

Memorandum X

THE CALENDAR OF ELECTIONS

A. Relevant Considerations

Several alternative apportionment plans have suggested that legislators be apportioned on the basis of votes cast both in a presidential and a gubernatorial year (that is, the number of votes cast for either senator or assemblyman at the last two regular elections). Two consecutive elections are used because voter participation in presidential elections does not increase over that in gubernatorial years at a uniform rate throughout the State.

Several modern political theorists believe that state and national politics can and should be separated. They assume that the settlement of the debates of national politics would and should not also automatically fix the outcomes of state elections. This view is based on the coattails theory which says that the voters' choice for the office of assemblyman results from their choice for the office of president.

To the extent that states can be isolated from national elections, one-party dominance is facilitated. This is because the political stimuli (such as candidate and issue involvement) are not strong enough and the campaign is not long enough to enable such influences to supersede social predispositions (such as age, education, and social class)

as the principal determinants of interest in the election. More drastic shifts are possible in national elections.

However, a midterm campaign (i.e., an election in a non-presidential year) may have little power to crystallize and accelerate state trends. Interest in the candidates for state legislative seats is minimized during a national election. Thus, although such candidates may receive more votes due to increased participation by the electorates, the degree of accurate reflection of any "opinion" or mandate to the representative is small because of little voter interest in or knowledge of legislative issues.

Furthermore the state legislative candidate discovers he has very little opportunity and incentive to raise local issues and indeed contributes to the vicious cycle himself by espousing national candidates and issues that have small bearing upon his job. Again, in turn, the cycle serves to encourage candidates to run for office uninformed and unprepared on local problems.

Despite the close relationship of party strength for state and national candidates, the electorate in New York State often manages to apparently separate its choices of presidential and state officials. When Republican presidential candidates received large majorities in the state,

Alfred E. Smith and Franklin D. Roosevelt controlled the governorship. Republican Thomas E. Dewey and his supporters managed the state government during a period when Democratic presidential candidates usually won the state. The influence of national tides, however, is continuously felt in legislative elections.

One advantage of having gubernatorial elections in a non-presidential year is that it appears to give an advantage to the candidate of the party that does not control the White House.

B. Questions of Policy for Recommendations

1. Should the election of the legislature be integrated or separated from other state, local, and national elections?
2. If part of both houses is renewed at each general election, is it fair to subject some candidates to the special influences of a national election while others are exempted?