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The Effect of Presidential Campaigning: The 2002 and 2006 Midterm Senate Elections

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Abstract

Many scholars address the indirect effects presidents have on midterm election results by examining the "midterm loss" phenomenon, presidential coattails, negative voting, and the "referendum" thesis. However, very little research investigates the direct effect that presidential campaigning has on congressional candidates prospects for victory. This study adds to this growing literature by exploring presidential campaigning in the 2002 and 2006 U.S. Senate midterm elections. Our investigation makes two important contributions to previous research. First, we explicitly model the strategic decisions presidents make in visiting states in order to get a better estimate of presidential impact that accounts for selection bias. Second, we take advantage of a natural experiment between 2002 and 2006 to test the importance of presidential popularity in driving campaign effects. Although we expect presidents to primarily campaign in states where he believes he will be effective–an efficiency argument–we argue that the size of that effect depends very clearly on his own popularity. We discuss the implications of these results for understanding the role of the president in modern American electoral politics.

Introduction

Many scholars have addressed the indirect effects presidents can have on midterm elections by examining the "midterm loss" phenomenon (Tufte 1975), presidential coattails (**???**), negative voting and the "referendum" thesis (**?????**). However, few have examined the direct effects a president can have on midterm elections by campaigning for candidates (**??**). This paper attempts add to this growing discussion in the literature and explore the direct impact of presidential campaigning on U.S. midterm Senate elections using data from the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections.

Specifically, we examine the effect of campaigning for Senate candidates by President George W. Bush during the 2002 and 2006 midterm election campaigns. Our investigation makes two important contributions to previous research. First, we explicitly model the strategic decisions presidents make in visiting states in order to get a better estimate of presidential impact that accounts for selection bias. Second, we take advantage of a natural experiment between 2002 and 2006 to test the importance of presidential popularity in driving campaign effects. We investigate to what extent President Bush may have directly influenced these two midterm elections and how his popularity affected his ability to influence the elections. Although we expect presidents to primarily campaign in states where he believes he will be effective–an efficiency argument–we argue that the size of that effect depends very clearly on his own popularity.

Presidential Campaigning for Senators

Scholars have found that campaigns matter and have the potential to influence the public's political attitudes and political behavior (**??**). **?** argue that presidential campaigning can help mobilize voters and be a decisive factor in a close election, which "attests strongly to the power of the presidency" (176). However, becuase presidents have little time to do

more than their presidential duties require, they must make strategic decisions during campaigns about where their presence will be most effective (**??**). Hoddie and Routh (2004) argue that that there are fewer personal stakes for the president in midterm elections than in the general election, so the strategy he uses will differ from his own campaign strategy. In midterm elections, a president is not likely to campaign for a candidate who is sure to win or sure to lose, and presidents will be more likely to campaign for a member of their party when they think they can positively impact the results of the election.

Why does the president choose to devote some of his valuable time to campaigning for other politicians? One reason that a president may campaign for members of his party is to secure a favorable congress. With very rare exceptions, members of the president's party are more likely to support his legislative agenda than members of the opposition party. If the president's party is in danger of losing an important seat in the congress, and the president thinks he can positively affect the outcome in that race, he may campaign for the candidate running for that seat. The president may have particular interest in protecting the seat held by a candidate who is very supportive of the president's agenda and who is ideologically close to the president.

In allocating his time and resources, a president may choose to campaign for an incumbent senator over a House member because "Senate incumbents have greater difficulty holding their seats than House incumbents" (Abramowitz 1988, 386). Given that "the midterm election is a period of low voter stimulation" (Kernell 1977, 63), a president who is popular in a given state may choose to campaign for that state's senatorial candidate in hopes of mobilizing supportive voters for that candidate. The president hopes that the voters who supported him in the previous presidential election will also support his party in the midterm election (**?**).

Hoddie and Routh (2004) note that it is possible a president may use the midterm election as an "opportunity to reward friends and contributors with a campaign visit as opposed to

developing a broader electoral plan designed to benefit his political party or legislative priorities" (257). If this were the case, we would be unable to predict where the president would prioritize his campaign activities. However, if the president were strategically campaigning to ensure that his party gain or maintain a "favorable configuration" in Congress, his campaign activity should be predictable. Hoddie and Routh (2004) find evidence that presidential campaigning activity in midterm elections can be predicted, and one of the strongest variables they find for predicting presidential campaign visits is presidential popularity.

