ratings rose significantly from 11 percent in August to 18 percent of support in a month later. This picture slightly changed by the end of the year because of Huckabee’s surge to the top and McCain ended up around 16 percent along with the three other candidates (The Economist, 2008; Newport & Carroll, 2007). At the same time, the Iraq War was still the top issue in the primaries with 29 percent compared to illegal immigration and homeland security that were only prioritized by 17 percent of Americans (Carroll, 2007).
Figure 8: Impact of U.S. Troop Surge in Iraq on Situation in Iraq

Impact of U.S. Troop Surge in Iraq on Situation in Iraq

Source: Saad, 2007b

5.4 Bush’s unpopularity

Since the 2000 primaries, John McCain had challenged President Bush on different issues and continued to do so in his campaign for the 2008 primaries. The reason can be found in Bush’s approval ratings. During the course of his presidency, George W. Bush went from being viewed as favorable by half the American population to having 79 percent of the American people supporting him following the terror attack on the World Trade Center in New York City and on the Pentagon outside Washington on September 11 in 2001.

The same increase in popularity happened when the United States went to war in Iraq. Just before the war in January 2003, 56 percent of Americans had a positive view of President Bush. However, just two months after the war was initiated in March the same year 80 percent rated him positive or somewhat positive in spite of the great opposition to the war in the American public. From then on his approval ratings steadily fell to 50 percent in November 2004 at the time of his reelection to 47 percent in July 2005. Then Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans creating massive damages and Bush’s approval ratings fell with six percentage points to 41 percent in just three months (PollingReport.com, 2010; PEW Research Center, 2008b). He was widely criticized by the public for the way he handled the disaster. It took him five days to arrive in the city, which was not viewed positively. At the midterm elections in November 2006, 38 percent of Americans had a very
positive or somewhat positive view of Bush according to Gallup. By the time the first primaries began in January 2008, this figure had fallen to a mere 32 percent (Economist.com, 2009; PollingReport.com, 2010).

When John McCain initiated his campaign for the 2008 presidential nomination, he did not have a positive relationship with the Christian Right. In the 2000 Republican primaries, George W. Bush had gained the majority of the Evangelical voter segment because McCain had done his part in alienating them. In both of the presidential elections in 2000 and 2004, George W. Bush received 71 percent and 78 percent of the Evangelical vote respectively. In those four years the number of Evangelicals voters in presidential elections increased with nearly 3.5 million (Economist.com, 2004c). These figures gave a good indication of the increasing strength of the Christian Right during President Bush’s first term. Americans also felt that the influence of religion on American life was increasing where 39 percent believed in an increase in religious influence in February 2001 to 48 percent in December 2004. Nonetheless in Bush’s second term as president this figure went down to 32 percent of Americans, who believed religion had an increasing influence on American in December of 2007 (Saad, 2008). However in the 2008 Republican primaries, the evangelical vote seemed to split between the remaining two candidates in New Hampshire and in several states during Super Tuesday (The Pew Forum, 2008). This did not help Mike Huckabee, who was the last candidate to draw from the race because he did not seem to attract a lot of votes from non-Evangelicals and other non-religious groups in the Republican Party. This shows that the Christian Right did not have the same momentum in the 2008 primaries as they had eight years ago, when they mostly supported George W. Bush.

5.5 Discussion
No campaign exists by itself, and the nomination of a candidate for the presidency is always influenced by external structures. McCain’s 2008 victory was no different. One of the key external structures that created McCain’s opportunity to win the nomination was the team of rivals who competed against McCain. Giuliani had been a leader in the race from the beginning, and Romney, Thompson, and Huckabee were never far behind. Giuliani earned his reputation by serving as mayor of New York City and guiding through the events of September 11. Giuliani’s work with national security gave him a boost that seemed more powerful than McCain’s military record. The former mayor was also one of the most efficient fundraisers of the race, only outdone by Mitt Romney and his large personal fortune. Romney was an accomplished businessman and seemed to
do very well among educated Americans. As a speaker he was stout and competent in economic matters. He won an Iowa straw poll in the spring of 2007, and this created some momentum for him. Romney focused his attention on the social conservatives in the Republican Party.

Fred Thompson was a former attorney and state governor, better known as an actor in several major motion pictures. He was a latecomer to the race, but was convinced that his image as a genuine conservative would attract support from the conservative base of the Republican Party. He seemed to be aware of Iowa’s importance as an early state to vote in the primaries, and he chose to campaign in the state from the beginning. The fall was also the time of Mike Huckabee’s surge to become the frontrunner. Huckabee had fallen far behind in raising sufficient funds, but his image as a Baptist pastor from the south and an intriguing speaker made him a popular choice among the Christian Right. Huckabee’s main campaign strategy was to win the support of the social issue voter segment, and in doing this he became the main challenger to Mitt Romney. However, unlike Romney, Huckabee’s main support came from blue-collar workers.

