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The Timeline of Presidential Elections: How Campaigns Do (and Do Not) Matter by Robert S. Erikson and Christopher Wlezien. Chicago, IL, University of Chicago Press, 2012. 216 pp. Paper, \$25.00.

Every four years, the country is treated to a spectacle wherein presidential candidates engage in year-long efforts to convince voters of their suitability to occupy the White House. Even though many voters may find presidential campaigns to be excessive, regarding both length and the expenses that they regularly entail, these campaigns provide opportunities for voters to see candidates in varied situations. During campaigns, presidential candidates are regularly on the stump; they confront their competitors directly in debates and indirectly through the media; and they are forced to display management skills as heads of complicated and costly operations.

What, then, do voters make of presidential campaigns? Do they update their beliefs about the best candidate as campaigns progress? Or are their minds made up before the campaigns have even started? Simply, do campaigns matter? If presidential campaigns were drastically reduced in length (never mind how this situation might come about), would anything be different?

These sorts of questions are probed in great detail by Robert Erikson and Christopher Wlezien in their new book on presidential campaigns. These two political scientists seek to know if, as the question is often posed, campaigns matter. To answer this query, Erikson and Wlezien offer a wealth of opinion poll data on the presidential elections of 1952–2008, which, they argue, illuminate some key campaign dynamics. Using a variety of time series analyses, Erikson and Wlezien provide evidence that campaigns are rather stable in their last 60 days, stable in the sense of voter preferences that is. They argue that the rate at which voters change their minds is “glacial” and that early polls—those that date to April—“incorporate a considerable amount of extraneous information that does not survive to impact [presidential elections]” (p. 165). Erikson and Wlezien paint a picture of presidential election campaigns in which most voters appear to know what they want early in a campaign yet are engulfed by noisy environments, sometimes a lack of clarity as to who the dominant candidates are, and imperfect information about what the economy will look like in November. Once nominating conventions have taken place, however, short-term campaign shocks to the electoral environment matter only to the extent that they are very proximate to Election Day.

The extent to which presidential campaigns matter is difficult to study, due to the observational nature of most campaign data and the strategic incentives

that campaigns pose for candidates who are considering running for president. The candidates who (seriously) run consist almost exclusively of individuals who have a (serious) chance of winning election and who are willing to endure a lengthy, expensive, and at times humiliating experience. For the sake of a thought experiment, suppose that lengthy presidential campaigns as we know them did not exist at all and that in some sense anyone could throw his or her name into the proverbial hat and then be considered by voters. Would the set of candidates who choose to run in such a situation be different from those who run in the current environment? Almost certainly, one would imagine, in which case, one must argue that campaigns very much matter by screening out certain types of candidates. This is not the sort of argument that Erikson and Wlezien confront in their eminently readable and engaging book, but it is nonetheless the sort of question that a complete treatment of the query, “Do campaigns matter?” should consider. In the meantime, Erikson and Wlezien have done an excellent service in writing about how voters react to campaigns, and future research on the way in which presidential campaigns shape election outcomes would be well-advised to ground their work in what Erikson and Wlezien have accomplished.

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Ideology and Spatial Voting in American Elections by Stephen A. Jessee. New York, Cambridge University Press, 2012. 260 pp. Paper, \$29.99.

How do voters choose which candidate to support? Spatial voting theory offers a simple and parsimonious explanation: voters choose the candidate who is closest to them on the issues. Stephen A. Jessee’s new book develops the best data available with which this simple proposition can be put to the test. Spatial voting theory mostly passes that test.

Jessee’s key methodological innovation is the use of general population surveys with many specific issue-position questions, questions for which candidate stances are known. The dataset includes voters’ responses to 27 actual Senate roll call votes for the analysis of the 2004 election, and 10 specific policy statements for the 2008 election. Jessee then uses dimensional scaling approaches developed to infer the ideological locations of legislators from roll call votes to identify the locations of voters and presidential candidates on a common ideological dimension. He finds that most respondents have views that fit well within the framework of a single ideological dimension.