Presidential Approval

Presidents may be effective campaigners, but the direction and size of that effect depends on how popular the president is among the constituents of the candidate the president is campaigning for. Politicians think the public holds the presidents' party responsible for the "performance" of government (Kernell 1977) and a popular president may choose to help a candidate's chances in the election by campaigning for him or her.

The president takes several risks when he campaigns for someone. If the president chooses to campaign for a candidate, he risks losing "public prestige" in the event that the candidate loses the election. Also, the candidate's opponent may become increasingly active against the president. If the president is unpopular, campaigning for a candidate may actually improve "the opponent's ability to secure financing or... [increase the opponent's] popularity among constituent groups" (Cohen, Krassa, and Hamman 1991, 168). In fact, as stated above, Kernell (1977) found that "disapproval of the President's job performance is associated with higher midterm turnout" (61), so an unpopular president may unintentionally mobilize voters who are likely to vote against his party's candidates.

Presidential "coattails" refers to the effect the public's perception of the president has on voter's choice for candidates running for other offices. From what we understand, the

presidential coattail theory is slightly different from the referendum theory. The referendum theory is an evaluation of the job the president is doing and it is more susceptible to "negative voting." The presidential coattail theory is more related to positive evaluations of the president where the positive perceptions of the president held by the public can have a positive effect on the public's evaluations of candidates who are members of the president's party.

? attempts to answer the question: "to what extent do presidential coattails affect the partisan distribution of seats in the House of Representatives" (165)? He claims that his "coattail model" explains more than 80 percent of the variance from 1900 to 1980 and more than 90 percent of the variance in the two other series. He concludes that "all things being equal, a party can expect in recent elections a net gain of three seats in the House for every additional percentage point of the two-party vote won by the party's presidential candidate" (165). The coattail effect also seems to depend on how many seats the party had in Congress prior to the midterm election.

In a subsequent article, Campbell and Sumners (1990) attempt to "determine to what extent and how presidential and Senate voting are related" in an election, and "to what extent, if any, do presidential candidates offer coattails to Senate candidates" (514). They find evidence of presidential coattails having an effect on the vote for Senate candidates, but there is no evidence of "reverse coattails" where the Senate candidate has an effect on the vote for president. **?** finds that coattails appear to be more helpful to Republican candidates than Democratic candidates in the races he examines.

Typically, the incumbent president's party loses seats in midterm elections; this is known as the "midterm loss" phenomenon (**?**). **?** proposes a combination of the referendum and negative voting explanations for the "loss" patterns observed in midterm elections. He argues that when voters are unable to show their dissatisfaction with the incumbent president by voting against him personally (since he is not on the midterm election ballot), these

dissatisfied voters "take out their discontent" on the members of the president's party who are on the ballot. Abramowitz then says that "in midterm elections, negative evaluations of the incumbent president may have a stronger impact on voting decision than positive evaluations" (1988, 398). If the referendum/negative voting combination theory is accurate, the president would not want to campaign for candidates in states where he is unpopular. If he did, he may cause the negative effect to intensify.

The Bush Presidency

Previous studies have shown that certain national conditions can affect how people vote for senators (Gartner and Segura 2008). The presidency of George W. Bush has been very eventful to say the least, and it is important to understand the national events that have shaped his presidency, affected his popularity, and could possibly have had an impact on the way people voted in the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections.

In 2002, President Bush became the second since Franklin Delano Roosevelt to see his party gain seats in a midterm election. In 1998, Bill Clinton was the first. **?** says that "two specific factors seemed to have been most important in allowing Bush to translate his popularity into vote gains for his party: 1) his active campaigning, and 2) the war on terrorism." At the time of the 2002 midterm election, the president had a fairly high national level of popularity at around 63 percent (**?**). The day before the election, Gallup surveyed likely voters and found that 35 percent of the voters "said they were sending a message of support for Bush with their vote, and 18% said they were sending a message of opposition" **?**. Accroding to **?** "Bush was given substantial credit not only for maintaining his tremendous hold over one chamber of Congress, but also for actually gaining seats in both the Senate and House of Representatives" (2).

