

Discussion Questions for 17.951, Political Behavior

Political Campaigns

- Do campaigns matter? Do the day to day events of campaigns matter for the outcome, or can we simply predict outcomes based on preexisting factors?
- What is a campaign effect? Does it mean converting voters to a candidate that doesn't match their predispositions (a high bar), or simply bringing people around to vote in line with their predispositions?
- Who is available for a campaign to have an effect on?
- Should we worry about generalizing from one campaign to another? Do the authors' conclusions vary because of the particular campaigns they choose to study?
- What is the "minimal effects" model? Why was it reconsidered by researchers?
- As Gelman and King ask, why do polls vary so much but vote choice is ultimately so predictable? What theories fail to account for this phenomenon? What is the role of campaigns in their theory (bring people around to vote their fundamentals). What happens if campaigns are asymmetrical in resources or skill?
- If people vote their fundamentals, Gore should have won the presidency in 2000 – why didn't he, according to Johnston, Hagen and Jamieson? How generalizable was the 2000 experience? What mattered more – Gore's failure to prime the economic fundamental, or Bush's skill and advertising advantage?