THE IMPACT OF PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING ON MIDTERM U.S. SENATE ELECTIONS

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The conventional wisdom about presidential campaigning in midterm Senate elections is that presidential efforts lack impact or have negative impact. We discuss conceptual problems with the conventional view and offer an alternative that views presidential campaigning as strategic. We test this alternative and find support for it. Further, we find that presidential campaign efforts have a positive impact on the vote through the mobilization of nonvoters. Finally, in a significant number of cases, presidential campaigning may have been the margin of victory for candidates of the president's party. We discuss the implications of these findings on assessments of the president and relations with Congress during the second half of the term.

The conventional wisdom of journalists and politicians asserts that a president's attempts to help his party's senatorial candidates in midterm elections usually fail.1 Midterm elections are assumed to be referenda on the president; and as presidential popularity dips from the onset of the administration to the midterm, losses of seats attend.2 As a result, presidents can rarely have much impact. For instance, one journalist writes about Lyndon Johnson and the poor Democratic showing in 1966: "In light of the election results, it was probably just as well for President Johnson that he canceled the political tour that he had set up for the weekend before the election in favor of a pre-operation rest . . . Of ten states that were on the tentative presidential schedule, all but Montana saw Democrats lose, which would have been a rather sorry reward for Mr. Johnson" (Weaver 1966, 28).

Similar comments were made about President Ford's efforts in 1974: "President Ford's impact on the campaign this fall was minimal despite his gruelling month-long Republican rescue mission that took him 16,685 miles through 20 of the 50 states" (Hunter 1974, 32; see also Congressional Quarterly 1974, 3091).

Even President Nixon, whose party fared better than expected in 1970, was thought to have had little impact: "The President's campaigning failed to produce enough Republican Senate victories for a Republican majority . . . The impact of a Presidential appearance is unclear. In several races in which the President personally intervened, one member of the Senate-Governorship campaign team lost while the other won" (Congressional

And the few times that presidents were credited with impact, it was thought to be negative. Reagan's efforts in 1986 provide one dramatic example. Despite relatively high popularity levels and a vigorous schedule, only 5 of the 18 Republican senatorial candidates for whom Reagan campaigned won (Broder 1986, A-19). Thus, despite strong efforts and even when the party does well, the impact of a president's campaign effort is thought to be trivial or negative.

A number of conceptual and theoretical problems plague the conventional wisdom. If presidential campaigning is so fruitless, why do presidents campaign so often? Of the 199 contested midterm elections from 1966 to 1986, presidents campaigned in 90 (45.2%). The conventional wisdom's assumption that midterm contests are referenda on the president shifts responsibility for losing from the candidate to the president. Blaming these losses on the president harms his reputation, one of Neustadt's (1960) pillars of presidential power. Under such adverse and damaging conditions, why would presidents campaign? The conventional wisdom has a difficult time accounting for presidential motivations and behavior.

Moreover, the conventional wisdom focuses too exclusively on the win-loss ratio of Senate candidates for whom the president campaigns, which makes presidential effort look dismal. For instance, across all midterm Senate contests from 1966 through 1986, candidates for whom the president campaigned lost 65.6% of the time. However, in three out of six of these midterm contests presidentially supported candidates fared better than those for whom the president did not campaign (see Table 1).

Rather than focus on a crude win-loss rate, as the conventional wisdom does, it makes more sense to ask whether presidential campaigning added to, or subtracted from, the candidate's vote total and whether that increment was large enough to affect the election's outcome. On these crucial issues, the conventional wisdom is silent. Thus, the conventional wisdom is deficient on a number of counts. It fails to explain presidential motivations to campaign, and it is based on a very crude assessment of the impact of campaigning.

