Battleground States versus Blackout States: The Behavioral Implications of Modern Presidential Campaigns

James G. Gimpel University of Maryland, College Park
Karen M. Kaufmann University of Maryland, College Park
Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz University of Maryland, College Park

We examine the influence of "battleground" designation by presidential campaign strategists on the political activation and involvement of resource poor voters, particularly those in lower income brackets. We hypothesize that increased exposure to campaign stimuli may provide lower income voters in the contested states with an appreciable advantage over those in the "blackout" states by underwriting the costs associated with becoming engaged. Our findings show that the condition of living on contested electoral terrain does have a positive impact on the political interest and engagement levels of lower income voters. The results reinforce the importance of the political campaign as an instrument of democracy. Modern campaign strategies can diversify the electorate in meaningful ways, but the influence of the campaign is also limited by the narrow geographic targeting of party resources.

In recent years, the American presidential electioneering battlefield has been narrowed to a range of contested states that represent less than half of the U.S. electorate, and much less than half of the nation's geophysical terrain. In 2004, for instance, the seven battleground states targeted by both major parties contained only 18% of the nation's population, with another 24% residing in states that were classified as leaning, but not quite safe. Campaign strategists calculate that for many safe states (i.e., those where there is a consensus that one party or the other overwhelmingly dominates presidential voting), there is little reason to campaign or even try to mobilize voters. The residents of these states may never see a presidential campaign advertisement on their local television networks,[1] may never be contacted by a political party, much less have the experience of a presidential candidate visiting nearby. Varying levels of exposure and party contact during presidential election campaigns may have important consequences for political socialization processes and subsequent levels of political involvement. Our effort here is to evaluate whether battleground status provides low resource voters in the contested states with an appreciable advantage over those in the "blackout" states on various measures of political interest and involvement.

Specifically, we inquire about the consequences of devoting a disproportionately high percentage of campaign resources to a relatively small, and possibly shrinking, number of battleground states. We begin with the presumption that presidential elections are the political jump start for most new voters (Campbell 1966). Presidential sweepstakes nearly always have higher voter turnout rates than other political contests; for otherwise unlikely voters, the inordinate salience of presidential election politics, the relative amount of campaign spending, and the increasingly sophisticated mobilization efforts associated with these campaigns can underwrite many of the participation start-up costs that can be so burdensome for

[1]Given the increasing prevalence of cable television, voters in uncontested states may still see presidential ads run on cable news programs like CNN, Fox News Channel, and MSNBC. Modern campaigns spend relatively little on cable advertising, however, and any given cable audience is still dwarfed by the size of a network audience in most time periods. Finally, we note that voters most likely to see political ads on cable television are also likely to be resource-rich partisans already inclined to participate.

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the resource poor (Gerber and Green 2000; Green and Gerber 2004; Gimpel, Dyck, and Shaw 2004). Eligible citizens who sit out in presidential election years almost assuredly sit out in off-year contests and, over time, this pattern of behavior can result in habitual nonvoting (Plutzer 2002). If presidential campaign politics continue to narrow the electioneering battleground and strategically target pivotal swing voters, will the character of the political electorate change? Typically disengaged citizens in states where campaign resources flow plentifully may be drawn into the democratic process creating larger, more diverse electorates, but the expansion of the electorate may very well be limited to a small number of battleground states.

As acknowledged by political scientists and pundits alike, American voters comprise an unrepresentative sample of the nation; they are older, more affluent, better educated, and more likely to be white than they would be if everyone were to participate at equal rates. Socioeconomic bias remains a central feature of the American electorate (Berinsky 2005; Hill and Leighley 1994, 1996; Leighley and Nagler 1992; Verba, Nie, and Kim 1978; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Politically inactive citizens are disproportionately settled at the bottom rungs of the socioeconomic ladder, and their relatively low levels of participation virtually ensure that their political priorities are overlooked in favor of more active segments of society (Hill and Leighley 1992; Mebane 1994). Given the high stakes of nonparticipation, why do so many citizens choose to remain on the sidelines of American politics? According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995), the reasons for nonparticipation fall into three broad categories: *they can't* because they lack necessary resources, *they don't want to* because they lack sufficient interest or knowledge, and *nobody asked them to* because they fall outside of the traditional networks that rally voters (also see Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Given these general explanations for nonparticipation, we evaluate the influence that modern campaign strategies have on poor voters' interest, likelihood of party contact, and levels of political involvement. Is it possible that the new tactics of the modern campaign are sufficient to spur political action even among society's less privileged?