However, by the 2006 midterm election, President Bush's popularity had reached a very

low national level at around 36 percent (Jones 2008). His average popularity for all of 2006 was 33.3 percent (Jones 2008). According to **?**, "much media attention was paid to President George W. Bush's declining popularity and the public's dissatisfaction with the Republican-controlled Congress" (139). In the end, the Democratic party did not lose one seat and gained six new seats (which had been held by Republicans) giving the Democrats majorities in both the House and the Senate (Gartner and Segura 2008, 95).

Hypotheses

What conditions influenced President Bush's decisions to choose some Senate candidates over others in the 2002 and 2006 midterm elections? And did the change in his national and state popularity levels alter his campaign strategies from one midterm election to another? Well, it makes sense that the president would choose to campaign in places where he will be most effective. It is unlikely that he will campaign for a senator in a state where he is terribly unpopular or where the candidate is sure to win (or to lose) (**?**) regardless of the president's acitons.

The president will therefore visit states where the election is likely to be a close one; the president's popularity, the vote spread in the previous election between the president and the challenger, and the incumbency status of the candidate can provide clues about whether the election will be close. Also, since it is more risky for the president to support nonincumbents than it is for him to support incumbents (because incumbents have the "incumbency advantage") his willingness to campaign for nonincumbents will vary with his popularity at the national and state level.

If the nonincumbent loses the election, the president may be blamed for that loss. Being associated with a losing candidate 'harms his reputation" (Cohen, Krassa and Hamman 1991, 166), so if the president already has low popularity levels, he will be less likely to

campaign for nonincumbents. If the nonincumbent wins, it is unlikely that the president will be given credit for the win. However, if the president has a high approval rating, he will be more likely to take risks and campaign for a few nonimcumbents in close races. In 2002, President Bush had a high approval rating and he made campaign appearances for several nonincumbents. In 2006 President Bush campaigned for fewer nonincumbents (and fewer candidates in general) than he did in 2002.

The president may develop a strategy of campaigning for candidates in order to secure a favorable congress. The president will want to campaign for candidates who are supportive of his agenda and who are ideologically in line with the president. The president's persuasive power was lower in 2006 than in 2002 since he was very unpopular (which cost him much of his persuasive power); this created even more of an incentive for the president to retain influence over the congress.

In midterm elections, when the president campaigns for a candidate he hopes those who supported his campaign two years prior will show up to support the midterm candate (**?**). Also, a president may also use a midterm election during his first term to boost support for his own reelection campaign; therefore he will want to visit states with large Electoral College values. If the midterm campaign is successful for the member of his party, that member may help the president by supporting him in the following presidential election. Campaigning for Senate candidates may also grab attention of local news media and help the president build grassroots support for his next campaign.

Aside from presidential campaign appearances for a Senate candidate, campaign spending has been found to have a substantial effect on the outcome of Senate elections (**?**). A spending advantage combined with an incumbency advantage can increase the incumbent's vote share by six percent on average according to **?**. Therefore, incumbents who outspend challengers are almost sure to win in a close election, and it is unlikely that the president would make an appearance for incumbents in this case.

We expect that presidential visits for Senate candidates can be predicted by the competitiveness of the race, the president's popularity in the candidate's state, the candidate's incumbency status, whether the incumbent candidate has a spending advantage, the senate candidate's ideology and support for the president's agenda, the number of Electoral College votes the state has, and the president's margin of victory in the previous presidential election. It is also important to take into account the specific year; for example, 2002 versus 2006 provides a great natural experiment that will allow us to explore differences in presidential campaign behavior when he is very popular versus very unpopular. President Bush should be more influential and more willing to take campaigning risks in 2002 when he is more popular than in 2006 when he is far less popular.

Data

As our focus at this point in time is on midterm campaigning during the Bush years, we use data on Republican races for the Senate in 2002 and 2006. Although president's also campaign for a select set of House races, it is difficult to establish when the president makes campaign visits on behalf of House candidates. Moreover, focusing on the Senate gives us some the opportunity to test whether strategic aspects of presidential electoral politics—e.g., a state's number of Electoral College votes—impact behavior at the midterm.

