

SWINGERS: HOW PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES BUILD
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS IN SWING STATES

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SWINGERS: HOW PRESIDENTIAL NOMINEES BUILD
SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS IN SWING STATES

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ABSTRACT

A review of presidential campaign data shows that candidates in every election cycle heavily concentrate campaign activity in swing states. This state-specific activity seeks to connect with varying types of potential voters and garner enough votes to tilt a state's electoral votes in one candidate's favor. This thesis reviews scholarly literature regarding campaigns and their efficacy, the different blocs of voters, the definition and importance of swing states, and campaign strategies. From the review, this paper moves into a study of the effects that field offices, contributions from individuals, television advertising dollars, campaign event spending, state visits by both the presidential and vice presidential candidate, and the June polling margins have on a state-by-state level in delivering electoral votes to a successful presidential nominee. Finally, this thesis makes recommendations, extrapolated from the data, on how to run a successful presidential campaign in swing states.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In my favorite book, *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel writes, "It's important in life to conclude things properly. Only then can you let go. Otherwise you are left with words you should have said but never did, and your heart is heavy with remorse." My heart would be heavy with remorse without a few acknowledgements of those who have helped me conclude this thesis properly.

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INTRODUCTION

Presidential elections have seen their fair share of change since George Washington was (reluctantly) elected in 1789. The changes in laws determining who can vote—originally only white men who owned property—have undoubtedly provided the most seminal shift in American politics, enfranchising more Americans (most famously including women and minorities) to determine the course of the country. However, the second-most important adjustment to the presidential election process has proven to be the changes in the presidential campaign process.

Presidential campaigns have become staples of the 24-hour news cycle with every move, countermove, and blunder, however trifling, being dissected and analyzed by pundits and average Joes alike. These campaigns have become such grand ordeals that they have adopted a “permanent” and “constant” nature that has inadvertently given birth to the celebrity status of politicians (Jones 2000). Party national conventions and primaries have become primetime events in their own rights, and presidential debates have winners and losers declared on Twitter 45 seconds after the debate has ended—or even while the debate is still on the air. Campaign finance has swelled prolifically as Political Action Committees (PACs) and Super PACs have been granted practically unlimited finances with little to no regulation via the court cases of “Citizens United” and *Speechnow.org vs. FEC*, leading to a virtual financial arms race for presidential candidates.

With the advent of the constant campaign and the proliferation of campaign spending, an important question must be considered: what constitutes a successful campaign? Especially during a time in American politics where entrenched

partisanship all but guarantees a significant portion of the electorate, how do candidates effectively target, approach, and garner the votes of the swing states that are up for grabs and determine the course of an election? This paper seeks to fill that knowledge gap, determining how George W. Bush in 2004 and Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012 built successful presidential campaigns in the requisite swing states to deliver the presidential nomination. In addition, this paper will search for any threads or trends among these three campaigns to discover if there are any hallmarks or commonalities of a successful campaign.

This thesis will draw conclusions from all three of these campaigns to arrive at an idea of what exactly constitutes a successful campaign, regardless of party or incumbency.

WHAT DO PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNS ENTAIL?

It may be impossible to fully determine what a presidential campaign entails; Campbell (pg. 438, 2001) broadly defines a general election campaign as involving “all attempts to influence the vote decisions of potential voters from the time of the national conventions until election day.” This definition serves as a very inclusive viewpoint and may encompass “everything from candidate speeches and appearances to televised campaign advertising to neighbors exchanging political views over the back fence” (pg. 438, Campbell 2001).

Brady (2004) put a finer point on the substance of a campaign with two conceptual and empirical lenses through which campaigns can be viewed and judged. The first lens considers certain institutional conditions that generally indicate that a campaign is underway—namely: 1) the election date is known, 2) the

candidates' identities are known, 3) candidates are able to dedicate the majority of their time towards election or re-election, and 4) certain normally unregulated actions are now strictly monitored and sometimes forbidden (e.g. fundraising, spending, etc.).

These parameters introduce two issues of campaigns that are difficult to measure. There *is* a known election date—and thus, a known end to the campaign—but the beginning of a campaign is murkily subjective. Should the first campaign-like activity be considered the commencement of a campaign, should it be the date that intention to run is announced, or should it be the day that a candidate actually receives nomination for the presidential election by his or her respective party? For the purposes of this paper, campaigns are considered to start after both the Republican and Democratic candidates have received official nomination from their respective parties so as to separate primary campaigns from presidential campaigns and to pick a similar campaign starting point for both candidates (particularly in the event of an incumbent running against a challenger).

A second difficult to accurately assess campaign element—as defined by Brady (2004)—is the sense of elevated intensity. As the date for the citizens' opportunity to cast a significant political vote draws nearer, campaigns ratchet up the effort to connect with and educate as many voters as possible. Candidates travel extensively to swing states, volunteers constantly canvass and call voters, and campaign teams oversee a flurry of advertisements, statements, and other strategic moves. Media outlets contribute to this intensity with increased coverage, attentiveness, and political discussion as opposed to less politically intense periods.

This all-encompassing intensity is felt by average Americans in almost all aspects of daily life: bumper stickers on the car in front of you, advertisements during an episode of *Modern Family*, a nervous high schooler knocking on your door and asking to place a sign in your lawn. The fever pitch is inescapable, and all of this activity fits in with “the all-encompassing goal of political campaigns”: “to maximize the probability of victory” (pg. 51, Nickerson and Rogers 2004).