Of course, not everything about McCain’s competitors was rosy. Fred Thompson’s downfall was himself. He began strong, but seemed unable to meet the high expectations he created in his invisible primary. Thompson did not campaign as much as the other candidates, and his weak attempt to win the nomination showed that he was not up to the challenge. Then there was the Romney campaign, which did not stand much of a chance from the beginning. His change in attitude towards abortion and same-sex marriage combined with his religion meant he had little chance to win. Huckabee was another candidate with a small chance of winning the nomination. Huckabee’s lead at the end of 2007 was very small, and seemed to be a consequence of the other candidates’ loss of support. Huckabee was the evangelical candidate, but he had trouble attracting non-religious voters. In the end, Romney and Huckabee were campaigning for the same social voters and lost support from other vital groups in the process.

Giuliani suffered the greatest fall of all of the candidates. After he nominated a close friend to a major position, that friend was indicted. His efforts to gain social voter support also failed, because of his long-standing liberal approaches to abortion, same-sex marriage and gun control. Many Republicans were not aware of these facts until the campaign progressed. Giuliani also seemed to be without a platform, and had no basis to seek votes other than his leadership on September 11,
2001, though he tried to keep the support of the social conservatives. Giuliani’s personal history as a man who had been married several times, and engaged in several affairs, did not help his popularity among conservative Christians. Perhaps his biggest mistake was pulling out of the early primary states to focus solely on Florida.

Another external structure that may have impacted McCain’s nomination was the United States military surge in Iraq. By the summer of 2007, the McCain campaign was almost non-existent, after a sustained decrease since the early spring that same year. McCain’s campaign platform of national security and his support for the unpopular Iraq War did not seem to appeal to many Republicans. McCain urged the Bush Administration to send a substantial surge into Iraq in an effort to turn the tide of the war and, after years of persuading the president, a successful troop surge began in 2007. At the same time, American support for the war increased by 18 percentage points, and McCain’s poll ratings also increased.

The lack of popularity of President Bush was another external structure that may have influenced McCain’s nomination. Immediately prior to the primaries, Bush enjoyed a favorable ranking from just a third of Americans. There were also indications that the Christian Right had lost some of its importance, and the fact that the evangelical Christians were not united in support of a single candidate also hurt their power. McCain’s success in persuading some evangelical Christians to support his campaign, combined with his efforts to distance himself from the unpopular policies of President Bush, may have given him an edge in the nomination process.

Thus, McCain’s troublesome challengers, the surge in Iraq, and the incumbent president’s lack of popularity joined together to create a situation in which John McCain won the republican primary. While his opponents were their own worst enemies, McCain gained credibility for predicting the need for a troop surge in Iraq. His bitter relationship from 2000 with conservative Christian members of his party was softened by the weakening of that group and Bush’s lack of support among the American people. Nevertheless, McCain’s rivals had the greatest impact on McCain’s victory. Giuliani and Thompson failed to live up to expectations, Romney and Huckabee competed with each other for the same voter segment, and Huckabee was not able to gather enough support outside the Christian Right to surpass McCain. As these turbulent conditions played out on the campaign trail, it was McCain who remained untouched. Surely McCain’s victory resulted, at least
in part, from the interaction of external structures, which created a perfect opportunity for McCain to come from behind and win the nomination. However, whether his success was related only to externalities will be addressed in the chapter that follows.

**Chapter 6: Conclusion**

The combination of resource mobilization theory and political opportunity structure provides a complex framework through which multi-dimensional social movements like political campaigns can be studied. Examining the internal resources mobilized by John McCain as they existed within the external factors that most directly influenced the 2008 Primaries makes it clear that the political opportunities created by external structures were most responsible for McCain’s unexpected victory.

McCain’s resources had both positive and negative effects on his campaign. His image was not particularly dynamic, and he did not enjoy support from a particular segment of the Republican Party as had George W. Bush during the 2000 Primary. Instead, McCain’s campaign came very close to failing. And then without a major change in strategy, or advisors, or image, McCain’s ranking in the polls began to improve. The lack of an internal explanation for this sudden change suggests that other external factors must have played an important part.

The most powerful external structure that created a political opportunity for John McCain was the lack of a single, strong opponent in the election. Giuliani, Thompson, Romney and Huckabee each had strengths, but each also had major weaknesses that could not survive the campaign. Other external structures, including the turning tide in the Iraq War, and the unpopularity of the incumbent conservative Christian president, also aided McCain’s quest to win the nomination, though to a lesser level.

Of course, external structures alone do not account for McCain’s victory, though this thesis concludes that those structures were the major reason for his win. Had McCain not mobilized the resources of the conservative Christian voters he alienated in 2000, had he not changed his strategy relating to tax cuts to gain support from economic conservatives, had he not maintained his image as a war hero and senator who was strong on national security, he probably could not have won.
The complex interaction between the political opportunities created by external forces and the internal resources mobilized by McCain enables the identification of each contributing factors. It is only through engaging in such a complex analysis that the full picture of McCain’s victory comes into focus. So, why did John McCain win the 2008 Republican nomination for the presidency? Partly because of terrorism, partly because of his military background, and mostly because there was no one any better in the race.
Bibliography


Levin, Mark R. (Jan. 23, 2006) John McCain, Weak on Defense. Retrieved on May 2, 2008 from http://article.nationalreview.com/?q=MTg0NTE5MjRiZDEzZmZmZGRjZGY5NWt3MmY0NWEzNzl=-.


Meyer, David S. (April 1994). Political opportunity after the cold war. Published in Peace and Change, Volume 19, issue 2, page ?.


