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ARTICLES

The Methods behind the Madness: Presidential Electoral College Strategies, 1988–1996

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The prevailing conventional wisdom in political science is that presidential candidates behave strategically and systematically. This study posits that we have not had adequate empirical information to judge how much strategic planning goes on, how these plans are derived, or how systematically they are realized. The analysis examines actual electoral college strategies from the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections and judges them against state-by-state allocations of television advertising purchases and candidate appearances. The data show that candidates devised and acted upon electoral college strategies, which were largely symmetrical across elections and party lines. The data also show, however, that strategies were neither perfectly symmetrical nor static, raising the possibility that presidential campaigning is less predictable than previously assumed.

Presidential election campaigns receive much attention from the news media and political science. This attention is driven by the assumption that campaigns play a critical role in American democracy. Campaigns are usually conceived of as essential contact points between voters and public officials in the United States. They are thought to be the means by which candidates articulate the issue positions and policy commitments that are validated by elections and bind officeholders to a course of action. Yet, for all of the attention devoted to campaigns, little systematic evidence on the character of presidential electioneering has been offered.

Most studies of presidential elections assume that candidates behave in a strategic and systematic manner, but this has never been established empirically. This is largely because presidential candidates have been reticent in divulging information on their strategies and downright miserly on providing data as to the quality and quantity of their campaign activities. But the lack of research can be attributed to the absence of agreement on how institutions (like the electoral college) or alternative goals (like raising money or helping elect a friendly senator) affect the strategic environment against which our expectations are formed. Thus, agreement on the underlying rationality of candidates does not necessarily inform our expectations about the nature of presidential campaigns. The bottom line, then, is that analyses of campaigns are hampered by a shortage of knowledge with respect to the candidates' goals and allocative behavior.

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The purpose of this paper is to describe how presidential candidates allocate resources. The main questions are where do candidates choose to campaign and for what reasons? Unusually rich empirical data on strategies and resource allocations from the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential campaigns are used to examine these questions and reopen the door on a literature that has been sporadic, at best. The data show that although presidential candidates develop and largely adhere to electoral college strategies, these strategies are broader than is typically conceded in the literature and can lead to discrepancies in the allocation of campaign resources even among the battleground states.

What We Know about Electoral College Strategies

While political science has provided formidable theoretical and empirical evidence attesting to the use of issues and agendas in presidential elections, much less is known about whom the candidates seek to persuade. A small set of studies has taken aim at this question, with the most common approach being the analysis of how candidates allocate their resources in election campaigns. Most of these studies, in turn, have focused on what is called “targeting,” which is the process of identifying persuadable voters and gaining their support (Herrnson 1995; Jacobson 1991; Salmore and Salmore 1992). In practice, targeting is straightforward. Candidates and consultants rely on polling information to break the electorate into three groups: supporters, nonsupporters, and persuadable voters. It is persuadable voters who draw the lion’s share of attention—issues are designed to gain their support and resources are allocated to convey messages to them.

The difficulty is that this literature does not provide us with much evidence on the precision with which persuadable voters are identified nor on how this targeting affects the subsequent allocation of resources. Moreover, this literature focuses on congressional races and does not address the peculiarities endemic to presidential election campaigns. Targeting voters is relatively uncomplicated in a single-district, simple-plurality setting, but what about targeting *multiple electorates* in an election waged through the anachronistic electoral college? How does one account for candidate behavior, strategic or otherwise, in a simultaneous, multistate, weighted, winner-take-all setting?

Several empirical analyses of this subject have been conducted since the 1960s. Most notably, Kelley (1961, 1966) collects and analyzes data on the statewide campaign appearances of presidential candidates, while Alexander (e.g., 1966, 1971) records campaign expenditures in what has become a quadrennial study of election finance. More recently, Goldstein (1997) describes television advertising expenditures across dozens of media markets for the 1996 presidential election. These studies, however, do not offer a common theoretical perspective on the strategies motivating this campaigning.

Some interesting empirical research on allocation strategies has also been produced by scholars investigating presidential primaries. For example, Aldrich

(1980) argues that (1) uncompetitive states are more likely to draw resources from the favored candidate and (2) a low probability of success, coupled with a winner-take-all format, makes it unlikely that a state will be contested regardless of its size. Bartels' (1988) analysis of presidential primaries picks up where Aldrich's leaves off, arguing that resource allocation in primaries depends on the political characteristics of the states and that the marginal value of additional campaign effort declines as the amount of effort already expended increases. Unfortunately, while these works give us practical, theoretically derived expectations of candidates' strategies, the sequential, multicandidate nature of presidential primaries makes comparisons with the general election difficult.

From a slightly different vantage point, game and formal theory analyses of resource allocation in presidential elections also offer insights into strategies. Brams and Davis (1974) find that local equilibrium strategies—assuming that candidates match each other's campaigning in each state—dictate allocating campaign resources proportionate to a state's relative population raised to the 1.5 (or " $3/2$ s") power. Lake (1979) uses a similar model, but substitutes the probability of winning for the share of the popular vote as the value that candidates are presumed to maximize, and estimates the exponential power to be 1.72. Similarly, Bartels (1985) employs data from Carter's 1976 campaign and estimates that television and radio advertising resources were allocated proportionate to a state's relative population raised to the 1.70 power.