Even though campaigns have an end date in the form of Election Day, campaigns never quite stop. Mann and Ornstein (pg. 45, 2000) state that “campaigns are nonstop and year-round, and governing is intimately linked to the campaigns in a continuous loop,” leading to the “transcendence of campaigning over governing” (pg. 46, Mann and Ornstein 2000). This has led to lower voter turnout and a general sense of disenchantment from some members of the American electorate. Many voters have grown distrustful of politicians, believe every move or statement is a ploy to secure votes, and assume the worst about every candidate. Choosing “the lesser of two evils” instead of a candidate to be excited about has become a common refrain for American voters. While these are some of the downsides of the current system, it appears unlikely that America abandons the current state of campaigning any time soon as politicians (the very people with the legal ability to enact change) and donors grow more entrenched in the status quo.

However, the definition of a campaign and its potential downsides prove to be a moot point unless campaigns actually have some affect on the outcome.

DO CAMPAIGNS EVEN MATTER?

Historically, the research community has reached near unanimous agreement that presidential campaigns matter in the course of presidential elections, but a divide has persisted on exactly how much campaigns matter. Some scholars contend that campaign events drive public reactions, issue context influences vote choice, and that election results are linked to campaign intensity (McClurg & Holbrook 2009) while others have postulated that the net effects are small or minimal (Campbell 2001). However, as presidential campaign research has built in more recent years, academics have come to a consensus that campaigns play a critical role in the determination of the president.

Bartels (1993) submitted that the miscalculation of the effect of presidential campaigns stemmed from researchers' tendency to only look for large aggregate shifts in voting behavior from campaign events. Bartels suggested that a reconceptualization was necessary on behalf of the researchers—that academics should look not only for the large aggregate shifts (which are unlikely to occur) but also for the less significant shifts that can solidify or slightly turn an election. Finkel (1993) took this one step further, documenting data from the 1980s and noting an increase in the instability of voter intention during campaigns. From this data, Finkel was able to conclude that “although campaign effects may be minimal in the sense that precampaign preferences explain the vast majority of votes, campaigns play a key role in ensuring that voters correctly cast votes in accordance with their preferences” (pg. 5, Cera & Weinschenk 2012).

Zaller (1996) argues that campaigns have an amount of magnitude closer to “massive” than to “negligible,” and he reasons that the apparent minimal effects of presidential campaigns often come from starkly conflicting viewpoints and campaign messages from opposing parties (Benoit, Hansen, Holbert 2004). The needle might not move much in either direction—leading some to believe that campaigns play no important role—because these influential and deliberate campaigns counterbalance each other so effectively.

Campbell (pg. 454, 2001) went so far as to estimate that “approximately 1 presidential election out of about every 4 has been decided by its campaign.” This point does not refute the importance of campaigns—the principles of counterbalance and a dearth of large aggregate shifts still ring true here. This point also does not imply that the remaining 3 out of 4 presidential campaigns played no part in shifting voters or states from one candidate to the other. Rather, in one out of every four presidential elections a campaign is run, planned, and managed so effectively that it garners even *more* importance than can be typically expected—or one campaign is massively bungled while the other operates normally. These superior campaigns (or vastly inferior campaigns) account for larger aggregate shifts that make up for, squander, or build upon early pre-election polling indicators. Campbell (2001) points to the elections of 1948, 1960, 1976, 1988, and 2000 as five elections from 1948 to 2000 that were determined by the candidates’ campaigns.

Campaigns clearly play an important part in the nomination of the president, but this role is not solely from an academic perspective. The most critical role of

campaigns is to attract and mobilize the very people that make an election happen: voters.

WHAT KINDS OF VOTERS ARE THERE?

In any given presidential campaign, Strohmeier (2013) classifies potential voters into four main categories: traditional base voter, value-rational base voter, instrumentally rational swing voter, and affectual swing voter.

The traditional base voter “shows an extremely high degree of party affiliation and a low degree of rationality (political interest and political education)” (pg. 52, Strohmeier 2013). This traditional base voter will always vote for the same party without a critical examination as to why or any kind of deeper consideration of the current candidates, issues, or political climate. If Big Bird ran as a Republican or Democrat, the traditional base voters for Big Bird’s party wouldn’t bat an eye in casting their ballots even though his occasional struggles with elementary concepts such as counting and the alphabet should provide cause for concern about his ability to lead the country.

Value-rational base voters, on the other hand show “both a high degree of party affiliation and a high degree of rationality” (pg. 52, Strohmeier 2013). Value-rational base voters remain attuned to politics and preserve allegiance to a party “as long as this party represents the voter’s political values” (pg. 52, Strohmeier 2013). So long as the value-rational base voter’s party maintains its stance on the issues that the voter prioritizes and agrees with (e.g. gun control, abortion, immigration, marriage equality etc.), the value-rational base voter will remain both engaged and loyal.

Instrumentally rational swing voters make up the third category. An instrumentally rational swing voter “shows a low degree of party affiliation and a high degree of rationality” meaning that “he or she is not attached to a political party but is still ‘involved in politics’” (pg. 53, Strohmeier 2013). This voter chooses the party and the candidate that proves most advantageous to the individual voter in each election. The absence of party loyalty remains critical with these voters as an instrumentally rational swing voter could choose a candidate that winds up elected, grow dissatisfied, and vote against the very same candidate for re-election.