First, we consider the presidential decision to campaign. We find that presidents campaign for candidates for whom they think campaigning can make a difference; they do not campaign for those who look like sure winners or losers. Second, we find that after holding constant other in-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>With President Campaigning</th>
<th>With President Not Campaigning</th>
<th>Difference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td>44.4 (4/9)</td>
<td>41.7 (10/24)</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>36.4 (8/22)</td>
<td>25.0 (3/12)</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974</td>
<td>29.4 (5/17)</td>
<td>35.7 (5/14)</td>
<td>-6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978</td>
<td>30.8 (4/13)</td>
<td>46.7 (10/21)</td>
<td>-16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>45.5 (5/11)</td>
<td>36.4 (8/22)</td>
<td>9.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>27.8 (5/18)</td>
<td>56.3 (9/16)</td>
<td>-28.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>34.4 (31/90)</td>
<td>41.3 (45/109)</td>
<td>-6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Figures exclude races not contested in the general election but include special elections to fill midterm vacancies.
fluences on the vote, presidential campaigning has a statistically significant and positive impact on the vote. Further, this effect is large enough to turn election tides in relatively close contests.

The Rationality of Presidential Campaigning

Assumptions and Motivations

Why do presidents campaign in some races, but not in others? We begin with two assumptions about presidential campaign appearances. First, we conceive of a president's time (and thus campaign appearances) as a scarce resource. Presidents, therefore, develop an appearance allocation strategy that maximizes presidentially preferred outcomes. Second, presidents are primarily interested in programmatic success in Congress. They desire a supportive Congress, which usually means increasing their party's control of legislative seats. Presidents are thus more likely to campaign where they will safeguard a threatened seat or help wrest a seat from the opposition. Further, they will avoid campaigning if it will damage the electoral prospects of copartisans. In other words, presidential campaigning is a problem of political action, where presidents are concerned with the marginal expected utility of their action. Rational presidents will campaign for a supporter only when the expected marginal benefits from electing that supporter are greater than the costs of campaigning for him.

To derive a benefit from campaigning, a presidential campaign appearance must have some impact. Under what conditions will it have an impact? Impact depends upon the number of voters that the president can sway and whether that number is sufficient to determine who wins. A president must thus make some estimates of the votes each candidate in an election will receive and determine whether a campaign appearance is necessary for his copartisan to win. If his copartisan appears a likely and easy winner, the president need not intervene. If the copartisan does not possess such an advantage, the president must estimate whether a campaign appearance can help sway enough voters to the copartisan's side, resulting in the copartisan's victory. If the president cannot sway enough voters, the president will not campaign.

A president may sway more votes the more popular he is in the state; and the combination of popularity and competitiveness determines if he can sway enough voters to affect the election outcome. However, if the president is not popular, he may damage the candidate's prospects (a possible cost of campaigning). Further, when a seat is safely in opposition hands, he may not be able to sway enough voters to affect the final outcome.

Similarly, presidents with lower levels of programmatic success in Congress may derive a larger benefit from increasing their party's control of seats. If a president's party is hegemonic and/or support of his program is usually guaranteed, the loss of a program supporter may not make much difference. Only when seat losses might undermine the passage of his program will campaigning be beneficial. Hence, presidents who have smaller and/or less stable congressional support coalitions, as witnessed by lower levels of floor success, will derive greater marginal benefits from campaigning.

Thus far, we have focused mostly on the benefits of campaigning. However, campaigning also entails costs. Some of these costs are constant across races; others are variable. For our purposes, the constant costs constrain the total number of appearances rather than determine appearance prioritization—and thus are relatively trivial.

Variable costs are more important to us because they help us understand how
presidents prioritize the races that they will consider entering. Some of these are associated with failed campaign efforts and may include the loss of public prestige and image that accompany an association with a losing campaign, as well as the risk of increasing the legislative activism of the opponent against whom the president campaigned. Thus, presidential popularity in part determines the probability of an appearance, but it also influences the chance that the president must bear the cost of being associated with a losing candidate.

Other variable costs relate to possible effects on the strength of the opponent’s campaign. If the president’s campaign appearance improves the opponent’s ability to secure financing or increases his popularity among constituent groups, the president may have done more harm than good. The probability of bearing such costs (while not directly related to the probability of winning the election) may be related to election outcomes, since they should also be a function of presidential popularity.

