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Bill, Don't Count on New York in '96

Although Clinton campaign television ads are running in major markets across the country, they will not be seen in New York because the president's advisers are confident of his support here. They even had the gall to launch Clinton's 1996 campaign in New Jersey.

But 1996 will not be a rerun of 1992. Without New York, there is no way a Democratic president can win re-election, and Bill Clinton cannot count on winning New York State next year. In fact, a Republican presidential nominee might even take the Empire State, just as Reagan did in 1980 and Nixon did in 1972.

Unlike 1992, when Clinton defeated Jerry Brown in a brutal primary, the president will not have any serious opposition in the New York primary next March. However, the successive defeats of Democrats David Dinkins and Mario Cuomo have deprived Clinton of the managerial talent and volunteer labor needed to run a presidential campaign in New York.

According to Jerry Skurnick of Prime New York, a political consulting firm, Cuomo operatives ran Clinton's campaign in 1992, but the 1996 Clinton campaign cannot rely on the State Democratic Committee, which is now a collection of fiefdoms lacking any common ideology or loyalty to a single political leader. Furthermore, without the help of a Democrat in high office, contributions from wealthy New Yorkers that usually help subsidize campaign costs in other parts of the country will be needed to pay for workers and telephone banks here.

Clinton's new 10-year deficit-cutting budget plan, including cuts in Medicare, do not help him with hardcore liberals, an endangered species that Democrats cannot afford to ignore. Ironically, the ideological shift to the center that helps Clinton nationally undermines his appeal in New York, where public spending is still popular despite last year's Republican victories.

While African Americans and Latinos will not abandon Clinton, he has definitely not exceeded their expectations. A big turnout in minority neighborhoods is essential for Clinton, but to produce that, he must reinforce their fears of the Republican right wing in order to overcome his failure to deliver on either universal health care or inner-city jobs.

Adding to Clinton's woes is the resurgence of the New York State Republicans and their plans to seek control of the State Assembly in 1996. Republican State Chairman Bill Powers has targeted vulnerable Democratic Assembly members for defeat, a strategy that will inevitably help the Republican presidential nominee. And while most Jewish voters favor Clinton and consider the religious right to be anathema, the growing political conservatism among American

Jews cannot be ignored, especially among the ultra-orthodox who will follow the preferences of Sen. Alfonse D'Amato.

Though the Clinton Administration's policies on abortion, gun control, Northern Ireland and Haiti are compatible with most New Yorkers' politics, Clinton will not have the benefit he drew from the 1992 Democratic Convention in Madison Square Garden, which energized local politicians and gave him enormous exposure to the local media. Next year's convention in Chicago will not help him much here.

Of course, the best way for Clinton to take New York is to appoint Rudy Giuliani to a high-level Cabinet position. This would endear Clinton to Democratic leaders, who could then retake City Hall in 1997, and to Republicans, who wouldn't have to worry about Rudy's statewide ambitions. Clinton would also have a genuine tough guy capable of going head-to-head with congressional Republicans. Meanwhile, Rudy could position himself for a Democratic presidential run in the year 2000. And with Giuliani safely fucked away in Washington, political life in New York would return to normal, something that means more to New York pols than who sits in the White House.

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