The fourth and final category is the affectual swing voter. “This voter shows an extremely low degree of party affiliation as well as a low degree of rationality” (pg. 53, Strohmeier 2013). Affectual swing voters vote with the heart, not the head. Unquantifiable elements such as candidates’ personalities often drive the decisions of this group of voters, as well as emotions towards the candidates, both positive and negative. Charismatic candidates have an unquestionable edge with this voting bloc as the likability and energy that these candidates exude can be the most important quality for an affectual swing voter. Popular charismatic candidates that have attracted this voter bloc include Ronald Regan, Bill Clinton, and John F. Kennedy.

Strohmeier (2013) explains that any successful campaign must connect with all four types of voters, though the methods and intensity of a candidate’s message must be adjusted based on who is being targeted (e.g. television connects more readily with swing voters whereas Internet connects more readily with base voters).

While it's easy to know who the base voters are and even easier to convince them to vote for their own party's candidate—though mobilization of said voters still holds great importance—swing voters can be tougher to definitively nail down. Generally speaking, swing voters are individuals who “have a more even or balanced set of attitudes” and “could vote either way” (pg. 359 – 360, Mayer 2007). In reality, the term “swing voter” is applied with great inconsistency and can just as well mean anyone a campaign manager wants it to mean when it comes to targeting specific voters. Even within a party the definition of swing voter can vary greatly. For instance, in 2002 the Democratic Leadership Council defined swing voters as “white-collar professionals who are economically moderate and socially liberal” while the liberal faction of the Democratic National Party considered swing voters to be “blue-collar, downscale voters who are economically populist and socially moderate” (pg. 12, Chait 2002).

Though there's no way to positively know who identifies as a swing voter, Mayer (2007) adopted a definition based off a National Election Studies (NES) pre-election survey. The survey utilizes the so-called “feelings thermometer” questions to assess who qualifies as a swing voter, asking respondents to rate how favorably or unfavorably they view candidates on a scale from 0 to 100. Those respondents who rate the candidates within 15 degrees of each other can be deemed swing voters, and, true to form, partisan conversions reach about 15% in this range. While a 15% conversion rate is still a small number, it represents a tremendous opportunity for each candidate to swing the election in his or her favor.

Swing voters also report as a significant portion of the electorate. For presidential elections from 1952 – 2004 “campaign swing voters ranged from 13 to 23 percent with a median of 16 percent” (pg. 124, Campbell 2008) rendering about one out of every six voters unsure of how they would cast their vote during the campaign season. From 1940 to 2012, the average margin of victory in presidential elections has been 8.37% (Presidential Election Popular Votes 2013). If you remove the landslide victories from the formula (using *Politico’s* definition of a landslide election as being one in which the winning candidate beats his opponent by at least 10 percentage points), the average margin of victory falls to 6.25%—clearly a margin that could be greatly influenced by swing voters.

However, interestingly enough, analysis has proven that “presidential candidates do not need to carry a majority of the swing vote in order to win a majority of the two-party popular vote” (pg. 129, Campbell 2008). Fluctuations in party loyalty and voter mobilization can often offset a majority or minority of swing voters and leave the presidential nomination unaffected. However, just because a candidate wins without receiving a majority of the swing vote does not mean that this candidate neglected swing voters in campaigning—rather, these candidates garnered just enough swing vote support to leave their bid for presidency unscathed. In other words, swing voters are important, but they’re not the *most* influential player in determining the course of a presidential election. Thanks to the Electoral College, that distinction belongs to the swing voters *in* swing states.

IMPORTANCE OF SWING STATES

Swing states share a key similarity with swing voters: the uncertainty with which way the state's electoral votes will go. Schill (2014, pg. 537) defines swing states as "a state in which no single candidate has sufficient voter support and the state, therefore, is potentially winnable by any of the leading candidates." As opposed to safe states—states with a clear majority leaning towards one candidate (Gimpel 2007)—swing states have a close enough margin that could tilt towards either candidate. Consequently, the swing voters *in* the swing states become the most sought-after sliver of the electorate as these voters hold determinative power in their state's—and possibly the nation's—voting outcome (Schill 2014). To that point, the greatest variance and voter movement exists in swing states due to heavily targeted and effective marketing during the campaign season (Panagopoulos 2009).

The importance of swing states stems from the number of electoral votes in play. For instance, in the 2012 election the nine swing states—Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Virginia, and Wisconsin) combined for 110 electoral votes (*Politico* "2012 Swing States"). Considering the president elect needs 270 electoral votes to win, it's easy to see the value of adding even one swing state's votes to a nominee's final tally. This importance amplifies in close races. In 2000, Bush won with a final electoral vote count of 271 to 266. Had any of the 28 states that voted for Bush chosen Gore instead, then Gore would have won the presidency (Stromberg 2008). It's banal to say that every vote matters, but it is spot on to say that every state counts.

Swing states also hold great importance for parties hoping to convert them to safe states—or keep the opposition from doing so. If a historic swing state has shown greater favorability towards a particular party in recent years, that party will make every effort to convert the swing into a consistent safe state, while the opposing party will make every effort to keep it as a swing.