For much of our recent history, political campaigns (in particular, party contacting strategies) served to exacerbate the socioeconomic bias of the active electorate (Berinsky 2005). Disproportionately strong commitments to media advertising and relatively weak commitments to grassroots organizing were the prevailing norms during the 1990s (Devlin 1993; Shaw 1999); furthermore, party contacts were generally targeted to those more likely to participate (Goldstein and Ridout 2002). Low-income citizens were simply less likely to be the targets of organized contacting efforts.

New technologies and new philosophies led the parties to reconsider traditional outreach strategies by 2004 with enormous resources now devoted to grassroots mobilizing in the designated battleground states. Concurrent with these contacting efforts, voter turnout hit a contemporary high (Campbell 2005). Modern campaign strategies—armed with voter lists, enhanced computing technology, geographic information systems, and a renewed commitment to grassroots mobilizing—may generate a consistently more diverse electorate as parties are able to reach beyond their traditional bases of support. By the same token, even if new campaign strategies activate greater numbers of lower income voters, the innovation associated with the modern campaign may still be a double-edged sword. Poor voters living in the political contested states may increasingly join the ranks of the active electorate, whereas their nonbattleground counterparts remain marginalized.

Do Campaigns Really Matter?

The scholarly debate over campaign effects has focused much of its attention on questions of persuasion, on whether campaign activities influence voter choice.[2] Less attention has been paid to the ancillary questions of whether campaign activity in presidential campaigns enhances political interest and the level of political engagement (but see Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Arceneaux 2006; Freedman and Goldstein 1999; Gronke 2000; Kahn and Kenney 1999a, 1999b). These, however, are important questions for this study as they speak to the mechanisms that may produce higher involvement among low-resource voters.

Political communication research consistently maintains that political campaigns contribute to learning (Arceneaux 2006). Voters exposed to campaign advertisements are better able to recall candidates and are more familiar with campaign issues (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1995; Bartels 1993). Vigorous campaigns typically generate an information rich atmosphere where political information is difficult to

[2]For a recent summary of this literature see Hillygus and Jackman (2003).

avoid (Kahn and Kenney 1999b). All else being equal, citizens should exhibit greater familiarity with the candidates and salient issues in battleground states than they would if they remained less exposed through residence in a safe state (Lipsitz 2005). In turn, campaigns direct their appeals toward residents in the competitive states, having little incentive to even visit safe states (James and Lawson 1999; Shachar and Nalebuff 1999; Shaw 2006).

Along with the air wars that take place in the battleground states, party contacting (the ground war) has become an increasingly important component of the modern campaign (Gershtenson 2003). Contacting of the type so prevalent in 2004 can be an effective means of boosting political participation (Gerber and Green 2000; Gerber, Green, and Shachar 2003; Nickerson 2006). Historically, levels of party contacting were constrained both by resources and technology. The microtargeting models and electronically accessible voter lists that allowed Democrats and Republicans to steer their contacting in 2004 simply were not available in previous presidential elections. In their stead, parties focused their limited mobilization resources on relatively high-probability voters (Goldstein and Ridout 2002), usually working from voter lists printed locally on reams of paper. Older people, homeowners, and members of religious or civic organizations were contacted while younger voters, new migrants, and those in the lower socioeconomic classes went largely ignored (Gershtenson 2003; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1992; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). In 2004, a fresh commitment to mobilizing voters with spotty vote histories, so called "floating voters," markedly enhanced turnout. To the extent that the Republican and Democratic parties continue to reach beyond their typical middle-class, middle-aged constituencies, it seems possible that battleground status, and the intensified contacting efforts associated with it, may indeed diversify the electorate in significant ways.

We suspect that battleground status, and the highly focused campaign efforts of the modern campaign, could have a likely long-term effect of diversifying some electorates but not others. This would be especially true if, over significant periods of time, three to five presidential election cycles, the competitive states remained competitive, and blackout states stay uncontested (Johnson 2005). While battleground status certainly changes over the long term, recent election margins suggest considerable continuity in what is targeted as a battleground and what is considered a base state, suggesting that it is entirely possible for some people to live out much of their lives in a single state without experiencing the stimulus of an engaging presidential campaign, while others can expect one on a regular, quadrennial basis.[3] Hailed as a model of resource allocation efficiency, the modern campaign, in all of its exactitude, constitutes an interesting natural experiment. Some voters get the campaign "treatment," while many others do not. If campaigns have the power to inform and mobilize the electorate, then interest and turnout levels in the battleground states should be quite different from that in the blackout states.

In summary, our theoretical expectations are that campaign activities, political advertising and party contacting—especially of the striking magnitude experienced in battleground states—should certainly increase the number and diversity of those who participate in electoral politics. In particular we expect to see disproportionate gains in political involvement among lower income voters who live in battleground states. The overall spectacle of the "air wars" should help to spur voter interest. Additionally, increasing party contact with lower income voters should translate into greater levels of political involvement among the poor vis-à-vis their safe state counterparts.

