

Summary of Course to Week
Three: A Framework for
Understanding the Environment
of Elections & How Voters Make
Decisions

MU MVZ 449
Spring 2010
Dave McCuan
Masaryk University

Agenda for This Week

- Elements of elections and campaigns;
- Environmental aspects of elections;
- Strategic aspects of elections;
- Linking “micro, ind’l level preferences” with “mass prefs. & outcomes” while paying attention to the “Ecological Fallacy;”
- Which came first, the “Chicken or the Egg?”

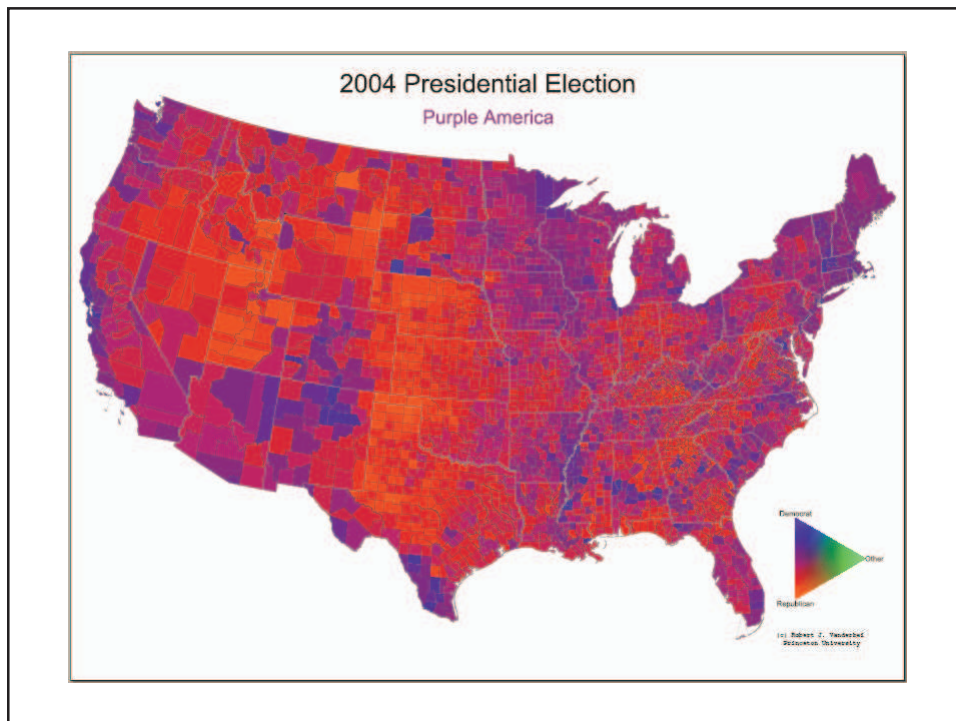
Predictability of Election Results

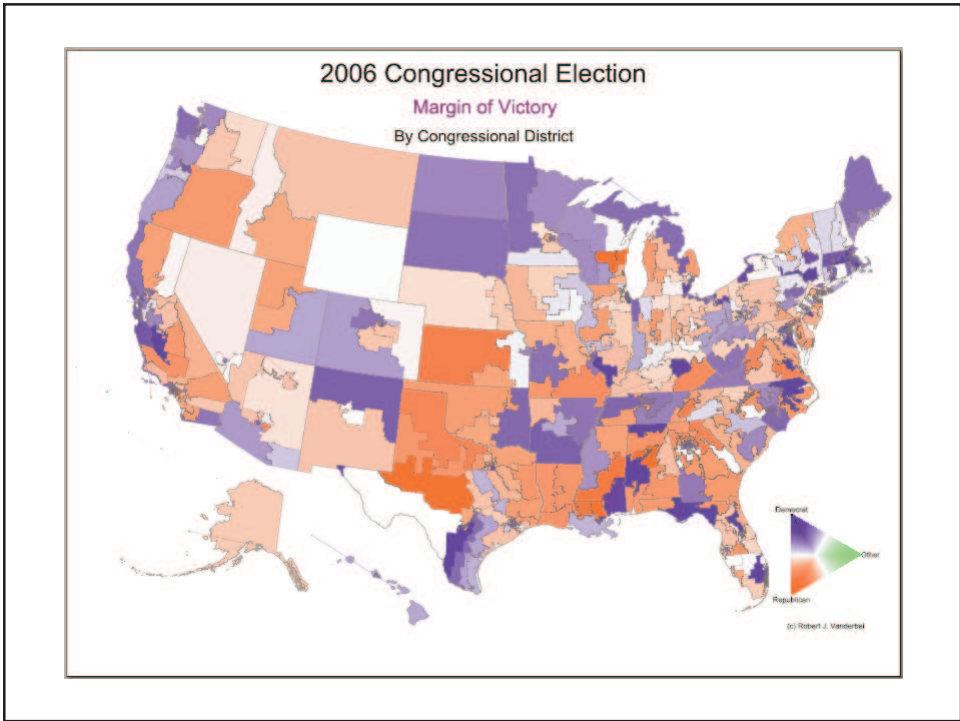
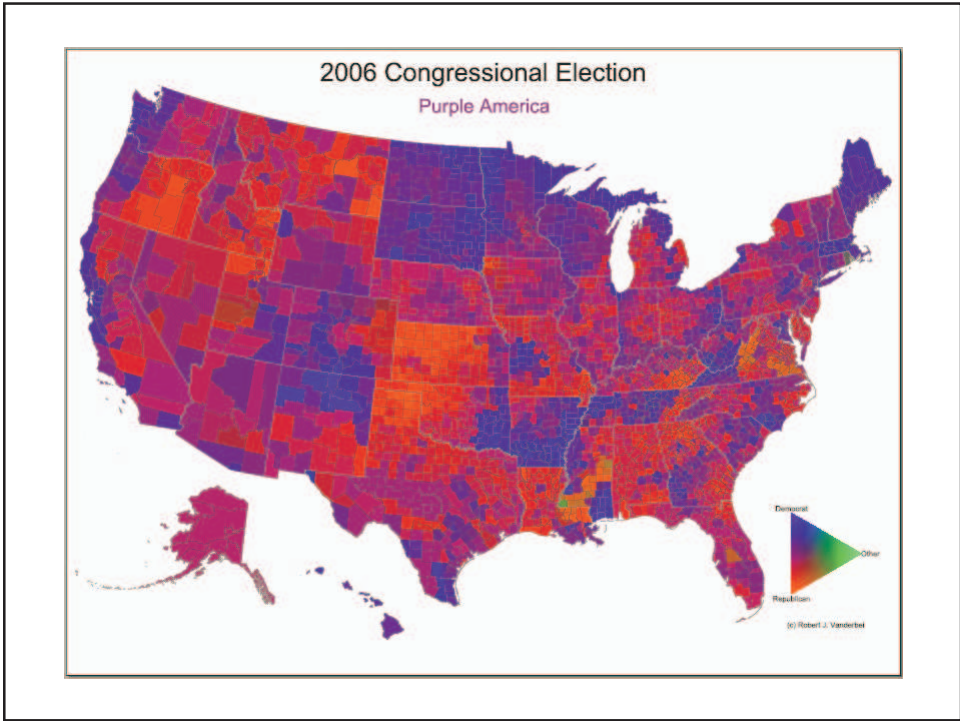
- Re-casting the issue
 - To what *extent* do campaigns matter?
 - *When* do campaigns matter?
- This “resolves” the quandary, a key question in Political Science:
- “Do campaigns *make a difference* at all in the outcome?”
- “Do candidates *matter* all?”
- Analyzing all elections with a focus on these.

Campaigns function within an electoral environment that constrains *what* campaigns do and what *effect* those actions have on the outcome?

Key Factors Here on Elections & Campaign Analysis

- Historical “importance” of the election itself;
- Variables of importance here;
- Importance of the non-linear effects of money;
- Role of trends, gaps, and cross-cutting pressures & cleavages.





1992 Presidential Election

- Persian Gulf and the nomination campaign
- “It’s the economy, stupid!”
- “No new taxes”

1996 Presidential Election

- 1994 Congressional election...and the following budget debates
- Economic growth
- What was Bob Dole to do?

2000 Presidential Election

- The incumbent president ☹
