

# Lance Tarrance: Magazine cites his national influence

**Editor's note:** The following story is re-printed from the June 14 edition of *The National Journal*, a Washington D.C.-based magazine that covers national affairs. The article is about Republican pollster Lance Tarrance, who is identified in the magazine as being one of 150 people in the United States who stands out in their ability to influence national policy.

He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Lance Tarrance of Athens.

**By RONALD BROWNSTEIN**

The National Journal  
In the storied tradition of Texas populists, V. Lance Tarrance is a pretty unlikely figure.

Start with his occupation: He's a political pollster, with an academic mien and a buttoned-down wardrobe. It's hard to picture Tarrance with cow dung on his shoes.

Then there's the matter of his party. Tarrance is a Republican, whose nonpolitical clients include some of Texas's largest energy companies and utilities.

Tarrance's is clearly not the populism of Sam Rayburn or Wright Patman, two former Members of the House from Texas who raged against banks, railroads, utilities and other special interests. To their modern successors, liberals such as Texas agriculture commissioner Jim Hightower, it isn't populism at all. But to many younger Republicans, the conservative populism Tarrance preaches is the road to salvation — or at least to the elusive majority party status.

Tarrance, 45, has been around numbers and politics all of his pro-

fessional life. In the late 1960s, he served as research director for the Texas Republican Party and then the Republican National Committee. From 1970-73, he studied demographic trends and survey techniques as special assistant to the director of the Census Bureau and later joined Richard B. Wirthlin's polling firm, Decision/Making/Information Inc., as a vice president. In 1977, he established his own polling firm in Houston.

Tarrance has his share of top-drawer Republican clients, primarily throughout the South and West — among them, Texas Sen. Phil Gramm, Alabama Sen. Jeremiah Denton, California Gov. George Deukmejian and Rep. W. Henson Moore, now seeking a Senate seat in Louisiana.

Wirthlin and Robert M. Teeter, the other leading Republican pollsters, have more impressive client lists. What gives Tarrance his influence is that to an unusual degree for a pollster, he has developed and articulated his own vision of how the political world works.

"Tarrance is more of a philosopher pollster, and he has a theory of public opinion," said University of Virginia political scientist Larry J. Sabato, author of a book on political consultants. "I don't think you could say that about Wirthlin. I think Teeter has theories about specific demographic groups, but they are not as enveloping as Tarrance's... In that sense, he may be the Republican (Patrick H.) Caddell."

The philosophy Tarrance sells is a populist-tinged appeal to con-



Lance Tarrance in his Houston-based political polling firm.

servative rural southerners and urban northern ethnics — former Democrats who are disaffected from their party largely on fiscal and cultural issues. Tarrance is prominent among those who believe that the GOP can lure Democratic voters by first attracting Democratic officeholders to switch parties, and among his clients are some of the most prominent switchers, including Gramm and former Rep. Kent Hance, who lost in the Texas Republican gubernatorial primary last month.

"Not only is he identified with (the development of conservative populism)," Gramm said, "he has been an important part of it. He was one of the first people to really see there was a shift under way where people are sitting around a kitchen table saying, 'What are the Democrats doing that I support?' He has probably done more than anyone else in helping us to understand the underlying reason for that."

To Tarrance, the conservative populists are a swing group with views that draw from both parties'

traditional appeals. Unlike traditional Republicans, the conservative populists are not reflexively antigovernment; they see a "role for the government protecting the individual," against economic hardship and promoting economic change. Culturally, they are conservative, holding "values that are somewhat nostalgic — restorative, patriotic" though they don't necessarily support the religious right agenda on specific issues such as abortion or back aggressive fore-

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ign intervention, Tarrance maintains. And, in pure populist tradition, they are skeptical of big institutions "including big business as well as big labor and big government."

For a candidate, acquiring a pollster with such a developed world view can be a mixed blessing. Some candidates have hired Tarrance for a different perspective on how to assemble a majority coalition. But some politicians worry that such clearcut opinions lead to rigidity. "Sometimes Lance lets his own personal political preferences bias the strategic view of the campaign," said Karl C. Rove, a Texas Republican consultant who has worked with and against him.

Conservative populism's place in the GOP is still unsettled. The backbone of the Republican Party remains business executives and affluent suburbanites — the kind of "elites" that populists don't like. Sometimes the two groups agree on candidates, sometimes they don't. As a party switcher, Gramm was spectacularly successful; Hance flopped badly against former Gov. William P. Clements Jr., a classic country club Republican.

Gramm and Tarrance maintain that showing doesn't constitute a rejection of party switching or a populist appeal, but it certainly is a reminder that "the Republican Party is still a suburban, upper-income, upper-educated party," said Stuart Rothenberg, political director of the conservative Institute for Government and Politics. "Let's face it: (Clements) the old-time Republican won."

The major test of the conservative populist appeal will come in 1988, when Rep. Jack F. Kemp, R-N.Y., is expected to seek the presidency under that banner. If Kemp runs, Tarrance is likely to be his pollster. Tarrance said that a populist appeal like Kemp's "is just absolutely critical if the Republican Party is going to be a majority party. If we allow Wall Street rather than Main Street to take over the Republican Party, we may find it was only a Reagan revolution, rather than a Republican revolution."

The 1988 primary season may show how many rank-and-file Republicans agree.