Data and Research Design

We use the *American National Election Studies* (NES 2001, 2005) to test our hypotheses. We are interested in identifying the differences in interest and levels of political involvement between those who reside in battleground states and those who live in uncontested states where presidential campaigns devote little, if any, attention. In particular we focus our analyses on low income voters, examining the extent to which campaigns matter for those who are typically among the most challenging to engage.

Defining our Dependent and Independent Variables

Our dependent variables include *Political Interest, Party Contact and Political Involvement.* We measure *Political Interest* as a principal components factor score

[3]From 1980 to 2004, seven election cycles, 14 states experienced average presidential vote margins of less than 10 points separating major party candidates, and the typical standard deviation from this mean margin was only six points. At the other extreme, 17 states were hardly ever competitive, with the mean margin dividing major party candidates exceeding 15 points. The remaining 21 states waxed and waned in their levels of competitiveness, exhibited tight standard deviations, but were often ruled less consequential due to a small number of Electoral College votes.

of responses to a question about campaign attentiveness and a question about whether the respondent cared who won the election. Higher values on this scale indicate respondents who were more interested in the election.

Party Contact is a dichotomous variable based on self-reports. We use contacting as a dependent variable to ascertain the extent to which low-income voters are more likely to be contacted in battleground states. We also use the party contact measure as a control variable in our analysis of campaign involvement with an eye to whether contacting is the sole source of greater involvement or merely a part.[4]

Our dependent variable for the level of *Campaign Involvement* is taken as a summary score of the following self-reported activities: placing a sign in one's yard, contributing to a party or candidate, attending a campaign meeting, influencing others' political decisions or views, volunteering to work in a campaign, and voting.[5] Naturally, those who report a higher number of reported activities are judged to be more involved than those who report fewer of these activities.

The NES questionnaire items we use to construct our dependent variables and the descriptive statistics for all of our measures are reported in Tables A1 and A2 in the online appendix at http://journalofpolitics.org/articles.html. We have revalued the interest and involvement variables on a 1–100 scale in order to facilitate interpretation. On this scale, the mean level of Political Interest expressed in 2000 was 74, and 72.6 in 2004, not a statistically significant difference. Campaign Involvement rated a low 19.5 in 2000, but a substantially higher 28.7 in 2004. Finally, the mean value for party contact was 32% in 2000 and 40% in 2004.

Determining the Battleground

Our *Battleground Status* measure delineates between states where considerable campaigning took place and the safe states that experienced little to no campaigning on the part of the parties and the candidates. The battleground status designations for 2000 and 2004 are presented in Table A3 in the web appendix. The blackout (or base) states are those that both parties categorize as safe. There were 23 base states in the year 2000 and 29 in 2004. The leaning and battleground categories include the remaining states where one or both parties sought to contest the election.[6] To be sure, the extent to which the political parties identify the same primary battleground states does vary somewhat from year to year. In 2004, for example, only seven states fall into the battleground category for both parties, down from 13 in 2000.

Battleground status is a simple ordinal scale categorizing each state as safe, leaning, or highly competitive for each party. This scale is then summed across both parties, rendering a 5-point categorization ranging from 0 (both parties classify state as safe) to 4 (both parties classify state as a battleground). The intermediate positions on the scale include states that one party or the other may have classified as competitive (or safe) but the other did not, or one in which both parties classified the state as leaning.

We acknowledge that this is a somewhat blunt instrument and, as such, we consider our analyses to be a conservative test of our hypotheses. In the absence of highly detailed campaign effort data (combining staffing, contacting, volunteer efforts, advertising, value of in-kind contributions) by state, for each party, there is no alternate measure that readily offers greater precision.[7] Also, we feel confident using this measure as we can validate it by correlating our battleground designation with a factor that should be closely associated with it: campaign advertising expenditures by state. The association between campaign spending for

[4]We acknowledge that self-reports in general can be problematic and that they are less than ideal measures of campaign contacting, participation, media exposure, and the like. With particular regard to contacting, the propensity to forget a party contact may be related to lack of political engagement more generally and could potentially bias our results in favor of contacting effects. Counter to these general concerns, however, we presume that any error in the contacting measure is randomly distributed across battleground designations. As our analytical focus is a comparison across this range of campaign contexts, any error associated with the contacting measure should not bias our findings; furthermore, our empirical results reveal that contacting explains only a portion of the total effect of battleground status on participation. The poor remain more likely to participate in contested states even after controlling for the effects of party contact.

[5]As has historically been the case, voting constitutes the most widespread form of political involvement; nonetheless, our involvement measure is not simply a surrogate for voting. In 2000, 48% of voters report engaging in at least one additional campaign activity. In 2004, over 60% of voters report campaign activity beyond participation at the ballot box.