But these works are not without their differences. For example, Bartels also argues that campaign resources are distinct and that it is "instrumental" (as opposed to "ornamental") resources that are allocated strategically. In another critical analysis, Colantoni, Levesque, and Ordeshook (1975) present both formal and empirical evidence that Brams and Davis overstate the bias of the electoral college and suggest that, in fact, presidential candidates allocate resources in proportion to the population of the states. In addition, Colantoni, Levesque, and Ordeshook contend that two issues make rational planning difficult in presidential campaigns: (1) the activities of the opposition, which usually affect the strategic situation and tend to change over the campaign, and (2) the existence of "safe" states that should receive no resources, making national television advertising purchases problematic.

While many of these studies offer excellent analyses, we are still left with only a scattered set of predictions and precious little empirical data on the strategic behavior of presidential candidates. From related studies, we know that presidential candidates use issue positions and priorities to maximize their appeal to key portions of the electorate. Furthermore, we know that they spend extraordinary amounts of money and time on campaigns. We do not, however, know how they *actually* allocate resources to disseminate these positions and priorities.

This study gathers information on the campaigns' *actual* electoral college strategies, as well as unique data on resource allocation, to shed light on how

candidates think and behave. It focuses on three specific questions that seem to beg for empirical investigation. First, how much strategic planning goes on in presidential campaigns? Second, to what degree is there anything systematic in the derivation of electoral college strategies? Third, how systematically are plans realized? The answers to these questions will allow us to more effectively understand the nature of presidential campaigning.

In addressing these questions, the article proceeds in five sections. In the first section, the data for the study are presented, with special emphasis placed on how recent electoral college strategies were derived. Section two delineates these strategies, while section three empirically examines the extent of strategic planning, the factors affecting strategies, and the influence of these strategies on resource allocation. Section four considers the dynamic aspects of strategies, as well as additional factors influencing the allocation of campaign resources. In the fifth and final section, the paper reviews the findings and suggests the most promising areas for future research on this subject.

Data

Three pieces of information are essential to this study: (1) the electoral college strategies devised by the presidential campaigns, (2) schedules of the candidates' appearances, and (3) television advertising purchases made in the states. The importance of the electoral college strategies for the present analysis is obvious, while the data on appearances and television advertising are crucial if we are to evaluate how closely the actual dispensation of campaign resources matched the particular plans. Fortunately, all of this information was provided by people who worked in one or more of the presidential campaigns of 1988–1996.

The electoral college strategies for the GOP's candidates were provided by Republican consultants. The Dukakis-Bentsen strategy was obtained through the author's conversations with Dukakis aides and from narrative accounts of the 1988 campaign. The 1992 Clinton-Gore strategy was culled from a widely cited postelection article in the *Baltimore Sun* written by Jules Witcover, while the 1996 strategy was taken from several journalistic accounts and the author's conversations with people involved in Clinton's reelection campaign. It should be emphasized that, with the exception of Dole's plan, these strategies were formulated prior to September—they are *not* post hoc reconstructions based on resource allocations. Because of this, they allow us to judge the behavior of presidential candidates against their own standards for rationality.¹

¹Republican consultants Frederick Steeper, Robert Teeter, Dana Fitzgerald, Adam Stoll, and Christopher Turner provided invaluable information on strategies. Special thanks should also be given to Dukakis aide Ruth Rowley. The narrative and journalistic accounts of the campaign that helped fill in some of the gaps include those by Germond and Witcover (1989), Goldman et al. (1989), Woodward (1996), Morris (1997), and articles from *Time* (Eric Pooley, "Clinton's Stealth Campaign," 22 April 1996, 54–56) and *USA Today* (Martha T. Moore, "Swing States Are Thrown into Spotlight," 3 October 1996, section B, 1–2).

Candidate appearance data come from three sources: *The Hotline* (a daily political newsletter published in Falls Church, Virginia), *The Washington Post*, and schedules kept by the campaigns themselves. Since schedules are updated after the fact and reflect last-minute stops that may not be reported in the news media, the last of these sources is the most reliable. However, they were only available for the Dukakis and both Bush campaigns. For the Clinton campaigns and for Dole, the schedules noted each day in the *Hotline* were checked by the accounts of candidate activity in the *Post*. This information makes it possible to count the number of days the presidential candidates spent in each state.²

Data on television advertising come from several sources. For 1988, information on media buys were provided by Market Opinion Research (for Bush) and Yellin Communications (for Dukakis). For 1992, media buy estimates for both Bush and Clinton were provided by The November Company, which handled TV advertising placements for the Republican campaign and tracked those of the Democrats. Finally, 1996 estimates of media buys for Dole and Clinton were provided by New Century Media, which handled advertising placements for the Republican campaign and tracked those of the Democrats.³

The volume of advertising in each of the states is measured in gross rating points (GRPs, or points). Ordinarily, market cost discrepancies make it impossible to compare advertising dollars spent in Sioux Falls, for example, with those spent in New York City. GRPs provide a measure of audience reach independent of market costs. Roughly speaking, 100 GRPs represent 100% of voters in a market seeing an advertisement once (50 GRPs indicate one of every two voters has seen an advertisement once). For the present analysis, a campaign's statewide GRPs are calculated by multiplying the number of points bought in a market by the percent of the state's eligible voters in that market, and then summing numbers from each market to provide an estimate of GRPs bought statewide.⁴

²Appearances by the candidates in their hometowns (Boston, Houston, Little Rock, or Russell), at their places of work (Boston, Little Rock, or Washington, DC), or at their vacation destinations (Camp David, Kennebunkport, or Jackson Hole) were not counted unless campaign appearances were reported.

