Losers in Politics (And How They Sometimes Become Winners): William Riker's Heresthetic
Author(s): Kenneth A. Shepsle
Source: *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Jun., 2003), pp. 307-315
Published by: American Political Science Association
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/3688902
Accessed: 04/11/2010 16:14

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=apsa.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

American Political Science Association is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Perspectives on Politics.*

http://www.jstor.org

Losers in Politics (and How They Sometimes Become Winners): William Riker's Heresthetic

By Kenneth A. Shepsle

This article develops an idea implicit in many of the writings of the late William Harrison Riker on the role in politics for "losers." Out-of-power politicians, intent upon changing their fortunes and securing office, provide a rhythm to political life that often goes unappreciated (with media and scholarly attention primarily focused instead on those in power).

Introduction

William Harrison Riker was a substantively and theoretically inspiring political scientist.[1] I hope to convey in this article (previously a lecture in his honor), especially to those who never knew him personally, his intellectual vision and honesty, by addressing one of the most original themes of his research: the importance of political "losers" (out-of-power politicians or in-power politicians with distinctly out-of-favor ideas) who are determined to improve their circumstances, and how they go about doing so. This, then, is an article intended to convey an appreciation of a scholarly innovator, as well as *his* appreciation of political innovation.[2]

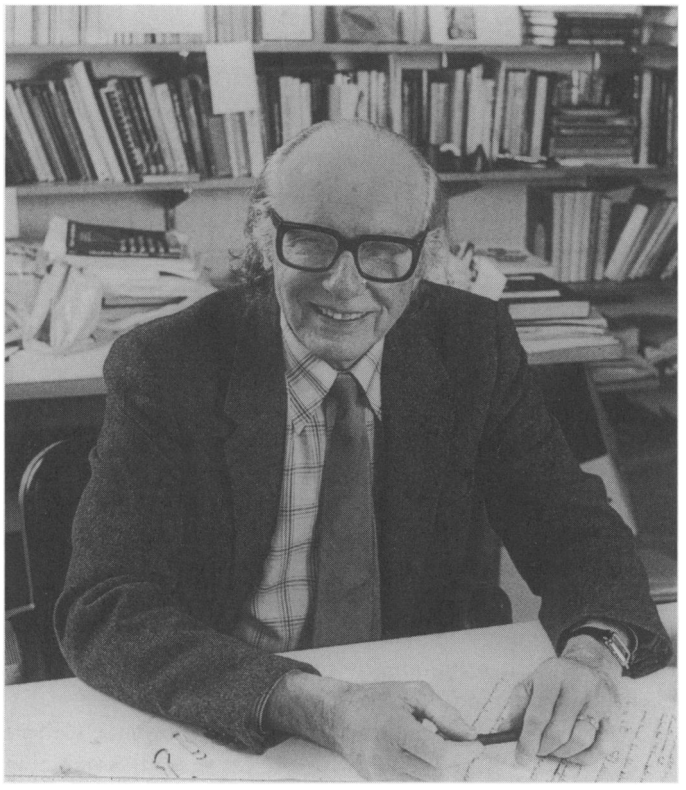
Riker graduated from DePauw University in 1942 with a degree in economics. With a war in progress in which he was ineligible to fight for medical reasons, he delayed graduate school to participate in the war effort as a time-and-motion analyst for the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). Riker subsequently entered graduate school at Harvard University in 1944 and finished his doctoral studies in 1948, surely making the time-to-completion gods there smile. While at Harvard, he was exposed to political science as it was then—a philosophically and historically grounded discipline without much emphasis on analytical argument or systematic empirical evidence. The political philosopher and comparativist Carl J. Friedrich—the dominant figure at Harvard then—was to become Riker's bête noire throughout his career. Friedrich, reported Riker in an interview with me in 1979, "was an extremely vigorous person . . . and yet he had no idea of how to use information [from political history] to understand politics."[3] Another scholar, Pendleton Herring, however, was innovating a self-consciously methodological approach to the study of public administration—what came to be known as the *case study method.* He thereby showed Riker a way forward, directing his attention to empirical regularities and to the objective of explaining them. As Riker later put it, Herring did not hold "the view that I ultimately adopted, but it was a clear view of what he was doing."[4]

So Riker took his first teaching post, at Lawrence College (now Lawrence University), with an eye toward combining Herring's empirical approach with Friedrich's sense that bigger questions might be entertained beyond case studies. While writing his first book,[5] an American politics text that put forth a moral position and asked what set of institutions would bring this position about, these two influences led Riker to a "disconcerting" realization:

> [O]nce you raise the question of what can you do to bring a particular moral position into some sort of effective institutional operation why you also raise the question of whether or not institutions accomplish what they are intended to accomplish. And, that is not a normative question at all. That is just a plain straightforward descriptive question about institutions. And I began to ask myself then whether or not the more or less descriptive sentences which I had uttered in this textbook were in fact true, simply as descriptive analysis of the way institutions worked. And, I rather reluctantly, but nevertheless certainly, concluded that there was hardly a true sentence in it, which is a disconcerting experience to say the least. And so I began to think seriously about what political science was and whether or not it could utter true sentences because that then is the next step, you see. Can you describe things in the real world at all?[6]

In this agitated state of mind, Riker discovered logic (Willard Van Orman Quine, Alfred North Whitehead, and Bertrand Russell), and books by other social scientists putting forth analytical formulations (Maurice Duverger's *Political Parties,*[7] Kenneth J. Arrow's *Social Choice and Individual Values,* and John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern's *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*). "Von Neumann's book was the one that really turned me on," he reported, "because it seemed to me that there were some generalizations there that one could look at in nature and see if those generalizations turned out to be true. . . . And so I began. I developed the notion of the size principle out of von Neumann and then began to consider

Kenneth A. Shepsle is George Markham Professor of Government at Harvard University (kshepsle@latte.harvard.edu). His research has focused on developing formal theories of politics with special application to American and comparative institutional practices. Currently he is devoting attention to intergenerational strategic considerations. William Riker was his teacher and mentor.