[6]Campaign strategy designations were kindly provided to us by Daron R. Shaw. For a detailed discussion, see Shaw (2006).

[7]In order to verify this point, we conducted a parallel set of analyses substituting campaign visits, spending on advertising, and party contacts in lieu of the battleground status measure to assess whether a direct measure of campaign activities might not better predict interest and involvement. This specification did not perform as well as our models using battleground status, leading us to conclude that the participatory benefits of living in contested terrain equal more than a sum of its parts.

advertising and our battleground status measure across states for the pooled 2000 and 2004 elections was quite high ($r = .717$; $p \leq .001$), certainly high enough to bolster confidence in our measure. The vast majority of candidate visits were also allocated to the states identified here as battlegrounds (Hill and McKee 2005; Shaw 2006).[8]

We selected our covariates borrowing from the collective wisdom of previous research on participation, paying particular attention to electoral groups that are generally defined as resource poor or disadvantaged. Our primary focus regards the effect of battleground status on low income voters, defined as those earning less than $35,000 at the time of each survey (approximately 80% of U.S. household median income and below). We include control variables for other groups who are often designated as resource poor in order to elude spurious findings with respect to our low-income group. They include recent migrants (those living in their current place of residence for less than one year), young voters (age 18–24), the less educated (those reporting a high school diploma or less), and nonideologues (respondents who did not place themselves on the liberal-conservative continuum; Campbell et al. 1960; Teixiera 1992). Finally, we control for African Americans who, on one hand usually report less interest and political knowledge than whites across many measures, but on the other have strong community mobilizing organizations that can rival political parties in their effectiveness (Harris 1994; Rosenstone and Hansen 1993; Shingles 1981; Walters 2005; Wielhouwer 2000).

Our primary expectation is that low-income voters will generally exhibit lower interest and involvement than their resource-rich counterparts; but if they live in battleground states, the extent of their disadvantage will be mitigated by the more vigorous campaign to which they are exposed. Testing this hypothesis requires an interaction term combining battleground status with our measure of low income. Specifically, we expect the poor to benefit from living in contested states.

[8]We would also be troubled by our battleground status measure if there were evidence that recent campaign strategists dynamically altered their battleground designations mid-stream. But they usually do not. Strategies are cooked-up well in advance of the tightening that accompanies the fall horserace. And the general stability of mass preferences across months and years (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002) often means that strategic choices can be made well in advance because general predictions about which states will be competitive (or safe) usually hold up well in the medium term.

Among our independent variables, we also include a measure for the *Electoral College Votes* in each state, *State Median Income Level* (in $1,000s), *Party Registration State* (those states with partisan registration), and the presence of a *U.S. Senate Election* in the state.[9] Because larger counties may be targeted for greater campaign attention than sparsely populated ones, we also control for the *Voting Age Population of the County* of residence. These variables are introduced as controls in order to ensure that battleground status is not simply substituting for some other politically relevant attributes of a state's political climate, such as its level of affluence, its sheer size, or the superior capacity to target on a partisan basis given party enrollment at time of registration. The presence of a U.S. Senate election is intended to capture the influence of other statewide campaign stimuli in addition to the stimulus of the presidential campaign.

Estimation Strategy

Having identified our measures for independent and dependent variables, we rely upon straightforward least squares regression to obtain estimates for political interest and involvement, although we do add an adjustment to the error to account for the clustering of observations within states where respondents are subject to much of the same campaign stimuli.[10] To estimate the probability of party contact, we use logistic regression for the dichotomous dependent variable. Finally, we model political involvement with and without a control for political contacting in order to ascertain the extent to which battleground gains in

[9]It is important to note that competitive Senate elections do not necessarily correspond with presidential battleground status. In 2004, four of the seven most competitive Senate elections (with 10 point or less margins of victory) occurred in safe states. Conversely, only one of the competitive Senate elections took place in a battleground state (Florida). To the extent that the poor participate at higher rates in battleground states, controlling for competitive Senate races elsewhere, this suggests that the mobilizing force of competitive Senate elections may add to, but does not fully substitute for, the effect of exposure to a competitive presidential campaign. The 2006 midterm elections saw a slight increase in the number of competitive Senate races (from seven to nine) and, like in 2004, most took place in nonbattleground states. Our analysis of recent competitive Senate elections suggests that competition in one domain does not necessarily indicate competition at the presidential level, and as such, we are not confident that competitive Senate races in 2006 will necessarily translate into an expanded set of presidential election battleground states in 2008.