³Estimates of Republican buys (1988–96) are from internal records of TV ad placements and were validated by satellite tracking. Estimates of Dukakis' buys are from internal records and were validated by the Bush campaign's estimates. Estimates of Clinton's buys (1992–96) are from National Media, Inc., which used satellite technology to track the placement of Clinton's ads. No validation of these estimates has been done, although the consistency between tracking and internal records for the GOP ads makes this less disconcerting than it might otherwise be.

⁴There are three points to be made about the GRP estimates. First, advertising time is not always purchased in the state for which the ad is targeted. For instance, one must purchase time in New York City to reach northern New Jersey. Whenever possible, GRPs targeted for a particular state are attributed to that state. Second, GRP estimates include spot, regional, and network buys, with network buys encompassing prime time, sporting events, national cable, and CNN buys. The inclusion of network GRPs is essential to assess properly the relationships between strategy, campaigning, and voters' preferences. Third, GRP estimates do not include national party or independent expenditures. These data were simply not available, although it is quite probable that these resources were allocated in a manner similar to the candidates' expenditures.

The candidate appearance and television advertising data span the nine weeks between September 1 and election day. Because quality data are simply not available prior to this date, appearances and advertisements occurring before September 1 are excluded from the analysis. This study assumes that these campaign activities set the stage for what follows and are an important part of the full election story. Despite the underestimation of total campaigning, however, September 1 is the date on which the presidential campaigns receive their checks from the Treasury Department and serves as both a legal and a historical starting point for the fall campaign. Summary statistics for all data are presented in the appendix.

Electoral College Strategies, 1988–1996

To give context to the substantive findings and multivariate analyses presented later, it is first necessary to describe the particulars of the electoral college strategies employed in the three most recent presidential campaigns. The specific strategies from each year are, of course, interesting and important in their own right. More critically, these strategies demonstrate the similarity of state-by-state targeting plans and therefore provide suggestive evidence of the rationality of campaigning.

Table 1.A shows the 1988 campaign strategies side by side, highlighting their symmetry. (The titles of the strategic categories varied from election to election but have been labeled consistently here for the sake of comparability.) In 1988, Michael Dukakis boasted of a “50-state strategy” at the Democratic Convention in Atlanta. This claim was clearly exaggerated, as Dukakis’ preliminary electoral strategy abandoned 24 states in the South and West. The Dukakis-Bentsen campaign had loose designs on 26 states and the District of Columbia, with 8 states seen as prime targets: California, Illinois, Michigan, Missouri, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Texas. After the second presidential debate, they decided to focus on a spare 18-state strategy, which would have produced a bare electoral college majority of 273 votes. In the words of Lee Atwater, it was “like threading a needle,” but it was a strategy borne of necessity.

The 1988 Bush campaign saw the world similarly, as is evidenced by the relatively few states (15) in the off-diagonal cells. They figured to hold 14 states in the South and another 14 in the West without much difficulty. Added to these were the “reliable” Republican states of Kansas, Nebraska, New Hampshire, and Indiana. The campaign considered Connecticut, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania in play, but identified New Jersey and Ohio as the most likely to go for Bush (and consequently treated them as part of their base). As the campaign wore on and Bush looked like a winner, the campaign split into two groups. The “fundamentalists,” including Robert Teeter and Lee Atwater, preferred a bare but reliable coalition and advocated concentrating resources on New Jersey and Ohio, whereas the “opportunists,” led by James A. Baker and Richard Darman, made the case for a maximal coalition and an electoral

TABLE 1A
1988 Presidential Election Strategies

Dukakis Electoral College Strategy	Bush Electoral College Strategy				
	Base Republican	Marginal Republican	Battle- ground	Marginal Democratic	Base Democratic
Base Democratic					DC* HI* IA* MD* MA* MN* RI* WV*
Marginal Democratic					
Battleground			CA* MO* OH* TX*	IL* MI* NY* PA*	
Marginal Republican	AR CO LA		NJ OR* WA*	CT* DE ME VT WI	
Base Republican	AL AK AZ FL GA ID IN KS KY MS MT NE NV NH NM NC ND OK SC SD TN UT VA WY				

Note: * indicates states in Dukakis' "18-state strategy."

mandate (Goldman et al. 1989). They wanted to go after wavering states like Connecticut and Pennsylvania. The resolution of this debate is not clear, although Bush added some stops in the two states targeted by the opportunists.

Moving to 1992, Table 1.B shows targeting strategies that were similar to each other and to those of the previous campaigns. Bush's campaign employed a five-fold distinction:

1. *Base Republican*—13 states representing 88 electoral votes (EVs);
2. *Marginal Republican*—9 states representing 109 EVs;
3. *Battleground*—5 states representing 90 EVs;
4. *Marginal Democratic*—11 states representing 88 EVs; and
5. *Base Democratic*—12 states (and the District of Columbia) representing 163 EVs.