Courtesy of University of Rochester

William H. Riker at the University of Rochester, 1989.

what sort of behavioral evidence one might adduce for such a principle."[8]

In 1962, Riker completed *The Theory of Political Coalitions,* which conceived of politics as all about *winning* and made the forming of coalitions in order to win the fulcrum of political activity. Starting with that book, in the 30 years Riker had remaining he revolutionized political science. He sought to develop an analytically clean theory of politics—one that relied on a systematic argument on the one hand, but without rejecting the richness of history or the appropriateness of a particular case on the other. He dismissed neither the historical approach of Friedrich nor the case-study methodology of Herring; he subsumed them. Thus, though a revolutionary, Riker never abandoned earlier approaches entirely; intellectually, his revolution was more like the American than the French.[9] Nor was his interest in method to substitute for the priority he gave to understanding *politics* as the motivating objective. Nonetheless, his scholarship charted brand-new territory. It must have been an isolated and lonely experience.[10]

Riker accepted a professorship and the post of chair of the Department of Political Science in 1962 at the University of Rochester, which was only just commencing on a program of building up its offerings in social sciences. As it happened, Riker benefited from an accident of timing. The department, consisting of only half a dozen faculty, had experienced a divisive fight over a promotion decision just prior to Riker's arrival. Soon after arriving, Riker circulated a memo outlining the basis for a new Ph.D. program, a radical framework grounded in decision theory, game theory, and econometrics. He claims to have circulated the plan only as a discussion document, hoping to stimulate debate among his new colleagues in looking forward to a broader departmental mission. His colleagues, however, embarrassed by their recent dispute and eager to restore collegiality, simply endorsed the plan of their new chair full stop. Was this merely a happy accident? Or like Boss Plunkitt of Tammany Hall, had Riker "seen his opportunities and took 'em"? Hard to say, but it marked a "constitutional moment" in the creation of a new way to do political science. Riker then hired some junior faculty members—Richard G. Niemi, Gerald H. Kramer, Arthur Goldberg, John Mueller—and nurtured his faculty and his program (for both really were *his*) for three decades. Inside the department, the university, and the profession, Riker proved an adept strategist, spokesperson, and *provocateur.* He became what he studied, a point to which I shortly return.

Riker never lost his commitment to being a scholar. *The Theory of Political Coalitions* is a classic, and he continued to work on coalition theory after he came to Rochester. Another of his subjects was federalism, which today constitutes one of his most durable contributions. He was among the first political scientists to use experiments. He wrote a successful book centered on the paradoxes of social choice, *Liberalism Against Populism.* His interest in political history never waned, with special attention given to antebellum electoral politics, the politics of the founders, and, as his last large project published posthumously, the ratification campaign of the Constitution. But the subject on which he spent perhaps the most time in the last decade of his life, a subject that continues today to fascinate scholars, revolves around his invented concept of heresthetic. And it is to this theme that I shall devote the remainder of this article.

The Inventor of Heresthetic

Riker began teaching a graduate seminar on "positive political theory" in the mid-1960s at Rochester, coining this term to emphasize scientific theory as a legitimate intellectual companion to the normative political theory he associated with Harvard and Friedrich. He taught Anthony Downs's *Economic Theory of Democracy,* Mancur Olson's *Logic of Collective Action,* Duncan Black's median voter theorem, Kenneth Arrow's *Social Choice and Individual Values,* James M. Buchanan and Gordon Tullock's *Calculus of Consent,* and Herbert A. Simon's bounded rationality.

What became evident in all the material available at the time was the centrality of the issue of equilibrium.[11] Political events and outcomes were conceived of as the equilibria of some process. In effect, the social result—a winning outcome, a victorious candidate, or prevailing event—was described as an equilibrium. It was a decision that could not be overturned, a winning platform that was king of the hill, a candidate who could prevail against any opponent, a bill that could fend off amendments. Equilibria were winners and winners were equilibria.