[10]The similarity of errors in spatially proximate observations violates the classic *i.i.d* assumption in standard regression, usually resulting in a marginal underestimation of standard errors (Rogers 1993).

political engagement are a function of political party contact.[11]

With these considerations in mind, we estimate the following model:

$$\begin{aligned} Y = {} & \beta_0 + \beta_1 Black + \beta_2 Migrant + \beta_3 Young \\ & + \beta_4 WeakPartisan + \beta_5 NonIdeol + \beta_6 HSLess \\ & + \beta_7 Poor + \beta_8 Battleground + \beta_9 Battleground \\ & * Poor + \beta_{10} ElectoralCollege + \beta_{11} VAPCountry \\ & + \beta_{12} PartyReg + \beta_{13} StateIncome \\ & + \beta_{14} SenateRace + Error \end{aligned}$$

The inclusion of the interaction term in this model requires a note regarding its interpretation. Specifically, the conditional effects of battleground status and low income cannot be interpreted in the same way as they would in a model without product terms (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006; Braumoeller 2004; Hardy 1993). The coefficient for the low-income dummy variable reflects the effect of low-income status in safe states (where battleground equals 0). The coefficient for battleground status (β_8) gauges the effect of battleground status for the nonpoor, and the coefficient for the interaction term reflects the increase or decrease in the dependent variable as low-income voters are exposed to increasingly rigorous campaigns ($\beta_7+\beta_8$).

Results: Political Interest

As two of our dependent variables (interest and involvement) are scaled from 0 to 100, we discuss our analyses in terms of percentage point increases or decreases. Our findings regarding levels of political interest in 2000, 2004, and the pooled sample appear in Table 1. The conditional effects indicate that poor voters who live in battleground states report significantly higher political interest levels than their low-income brethren in safe states, particularly so in 2004. Low income voters in the safest states are about 9 percentage points lower in their level of political interest than are poor voters who live in contested states. The interaction term indicates that battleground status does increase the reported political interest level of lower income voters, but only in the Kerry-Bush contest and in the pooled sample. The change in political interest among low income voters is approximately 6 percentage points if we move from the lowest to the highest value of battleground status.[12] Given the consistently high correspondence between political interest and participation, this is a statistically significant *and* substantively important finding.

Results: Party Contacting and Political Involvement

In general, low-resource voters report less party contact than those with greater resources. Blacks, recent migrants, the young, low-income voters, weak partisans and those with low levels of education all reported considerably less contact than whites, older voters, strong partisans, and the better educated. The main effect for battleground status is positive and significant in both 2000 and 2004, but it is particularly robust in the latter contest (See Table 2). This clearly corresponds with the conventional wisdom that grassroots efforts were far better targeted in the latter of the two campaigns. The interaction effect in Table 2 indicates that for low-income voters living in battleground states, party contacting was far more prevalent than for similar voters in nonbattleground locations. In 2000, the probability that low-income voters in the battleground would be contacted was approximately 13% higher than it was for poor voters in safe states. In 2004, however, the probability of low-income voter contact in a battleground state was 36% higher than in safe states. Consistent with our expectations, party organs reached out and touched the poor in competitive states, but not in the lopsided ones.

Political involvement is perhaps the dependent variable of most interest to us. Our estimates in Table 3 report the influence of battleground status and indicators of voter disadvantage on campaign involvement in 2000 and 2004. We estimated models with and without party contacting to discern whether the effect of battleground status is captured entirely by the greater degree of party contact occurring in the most heavily contested states. The results indicate that

[11]Technically speaking it might make better sense to estimate a count model, typically a negative binomial, for political engagement and the accuracy of political perceptions given that these variables are constructed as the number of activities and correct perceptions that survey respondents report. We stay with the more standard specification to ease interpretation, presentation, and comparison. Results of the estimation of the negative binomial models are available from the authors upon request and exhibit no substantive differences from what we report here.

[12]We calculate this by adding the coefficients for Battleground State + the coefficient for the interaction term (−2.21 + 3.78 = 1.57) and then multiplying by 4 (the range of the battleground status variable).

TABLE 1 Political Interest in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. Presidential Elections, by Battleground Status of State