The Bush campaign used a state's tendency to vote Republican in presidential elections to determine if the campaign should be on the offensive (where they would act as the underdog) or the defensive (where they would act as the favorite). The Republican campaign focused on persuading independents in the battleground and marginal Democratic states and on mobilizing partisans in the marginal Republican states. Bush's campaign also examined a state's electoral votes to determine the relative prioritization: some marginal states were "A" states because they offered larger electoral prizes, while smaller ones were "B" states and were considered less consequential.

Clinton's 1992 campaign strategy also sorted states into five categories, based primarily on Clinton's potential for victory:

1. *Base Democratic*—9 states (including the District of Columbia) representing 134 EVs;
2. *Marginal Democratic*—9 states representing 102 EVs;
3. *Battleground*—13 states representing 140 EVs;
4. *Marginal Republican*—8 states representing 91 EVs; and
5. *Base Republican*—11 states representing 71 EVs.

According to James Carville, the Democrats believed a minimal amount of energy would be sufficient to secure the marginal Democratic states, while "flashing some armor" could induce Bush to expend precious resources in the marginal Republican states (Matalin and Carville 1994, 442). Meanwhile, the Clinton campaign focused much attention on the battleground states, where they needed one or two victories to carry an electoral college majority (Goldman et al. 1994, 505; Mileur 1993). Again, note that only 16 states fall into the off-diagonal cells, indicating symmetry between the Republican and Democratic campaign categorizations.

It is worth observing that Perot's impact in 1992 was to increase the perceived competitiveness of the typically Republican states of the Mountain West. States such as New Mexico, Nevada, Colorado, and Montana were targeted by both campaigns due to the belief that Perot would siphon off votes from an unexpect-

edly shaky Republican president (a belief that was buttressed by statewide poll results throughout the spring and summer). Perot undoubtedly shaped other strategic decisions (e.g., issue agendas), but the “Mountain West effect” was perhaps his most obvious impact. Despite Perot’s strong showing in 1992, both the Dole and Clinton campaigns appear to have largely ignored Perot when developing their plans for 1996.

TABLE 1B
1992 Presidential Election Strategies

Clinton Electoral College Strategy	Bush Electoral College Strategy				
	Base Republican	Marginal Republican	Battle- ground	Marginal Democratic	Base Democratic
Base Democratic					AR CA DC MA MN NY RI VT WV
Marginal Democratic			PA	CT DE OR TN WA	IL IA MD
Battleground		CO MT NC	GA MI NJ OH	KY LA ME MO NM WI	
Marginal Republican	AZ KS NV NH	AL FL SD TX			
Base Republican	AK ID IN NE ND SC UT VA WY	MI OK			

Perot notwithstanding, Clinton's 1996 campaign revived much of the 1992 strategy, with some interesting twists. Table 1.C demonstrates that Clinton's base was essentially unchanged, while he conceded fewer states even adding the Republican stronghold of Florida to his battleground category. In perhaps the most interesting development, pollster Mark Penn used a seven-variable model to identify the markets where television advertising money should be spent. The variables included the market's previous voting history, the cost of advertising time, the estimated number of persuadable voters, the cumulative amount of previous pro-Clinton advertising that ran over a given period of time, the likely impact on House and Senate races, and the electoral votes in the state. The model thus proposed a rank-ordering of markets based on an estimated "cost-per-persuadable-voter" (Woodward 1996, 416). While such estimates are standard fare in lower-level races, the application to the complex environment of the presidential election represents an innovation.⁵

Meanwhile, Dole's 1996 campaign started off with a fairly standard plan for Republican presidential candidates. As reported in Woodward's *The Choice*, Dole campaign manager Scott Reed saw the Republican base as 19 states worth 238 electoral votes. Reed also identified 9 states—California, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, and Ohio—worth 167 electoral votes as the battleground states (Woodward 1996, 420). Controversy within Dole's campaign over the electoral college strategy emerged early on, however, and persisted until a series of meetings in early October. (Prior to the October summit, agreed-upon changes in the strategy were scuttled after they were leaked to the press.) At those meetings, as many as five electoral college options were offered. The campaign finally decided on a "South and West" option over a "Midwest" option, and adopted the following approach:

1. *Base Republican*—15 states representing 132 EVs;
2. *Marginal Republican*—8 states representing 80 EVs;
3. *Battleground*—4 states representing 71 EVs;
4. *Marginal Democratic*—6 states representing 100 EVs; and
5. *Base Democratic*—17 states (and the District of Columbia) representing 155 EVs.⁶

⁵This algorithm also guided Clinton's dispensation of advertising dollars during his attempt to define the budget showdown of 1995. However, while Penn's model was important for determining the allocation of resources during the budget negotiations, Clinton assiduously avoided advertising in major markets where the TV ads might be detected and reported by the mainstream news media. Noncoastal California, for example, was saturated with advertising while Los Angeles and San Francisco received no play at all.

⁶In evaluating Dole's campaign, the study uses the South and West plan, which was finalized in October. In all other instances, it uses the candidates' plans as articulated in early September. This undoubtedly reduces the overall relationship between campaigning and strategy. Still, even Dole's and Dukakis' strategic shifts were more a matter of priorities within the agreed-upon battleground states than moving states into different categories.