Take for example the case of West Virginia, a reliably Democratic state until 2000. In 2000, Gore disregarded West Virginia as a swing while Bush saw a tremendous opportunity in a state that had been economically liberal yet socially conservative (Woodruff 2014). Bush outspent Gore in the state, winning West Virginia's 5 electoral votes in an election that Bush ended up winning by 5 electoral votes total. Since the 2000 election, West Virginia has voted Republican in every subsequent election. At present, the Republican shift has been fueled by “support for the coal industry and gun rights, and the deep unpopularity of President Obama” (Davis 2014). And to drive the point home even further, West Virginia elected a Republican Senator in 2014 for the first time since 1958. In the 2016 presidential election, Democrats will fight to turn the state back to blue while Republicans will be eager to deepen the red roots taking hold in West Virginia.

It's plain to see that presidential campaigns have taken to heart the importance of swing states. Voters in swing states report higher political interest, significantly more contact from political parties, and greater participation and political involvement (Gimpel 2007). This also contributes to higher voter turnout in swing states while often leaving voters in safe states feeling unable to make any tangible difference (Page 2012). The differences in voter turnout have only been

widening in recent years, with 7.4% more voters turning out in swing states in 2012 (Page 2012). Candidates implicitly tell safe states they're less important and explicitly petition swing states for their votes, and the results reflect this dichotomy clearly.

Table 1: Swing States of 2004, 2008, and 2012

2004	2008	2012
Arkansas	Colorado	Colorado
Colorado	Florida	Florida
Hawaii	Indiana	Iowa
Iowa	Iowa	Nevada
Maine	Missouri	New Hampshire
Michigan	Nevada	North Carolina
Minnesota	New Hampshire	Ohio
Missouri	New Mexico	Virginia
Nevada	North Carolina	Wisconsin
New Hampshire	Ohio	
New Jersey	Pennsylvania	
New Mexico	Virginia	
Ohio	Wisconsin	
Oregon		
Pennsylvania		
Wisconsin		
West Virginia		

Electoral history portrays Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin as the fourteen most common swing states (Highton 2014). Table 1 shows the states considered swing states for the elections of 2004, 2008, and 2012.

As partisanship has grown more entrenched in recent years and in specific safe states, swing states will continue to be the most salient targets in upcoming elections. While significant implications may arise from excluding a majority of the country from the heart of political discourse and the focus of campaign attention, these implications reside outside of the scope of this paper. In fact, this exclusion makes practical sense as campaigns allocate resources toward voters and states that have yet to make up their minds and could be persuaded towards a candidate's side (Schill 2014). Panagopoulos (pg. 128, 2009) asserts that this allocation of resources works as he notes "at least some real movement in voter sentiment in swing states, while observed movement in nonswing states is nearly all sampling error."

With the concept and importance of campaigns, the make-up and value of the different voter blocs, and the understanding of the power of swing states all in hand, it now makes sense to turn and focus on the strategies driving campaigns in an effort to capitalize on this knowledge of the electorate and deliver votes.

CAMPAIGN STRATEGIES

Joe McGinniss's 1969 book *The Selling of the President 1968* may have been the first public investigation of the calculation that goes into marketing and packaging a political candidate, but meticulous design and preparation have always

been a constant of the battle for the presidential nomination. Some would be so blunt as to say that “modern campaigns...effectively sell candidates as products” meaning that “salient campaign issues are product attributes and positions a candidate may assume on each issue correspond to attributes levels” (pg. 64, Cochran 2012). With this corporate view of candidates as products, the campaign strategy takes on greater importance as many voters see these “products” as similar, interchangeable, and equally unexciting.

From a theoretical standpoint, there exists for every candidate in a race an “optimal platform.” This optimal platform—which has much in common with Anthony Downs’s “Economic Theory of Democracy” (1957) in which Downs outlined certain ideological conditions under which a challenger could always beat an incumbent—“finds the combination of attribute levels that maximizes a candidate’s issue-based support among a sample of voters” (pg. 77, Cochran 2012). More simply, an optimal platform is the perfect blueprint of moves, countermoves, statements, and actions that result in the most votes possible toward a desired nomination. Although an optimal platform remains an essentially unattainable ideal due to the limitations of forecasting and the unpredictability of real life, analysis of optimal platforms provide campaign strategists a tremendous jumping-off point in developing a campaign and a candidate.

The fact that any number of unpredictable events or developments could arise throughout the course of a campaign prevents a truly optimal platform, and many of these developments will have to do with a candidate’s opponent. As Carsey (2011) points out, a candidate’s opponent and that opponent’s behavior play a

crucial role in determining campaign strategy. In Carsey's own words: "Whether the opponent has prior political experience, has particular strengths on some issues or among specific segments of the constituency, or is expected to run a negative campaign are just a few examples of what might matter to candidates in formulating their own campaign plans" (pg. 270, Carsey 2011). Often times we think of negative candidate behaviors as those requiring responses or maneuvers (e.g. a scandal, an outburst, a flub), but positive candidate behaviors require perhaps more adroit responses. If an opponent does well in a debate or runs a devastatingly effective advertisement, a candidate's strategy must account for these positive actions on behalf of the opponent and act accordingly.