Independent Variable	Political Interest 2000	Political Interest 2004	Political Interest Pooled
Black	5.63**	−1.02	1.91
	(.75)	(1.80)	(1.02)
Recent Migrant	−5.52	1.01	−2.44
	(3.64)	(1.57)	(2.11)
Age 18-24	−6.49**	−11.33**	−8.77**
	(1.38)	(1.50)	(1.27)
Low Income (under $35k)	−5.52**	−9.33**	−7.62**
	(.53)	(.74)	(.60)
High School or Less	−8.54**	−6.11*	−7.50**
	(1.20)	(2.71)	(1.68)
Non-Ideologue	−12.36**	−4.41**	−9.84**
	(2.20)	(1.62)	(1.80)
Electoral College Votes	−.07	−.02	−.07
	(.05)	(.08)	(.07)
VAP of County (in thousands)	.00069**	.00004	.00054
	(.00017)	(.00067)	(.00047)
Party Registration State	.78	.70	1.21
	(1.21)	(2.62)	(1.30)
State Income	−.00005	.0000002	−.00006
	(.00009)	(.0001052)	(.00007)
Senate Election	−1.23	2.42	.22
	(1.62)	(1.38)	(.80)
Battleground State	−.43	−2.21**	−1.43**
	(.46)	(.58)	(.57)
Battleground × Low Income	.49	3.78**	2.36**
	(.30)	(.18)	(.23)
Year = 2004	—	—	−1.18
			(1.15)
Constant	88.79**	82.39**	88.93**
	(3.77)	(7.04)	(3.60)
N	1,373	1,054	2,427
R^2	.09	.07	.07
RMSE	25.034	25.684	25.363

OLS Regression with robust standard errors.
Cell entries are OLS regression coefficients (standard errors) significance: ** < .05; * < .10, two-tailed.
Source: American National Election Studies, 2000, 2004.

contacting does not account for all of the mobilizing effects that come with living in a battleground state.

The results of our model with no control for party contact indicate that the impact of residing in an uncontested state is highly detrimental to the participation of the less educated, low income, and the non-ideological in both election years. Battleground status by itself does nothing to increase voter involvement among the more affluent (once controlling for race, age, partisan strength, and education), but the interaction of battleground status and low income, notably enhances the engagement of the have-nots. Campaign involvement is 7 to 8 percentage points higher among low-income voters in the most competitive states in 2004 than it is in the safe states.

Table 3 also contains the results for campaign involvement controlling for party contacting. Contacting greatly increases the extent of reported involvement, but does not appreciably diminish the effect of battleground status on the participation of lower income citizens in the 2004 contest. Even controlling for contact, poor voters in the most competitive states are approximately 6 percentage points more engaged than those who live in safe terrain. What this suggests is that the effect of battleground status is only partly a result of the political party contacting efforts in 2004. Consistent with previous findings by Huckfeldt and Sprague (1992), these results seem to suggest that party canvassing has a cascading effect whereby at least some of those that are contacted by campaigns reach out to

TABLE 2 Political Party Contacting in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. Presidential Elections, by Battleground Status of State

Independent Variable	Party Contacting 2000	Min->Max	Party Contacting 2004	Min->Max	Party Contacting Pooled	Min->Max
Black	−.40*	−.08	−.69**	−.15	−.56**	−.12
	(.21)		(.16)		(.12)	
Recent Migrant	−.80**	−.15	−1.48**	−.26	−1.12**	−.20
	(.38)		(.20)		(.27)	
Age 18-24	−1.00**	−.18	−1.10**	−.22	−1.04**	−.20
	(.18)		(.26)		(.14)	
Low Income (under $35k)	−.24**	−.05	−.33**	−.08	−.28**	−.06
	(.09)		(.14)		(.03)	
High School or Less	−.57**	−.12	−.54**	−.12	−.56**	−.12
	(.12)		(.18)		(.10)	
Non-Ideologue	−.29**	−.06	.22	.05	−.10	−.02
	(.15)		(.25)		(.14)	
Electoral College Votes	−.01**	−.10	.00	−.02	−.01*	−.08
	(.00)		(.01)		(.00)	
VAP of County (in thousands)	−.000002	.00	.00003	.04	.000009	.01
	(.000007)		(.00013)		(.00005)	
Party Registration State	.04	.01	−.38**	−.09	−.14	−.03
	(.09)		(.08)		(.14)	
State Income	.00001**	.11	.00002	.15	.00002**	.15
	(.000007)		(.00001)		(.000006)	
Senate Election	−.05	−.01	.01	.00	−.06	−.01
	(.11)		(.21)		(.16)	
Battleground State	.08**	.07	.21**	.20	.15**	.14
	(.03)		(.06)		(.02)	
Battleground × Low Income	.14**	.13	.17**	.16	.15**	.14
	(.05)		(.06)		(.02)	
Year = 2004	—		—		.19	.04
					(.12)	
Constant	−1.21**		−1.15		−1.16**	
	(.34)		(.78)		(.33)	
N	1,592		1,205		2,797	
McKelvey-Zavoina R^2	.105		.197		.144	
Log-likelihood (full model)	−939.341		−717.471		−1,664.898	

Logistic Regression with robust standard errors.
Cell entries are log odds coefficients (standard errors) and change in probability from moving each independent variable from its lowest to highest value while all other variables are held constant at their sample means.
Significance: ** < .05; * < .10, two-tailed.
Source: American National Election Studies, 2000, 2004.

others in their social networks, extending the breadth of party mobilization efforts. Our findings also show that the cascading effect of party mobilization seems to work at all levels of the socioeconomic ladder, not just among the more affluent or better educated.