But results from social-choice theory (Arrow and others) had a truly jolting and discouraging effect on this orientation. In most situations in politics, an equilibrium rarely existed, so there was little basis for equating winning with equilibrium. The idea of "winning" was not the problem—it could be speci-

fied in any circumstance since something or someone actually *won.* But in many of those same circumstances, the particular winner was not the equilibrium of an underlying process. The winning alternative constituted a provisional choice at best, a fragile result that could be expected to be overturned in due course. The alternative that prevailed, moreover, may well have won for idiosyncratic reasons, not systematic ones, so that the slightest perturbation in underlying conditions would have resulted in a different winner. So it would appear that *dis*equilibrium is the human condition in politics. Riker remarked on this in my 1979 interview with him—an early indication of his fascination with how politics is vulnerable to acts of strategic creativity:

> **Riker:** [T]he things that will have the deepest impact on the science [of politics] are the ideas of disequilibrium. That fundamentally brewed in [Duncan] Black's work. Black found the [Condorcet] paradox[12] and then said, "What condition can I devise that will prohibit the paradox?" He looked for a sufficient condition to prevent the paradox and he arrived at single-peakedness.[13] And that, of course, is what Downs exploited. That is to say, the median voter idea is the single-peakedness condition. . . . But Black, no sooner had he gotten the median voter [result] than he began to think, "Well, what if there are two dimensions?" And he produced a little book with [R. A.] Newing. And that is the beginning of all the material on disequilibrium. And from that point on, it seems to me that the development pretty much determined that somebody is going to see all the disequilibrium in the world once they begin to look at it in the way that Black and Newing looked at it. So that is why I think Black is really a distinctive figure. . . .
>
> The thing that is impressive to me is this: We, in this century, have been looking for some kind of equilibrium that is comparable to the equilibrium of tastes that one finds in the market, the price, the notion of a market price. That is the only good equilibrium that we know about in social science. And it is so valuable because it does permit us to predict things. We can just predict a huge amount knowing something about the market equilibrium. And it would certainly be nice to do the same thing in political science. But suppose we know from the theory that we are not going to find that equilibrium. Then we are driven to look at the world for less certain equilibrium, a sort of temporary equilibrium, a kind of local equilibrium. And that is what a lot of our science is right now.
>
> **Shepsle:** I think Duncan Black in fact in an essay wrote something to the effect that there is a thread of harmony running through economic science that does not exist in politics.
>
> **Riker:** It is in the first or second chapter of *The Theory of Committees and Elections.* There is a paragraph to that effect, and he says that economic science is based on equilibrium and that economists of the last generation . . . are perhaps overly impressed with the natural harmony. And then he goes on to say that that harmony seems to be absent from politics.

At that point in his life, Riker had concluded that politics may not reflect "natural harmonies" (as Black put it). I believe this is a view he later qualified, at least partially in response to subsequent developments—particularly the noncooperative revolution in game theory, the rediscovery of institutions as contexts in which rational action occurs, and his own elaboration of strategic politicians responding to the environments in which they find themselves. These developments provided ways of thinking about social interaction in which equilibria (natural harmonies) do, in fact, emerge. The pessimism that had arisen from the literature on social choice was thus ameliorated.

I also want to emphasize Riker's concern that models, whether with equilibrium or not, are insufficiently attentive to the *process* by which outcomes result. For instance, many theoretical models begin with a technical prolegomenon something like "Assume a collection N of agents; a collection A of actions; functions $\{U_i\}$, one for each agent, assigning utilities to outcomes; and a mapping G that transforms the agent action-choices into final outcomes." Too many things in this statement are taken as fixed and given in advance. Fixed by what? Given by whom? These are the questions that began to permeate Riker's thinking. The "art of political manipulation," as Riker entitled a book of his published in 1986, makes abundantly clear that the maneuverings of political entrepreneurs with respect to these features means that they cannot be taken as fixed and merely part of the background.[14] Consider each in turn.

- Politicians seek to influence *who* the relevant set of agents is—the set N should not be taken as given. In *The Art of Political Manipulation,* Riker tells of a city manager who arranged a gerrymander of the city council districts to ensure that the set N of city councilors would possess a partisan majority favorable to keeping her in her job.
- Politicians invent new actions—the set A is not fixed and exogenous. Riker describes how nineteenth-century Speaker of the House Thomas Brackett Reed redefined the manner in which quorums were counted—something no speaker before him had done. For most of the nineteenth century, a minority could frustrate the will of the majority by refusing to vote. If the majority were unable to turn out their members in sufficient numbers, then a motion would fail even if there were no votes in opposition. This is because the Constitution requires that a quorum be present to conduct business; a sum of yeas and nays less than a majority of the House membership constitutes prima facie a lack of a quorum. In a closely divided House in which there is bound to be some absenteeism on the majority side, the minority strategy of not voting was often decisive. This practice, known as the disappearing quorum, was put to an end by Speaker Reed, who, by fiat, declared it in his power to count members "as present and counting toward a quorum," even if they refused to vote, a novel interpretation of the Speaker's powers that withstood objection then and that all subsequent Speakers have embraced.
- Politicians frame the evaluation of outcomes by others in order to improve the chances of the ones they most desire—they seek by rhetorical and other devices to alter agent preferences (the utility functions $\{U_i\}$) by changing the interpretation of what is at stake. In another wonderful story, this one about political maneuvering in the U.S. Senate, Riker tells of how Warren G. Magnuson (a Democratic senator from the state of Washington) transformed the issue of transporting nerve gas canisters from Guam first across the Pacific and then across his state by the Department of

Defense—something he wanted to block—into an instance of the executive failing to consult the Senate on a matter of foreign policy. In framing the issue in this way, Magnuson could claim that this was a case of the president disparaging the role of the Senate in foreign relations. In changing the meaning of what was at stake, Magnuson altered the preferences of senators. He was able to pick up a few decisive votes by this maneuver and ultimately prevailed.