Our unit of analysis for these data is the Senate election, rather than a particular person or candidate. With thirty-three races in both 2002 and 2006, this provides us with an N of sixty-six cases. In most cases, our variables measure either characteristics of the state or the race. However, for some of our political variables they are measured in terms of the incumbent party or incumbent party legislator. For example, in measuring the amount of support the president received from that seat, we have to use the presidential support score of the legislator who held the seat in the year prior to the election, even if that Senator did

not run for reelection. A full list of the variables we use in our analysis, along with their definitions and summary statistics, are provided in Table 1.

Dependent Variables

We are interested in explaining two separate processes. The first of these are the strategic dimensions of presidential campaigning. Stated simply, what explains a president's desire to campaign on behalf of a particular candidate for the U.S. Senate? This is measured with a dichotomous variable that says whether or not President Bush visisted a state for the purpose of helping a particular Republican candidate. To measure this variable, we examined the official White House schedule for the president. (Jessica...you'll probably need to be more specific about what you did than what I can accomplish here.) In line with what previous research leads us to expect, President Bush campaign selectively. With 33 seats up for grabs in both 2002 and 2006 he made only 12 and 9 campaign visits, respectively. If we add the First Lady into the analysis, we see even more variation as she visited 8 states in 2006 and none in 2002.[1]

The second dependent variable is the Republican share of the Senate election vote, which we will use to investigate the effect of presidential politics on midterm elections. There is significantly more variation on this variable, with a mean of 49%, a standard variation of 16.7%, and values that range from just 10% to 87%. As you might expect, the distribution of this variable differs substantially in our two midterm years. The mean is 54% in 2002 when President Bush was relatively popular, with a range of 22% to 85%. In the more bleak environment for Republicans of 2006, the mean was 44% with a minimum of 9% and a maximum of 87%. As these year-by-year differences are not entirely a function of the support for the president—economic and foreign policy issues undoubtedly helped produce

[1] Interestingly, only four of Mrs. Bush's campaign visits overlaped with the president. The four Republican candidates who received visits from both members of the First Family were Jon Kyl, Mark Kennedy, Jim Talent, and Conrad Burns.

these differences as well—we must control for them below. At the same time, we keep in mind the possibility that the effect of presidential politics through legislative support and campaigning might also themselves hold different consequences in the two years.

Independent Variables

Although we examine a variety of different variables, three of them are of primary interest because they help us understand the impact of presidential politics on midterm elections. The first is presidential campaign visists, discussed above. The other two are the president's popularity in the state and the second is his level of legislative support from the state. The first of these variables is measured as the Bush margin of victory in the preceding presidential election, consistent with previous research by Hoddie and Roth. On average, Bush won by a margin of 6% in the entire data set, ranging from -29% to 45%. The only significant differences between 2002 and 2006 on this variable is in the mean, which goes from 9% to 4% in the two years.

Presidential support in the legislature is measured using the standard CQ estimate of how frequently an incumbent senator voted with the president on those bills for which he had a public position. To account for the lag time between legislative behavior and the ability of the public to use this in evaluating candidates, we use the score of the incumbent legislator in the year prior to the election. This creates one interesting wrinkle to keep in mind – if it is an open seat, we are using the score of a candidate not in the election. We justify this on the following basis – the election represents an opportunity to change away from something very favorable, very unfavorable, or simply average whether or not the incumbent remains in the race. Whatever effect this particular decision may have on the data can be controlled for with a variable covering the status of the race as open or not.

The mean level of support by this standard is 82% in 2001 and 59% in 2005. While it is possible that some of this is a function of the staggered election cycled in the Senate, there

were nearly the same number of Republican incumbents up for election with an average ideology score (measured with NOMINATE) of .4 and .33 in both years. Also of note is that the standard deviation of this variable is far lower in 2002 (14%) than in 2006 (26%), suggesting that support for the president was more of an issue in the second midterm than in the first. In part this is because there were more differences between incumbent legislators on this score, but also because the president himself had become less popular by 2006.