However, at most times candidates will actually engage in what is known as a *rational expectations* approach wherein candidates accumulate information to form predictions about future behavior on behalf of an opponent, the public, and the media, and then act according to these projections (Carsey 2011). In practice, Candidate A would make choices based on his or her prediction of Candidate B's behavior and future moves instead of adapting his or her behavior as a response to the observed behavior of Candidate B (i.e. *reactive responsiveness*). This approach to campaign strategy intertwines readily with game theory, projecting a series of potential outcomes and taking action to manipulate the likeliest of these outcomes in an advantageous manner. While this approach injects plenty of proactivity into campaign strategy, the *rational expectations* approach is predicated upon accurate forecasting. If the forecasting is off, the expectations have been derived from

circumstances that have not actually come to pass and result in strategic moves based on faulty projections that do not reflect the current state of the race.

A. S. Belenky (2005) delves further into the game theory behind campaign strategy and recognizes that winning the nomination simply means using time and monetary resources within your limits and effectively enough to find a combination of states and DC that delivers the requisite 270 electoral votes. Belenky (2005) formulates this discrete optimization as a Boolean knapsack problem—more simply, a binary problem where (assuming two candidates) Candidate A's electoral votes total either less than 270 or greater than or equal to 270. Through this approach, Belenky detects several problems of campaign strategy that require grappling. When it comes to allocating resources, there could be an insufficient amount of funds to campaign in the requisite places, there could be a lack of necessary fundraising to meet these needs, and it can be tough to figure out where specifically a candidate should concentrate his or her campaign. A shortage of funds or a miscalculation of where to concentrate the campaign could serve as the death knell for any hopeful candidate.

Backing away from the game theory approach, Day (2010) realizes that other factors could drive resource allocation for candidates while campaigning. Specifically, Day lists helping same-party candidates win various elections, placating important people, maintaining political traditions, and bettering public relations. While campaigns are obviously primarily concerned with victory, these kinds of expenditures are typically aimed at a long game that may not immediately affect or alter an election outcome.

No perfect model or algorithm exists to maximize and optimize campaign strategy currently, but every year one candidate campaigns more effectively than the other and earns the presidential nomination. The election may be left up to chance, incumbency, and national well-being every year, but there seems to exist a certain combination of moves or strategy that winning candidates employ to hit the magic number 270. To test this contention, this paper will now shift to case studies of the 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections and investigate how Bush and Obama ran successful campaigns.

METHODOLOGY

In analyzing the data from the 2004, 2008, and 2012 elections, any expenditure or contribution data was drawn from the website of the Federal Election Commission (fec.gov) or the website of the Center for Responsive Politics (opensecrets.org). Both of these websites contain campaign finance files submitted by candidates available for public use and record. The itineraries and travel schedules of candidates were drawn from the presidential campaign information on George Washington University's website and Politico. The number of field offices for each candidate came from FairVote.org and the presidential campaign information on George Washington University's website. June polling margins came from the Wall Street Journal and RealClearPolitics.com while final polling margins came solely from the US Election Atlases of 2004, 2008, and 2012. All regression analysis was completed using SPSS predictive analytics software.

HOW CAMPAIGNS ARE (AND ARE NOT) CHANGING

In looking at the election-year-to-election-year data, presidential campaigns seem to be changing in some ways while remaining the same in others. Table 2 displays the average number of field offices per state.

Table 2: Average Number of Field Offices Per State

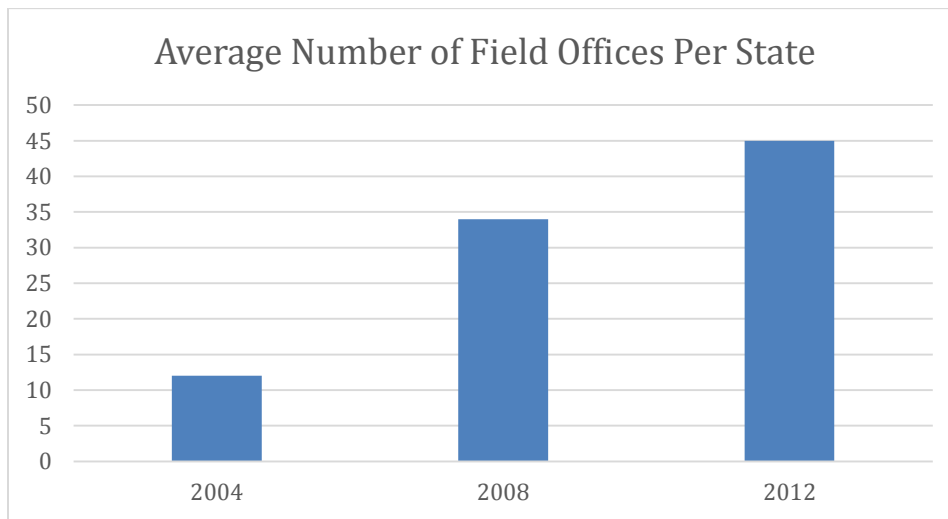
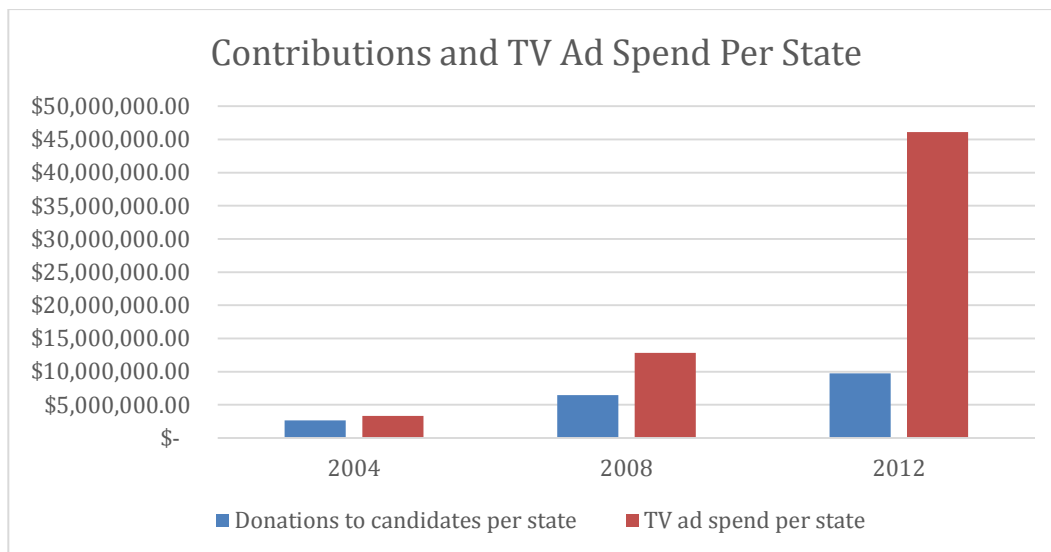