- Politicians invent political processes, G, to give favor to the outcomes they prefer. Riker depicts how Michael E. Levine and Charles R. Plott, Caltech professors in the late 1970s, repackaged alternatives considered by their flying club and revised agendas of votes in artful ways in order to achieve approval by the club of the fleet of airplanes the two professors most desired. In effect, from the myriad ways a group may structure a procedure to pare down a set of possibilities into a single choice, the Caltech professors exercised strategic vision by convincing their colleagues to employ a voting procedure that produced the results they wanted.

Riker invented the term *heresthetic* to describe such maneuvers.[15] Clever politicians do not take the political world as they find it. If that world possesses no conventional equilibrium, they engage in search behavior to find a preferred outcome that can defeat the status quo. If that world *does* possess an equilibrium, then by definition there is nothing within the conventional framework to be done. But this does not prevent a politician from finding some new way to accomplish what is blocked by existing ways of doing things. Riker admired this kind of inventive activity and, over several decades, sought to give scientific coherence to its practice.

Political Winners: Playing Heresthetical Defense

Riker had great faith in politicians' savvy, just as he admired the entrepreneurial cunning of businessmen. The theme is Schumpeterian, emphasizing the idea that the politician engages in acts of "creative destruction." If already a winner, the incumbent politician maneuvers to destroy the opportunities of his or her opponent to reverse the tables. If a "loser"—an out-of-power aspirant—the politician invents new dimensions of political conflict and controversy, or reframes old dimensions, all in an effort to deny the winner the political basis of his or her present domination. The key is that politicians *want to win,* a theme that goes all the way back to Riker's *Theory of Political Coalitions.* In Riker's later words, politicians may be found "continually poking and pushing the world to get the result they want."[16]

The logic of heresthetic—"the art of constructing choice situations so as to be able to manipulate outcomes"[17]—applies both to winners and losers. But Riker, I believe, had a soft spot for *losers.* They are the desperate ones; they are the ones whose survival is at stake; they are the ones driven by their despair to seek ways to triumph; they are, therefore, the inventors. Defeat is the mother of invention. In this sense it is losers who provide a political dynamic in public life—innovating and strategizing to become winners on the one hand, and energizing the incumbent winners to anticipate and try to deflect the losers' maneuvers on the other. But this is getting ahead of the story.

Let me first take up political manipulation by incumbent winners. At a very basic level, winners often don't need to do very much, for they already have claimed the high ground. They mostly play heresthetical defense. The Jeffersonian-Jacksonian coalition of early nineteenth-century America, for instance, defeated and then discredited the Federalist Party, winning six straight presidential elections from 1800 to 1820 as the opposition fractured. (They did lose in 1824 under very peculiar circumstances in which Andrew Jackson had both a popular and electoral plurality, but lost in the House of Representatives to the so-called "corrupt bargain" between John Quincy Adams and Henry Clay.) Having secured the winning side of the agrarian expansion/commercial development issue, the Democrats retook the White House in 1828 and managed to hold the opposition at bay, partly by focusing on profitable party-building pursuits, an organizational heresthetic that John Aldrich attributes to Martin Van Buren, Jackson's chief political operative and ultimate successor to the presidency.[18] The fractured opposition eventually re-formed as the Whig Party that sought time and time again to dislodge the winners, clearly succeeding only by nominating popular generals (William Henry Harrison in 1840 and Zachary Taylor in 1848), and almost succeeding when Clay's bid fell 10,000 votes short in New York City to a third-party candidate who cost him New York State and an electoral college majority in 1844. The dominant Democrats often worried about the potential for their undoing by the slavery issue ("a firebell in the night," in Jefferson's words), but it was not for another generation that the political stars would be properly aligned for a heresthetical move to split the northern and southern wings of the Democratic Party. In the meantime—i.e., for the better part of half a century—the opposition's best efforts to field popular candidates and raise new issues did not amount to much.

Indeed, successfully raising new issues in order to dislodge an entrenched incumbent is not an easy matter, as the long string of successes by Thomas Jefferson and his political progeny suggests. Losers have a hard road to travel and many obstacles to overcome. They may be the victims of the clash of factional ambitions within their own ranks. They may be hampered by uncertainty, not knowing which buttons to push. They face difficulties in amplifying the salience of new issues, even if they are able to discover the "right" ones, owing to the diverse priorities of those they are trying to influence and an imperfect ability to communicate with them. So incumbents may need only to govern competently to ride out any prospective storm the losers try to engineer.

Incumbent winners may also be insulated by electoral arrangements. In a lovely theoretical paper, Estelle Cantillon demonstrates that the electoral rule affects the very attractiveness of trying to introduce new issues—one of the standard heresthetical maneuvers in Riker's tool kit.[19] A new issue may be introduced by either of two mechanisms. An existing party can add an issue to its platform, expanding the dimensionality of political conflict as E. E. Schattschneider long ago described. Or a new party can enter the political competition on the basis of this new issue. The heresthetical question is whether it is in the electoral interest of a participant

(whether an existing party or a new party) to expand the dimensionality of competition by introducing the new issue.