TABLE 1C
1996 Presidential Election Strategies

Clinton Electoral College Strategy	Dole Electoral College Strategy				
	Base Republican	Marginal Republican	Battle- ground	Marginal Democratic	Base Democratic
Base Democratic					AR DC DE HI IA MD A MN NY OR RI VT WA WV
Marginal Democratic			CA	IL MI MO PA	CT ME WI
Battleground	NC	AZ CO FL GA KY TN	LA NV NM	NH NJ OH	
Marginal Republican	IN OK SC TX VA	MT SD			
Base Republican	AL AK ID KS NE ND MS UT WY				

As with Dukakis' 18-state strategy in 1988, Dole was attempting to "thread the needle;" he needed to carry all of the battleground states to win an electoral college majority with 273 votes. The inclusion of California, where Dole trailed Clinton by almost 20 points in early September, among the battleground states was especially surprising. Yet contesting long-shot states comes with the territory when you are an underdog in a zero-sum game. Aside from these moderate surprises, there was, as in 1988 and 1992, a general symmetry in the way the Republican and Democratic campaigns viewed the electoral landscape, with only 19 states falling into off-diagonal cells.

In short, electoral college strategies were developed by each of the major-party candidates in the past three elections. Though fairly broad, these plans were known by campaign strategists and by many journalists covering the campaigns. Furthermore, while some states were viewed differently by the opposing sides, there was a mirror quality to the categorizations. This suggests that similar factors were utilized in this strategic planning. The next section examines, in greater detail, the extent and basis of strategic planning, and the degree to which these plans were realized in the allocation of resources.

Systematic and Strategic Planning in Presidential Campaigns

How extensive were the electoral college plans? Strategies typically made five distinctions among states: "base Republican," "marginal Republican," "battleground," "marginal Democratic," and "base Democratic." This point is apparent from Tables 1.A–C, which specifically employ this terminology, and from the descriptions of the candidates' strategies. But while campaigns designed strategies emphasizing general categories of states, they rarely used systematic criteria to differentiate among states within a particular category (the exceptions were Clinton's 1996 campaign and, to a lesser extent, Bush's 1992 campaign). So even if campaigns were strategic in their allocation of resources, one could not have predicted whether a candidate would have made more appearances or aired more TV ads in a given battleground state. This is an important caveat to the assumption of strategic rationality. Candidates may have behaved strategically, but their plans were insufficiently detailed for them to have allocated resources to achieve maximal effect.

Where did the plans come from? Many factors influenced electoral college strategies. Extending the explanatory framework advanced by formal and game theorists, we can model a state's place in a presidential candidate's electoral strategy as a function of five variables: (1) electoral votes, (2) television advertising costs, (3) competitiveness, (4) the interaction between competitiveness and electoral votes, and (5) the interaction between competitiveness and the cost of television advertising. For analytical purposes, the key independent variables, including the interaction terms, are constructed so that they should positively correlate with electoral attractiveness. Thus, electoral votes range from few (3) to many (54), and television advertising costs—calculated by taking the inverse of

the amount of money necessary to purchase 100 statewide GRPs—range from expensive to inexpensive. Competitiveness is more elusive; the measure used here ranges from uncompetitive to highly competitive and is calculated as follows:

$$50 - (\text{abs } | 50 - \text{average Republican share of the two-party vote} |).^7$$

In addition to these, dummy variables for 1992 and 1996 are introduced to control for the distinct effects of different elections, making the models' intercepts interpretable as dummies for 1988.

The dependent variable, a state's place in a candidate's electoral strategy, is scored 0 if a state is considered a base Republican/Democratic state, 1 if it is considered a marginal Republican/Democratic state, and 2 if it is considered a battleground state. The logic in collapsing the categories in this way is that a base state is a relatively unattractive target, while a marginal state is slightly more attractive, and a battleground state is the most attractive of all.

Using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) techniques to run an ordered profit analysis, Table 2 shows the results of models for Republican and Democratic electoral college strategies. The parameter estimates thus represent the influence of the independent variables on the probability that a state is classified as base, marginal, or battleground. Again, because the model explains increasing strategic importance, one expects positive signs for the parameter estimates. All told, the models perform reasonably well, correctly predicting 78% of the cases. The most significant effect is the interaction between the *TV Ad Cost* and *Competitiveness*, meaning that states were more strategically important when advertising was inexpensive and previous elections were competitive.

Other effects were predictable, but somewhat less impressive. The interaction terms for *Electoral Votes* and *Competitiveness* were not overwhelming, although the parameter estimates are correctly signed and had substantive effects on electoral college categorizations. For instance, a state that was 10 electoral votes above the mean and was one point more competitive than the mean was 28% more likely to have been in the battleground category. More lackluster, and contrary to the expectations posed by the literature, are the insignificant direct effects of *Electoral Votes*, *TV Ad Cost*, and *Competitiveness*. These results are not unexpected, however, because of the strong interactive effects and the significant and positive *total* impact of these variables on strategy. Also worthy of mention are the 1992 and 1996 dummy variables, whose significance suggests the existence of interelection differences. In particular, the negative and significant parameter estimates on the Democratic side for 1992 and 1996 tell us that states were less likely to be targeted by Clinton's campaigns than Dukakis'. Put

⁷The average Republican share of the two-party vote uses statewide presidential election results from 1964–84. More expansive (1952–84) and more restrictive (1976–84) time frames were used and produced small differences in the analysis. In the end, the study employs 1964–84 because this period encompasses the duration of what many consider the post–New Deal party system, maximizing the number of years in the study without including incomparable elections.