Model and Data

We operationalize these ideas as follows:

\[ CA = f (\text{COMPET}, \text{POPULARITY}, \text{PFailure}) \]

where \( CA \) is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the president campaigned or not, \( \text{COMPET} \) is whether the contest is competitive as opposed to safe) for either party,\(^3\) \( \text{POPULARITY} \) is the difference between the vote for the president and the number two candidate in the previous presidential election at the state level, and \( \text{PFailure} \) is the percentage of legislative losses in the last legislative session where the president took a position.\(^4\) The \( \text{COMPET} \) and \( \text{POPULARITY} \) variables measure the probability that the president’s campaign appearance will have an effect, while the failure variable measures the expected benefit. We expect positive signs between each variable and campaign appearances.

The dependent variable is a measure of whether or not the president campaigned in the midterm Senate race and is coded one if he campaigned, zero if not. A number of standards can be used to measure presidential support for a senatorial candidate. The one that we employ is relatively conservative; to be considered to have supported a Senate candidate, for our purposes, the president must have visited the state during the campaign and made an explicit appearance for the candidate. Appearing in the state for any other reason does not constitute a campaign appearance. Further, the president must overtly express support for the senatorial candidate while campaigning. We use multiple sources to determine whether a president campaigned, including the Congressional Quarterly Weekly Report, the New York Times, the Public Papers of the President, or the Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents. We read the actual text of speeches to determine whether the president overtly supported the senatorial candidate.

Results

The data used to test the hypotheses include all contested Senate midterm elections from 1966 through 1986.\(^5\) Results of the probit analysis on the campaign/not campaign dichotomy are presented in Table 2. All three independent variables are statistically significant, and their signs point in the direction predicted by the cost–benefit strategy outlined above.\(^6\) As expected, these estimates show that presidents are more likely to campaign in a state where the vote spread in the previous presidential election was wide, the Senate race is competitive, and the
The model also demonstrates some statistical power. By chance alone, presidents will campaign in 45.4% of all races. This chance prediction can serve as a baseline against which to measure the power of the model. Our three-variable model represents an improvement of 9.9 percentage points over the baseline with 64.5% correctly predicted, an increase of nearly 20% in predictive ability. Clearly, there is a rational calculation on the part of presidents in deciding when to campaign.

These results offer strong support for our argument: if presidents strategically decide when to campaign, it should follow that their efforts will pay off. If campaigning has negative or trivial impacts, as the conventional wisdom asserts, experience over time would lead presidents away from such interventions. The conventional wisdom cannot explain this rational component to presidential campaigning.

The Impact of Campaign Appearances

Our results thus far undermine the conventional wisdom. Unlike that wisdom, we find that presidents strategically campaign where their impact might make the most difference and when they are in the greatest need of congressional support. However, to overturn the conventional wisdom decisively, campaign appearances must also have an impact on the vote that in some cases is large enough to turn election tides.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Maximum Likelihood Estimate</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POPULARITY</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMPET</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>.21</td>
<td>5.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FFAILURE</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>5.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent correct</td>
<td>64.5</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-116.61</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseline</td>
<td>54.6</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of cases</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

General Estimation and Data Considerations

Clearly, presidential campaign appearances do not singularly determine the vote. To calibrate the impact of campaigning, we must control for other influences on the vote by estimating a baseline. The literature on midterm and Senate voting leads us to expect incumbency, senatorial candidate campaign efforts, and noncampaign presidential effects on the vote; these factors will constitute our baseline. Further, we must control for any effects peculiar to specific election years that may exist (e.g., Watergate in 1974). Our general model takes the following form:

$$PVOTE = f(\text{year}, \text{baseline}, \text{presidential campaign effects})$$

where the vote is a function of year-specific events, the baseline model, and presidential campaign effects.

