

**THE 2000 U.S. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION:  
CAN RETROSPECTIVE VOTING BE SAVED?**

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**ABSTRACT**

According to a portrait of elections widely held in academic Political Science, election outcomes depend on the “fundamentals,” especially peace and prosperity. Al Gore’s election showing in 2000 runs counter to the preceding interpretation of elections. Objective conditions pointed to a comfortable victory, if not a landslide, but Gore’s narrow popular vote margin fell well below the expectations held by many political scientists. This paper attempts to account for Gore’s under-performance via detailed analyses of NES cross-sectional studies. We find that Gore’s oft-criticized personality was not a cause of his under-performance. Rather, the major cause was his failure to receive a historically normal amount of credit for the performance of the Clinton administration. Secondary contributors were the drag of Clinton’s personal affairs and Gore’s decision to run to the left of where Clinton had positioned the Democratic Party. Quite possibly these three factors are logically related: failure to get normal credit reflected Gore’s peculiar campaign which in turn reflected fear of association with Clinton’s behavior.