In a spatial model of the Downsian variety,[20] Cantillon considers an "old" issue (the left-right cleavage, say) and a prospective "new" issue (for example, the environment). She examines political competition under two institutional arrangements: a plurality rule and a proportionality rule. The new issue's level of appeal to the voters is treated in a very simple form: the issue is either unimportant to voters altogether or is equally important as the old issue. Which of these it is is determined by any of a number of factors that are put to one side by Cantillon and not taken up in the model. This is a simplifying restriction, but informative intuitions may still be derived. Initially, she considers the case of two political competitors. (Here, the conclusions are the same under either plurality or proportional rules.) The question of whether the availability of the new issue is something that can be exploited by the current out-party is answered in the negative. The new issue will be ignored by both parties if it is not sufficiently salient to voters. Positions on it will be adopted by both parties, however, if it *is* sufficiently salient. But there is no comparative advantage for the out-party. So the new issue cannot be used, at least in this symmetric setting, to any heresthetical benefit to the out-party.

More interesting is the circumstance in which two existing parties compete not only against one another but, potentially, against a third-party entrant as well. This is more complicated, so I won't spell out the argument in detail. The punch line is that the electoral rule plays a significant role. Under the plurality rule, competition with prospective entry differs from competition without that possibility. It induces the incumbent parties not to converge toward each other on the old issue (as they would under normal Downsian competition). They separate from each other in order to deter the third-party entrant, leaving neither enough room on either flank nor enough room between their positions to permit a third party to enter and win. The new issue plays no role in the sense that it will be ignored by the incumbent parties if it is not very salient, and co-opted if it is, but it will give no distinct advantage to the incumbent party in power, the incumbent party out of power, or the prospective entrant. So the new issue is not a heresthetical resource for any of the participants. But with proportional representation, entry becomes a real prospect, though the role played by the new issue again depends on its salience with voters. If it is very unimportant, then all parties will ignore it (and the third party will not enter). If it is highly salient, then all parties will focus their campaigns exclusively on it (and again, the third party will not enter). In the middle ranges of salience, however, it is the *entrant* that distinctively exploits the new issue.

This only gives a flavor of Cantillon's argument, but enough, I hope, to suggest that the heresthetical exploitation of a new issue (riding it to political victory) depends not merely on how dramatically this new issue appeals to voters, but also on the rules of electoral competition and the incentives they provide to actual and potential competitors to exploit new issues or not. The proportional rule, especially with a low electoral threshold, is more favorable to so-called "outside competition" involving new issue dimensions on which opposition politicians and new parties seek to pick off parts of the previous winner's voting coalition; the plurality rule is not very favorable to this. Incumbent politicians thus are privileged by the plurality rule, since the rule not only confers advantage on their dominant position on the existing issue, but also deters entry by politicians with new issues to peddle.

Cantillon's interesting results complement those of Thomas Palfrey, and Joseph Greenberg and me, on entry deterrence.[21] Palfrey's model (from which Cantillon drew inspiration), a Downsian-style model of plurality rule, shows that two existing parties—let's loosely call them the *winners* inasmuch as in the Downsian setting they may be assumed to alternate in office—can deter a third-party entrant without too much effort. They merely must avoid converging "too much" in their positions on the continuum (as noted above). With too few votes between their locations, and too few votes on either flank, there is no place for a third party to enter and win the most votes.[22]

Greenberg and I take a slightly different view. Like Palfrey, we employ a Downsian spatial model with plurality rule. We ask, what if the objective of a third party is not to win the most votes, as is conventionally assumed, but rather to become one of the two *major* parties by finishing among the top two (one of the "winners" as defined above)? If successful, a third party would displace a current major-party incumbent and position itself to win a future contest. This was ultimately the objective of the British Labour Party by the end of World War I, rejecting merger overtures from Lloyd George and the Liberal Party after a 20-year courtship. It was also surely the ambition of the Gang of Four, high-profile centrists who split from a mid-1970s Labour Party that had been captured by the "loony left." (Iain McLean, in a project directly inspired by Riker's agenda on historically based studies of heresthetic, has written about both of these cases, and many more besides, in his wonderful collection of essays *Rational Choice and British Politics.*) The deterrence by incumbents of third-party entry when a prospective entrant just wants to finish among the top two is more difficult. Indeed, Greenberg and I establish that although it is not always the case that an entrant can figure out a way to finish among the top two against a pair of optimizing incumbent candidates, there nevertheless are electoral circumstances for which it is possible for a third party to enter and achieve success as defined this way.

To sum up, then, plurality rule has the tendency to discourage the use of new issues, encouraging competition on existing issues instead. Entry by an outside party can be discouraged by slight maneuverings by the two major parties, straddling but not converging to the median position on the existing issue and co-opting especially salient new issues. So winners may manage to stay winners just by governing competently under existing competitive circumstances. If, however, the entrant is not deterred by the fact that it can be prevented from winning the most votes *this time,* and is willing to settle for second prize in the hopes of capturing the first prize *next time,* then today's winners cannot be so passive and may need to engage in some political manipulation of their own.

When winners must engage in heresthetical maneuvers of their own to counteract those of losers, or to discourage them in advance, these manipulations can take many forms. In the electoral arena, a short list includes fiddling with voter eligibility,

altering party and candidate qualifications, affecting rules for campaigning (and the financing thereof), inventing new ballot forms (did anyone say "butterfly"?), and gerrymandering. Their status as incumbents provides a decided advantage to them in setting the terms of subsequent political competition—not a fait accompli, but an advantage nonetheless. With this opportunity in hand, they can seek to affect who may vote, who may run, how voting is conducted, how votes are counted, how the counts are aggregated, how appeals are handled—the list is endless. And this just covers Florida in 2000!