The data used for this test pool the CPS/NES midterm election studies from 1974 through 1986; extending the data set much earlier is not practical because too many useful variables are absent. However, we also present an analysis of a 1970–86 pooling. This longer series excludes one important variable from the model—campaign expenditures—which was not available until 1974. As we show below, substantive interpretations of the two series are essentially identical. We pool the data to provide an opportunity
to build a more general explanation than would be possible if we relied on only one contest.

We operationalize the model presented above with the following equation:

$$\text{PVOTE} = \text{constant} + (\text{year dummy variables}) + (\text{rescaled party ID})$$
$$+ (\text{presidential feeling thermometer})$$
$$+ (\text{presidential party candidate campaign expenditures [%]})$$
$$+ (\text{whether opposition party incumbent ran}) + (\text{whether the president campaigned})$$
$$+ (\text{error term}).$$

We define the dependent variable (PVOTE) as whether or not a voter cast his or her ballot for the senatorial candidate of the president's party. (Nonvoters and those from states without Senate contests are excluded.) The year dummy variables identify election-specific factors that may affect the vote. Such factors do not help build a generic model but may be important in reducing spurious effects associated with the variable of interest.

Four variables estimate the baseline: party identification, the presidential feeling thermometer, campaign spending, and opposition party incumbency status. As party identification is found to be among the most important determinants of the vote, even in midterm contests, we include it in the model. We rescaled the standard seven-point index so that high values (six) denote strong partisans of the president's party and low values (zero) strong partisans of the opposition party.

Public assessments of the president also may affect midterm voting (Kernell 1977). To measure this referendum effect, we use the presidential feeling thermometers, which are only available from 1970 through 1986. Failure to control for this may confound campaign attempts with referenda or popularity-induced voting.

Incumbency has also been shown to be a powerful influence on congressional elections. We use a dummy variable for whether or not an opposition incumbent was running to account for incumbency effects. Experimentation with a simpler incumbent/open seat variable and another dummy for presidential party incumbent showed no effects, and were thus eliminated from the equation.

Congressional election studies now uniformly find that campaign expenditures affect the vote. Our expenditure variable is operationalized as the presidential party candidate's percentage of the two-party total expenditure in the election. Last, we include the dummy variable indicating whether or not the president campaigned.

Missing from the equation is one important factor: candidate-voter issue proximities. The data do not exist prior to 1978; nor do they exist uniformly since then. Using them would thus seriously limit our data series. However, as we will demonstrate, our model remains strong.

Analysis and Results

We estimate the model using probit regression. Results are presented in Table 3. The model correctly predicts 78% of the cases, a 23.7% improvement over the baseline (the vote split). Even with the limitations noted, the model is quite powerful.

The coefficients also behave reasonably. The constant (-2.36) indicates, as expected, that candidates of the president's party receive fewer votes than those from the opposition, which helps explain why the conventional wisdom exists. However, the dummy variables for years are statistically insignificant, indicating that no events or factors specific to any midterm had an impact on the vote decision.
Table 3. Impact of Presidential Campaigning on Midterm Senate Voting, 1970-86

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1970-86</th>
<th>1974-86</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Maximum</td>
<td>Standard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Likelihood</td>
<td>Error</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Estimate</td>
<td>t-ratio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-2.004</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 dummy</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978 dummy</td>
<td>.252</td>
<td>3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 dummy</td>
<td>.210</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 dummy</td>
<td>.112</td>
<td>1.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential feeling thermometer</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>9.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential party ID</td>
<td>.342</td>
<td>25.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition incumbent</td>
<td>-.259</td>
<td>-3.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spending</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential campaign</td>
<td>.188</td>
<td>3.61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of cases = 3,740
(1 = 1,689; 0 = 2,051)

Percent correctly predicted
77.9

Log-likelihood
1562.43, 8 df
966.5, 8 df

Pseudo R's
Maddala
.34
Craig-Uhler
.46
McFadden
.30
Adj. McFadden
.30
Chow
.37

Hensher-Johnson normalized success index
.371
.371

Midterm U.S. Senate Elections

The rescaled party identification variable is very potent, with a striking t-ratio (almost 20); the feeling thermometer, similarly, is strong and has a positive influence on the vote. Also as expected, the presence of an opposition incumbent reduces the likelihood of a vote for a candidate of the president's party. Lastly, campaign spending demonstrates a strong impact on the vote decision.