Table 3 shows the amount donated to candidates by individuals (does not include PACs or Super PACs) and amount spent on TV advertisements per state.

Table 3: Contributions and TV Ad Spend Per State



The number of field offices per state, the amount donated to candidates per state, and the amount spent on TV advertisements per state all seem to be increasing. While it is plain to see that both donations and TV advertising spend have increased each year, the 2012 TV advertising absolutely proliferated. TV advertisements serve as an easy way to reach potential voters, and unlike many other areas of campaign finance, it is easy for campaign teams to find out how much their opponent spends on television. This ease of access can lead to an arms race (obviously demonstrated in 2012) as candidates scramble to outspend one another.

Despite the changes to the number of field offices, donations to candidates, and TV advertising spend, one prominent feature of presidential campaigns has remained relatively unchanged: the number of days presidential nominees and/or their vice presidential running mates spend campaigning in swing states. Presidential candidates spent on average a remarkably consistent 9 days in each swing state in 2004, 2008, and 2012. Vice presidential candidates spent on average 5 days in each swing state in 2008 and 2012 while spending on average 7 days per swing state in 2004. This consistency, however, most likely does not stem from smarter campaigning, restraint, or an aversion to travel. In all likelihood, these consistent averages are due to the inherent constraint of the calendar. There are only 153 days from June 1 to November 1 every year, and though events in multiple states can be scheduled for the same day, candidates are hindered by the laws of time and space just the same as everyone else.

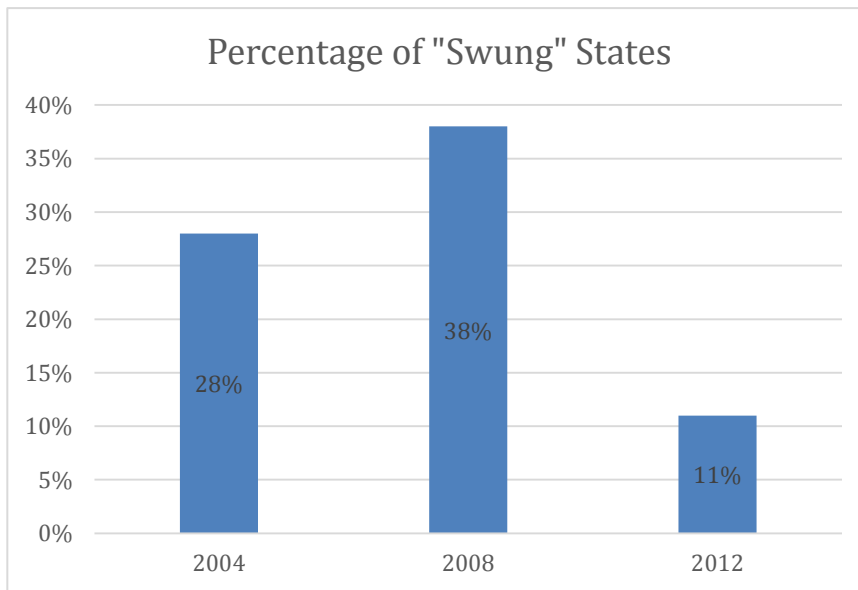
CAMPAIGNS (AGAIN) DO MATTER

It is important to start discussion of the aggregated data with the change in polling margins from June to the final margin of victory. By taking the mean of the absolute value of the June polling margins (absolute value because a positive lead for one candidate means a negative margin for the other candidate which would cancel out any margin altogether), the research showed an average June lead of 4.05% at the polls for any given candidate. This 4.05% average lead grew to 5.52% at the final polls. While it may be difficult to definitively prove that this shift comes exclusively as a result of campaigning, the correlation of an almost 1.5 percentage point increase at the polls after the heat of campaign season seems to underscore the notion that campaigns do matter.

