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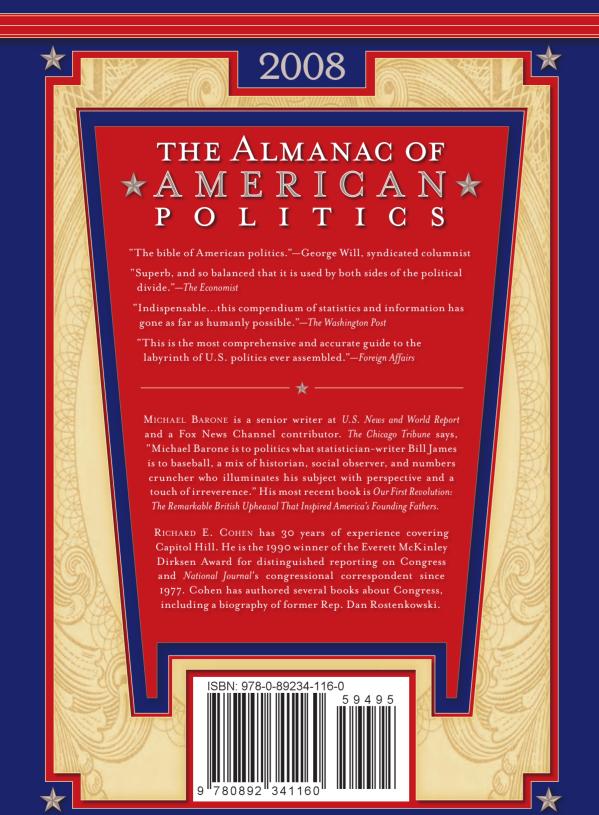
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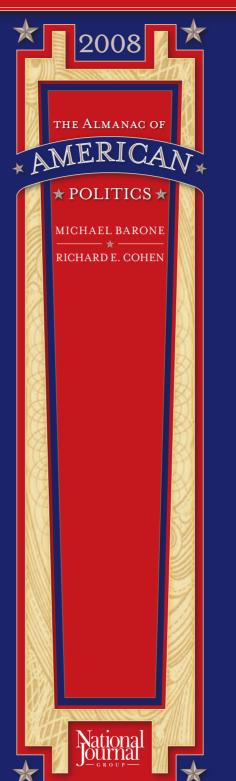
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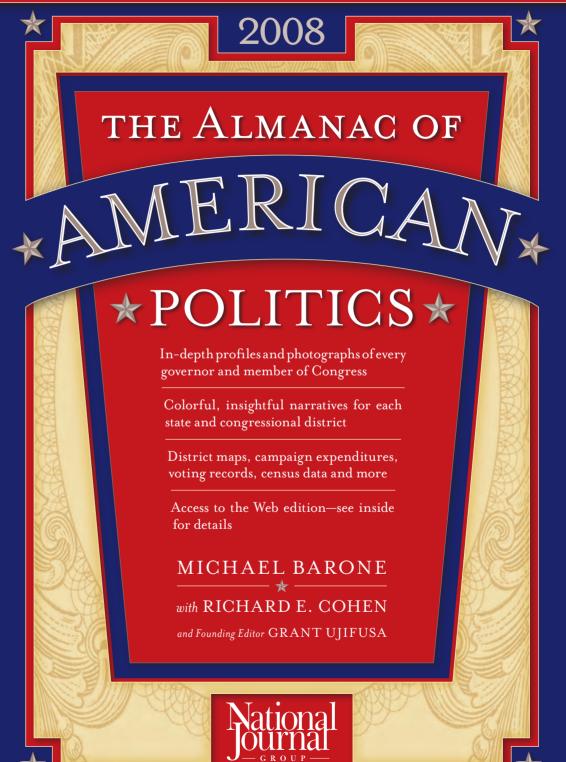
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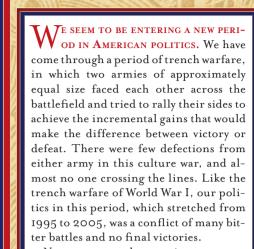
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Now we seem to be entering a new period, a period of open-field politics. It seems to be a time when there are no permanent alliances, when new leaders arise with new strategies and tactics, when the voters, instead of forming themselves into two coherent and cohesive armies, wander about the field, attaching themselves to one band and then another, with no clear lines of battle and no landmarks to rally beside.

Americans are facing the first presidential election since 1928 that doesn't feature the incumbent president or the incumbent vice president as a candidate. We have gone through periods of openfield politics before, most recently between 1990 and 1995. In those years, a little-known governor of Arkansas challenged an incumbent president whose job approval rose to 89 percent; a Texas billionaire announced his candidacy on cable news and soon led the putative Republican and Democratic nominees in the polls; and the Republican Party, after 40 years in the minority in the House, won thumping majorities in the House and Senate. Similar surprises, or quite different ones, may be in store for us.