TABLE 2
Factors Influencing Electoral Strategies, 1988–1996

Independent Variables	Republican Strategy	Democratic Strategy
Competitiveness ^a	0.122* (0.067)	0.084 (0.069)
Electoral Votes	0.065 (0.914)	−0.002 (.201)
TV Ad Cost ^b	2.307 (2.233)	0.962 (2.312)
Competitiveness* Electoral Votes	0.004* (0.002)	0.004* (0.002)
Competitiveness* TV Ad Cost	5.582*** (0.502)	2.980*** (0.520)
1992 Dummy	0.379*** (0.136)	0.320** (0.141)
1996 Dummy	−0.021 (0.136)	0.280** (0.141)
Intercept	−4.995* (3.041)	−3.031 (3.148)
−2 Log-likelihood	139.92	155.61
Correctly predicted	72.4%	80.6%

Notes: The table contains the results of an ordered probit analysis. The units of analysis are the states. There are 153 cases.

The asymptotic standard errors are in parentheses. The dependent variable, *Electoral College Strategy*, is scored 0 for “base Republican/Democratic,” 1 for “marginal Republican/Democratic,” and 2 for “battleground.”

^a*Competitiveness* is calculated as follows: $(50 - |50 \text{ ave. 2-party Rep. vote}|)$.

^bThe *TV Ad Cost* is calculated as follows: $(1/\text{cost of 1,000 GRPs})$.

*asymptotic t-ratio significant at 0.10.

**asymptotic t-ratio significant at 0.05.

***asymptotic t-ratio significant at 0.01.

another way, Clinton identified a smaller set of battleground states than did Dukakis.

Taken as a whole, these results show why there was symmetry between the campaigns' classifications. The campaigns used common information on certain factors to evaluate the potential of states to contribute to a winning electoral college coalition. More specifically, polling and television advertising data, along with electoral vote totals and previous statewide election results, were used to determine which states were most likely to be cost-effective in a given election. This led to symmetry in how the different campaigns regarded individual states.

Given these factors and their effect on strategies, it is also unsurprising that larger states—most notably California, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—have been disproportionately represented among the battleground states. It bears repeating, however, that this battleground consensus is probably

not because more populous states are inherently more attractive electoral prizes. Recall from Table 2 that *Electoral Votes* did not make a state more attractive *unless* previous races were competitive. And while competitiveness may have been somewhat greater in more populous states because they tended to be more diverse, its effect was conditioned by the increased costs of TV advertising. Because of this, the explanation for the prominence of more populous states in electoral strategies is complex: prioritization inequities are exacerbated by the tendency of more populous states to be competitive, but are also somewhat ameliorated by the high costs of campaigning in those states. This, of course, does not put to rest fears that the electoral college advantages citizens in the larger states, but it does complicate what is usually considered a simple story.

Did campaigns follow their plans? A partial answer is provided by Table 3. Typically, both Republican and Democratic candidates concentrated resources in the battleground states (5.1 appearances and 5,841 GRPs, on average), with the marginal states (3.0 appearances and 3,528 GRPs) receiving lesser portions. It is worth noting that while both parties' candidates allocated resources in their own marginal states, Republican candidates campaigned more than Democrats in their opponent's marginal states. This, of course, may have been because Clinton had the luxury of concentrating on his battleground states in 1992 and 1996. At the other end of the spectrum, few resources were expended in Republican and Democratic base states by any of the candidates (1.1 appearances and 1,514 GRPs), and what little campaigning there was can be attributed to national television buys, which aired in all states. All told, the relationship between strategy and resource allocation was strong, as evidenced by an average correlation coefficient of 0.4.

Some particular findings from Table 3 merit additional comment. Most notably, the pattern of spending in the base states contradicts the expectation that front-runners ought to have allocated more resources than challengers in these states (Aldrich 1980). In addition, because reliably partisan states receive so few campaign resources, modeling (and judging) candidate behavior becomes difficult (see Colantoni, Levesque, and Ordeshook's discussion of "corner solutions").