Political Losers: Playing Heresthetical Offense

If heresthetical maneuvers by incumbent winners are primarily defensive, then those of losers[23] must be much more proactive; political losers play offense—sometimes grinding out gains issue by issue, other times relying on a Hail Mary pass. It does seem to me that not enough attention is given to losers. We teach and write political history by focusing on the winners. Indeed, it is often alleged that the winners themselves actually write the history, thereby underemphasizing the significant role played by losers. (This piece of folk wisdom may be wrong. John Ferejohn pointed out to me recently that think tanks like the Brookings Institution and the American Enterprise Institute and enterprises like the Hoover Institution and the Kennedy School of Government serve as home bases for defeated politicians, where *they*, not the winners, write the history!) But it is the loser's motivation to win that sets the tone of a political conflict. As Riker put it:

> For a person who expects to lose on some decision, the fundamental heresthetical device is to divide the majority with a new alternative, one that he prefers to the alternative previously expected to win. If successful, this maneuver produces a new majority composed of the old minority and the portion of the old majority that likes the new alternative better. Of course, it takes artistic creativity of the highest order to invent precisely the right kind of new alternative.[24]

McLean sees things similarly: "Persistent losers . . . always have an incentive to repackage the issues so that they come together in a way that turns the tables." And he notes that "on critical occasions—however rare they may be—politics goes seriously multidimensional."[25]

One of the most compelling examples of a sure-fire loser who found a way to "repackage the issues" and create the occasion in which politics went "seriously multidimensional" is the case of Robert Peel's successful effort to repeal the protectionist Corn Laws in 1845–1846. The entire account is given as one of McLean's wonderful stories of strategic maneuvering in British politics. I commend it highly and give only the briefest of summaries.[26]

Peel, the Tory prime minister whose party was not keen on freer trade, had two battles to fight. He had to find some way to win majority support for repeal of the Corn Laws in the House of Commons, where his own protectionist-leaning Tories held 367 of the 658 seats (56 percent). And then he needed to succeed in the House of Lords, where anti–free trade agricultural interests were even more entrenched. He accomplished this by redefining the issue in several ways, each of which picked up a piece of support. The Whig and Radical opposition needed no inducement, supporting repeal out of ideological preference and in the hopes of using the issue to batter the government party in the next election. The Irish MPs were brought on board by the promise of famine relief tied to repeal. On the one hand, government revenues were expected to *increase* with a decline in tariff rates, allowing more generous financing of relief. On the other hand, prices for foodstuffs in Ireland, artificially high because of tariff protection and the failed potato crop, would come down with repeal, allowing the relief aid to stretch further. (By some accounts, Peel's appeal to famine relief was seen as a "fig leaf" to camouflage the fact that landed interests would take a hit, or as a "feather pillow" to soften the impact by reframing the issue.)

But this was insufficient in the Commons, let alone in the Lords. Peel needed to convince Tory partisans that more than trade was at stake. His main ingredients were the immediate fate of the Queen's government and the long-term prospects of the Tory party. The government would surely lose the next election if Corn Law repeal failed, bringing in Whigs and Radicals who would not only repeal the Corn Laws but do all kinds of other nasty stuff as well. So a defeat of repeal now was no more than putting off the inevitable, plus further unpleasantness to boot. Moreover, with Peel discredited, the Tory party would, it was expected, fall into "less reliable" hands—in particular, it would elevate Benjamin Disraeli, who in some quarters was thought to be too clever by half. This, according to McLean, was enough to woo a third of the Tory vote and thus to forge a 327 to 229 majority for repeal in Commons. Remarkably, two-thirds of the majority party followed Disraeli against repeal and against its own prime minister—against Peel and repeal, so to speak. The auxiliary issues were also sufficient to induce uncompromising loyalty from the Duke of Wellington, leader in Lords and former military hero who, despite his opposition to free trade and his lack of sympathy for the Irish, nevertheless put loyalty to the Queen and the Queen's government first. As McLean reports, "Once [Wellington] was convinced that the question was not corn but the Queen's government, he never wavered from the self-imposed task of getting the Queen's government's measure through the House of Lords."[27] Wellington managed to persuade a majority to support repeal by not mentioning a word in favor of free trade. It probably didn't hurt that the repeal package included property tax reductions to compensate landowners for the loss of protection.

On free trade, Peel was a loser who figured out a way to become a winner. He did it by inventing new dimensions, repackaging issues, and providing at least some of his colleagues with an unconventional interpretation of what was at stake. He used all the arrows in the heresthetician's quiver.[28] He could do it because the prime minister, in cahoots with the leader in Lords, held all the institutional cards. They could run their maneuver unheeded by procedural roadblocks, a feat unimaginable in the nineteenth-century U.S. House of Representatives (before Speaker Reed), not to speak of the twenty-first-century Senate.

Conclusion

Let me conclude on an institutional note by making a bit more of this last comment. It helps a great deal for someone to be in an

institutional position to implement his or her heresthetic. Even if all the obstacles to finding the right heresthetic to do the trick are overcome, it will be useless if the maneuver cannot be implemented. What if the city manager in the Riker story to which I referred earlier were not in a position to induce a partisan gerrymander of city council districts? What if Speaker Reed lacked either authority or support for his novel interpretation of how to count a quorum in the House chamber? What if Senator Magnuson's maneuver to block the shipment of nerve gas canisters required a powerful speech on the Senate floor reframing the issue, but the legislature radically restricted speeches (as in the House)? What if Professors Levine and Plott were not in a position to set the agenda for their flying club? What if the powers of the prime minister and leader of Lords in mid-nineteenth-century Britain did not enable them to bundle as they did the various pieces of what became the Corn Law repeal measure? Put in a more positive form, my claim is that the prospects for success of strategic manipulation are improved by conducive institutional arrangements. Indeed, institutional arrangements often provide precisely the opportunities that the master heresthetician may exploit.