Most crucial for our argument, presidential campaigning has a significant and positive effect on the vote choice. When presidents campaign, senatorial candidates of their party do better. To check for the generality of the results, we dropped each year one at a time and reestimated the equation. In each case results differed only trivially. No substantive interpretations were altered, and only slight changes in the magnitude of coefficients were seen. Hence, specific midterm contests do not determine the general findings reported here.

To better understand what the probit equation tells us about the effects of presidential campaigning, we compute the effects of campaigning under different conditions. Four scenarios, based upon the significant substantive variables in our estimated model, are used to describe variations in these conditions: opposition party incumbency status, each candidate's share of campaign expenditures, the distribution of party identification in the state, and presidential feeling thermometer ratings (popularity) for each partisan group.

First, consider the case where the president's copartisan looks like a sure loser.
Table 4. Probability of a Vote for the President's Candidate under Varying Competitive Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Case</th>
<th>President’s, Independent, and Opposition Parties, Respectively</th>
<th>Spending of President’s Candidate (%)</th>
<th>Opposition Incumbency</th>
<th>Probability of Vote for President’s Candidate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Party Identifiers (%)</td>
<td>Group Feeling Thermometer</td>
<td></td>
<td>With President Not Campaigning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure loser</td>
<td>25,20,55</td>
<td>90,65,40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sure winner</td>
<td>55,20,25</td>
<td>90,65,40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prototype close race</td>
<td>33,34,33</td>
<td>90,65,40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close with popular president</td>
<td>33,34,33</td>
<td>90,75,50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close with higher spending</td>
<td>33,34,33</td>
<td>90,65,40</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We define this situation as one where an opposition incumbent is running; the candidate spending rates are equal; and the distribution of party identifiers is 25% for the president’s party, 55% for the opposition party, and 20% Independent. Further, we set the thermometer rating at 65 for Independents (the mean across the surveys), 90 for presidential party identifiers, and 40 for opposition identifiers. In a state with these characteristics the probit estimates predict that the Senate candidate of the president’s party will receive 29% of the vote. Clearly, that candidate will lose. Further, a presidential intervention has little impact, raising the candidate’s vote total to only 30% (Table 4).

Next consider the opposite, when the president’s candidate looks quite strong. Such a situation might be one where there is no opposition incumbent running; the presidential copartisan can outspend his opponent by a three-to-two margin; and the distribution of party identifiers is 55% for the president’s party, 25% for the opposition party, and 20% Independent. Further, we keep the thermometer ratings at 65 for Independents, 90 for presidential party identifiers, and 40 for opposition identifiers. Under such conditions, 59% of the vote will go to the president’s copartisan. If the president campaigns, the vote total increases to a hefty 63%.

However, our model suggests that a president would intervene in neither type of race. In the first, the president’s copartisan is too far behind to help and in the second he is too far ahead to need presidential assistance. While many races may resemble these conditions (with some modification of parameters), our model argues that presidents are most likely to campaign in closer races, when an intervention may tip the outcome into the president’s party column.

Consider what may be a relatively typical closer race—what we will call our prototype close race. We define the prototypical close race as one with no opposition incumbent, when the presidential candidate can spend 50% of the two-party total and the distribution of party identifiers is now 33% for the president’s party, 33% for the opposition party, and 34% Independent. We again keep the thermometer ratings at 65 for Independents, 90 for presidential party identifiers, and 40 for opposition identifiers. Under such conditions, the probit estimates predict a vote split of 45% for the president’s candidate and 55% for the opposition. If the president campaigns on
Midterm U.S. Senate Elections

behalf of the candidate from his party, the copartisan's expected vote total rises to 49%. While the presidential copartisan might still lose, matters are perhaps too close to call; and as we shall see, minor changes in the prototypical case can easily lead to a copartisan victory.