Of course, a more stringent test of strategy's influence on resource allocation would control for the effect of the opposing campaign's activities. Unfortunately, as discussed earlier, both strategy and the opposition's campaigning are endogenous to other factors. Therefore, Table 4 uses two instrumental variables—for both the candidate's electoral strategy and the opposition's campaigning—to explain the allocation of television advertisement purchases and candidate appearances. Following a basic two-stage least squares (2SLS) framework, each of the endogenous variables are first purged of their dependence on the error term by regressing them on all the exogenous variables in the system (*Competitiveness*, *TV Ad Cost*, *Electoral Votes*, and their interactions) and obtaining OLS fitted values. Next, the instrumental and exogenous variables are

TABLE 3

The Impact of Electoral Strategy on Resource Allocation, 1988–1996

	Republican TV Advertising				Republican Candidate Appearances			
	1996	1992	1988	overall average	1996	1992	1988	overall average
Base Republican	845	3,204	1,341	1,646	0.9	0.4	0.7	0.7
Marginal Republican	5,403	5,732	—	5,577	4.8	2.4	—	3.5
Battleground	5,448	7,665	3,874	6,345	8.3	3.4	7.7	5.2
Marginal Democratic	4,073	3,400	2,653	3,232	6.0	0.0	3.9	4.4
Base Democratic	1,259	2,795	544	1,593	0.8	0.7	0.8	0.8
Correlation Coefficient (Eta^2)	0.709	0.628	0.370	0.566	0.421	0.408	0.507	0.440

	Democratic TV Advertising				Democratic Candidate Appearances			
	1996	1992	1988	overall average	1996	1992	1988	overall average
Base Republican	1,630	1,152	2,170	1,200	2.4	0.9	2.5	0.7
Marginal Republican	3,524	3,482	—	1,797	3.5	1.7	—	1.5
Battleground	4,993	7,174	2,875	5,328	3.7	3.9	9.0	5.0
Marginal Democratic	1,739	1,194	2,272	3,501	1.0	1.1	2.0	2.5
Base Democratic	1,046	727	1,475	1,616	0.9	0.9	0.5	2.0
Correlation Coefficient (Eta^2)	0.529	0.795	0.440	0.544	0.154	0.384	0.598	0.336

Note: Correlation coefficients represent the relationship between the allocation of campaigning resources and the strategic categorization of states, where base states = 0, marginal states = 1, and battleground states = 2.

used as regressors in the OLS equation explaining resource allocation (the exogenous variables included in the estimation procedure are not presented in Table 4 because they failed to meet either conventional levels of statistical significance or the Schwarz-Bayesian criteria).⁸

The second-stage OLS models explain a fair amount of the overall variance in resource allocation, with an average adjusted *R*-squared of 0.385. More to the point, electoral college strategies appear to have been extremely important in determining where the candidates campaigned, even after controlling for the effects of the opposition's activity. A one-standard-deviation increase in the mean value of the instrumental variable for *Electoral College Strategy* produced, on average, an additional 672 GRPs and 1.13 appearances in a given state. All coefficients for *Electoral College Strategy* are significant at the 0.01 confidence level.

As for the control variables, it is also clear that candidates responded to their opponents. In fact, *Opponent's Resource Allocation* was almost as important to campaigning as a candidate's own strategic plan. On average, a one-standard-deviation increase in the mean value of the instrumental variable for *Opponent's Resource Allocation* caused a candidate to purchase 151 more GRPs and make 0.47 more appearances. Among other things, this suggests a cyclical, repetitive pattern to campaigning: Dole's appearances depended on Clinton's, which depended on Dole's, and so on. Certain battleground states can therefore become more hotly contested simply because the candidates will match each others' allocations. Moreover, this finding supports the logic behind Carville's 1992 "feints;" allocating resources in certain states *can* pin down the other candidate (also see Aldrich 1980). Thus, while candidates adhered to their electoral college strategies, other factors—especially the opposition's campaigning—affected deviation in the pattern of allocation.

Caveats to Systematic and Strategic Planning

One important caveat to the story above is that electoral college strategies changed during each of the campaigns under study. Thus, planning appears to

⁸First-stage models of strategy and opposition campaigning will be provided upon request. This study acknowledges that using OLS to obtain fitted values for *Electoral College Strategy*, a three-category variable, is not standard methodological practice (and for good reason). In this case, however, the alternative is unclear. One possibility would be to use the ordered probit model to produce predicted values and to enter these values, as well as their residuals, into the OLS equation, along with the exogenous variables. This is, in essence, a reversal of the process outlined by Rivers and Vuong (1988), which uses OLS to derive predicted and residual values for a second-stage probit model. This technique was tried, yielding parameter estimates that were very close to those derived using the 2SLS methodology and increasing the plausibility of the 2SLS estimates. A related item worth mentioning is that these OLS regression coefficients cannot be interpreted in the standard manner, since the instrumental variables are not transformed so that predicted values equal the whole integers of the initial electoral college strategy scale (i.e., 0, 1, and 2). Finally it should be noted that potential problems with fully identifying the second-stage equations are avoided by using these instrumental variables, which produce different values for the Democratic and Republican models.