Finally, we should note that numerous other interaction effects beyond income were evaluated, both singly and jointly, and that none proved to be statistically significant. While battleground status seemed to be somewhat effective in activating lower income voters, it did not have much of an impact on the young, those with less education, and nonideological voters. This alone is a sufficiently intriguing result that we turn to an explanation below.

TABLE 3 Campaign Involvement of the Resource Poor in the 2000 and 2004 U.S. Presidential Elections, by Battleground Status of State

Independent Variable	Campaign Activities 2000	Campaign Activities 2004	Campaign Activities Pooled	Campaign Activities 2000	Campaign Activities 2004	Campaign Activities Pooled
Black	−.43	−4.03	−2.26**	.68	−2.92	−.98
	(.53)	(2.30)	(.73)	(.34)	(2.05)	(.73)
Recent Migrant	−1.46	−2.82	−2.27	.41	−.81	−.12
	(2.77)	(2.38)	(1.31)	(2.22)	(2.53)	(.80)
Age 18–24	−3.16	−.10	−1.90	−.80	1.55	.24
	(1.56)	(2.02)	(.96)	(1.49)	(1.77)	(1.02)
Low Income (under $35k)	−3.14**	−3.80**	−3.67**	−2.40**	−2.99**	−2.85**
	(.99)	(.85)	(.17)	(.68)	(.80)	(.17)
High School or Less	−6.28**	−7.21**	−6.75**	−4.56**	−6.33**	−5.37**
	(1.27)	(1.44)	(1.07)	(1.02)	(1.42)	(1.05)
Non-Ideologue	−3.70**	−6.03**	−4.11**	−2.92*	−6.37	−3.88**
	(1.30)	(1.15)	(1.30)	(1.30)	(1.33)	(1.15)
Electoral College Votes	−.11**	−.04*	−.10**	−.08**	−.03	−.08**
	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)	(.02)
VAP of County (in thousands)	.0001	.00007	.0002	.00009	.00006	.0002
	(.0004)	(.0003)	(.0003)	(.0004)	(.0004)	(.0003)
Party Registration State	−.49	−1.32	−.25	−.61	−.43	.09
	(1.21)	(2.26)	(.52)	(1.19)	(2.32)	(.66)
State Income	.00001	.00002	−.00003	−.00003	−.00003	−.00007
	(.00007)	(.00003)	(.00004)	(.00008)	(.00003)	(.00005)
Senate Election	−.49	3.58**	1.03	−.32	2.83*	.76
	(1.19)	(1.16)	(.59)	(.86)	(1.18)	(.45)
Battleground State	.81	−.38	.07	.54	−.73	−.34
	(.85)	(.33)	(.52)	(.79)	(.50)	(.59)
Battleground × Low Income	−.08	1.92**	1.05**	−.48	1.61**	.68**
	(.51)	(.30)	(.12)	(.37)	(.27)	(.19)
Contacted by Party	—	—	—	15.10**	8.07**	12.16**
				(.94)	(1.07)	(1.10)
Year = 2004	—	—	2.16**	—	—	1.05
			(.45)			(.60)
Constant	25.71**	24.29**	27.19**	22.22**	23.31**	24.80**
	(4.64)	(1.35)	(2.57)	(4.68)	(1.26)	(2.73)
N	1,589	1,059	2,648	1,589	1,059	2,648
R^2	.07	.07	.07	.22	.11	.16
RMSE	17.443	18.931	18.081	16.005	18.572	17.21

OLS Regression with robust standard errors.
Cell entries are regression coefficients (standard errors).
Significance: ** < .05; * < .10, two-tailed.
Source: American National Election Studies, 2000, 2004.

Discussion

Previous research has shown that presidential campaigns allocate resources on the basis of the Electoral College's distribution of votes, paying particular attention to larger states (Bartels 1985; Brams and Davis 1974). Notably, our coefficient estimates for Electoral Vote contribution were statistically insignificant predictors of the level of political interest and exerted a *negative* impact on the level of contact reported from political parties. What we have observed in recent years is that large states are the focus of additional attention only if they meet the obvious additional condition that they are *electorally* competitive. After all, spotlighting the large states makes sense only if there is at least some chance that campaign investments will pay off in winning over enough voters to capture the state's electoral votes.

New York, California, and Texas, therefore, were conceded as safe territory early in the 2000 and 2004 contests. Small states that were electorally marginal (e.g., New Mexico, New Hampshire, Iowa, and Nevada), even if they were not sizable in Electoral College terms, received a level of campaign attention not predicted by simplistic mathematical models. The Electoral College is an unquestionably important political institution, but as electorally rich states have become sure bets, size considerations give way to an uncontaminated focus on winning wherever victory is possible—and it is this contested terrain that observers have discovered to be shrinking.