This suggests that we separate Riker's heresthetic into two facets, the psychological and the institutional. While so much of Riker's 1986 book emphasizes the institutional alongside the psychological, his work on the ratification campaign for the U.S. Constitution, published posthumously in 1996, put psychological framing and persuasion at the center of his analysis.[29] (It is appropriate, therefore, that *rhetoric,* not *heresthetic,* appears in the title of that book.) I am mildly disappointed by his almost exclusive emphasis on the psychological. There is no doubt that Publius and other ratification supporters were engaged in a massive campaign of persuasion and sought to frame things in the light most favorable to their cause. Framing is surely part of the heresthetical story. And I applaud Riker for his prescience in marrying the rational to the psychological in order to provide insights from a rational choice perspective about mass political behavior. But politicians must also master the institutional resources at their disposal. Institutional arrangements provide both obstacles and opportunities affecting strategic maneuvering—whether as framing, agenda-setting, strategic voting, or some other form.

Riker's heresthetician figures out how to clear the obstacles and exploit the opportunities of the institutional environment. As McLean so lyrically puts it in describing his hero of British politics, Lloyd George, "Once in a while there comes a politician who sees further than the others. Such a politician can see opportunities where others do not."[30] In forcing us to pay attention to politicians who maneuver around obstacles and exploit their situations, who see "further than the others," and who, in the process, transform themselves from political losers into political winners, Riker reminds us that politics is not only a game in which shrewdness, cunning, and resourcefulness are rewarded; it also rewards *vision.* This is the gift to see farther down the game tree than anyone else, but also to imagine how the game itself might be transformed.

Indeed, as I hope I have established, William Riker embodied the idea of heresthetic. He possessed shrewdness, cunning, resourcefulness, and vision. He could "see further than the others"; he saw "opportunities where others [did] not." In the Political Science Department he created at the University of Rochester, as in the research he and his colleagues produced, he fashioned a new intellectual template and moved it from a minor tributary into the mainstream of the discipline. He transformed the way we think about politics and do political science.

References

Aldrich, John. 1983. A Downsian spatial model with party activists. *American Political Science Review* 77:4, 974–90.

———. 1995. *Why Parties? The Origin and Transformation of Political Parties in America.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, and Kenneth Shepsle. 2001. William Harrison Riker, September 22, 1920–June 26, 1993. In *Biographical Memoirs,* vol. 79. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press, 280–301.

Calvert, Randall. 1985. Robustness of the multidimensional voting model: Candidate motivations, uncertainty, and convergence. *American Journal of Political Science* 29:1, 69–95.

Cantillon, Estelle. 2001. Electoral rules and the emergence of new issue dimensions. Cowles Foundation Discussion Paper No. 1291. New Haven: Yale University.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy.* New York: Harper and Row.

Greenberg, Joseph, and Kenneth Shepsle. 1987. The effect of electoral rewards in multiparty competition with entry. *American Political Science Review* 81:2, 525–37.

McLean, Iain. 2001. *Rational Choice and British Politics: An Analysis of Rhetoric and Manipulation from Peel to Blair.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

———. 2002. Review article: William H. Riker and the invention of heresthetic(s). *British Journal of Political Science* 32:3, 535–58.

Miller, Gary, and Norman Schofield. 2002. Activist coalition formation, partisan realignment, and majority rule in the U.S. Unpublished manuscript, Washington University, St. Louis. Available at www-personal.umich.edu/~jbednar/Workshoppapers/schofield2.pdf. Accessed 21 March 2003.

Palfrey, Thomas. 1984. Spatial equilibrium with entry. *Review of Economic Studies* 51:1, 139–56.

Riker, William H. 1953. *Democracy in the United States.* New York: Macmillan.

———. 1962. *The Theory of Political Coalitions.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1982a. *Liberalism Against Populism: A Confrontation between the Theory of Democracy and the Theory of Social Choice.* San Francisco: Freeman.

———. 1982b. The two-party system and Duverger's law: An essay on the history of political science. *American Political Science Review* 76:4, 753–66.

———. 1986. *The Art of Political Manipulation.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

———. 1996. *The Strategy of Rhetoric: Campaigning for the American Constitution.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Schofield, Norman. 2000. Core beliefs and the founding of the American republic. *Homo Oeconomicus* 16:4, 433–62.

Schonhardt-Bailey, Cheryl. 2002. Conservatives who sounded like trustees but voted like delegates: The reinterpretation of repeal. Unpublished manuscript, London School of Economics.

Shepsle, Kenneth A. 1979. Interview with William H. Riker. APSA Oral History Project. Special Collection and Archives, University of Kentucky Library, Lexington.