TABLE 4

Electoral Strategy's Influence on Resource Allocation, 1988–1996

	Television Advertising		Candidate Appearances	
	Republican	Democratic	Republican	Democratic
Electoral College Strategy	809.44*** (168.99)	535.54*** (183.91)	1,592*** (0.253)	0.672*** (0.255)
Opponent's Resource Allocation	0.699*** (0.060)	0.709*** (0.060)	0.434*** (0.078)	0.384*** (0.071)
1992	2,633.14*** (604.45)	−7,306* (4,433.17)	−4.032 (2.923)	−2.893 (2.790)
1996	374.96 (434.28)	−382.89 (1,318.22)	0.298 (0.421)	−2.091 (1.960)
Intercept	−3,330.78 (4,318.99)	6,556.63 (8,273.12)	13.047 (9.699)	12.147 (14.956)
Adjusted R ²	0.819	0.734	0.674	0.602
Standard Error	1,119.52	1,129.66	1.88	1.82

Notes: The table is the result of a two-stage least squares analysis. The units of analysis are the states. There are 153 cases. Standard errors are in parentheses. Due to endogeneity, the independent variables estimating electoral college strategy and opponent's resource allocation are derived from a standard 2SLS methodology. The exogenous explanatory variables (*Competitiveness*, *TV Ad Cost*, *Electoral Votes*, and the related interactions) are included in the second-stage models, but are excluded from the presentation because all failed to achieve either standard levels of statistical significance or inclusion levels suggested by the Schwarz-Bayesian criteria. The instrumental variables for opponent's resources are *Democratic TV Ad Buys* (when *Republican TV Ad Buys* is the dependent variable), *Republican TV Ad Buys* (when *Democratic TV Ad Buys* is the dependent variable), *Democratic Candidate Appearances* (when *Republican Candidate Appearances* is the dependent variable), and *Republican Candidate Appearances* (when *Democratic Candidate Appearances* is the dependent variable).

*p < .10, two-tailed.

**p < .05, two-tailed.

***p < .01, two-tailed.

have been, in the words of Colantoni, Levesque, and Ordeshook, “sequential.” Specifically, campaigns altered strategies in response to changes in candidate support and the allocation patterns of the opposition. Typically, changes in resource allocation followed strategic changes, as when Dole pulled his TV ads out of Illinois and Iowa shortly after conceding those states in September of 1996 (Clinton followed suit, pulling his ads within a week). Furthermore, strategic changes were much more common for losing campaigns, as demonstrated by Dukakis and Dole adopting minimal winning strategies as prospects dimmed for their respective campaigns. It would be wrong to overstate the dynamic aspect of these strategies; most of the changes were minor, involving the addition or deletion of a few states from the battleground category. Still, variability in support

and opposition behavior *did* occasionally affect change in the strategic plans that drove resource allocation.

A second important caveat is that while winning was of paramount importance, concerns about governing also influenced electoral college strategies. Front-running campaigns were interested in creating the perception that they had an electoral mandate to implement their programs. This was clearly a concern for Bush in 1988 and Clinton in 1996. Another concern was for the composition of the Congress, which also affected front-runners' strategies. In 1996, Penn's model explicitly used the potential impact on congressional races to determine whether Clinton should advertise in a given market. Moreover, Clinton's appearances in states like Texas and North Carolina, where he was behind in the polls but where there were many close congressional races, strongly indicates that he had an eye on raising money for Democratic candidates and winning back the Congress.⁹ This finding contradicts both the specific notion that Clinton had no interest in party building and the more general notion that presidential candidates are solely concerned with the electoral vote total. Furthermore, this finding complicates both the development and the analysis of strategy; one cannot judge the strategic rationality of a campaign unless the prioritization of conflicting goals is understood.

Conclusion

This study began by arguing that we do not know much about how presidential candidates plan and allocate campaign resources. A review of the literature suggested that while formal and game theory have offered several perspectives on strategies and campaigning, little compelling empirical work has been done on the subject I offer. Data from the 1988, 1992, and 1996 presidential elections which demonstrate that: (1) campaigns engaged in systematic planning, (2) campaigns relied on a set of predictable factors in deriving their strategies, and (3) campaigns typically adhered to their strategic plans. Surprisingly, while Republican and Democratic candidates relied on similar factors to develop their plans and adhered to strategies that were more or less symmetrical, the imprecision of these strategies was sufficient to produce resource allocation patterns that were distinct, imperfect, and occasionally *ad hoc*.

Strategy, of course, is a means to an end. The next step for researchers is to use increasingly available information on candidate strategy and resource allocation to determine their effects on turnout and vote choice. Although the present study does not engage these issues, the existence of discrepancies in strategy and

⁹Interestingly, Clinton's TV ad buys in 1996 did *not* reflect a concern with specific congressional races. Instead of targeting close races in California, Texas, and North Carolina, he bought TV time in marginal GOP states like Arizona, Florida, Indiana, South Carolina, Virginia, and even Alabama. This probably reflects how difficult it is for a national campaign to create and target TV ads to help candidates in specific congressional districts.

resource allocation suggest effects *could* exist. It would also be interesting to see how candidates attempt to prime the electorates they target. That is, do candidates articulate general messages, tailor messages specific to the audience at hand, or emphasize different aspects of the general message when addressing a particular audience? Each is a plausible assumption for studying candidate behavior, but little empirical work has been done testing these possibilities against each other. Analyses of these and other aspects of candidate strategy and behavior are not only important in their own right, but are necessary for us to respond more convincingly to the confusion surrounding campaigns and their consequences.

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APPENDIX

Summary Statistics

Campaign Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	Number of Cases
Republican presidential appearances	2.22	3.29	153
Democratic presidential appearances	2.24	3.00	153
Republican TV ad buys (in GRPs)	3,066	2,624	153
Democratic TV ad buys (in GRPs)	2,561	2,182	153
Cost of a 100-GRP statewide buy	\$36,104	\$42,085	153
State population (in millions)	4.96	5.51	153

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