For instance, hold all parameters at prototypical levels but boost presidential popularity to a level where we can say the president is highly popular, that is, set the thermometer ratings at 90 for copartisan identifiers (the standard level), 75 for Independents, and 50 for opposition identifiers (a boost of 10 points for the latter groups). Under these conditions the predicted vote for the president's candidate is 48%; with a presidential appearance it rises to 51%; which tips the balance in favor of the presidential copartisan.

Similarly, if we reset the candidate expenditure ratio such that the president's candidate spends 60% of the total but leave the other prototypical parameters at their earlier levels, the president's candidate will receive 48% of the vote. If the president campaigns, it increases to 52%; and again the president's candidate wins.

Experimentation with other definitions of close races shows that in quite a few instances, the presidential campaign appearance will convert a loss into a win. Generally, a president's visit increases the probability of voting for the president's candidate by three to four percentage points in these close races. And there are many midterm contests where that margin means the difference between winning and losing.

The Dynamics of Presidential Campaign Impacts

This analysis allows us to understand the direction and magnitude of the presidential campaign effect. We shall now address the question of the dynamics of the effect. Two reasonable possibilities present themselves: presidential campaigning either converts voters or mobilizes non-voters. Testing the mobilization-versus-conversion hypotheses requires estimating the impact of presidential campaigning on turnout levels. If turnout levels are higher when presidents campaign than when they do not, mobilization effects are evidenced. If no turnout differential is found, then some type of conversion process is probably operating.

To test these possibilities, we estimate an equation that includes many variables usually associated with turnout, as well as the presidential campaign variable. The baseline turnout model includes dummy variables for each year to pick up year-specific properties; standard demographics (age, income, education); psychological involvement in the election (interest in the campaign, concern about the election's outcome); attitude toward the president (the feeling thermometer); strength of party identification; characteristics about the Senate contest (whether there is an incumbent; and lastly, presidential campaigning. States without Senate races are excluded from the analysis. We estimate the turnout model on the 1970-1986 pooled data series. Table 5 presents the results.

The model proves impressive statistically, correctly predicting 73.7% of the cases, an improvement of 21.2 percentage points over the baseline (the distribution of voters). All variables in the equation are statistically significant.10 As expected, turnout is higher among older people, those with higher incomes and more education, those who are more interested in and concerned with the election, strong partisans, voters in open races, and those who have cooler feelings toward the president (negative voting, perhaps).

Significantly, presidential campaigning stimulates turnout: when presidents campaign, the likelihood of voting increases.11 This finding raises the question, Why would a presidential campaign appear-
Table 5. The Impact of Presidential Campaigning on Turnout, 1970-86

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Estimated Coefficients</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>t-ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-13.766</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1974 dummy</td>
<td>10.245</td>
<td>3.396</td>
<td>3.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1978 dummy</td>
<td>10.459</td>
<td>3.394</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982 dummy</td>
<td>10.454</td>
<td>3.393</td>
<td>3.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986 dummy</td>
<td>10.323</td>
<td>3.393</td>
<td>3.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential feeling thermometer</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential party identification</td>
<td>.207</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>8.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open race</td>
<td>.139</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>2.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interest in campaign</td>
<td>.446</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>11.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concern about outcome</td>
<td>.287</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>10.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>12.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income</td>
<td>.190</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>5.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>.160</td>
<td>.016</td>
<td>9.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidential campaign</td>
<td>.214</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of cases = 3,823
(1 = 1,816; 0 = 2,007)

Percent correctly predicted 73.7
Log-likelihood 1,348.43, 14 df
Pseudo R's
Maddala .30
Craig-Uhler .40
McFadden .25
Adj. McFadden .25
Chow .30
Hensher-Johnson normalized success index .305

ance stimulate turnout? Three possible dynamics may be at work: direct stimulation of voters, increased resources flowing into campaign organizations, and greater effort on the part of campaign workers.