The data also finds that not only do campaigns matter—they can, in fact, swing a swing state from one candidate to the other. From 2004 to 2012, 11 out of a possible 40 swing states changed preferences from June to November—swing states that “swung.” These 11 states represent 27.5% of the total number of swing states from these election years. In a close race, a candidate able to turn over one fourth of the swing states in his or her favor gains a tremendous advantage.

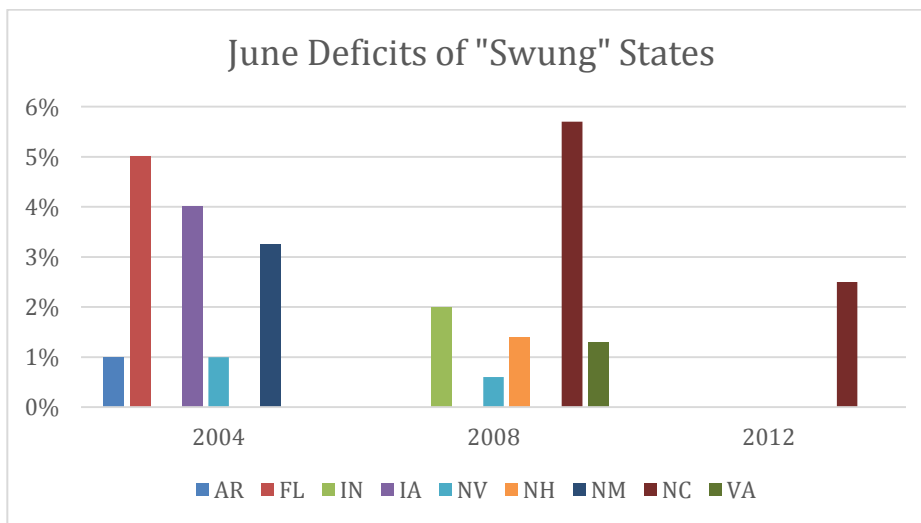
Table 4 shows a year-by-year breakdown of the percentage of states that swung in 2004, 2008, and 2012.

Table 4: Percentage of “Swung” States



The margins by which the candidate trailed in June for these states can be found in Table 5.

Table 5: June Deficits of “Swung” States



Not surprisingly, 10 of those 11 states that changed preferences ended up switching to the winning candidate. Save for North Carolina in 2012 (a traditionally red state that voted for Obama in 2008 and swung back Republican in 2012), every swing state that has changed since 2004 has shifted allegiance to the winner of the general election. Campaign teams that are able to swing states from the opponent to their candidate can turn a close election into a landslide or a deficit into a victory.

Table 5 shows that since 2004, no state has changed preferences from June to November with a June margin higher than 5.7% favoring any candidate. In all likelihood, campaign teams target states such as these (as opposed to states where the margin may be 6% or higher) as states that could potentially be turned and added to a candidate's electoral vote tally.

These states should have been easy for campaign teams (who surely have a cutoff number or a margin that defines the realm of "winnability") to spot and target. But reading polls is easy—the difficult part is deciding what to do in response to those polls. Through the gift of hindsight we are able to now interpret which moves and decisions actually proved decisive in extending a lead, cutting into a deficit, or actually flipping a state in a candidate's favor.

WHAT ACTUALLY TIPS THE SCALES

Table 6 displays a regression analysis ($F = 10.951$, $df = 79$, $p\text{-value} < .001$) run on six independent variables for which the campaign is responsible to study their interaction with the dependent variable of the final margin of victory.

These independent variables account for the differences between the campaigns in any year: how much more or less money or time a candidate spent in

any given area in every swing state. Most of the data points reflect a difference in money spent, but the Difference in Days in State and Difference in Days in State by VP both account for the difference in days spent in swing states for campaign-specific events.

Based on the weight of each beta, three of the seven independent variables showed statistical significance: Difference in Field Offices (B = .382, t-stat = 3.156, p-value = .002), Difference in Contributions (B = .250, t-stat = 2.415, p-value = .018), and June 1 Polling Margin (B = .422, t-stat = 4.896, p-value = .000).

Table 6: Variables Affecting Final Margin

		Variables Affecting Final Margin				
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
Model		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	-1.178E-16	.559		.000	1.000
	Difference in Field Offices	.077	.024	.382	3.156	.002
	Difference in Number of Days in State	-.078	.149	-.056	-.524	.602
	Difference in Number of Days in State by VP	-.049	.209	-.029	-.236	.814
	Difference in Event Spend	-5.810E-7	.000	-.082	-.681	.498
	Difference in Contribution	4.606E-7	.000	.250	2.415	.018
	Difference in TV Ad Spend	5.136E-8	.000	.066	.653	.516
	June 1 Polling Margin	.607	.124	.422	4.896	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Final Margin

It makes sense that field offices, contributions, and the June polling margin are statistically significant in guiding an election. Campaigns utilize field offices to maintain day-to-day contact and visibility with potential voters while large contributions from a state intimates support from a state—either widespread or by

influential wealth. Campaigns that commit a greater number of field offices improve their ability to influence potential voters on a daily basis, and campaigns that gin up contributions from a state secure voters that care enough to donate to a candidate—and a voter that will donate to a candidate is a voter that will tell others about the candidate. Finally, campaigns find it much easier to gain and maintain an early lead than to use the campaign to make up massive amounts of ground in states where a candidate faces a deficit.