Von Neumann, John, and Oskar Morgenstern. 1944. *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Notes

1 This is a substantially revised and shortened version of the inaugural William H. Riker Lecture delivered at the annual meeting of the Public Choice Society, San Diego, 23 March 2002. Entitled "Political Losers," the original lecture may be found on my Web page at www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~kshepsle/. I am grateful to the Public Choice Society's then-president, Professor Bernard Grofman, for inviting me to prepare this. Morris Fiorina and Cheryl Schonhardt-Bailey provided important historical correctives. Four referees provided extraordinarily incisive suggestions for revision, only some of which could be taken up in this brief article. Above all, I thank Jennifer Hochschild and Henry Brady, editor and associate editor of this journal, respectively.

2 A more extensive biographical essay is Bueno de Mesquita and Shepsle 2001.

3 See Shepsle 1979.

4 Ibid.

5 Riker 1953.

6 Shepsle 1979.

7 Duverger's Law identified a relationship between the form of electoral law and the number of candidates or parties contesting a seat. In particular, Duverger claimed a strong association between a first-past-the-post rule in single-member districts and two-party competition on the one hand, and proportional rules and multipartism on the other. Duverger's Law was to be a lifelong interest for Riker. He assembled a fine history of this law in an article years later (Riker 1982b).

8 Shepsle 1979.

9 I thank Henry Brady for this allusion.

10 Riker said: "I must have been the very first political scientist to read von Neumann's book and surely the very first political scientist to read Arrow's book . . . maybe Robert Dahl read that book sooner than I did. . . . So there was nobody to talk to about it. . . . When I gave a paper at [the Midwest Political Science meetings in Ann Arbor] . . . I don't think anybody said anything to me about the paper afterwards, one way or the other."

11 The concept of equilibrium figures prominently in the physical sciences and economics. In a social context, it means a situation in which no participant has any desire to change his or her present behavior (assuming that everything else stays fixed). That is, no participant believes that his or her lot in life can be improved by changed behavior. In this circumstance, the set of behaviors of the participants is said to be in (Nash) equilibrium—they hang together. This, of course, is an informal definition. Moreover, it describes the most elementary kind of equilibrium. More complex concepts—for example, outcomes for which no group of individuals has an incentive to make joint changes—have been elaborated in the literature.

12 The Condorcet paradox refers to the fact that individuals possess well-behaved preferences, but the "collective preference" that emerges through aggregating them via, say, pair-wise majority voting is not well behaved. In particular, collective preferences are often intransitive—x is collectively preferred to y, y to z, but z to x—and produce "cyclical" preferences, even though the individual preferences are *not* intransitive. This collective state of affairs lacks an equilibrium since there is always an incentive for a motion maker to offer an alternative that can prevail.

13 Without going into technical details, single-peakedness essentially means that the alternatives on offer can be "scaled" on one dimension, on which individuals possess a most-preferred location, and preferences decline with distance from this position in either direction. This produces a preference curve (or utility function) for each individual with a single peak. Duncan Black's famous theorem demonstrates that if all individuals have single-peaked preferences, and if their number is odd, then pair-wise majority voting yields transitive collective preferences and the median most-preferred point is an equilibrium.

14 Riker 1986.

15 A very detailed review of heresthetic (and other work by Riker) may be found in McLean 2002.

16 Riker 1986, 142.

17 Schofield 2000.

18 Aldrich 1995.

19 Cantillon 2001.

20 This is a familiar workhorse of formal political theory, dating back to Downs 1957. It represents political competition between parties or candidates as taking place on a left-right continuum. These political agents strategically locate at positions along this continuum with an eye to attracting the support of voters who are also arrayed along the continuum according to their preferences.

21 Palfrey 1984; Greenberg and Shepsle 1987.

22 In effect, there are two games occurring at the same time—the one between the established parties that Downs initially characterized (technically, a Cournot-Nash

game), and the other between each of the established parties and a potential entrant (a Stackelberg game). The heresthetic of *not* converging—in contrast to the Downsian canon—is the means by which the established parties optimize across both of these strategic interactions.

It is interesting to note that theorists in recent years have found a variety of explanations for nonconvergence that may be grafted onto the Downsian-style spatial model of electoral competition. The temptation for an election-oriented candidate or party to converge toward the preferred location of the median voter does not disappear, but there are mitigating pressures pulling candidates or parties apart. Entry deterrence, as I have just suggested, is one such mitigating pressure. Another, made famous by Aldrich 1983, and recently elaborated empirically by Miller and Schofield 2002, is the tension that exists between candidates (who want to win elections and thus are eager to submit to the pressure to converge) and activists (who want to implement their preferred ideology and are unwilling to compromise it too much in order to win). A third argument revolves around candidates with policy preferences of their own and uncertainty about the exact location of the median voter—combined, these factors induce candidates not to converge entirely to the ideal point of the median voter (Calvert 1985).

23 Let me reiterate here that "political loser" is my shorthand way of identifying out-of-power politicians or out-of-favor political positions.

24 Riker 1986, 1.

25 McLean 2001, 10, 20–1.

26 An alternative account, differing from McLean's in important respects, is Schonhardt-Bailey 2002. Even in this account, however, Peel comes across as a politician starting out with the deck stacked against him but prevailing nonetheless.

27 McLean 2001, 40.

28 Schonhardt-Bailey 2002 suggests another aspect of Peel's heresthetic. He tried out many ploys, interpretations, and arguments, seeing which ones worked with his followers and potential converts, and then moving his eggs into the baskets that worked. In short, Peel *listened* to the Peelites, taking heresthetical cues from their responses to various interpretations. He led by following.

29 Riker 1996.

30 McLean 2001, 231.