First, the distinction between high-stimulus and low-stimulus elections that Angus Campbell (1960) offered provides one possible answer. According to Campbell, congressional elections are low-stimulus elections, whereas presidential elections exemplify the classic high-stimulus election. Turnout levels in presidential elections are about 14% higher than levels in congressional elections.12

One explanation for our finding is that presidential campaigning for a senatorial candidate increases the level of campaign stimulation, leading to higher turnout. For instance, extensive media coverage and public discussion, which may continue for days, usually follow a presidential visit. However, we are not suggesting that a campaign trip transforms a traditionally low-stimulus election into a high-stimulus one—rather, the campaign appearance leads to a medium-stimulus election, resulting in modest turnout increases.

While this argument suggests direct effects on voters, the second argument suggests that campaign appearances affect the campaign organization, which in turn affect voter turnout. Thus, presidential campaigning may have indirect effects on voters, as well. Presidential campaigning may affect two aspects of campaign organizations: financial resources and worker activity. (Donors may give more; activists may work harder.)

A key activity of presidents during these campaign jaunts is an appearance
Midterm U.S. Senate Elections

Table 6. Senatorial Campaign Monies Attributable to Presidential Campaign Visits, 1986

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Money from Reagan Visit</th>
<th>Total Money</th>
<th>Presidential Money/Total Money</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alabama</td>
<td>900,000</td>
<td>4,621,000</td>
<td>19.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>California</td>
<td>1,500,000</td>
<td>11,781,000</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>920,000</td>
<td>3,786,000</td>
<td>24.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>1,710,000</td>
<td>6,724,000</td>
<td>25.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>1,350,000</td>
<td>5,119,000</td>
<td>26.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Idaho</td>
<td>180,000</td>
<td>3,230,000</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>1,075,000</td>
<td>5,986,000</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maryland</td>
<td>420,000</td>
<td>1,699,000</td>
<td>24.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>841,000</td>
<td>5,376,000</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nevada</td>
<td>800,000</td>
<td>2,687,000</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York</td>
<td>1,700,000</td>
<td>12,915,000</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>692,000</td>
<td>5,188,000</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>35,000</td>
<td>2,271,000</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>740,000</td>
<td>3,253,000</td>
<td>22.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>330,000</td>
<td>584,000</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>360,000</td>
<td>6,523,000</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Washington</td>
<td>700,000</td>
<td>3,290,000</td>
<td>21.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>400,000</td>
<td>3,434,000</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>19.3</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Personal communication from Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr., assistant to the president for political and intergovernmental affairs, White House, 5 December 1986.*

at a fund-raiser, as well as at the standard mass media event. Presidential fund-raising activities seem to lead to significant bounties for Senate candidates, as the data displayed in Table 6 suggest for the 1986 midterm. The table presents how much money each of Reagan's visits generated, according to the White House. On average, about 19% of money collected derived from the president's visit, a more-than-trivial amount; greater campaign efforts in the form of more advertising and the hiring of more canvassers and other campaign workers should result from such an infusion of cash.

The third argument follows from the second. Greater campaign resources should enable the campaign to increase its intensity level, running more ads, scheduling more events, and attracting more campaign workers—who in turn, should be able to contact and canvass more voters, thereby stimulating turnout. Research has found that contacting spurs turnout, sometimes quite substantially. For example, Kramer (1970) found that canvassing a neighborhood may increase turnout by as much as 20%; other studies estimate contacting effects to range between 5% and 15%. (For a review of these findings, see Krassa 1988.) In all, then, there are good reasons to believe that a presidential appearance may lead to higher turnout levels, affecting voters either directly or indirectly.

**Conclusions**

The conventional wisdom is that presidential campaigning in midterm Senate elections either has no impact or hurts Senate candidates of the president's party. This conventional wisdom is deficient on a number of grounds. It cannot explain
Midterm U.S. Senate Elections

why presidents campaign so often, nor does it contain a standard to assess the impact of presidential campaigning.

We argue that presidents campaign strategically. Presidents enter races where they feel that their campaign appearance may help their candidate win the election, in close races. Further, presidents campaign when their legislative programs are bogged down in Congress. A statistical test finds support for this line of argument.