More surprising is the finding that state visits (both by the presidential and vice presidential candidate), event spend (amount spent on executing campaign events), and TV advertising dollars do not achieve statistical significance in this regression analysis. These variables are not campaign activities that should be forsaken, but it appears that a minor to moderate advantage in these campaign aspects do not significantly guide the course of an election. A likely explanation for this phenomenon could be that campaigns have reached some kind of threshold with state visits, television advertising, and campaign events, where additional money and time generate diminishing returns.

Table 7 displays a regression analysis ($F = 12.772$, $df = 79$, $p\text{-value} < .001$) examining how the Republican and Democratic parties consistently differ over the three election cycles in their campaign strategies. The only statistically significant variable—the variable that appears to hold great importance to Democrats but not to Republicans—is the Difference in Field Offices ($B = -.693$, $t\text{-stat} = -5.765$, $p\text{-value} = .000$).

Table 7: Party Differences

		Party Differences				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.500	.041		12.220	.000
	Difference in Field Offices	-.010	.002	-.693	-5.765	.000
	Difference in Number of Days in State	-.020	.011	-.195	-1.825	.072
	Difference in Number of Days in State by VP	.005	.015	.042	.350	.727
	Difference in Event Spend	4.978E-9	.000	.010	.080	.936
	Difference in Contribution	-4.350E-9	.000	-.032	-.312	.756
	Difference in TV Ad Spend	-3.801E-9	.000	-.066	-.660	.511

a. Dependent Variable: Party

This finding should cause some alarm and readjustment from the Republican campaign teams. Table 6 showed that the difference in the number of field offices on a state-by-state level holds statistical significance in determining an election's final margin, and Table 7 underscores the Democratic Party's statistically significant commitment to having a greater number of field offices. If the Republican Party

continues to allow this discrepancy, the Democratic Party will maintain an edge on the campaign trail.

Field offices aside, however, and no independent variables reach statistical significance. From this finding, neither party seems decisively better at generating contributions or decisively more dedicated to spending or traveling. The Difference in Days in State ($B = -.195$, $t\text{-stat} = -1.825$, $p\text{-value} = .072$) nears statistical significance, hinting that one party may be hitting more states during the campaign, but without statistical significance this possibility remains loose conjecture. With all other independent variables, it appears that both parties strive to be competitive without being too far out in front in any one area. Perhaps campaign teams fear that an overspend in one facet could lead to a blitz in another area—in this case, campaign teams are merely trying to keep up with one another.

DISCUSSION

So what has the data actually shown that's useful in planning a successful presidential campaign in the swing states?

1) *"Ground game" matters*

Field offices take qualified staff and dedicated volunteers to properly operate, but once the necessary human resources have been committed a good field office can prove devastatingly influential in the course of an election. Some campaigns will choose to skimp on staff or local branches, but most other state-by-state elements of presidential campaigns have diluted statistical significance. Commit the money to open and staff field offices, seek

out and enfranchise passionate volunteers, and use locations to strategically target valuable cities and counties.

2) *Reach out to those that will support you—financially, and otherwise*

As mentioned above, a voter that will support you financially is one that will support you vocally as well. Make it easy for voters to donate, provide these donors ways to stay connected to the campaign, and grant these donors an opportunity to share their donation and support with others they know.

Candidates should also seek to win over wealthier and more powerful donors (those who give via individual contributions, PACs, and/or Super PACs).

These donors not only come with deep pockets; they also come with wide-reaching spheres of influence. Every donor matters, but the donor who sways one thousand voters holds more weight than the donor who sways one.

3) *Get an early lead*

The earlier a campaign team can establish a lead and a presence in a state, the better off that candidate will be. Tables 3 and 4 showed that it's possible to swing a state from one candidate to the other, but those tables also reinforced that it is far easier to maintain control of a state. Both the Republican and Democratic parties could potentially help themselves in this regard by coalescing behind a candidate earlier in the electoral season while the opposing party continues its primary campaigning. This earlier shift would afford a candidate the chance to establish a campaign and an optimal relationship with each swing state before the opposing party had even selected a candidate.

4) *Spend and travel competitively*

The one who spends the most on advertising will not necessarily win a state, but the one who neglects spending risks losing it. Similarly, face time is important in swing states, but no statistically significant evidence shows that a few more or less days in a state will affect the outcome. Effective advertising and strategically impactful campaign events make a greater difference than simply spending more time in or money on a state.

5) *Borrow from your opponent*

If a candidate's opponent has found something that works well, a candidate should not be afraid to mimic the tactic. This rings true for parties as a whole as well—Republicans should not wait to replicate the Democratic Party's emphasis on a ground game. No campaign team should allow an opponent to keep campaign exclusivity for an imitable and effective strategy.

CLOSING REMARKS

Presidential candidates are real people vying for an important job with tremendous power and influence throughout the entire world. Yet at the core, these nominees function just like products do: they have features that are desirable, characteristics that beget uncertainty, and an available alternative. Campaign teams are then tasked with packaging and selling their respective candidates in a way that resonates with enough voters in enough states to arrive at 270 electoral votes.

And through this binary system of success, a team of sleep-deprived and underpaid individuals can claim responsibility for the appointment of the most important position in the Western world.

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