Regardless of electoral size, then, we have found that exposure to the greater intensity of campaigning in battleground states does increase political engagement among lower SES voters; specifically among those whose status is gauged by their lower income. Our results (especially for 2004) suggest that low-income voters are more likely to develop an interest in the campaign when they reside in states that both parties have targeted as battlegrounds compared to states that both parties have designated as safe. The actual level of party contact these voters receive is much higher as a function of residing on contested terrain. Moreover, the political involvement of poor voters also improves markedly in 2004 as a function of residing in the political battle zone as opposed to the political periphery. The tradition of research extending from V.O. Key, Jr. (1949) through Hill and Leighley (1996), about the value of political competition in generating greater political inclusion, receives substantial support from the results reported here.

While battleground status itself has little direct impact on interest or engagement levels in the short term, it can interact with individual characteristics that usually predict apathy to mitigate the negative impact of those traits. Why does battleground status result in higher engagement for lower income voters, but less so in similar tests we conducted for recent migrants, the young, the nonideological, or those with less than a high school education? We suspect that lower income voters are much more easily targeted and mobilized on a geographic basis, both through the airwaves and on the ground in precinct canvassing efforts. Nonideologues, for example, *do not occupy a discrete place*—they are sprinkled rather randomly, in spatial terms, throughout the electorate. The same could be said for recent migrants. Young voters are also evenly distributed, except perhaps around college campuses, and poorly educated voters are far less clustered than are those with low incomes.

To illustrate the greater geographic concentration of low-income voters, we close our study by calculating a dissimilarity index (Lieberson 1969) across census tracts for every battleground state in the 2000 and 2004 election. The dissimilarity index provides a reliable estimate of the proportion of voters in each designated class that would have to relocate from their census tract to another one within the state in order for their concentration to be exactly even across all census tracts in that state. Higher values indicate a greater geographic concentration or clustering. Table A4 in the online appendix reports the results. In every battleground state, the low-income population is more concentrated than either young voters, recent migrants, or than those with low-educational attainment. Of the variables we examined, only African Americans are more geographically concentrated than the poor. Battleground status does not make much difference to African-American involvement because African Americans have mobilizing institutions within their communities that facilitate participation apart from political party activity (Harris 1994; Walters 2005).

The geographic concentration of the poor enables activation and mobilization because television and radio advertising remain constrained by the geography of electronic signal propagation, and grassroots organizing takes place over unambiguous geographic territory, where population concentration diminishes costs. While campaign technologies have advanced over recent years, the political parties have yet to produce an effective strategy for reaching and mobilizing many of the truly peripheral voters—peripheral both in the geographic and attitudinal senses—who pay little attention even during the most competitive of presidential election campaigns.

We should also bear in mind that battleground and nonbattleground populations have participation traditions and customs that are not entirely shaped by campaign stimuli. How else can we explain high turnout rates in uncontested states such as Kansas, Nebraska, the Dakotas, and Vermont? People do regularly involve themselves in politics without the stimulus of a competitive election, or even a sizable Electoral College contribution. Campaigns are capable of making a significant impact that may sway a close election, but they are certainly not everything.

The modern presidential campaign that combines resource allocation efficiency and intense contacting efforts has the capacity to enlarge and diversify those who vote. As noted by Riker (1982) more than two decades ago, institutions can have profound effects on who votes and how. Campaigns are institutions that

not only shape the size and nature of the electorate, but can also manipulate the political agenda and priorities that voters bring to bear on their electoral decisions. Our study reinforces the importance of campaigns as instruments of democracy. On the one hand, our results point to short-term gains in the socioeconomic diversity of battleground voters. In the long term, these efforts may result in an electorate that is reliably diverse across election cycles. As noted by Gerber, Green, and Shachar, voting may become "habit-forming" (2003). Intense campaign efforts such as we have seen in the past two election cycles do jar many otherwise low-probability voters into a participatory trajectory. For those that value full participation as a normative good for democracy, these results are promising, but limited in that they only extend to the narrowly defined battleground. Our confidence that campaign activities are only one of many stimuli that activate political participation, and our knowledge that designated safe states and contested states may vary over time, gives us some consolation that this scenario is not the only possible destination (Johnson 2005); nonetheless, it seems clear that political party activity expanded to a greater number of states is one path toward the mobilization of a more representative electorate.

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James G. Gimpel is professor of government and politics, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Karen M. Kaufmann is assistant professor of government and politics, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742. Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz is a graduate student of political science, University of Maryland, College Park, MD 20742.