Second, we suggest—based on the model of strategic behavior—that presidential campaigning will help candidates. We also find support for this proposition. The positive impact of presidential campaigning is seen clearly in a series of midterm elections, and sensitivity testing suggests that in many close races the president’s intervention may mean the margin of victory. Last, we find that a presidential campaign appearance mobilizes voters, rather than converting them. In all, this soundly overturns the conventional wisdom, upsetting it on grounds of logic, theoretical development, and empirical support.

With so many mid-term tides against the president’s party, the fact that these campaign appearances have a positive impact attests strongly to the power of the presidency. If our strategic perspective were employed, public evaluations of the president’s role in the midterm might change, and this change might affect relations with Congress during the final two years of the term. Resurrecting the president’s reputation may thus lead to more congressional support when he might need it the most. Further, if Light’s (1982) no-win presidency cycle is correct—that the president’s resources to influence Congress decline over time but his ability to develop good public policy improves—our more realistic assessment of presidential reputation may have significant policy impacts and may result in better public policy.

Notes

This research was sponsored by a grant from the University of Illinois, Urbana, Office of the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs. We thank James Kuklinski for helpful comments. And, we thank Mitchell E. Daniels, Jr. (assistant to the president for political and intergovernmental affairs during the 1986 election year) for making data available to us.

1. Representative statements of the conventional wisdom can be found in Broder 1986; Hunter 1974; Roberts 1970; Weaver 1966. For one scholarly discussion see Brown 1984.


3. We used the Congressional Quarterly prelection competitiveness assessments to measure COMPET. If Congressional Quarterly assessed the race as safe, COMPET is coded zero; if either party’s candidate is advantaged, COMPET is coded one; and if the race is a toss-up, COMPET is coded two. While the Congressional Quarterly assessments may be in error, they do present what keen observers perceive the race’s competitive level to be. And, as they are taken prior to the election, we do not have to rely on actual election results to assess competitiveness. Further, they are most similar to assessments that presidents and candidates use in evaluating a race. Thus, while they might incorrectly predict election outcomes, they accurately reflect the information used in the decisions examined herein. Lastly, they can also be viewed as summaries of all relevant campaign-related conditions affecting competitiveness, such as candidate recruitment functions (Jacobson and Kernell 1981), spending levels (Jacobson 1978), and candidate quality (Jacobson and Kernell 1981).


5. Including special elections, there were 206 midterm Senate elections during the period. However, some races witnessed no midterm opposition. With missing data, the number of cases drops to 197.

6. We experimented with five other variables, but none were statistically significant. They were presidential popularity at the time of the election, change in presidential popularity from the beginning of the campaign period to the election, level of support for the administration, and whether or not the seat was an open race or not. Further, the support variable was also reconstructed into two variables, one for each party. Not unexpectedly, these variables tended not to have impact because they were correlated with those already in the equation. The popularity variables were related to the president’s victory level, open status related to competitiveness,
Midterm U.S. Senate Elections

and the support/opposition variables related to presidential support in the state (spread).

Also, we might expect that first-term presidents are more likely to campaign than second-term presidents. However, across our series, only 1986 was a second-term midterm election. In the probit equation, we entered dummy variables for each year, singularly and together; but none had any impact.

7. See n. 1.

8. We use the feeling thermometer rather than Gallup-styled questions because the latter occur less often in the CPS/NES data series. However, the two variables are highly correlated.

9. We also present results of the 1970–86 pooling, which does not include the campaign expenditure variable. Results are essentially identical.

10. Race and sex were found insignificant and are excluded from this presentation. Their inclusion or exclusion hardly affects results.

11. If we drop the variable (which contains much missing data), the presidential campaign effect doubles in magnitude but model performance declines. Nothing else in the model is affected very much except the education variable; as expected, education increases in impact when income is dropped from the estimation.

12. This calculation comes from the figures in Stanley and Niemi 1988, 66–67.

References


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