- Economic health ☺
- Contrasting campaigns
- What did POLS Elections scholars say or think?

- 2004 Election
 - Terrorism, Security
 - Same sex marriage
- 2006 Election
 - War, Scandals, What Else?
- 2008 Election
 - Issues, Partisanship, Campaign Effects (L/T versus S/T factors), Candidate Effects & Characteristics

Environmental Factors

- Definition
- Impact
- Contrived examples? Bias here?

Environmental Factors

- Institutional framework
 - suffrage laws
 - ballot laws
 - candidate selection
 - party laws
 - campaign finance laws
- Ex., The rise of PACs

Environmental Factors

- Political culture
 - partisanship
 - social and economic values
 - public opinion
 - Norms
- Ex., Views on equality

Environmental Factors

- Campaign technology
 - Professionalization
 - Mass media
 - Paid media (radio, t.v., print, Internet)
- Ex., Advent of t.v. and cost of campaigns

Environmental Factors

- Political setting
 - party competitiveness
 - presidential vs. midterm election cycle
 - presidential popularity
 - state of the economy
 - issue context
 - district factors – incumbency, challenger quality, & redistricting

Environmental Factors

- We can simplify:
 - Incumbent-favoring vs. challenger favoring
 - Democrat-favoring vs. Republican favoring
 - *Others?*

Strategic Factors

- Definition
- Impact

Strategic Factors

- Environmental Effect on Campaigns
 - strategy
Ex., Valerie Plame, weakness, temptation, move or increase “uncertainty” factors, etc.
 - success of strategy
Ex., Implications of terror attack

Strategic Factors

- Targeting
- Message
- Mode of communication
- Campaign structure & organization
- Consultants
- Press
- Outside groups