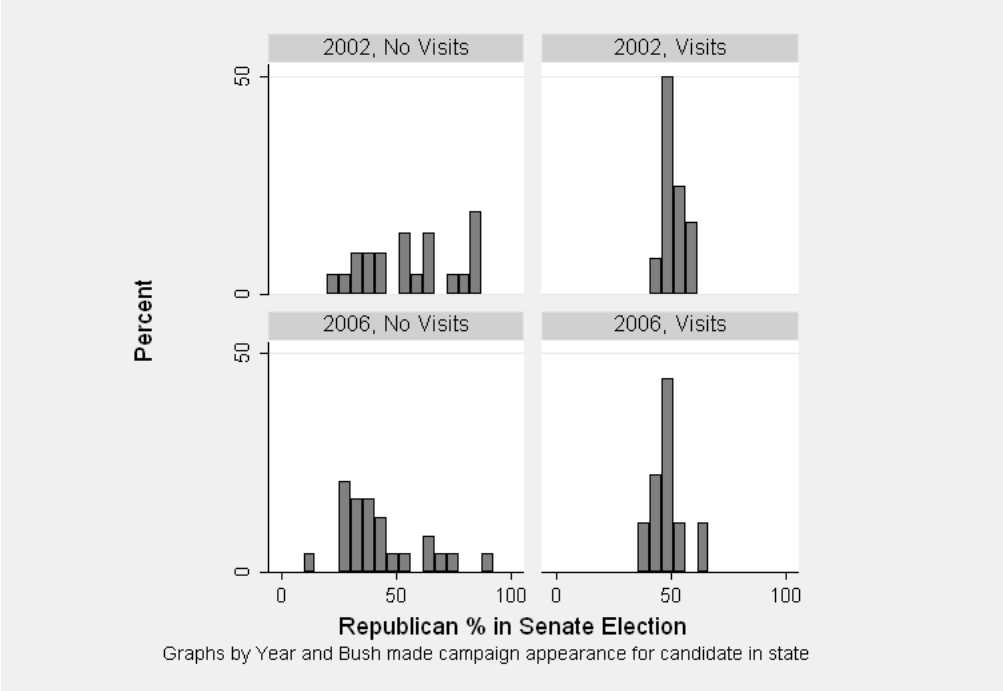
Analysis

Presidential Campaigning in 2002 and 2006

We will beging our analysis by considering the logic of presidential campaigning, the first of our dependent variables. We do by first examining the joint distribution of both of our dependent variables because it sheds light on the strategic context of presidential campaigning, a primary mode by which presidents are thought to influence Senate elections. Figure 1 displays a histogram of the percentage of votes gained by Republican candidates by whether or not they received a presidential campaign visit in 2002 or 2006. The most pertient observation we gain from this display is that President Bush visited a very select subset of races. In both campaign years, the bulk of the distribution lies on the 40% to 60% interval that covers the most competive races. The distributions for races that did not receive presidential campaign visits are flatter and cover a wider range of the 0% to 100% range.

Substantively, this graphs shows that the logic of presidential campaign visits matches the logic of presidential campaigning **?** in a very important way. Just as presidential candidates do not campaign in those states where one party is sure to win and to focus only on those that are likely to be competitive, they only campaign for senatorial candidates who are in relatively closer races. Importantly, this is *just as true* in 2006 when President Bush

Figure 1: Histograms of Senate Election Races and Bush Campaigning



was highly unpopular as in 2002 when he was more popular. This suggest that presidential popularity is less important for understanding the strategic dimensions of presidential campaigning that one might expect. When popular, it does not look as if the president reached into races that were seemingly less competitive in an effort to raise them up and make them more competitive. When unpopular, he neither did that nor did he campaign in those races where Republicans were more likely to win in an effort to highlight his support. While it is true that the standard deviation is higher for races President Bush visited in 2006 than in 2002 (2.4 compared to 1.2), a means difference test of the two shows no difference ($diff = 3.2$, $t = 1.29$, $p = .10$ for one-tailed test).[2]

[2]One potential objection to our discussion here is that presidential visits might have taken a race that was initially uncompetitive and transformed it into a race that ended up more competively. Although we do not have the polling data necessary to test this argument, two pieces of evidence argue against it. First, if that were the case then we might expect some sort of "reverse effect" in 2006 where an unpopular president visited a campaign and made it less competitive, something for which there is no evidence. Second, we would also likely find competitive Senate races in states where the presidential race is itself also competitive. However, there is no statistically significant difference in the presidential margin of victory in 2000 or 2004 between those states that did and did not receive visits in 2006, respectively.

What this graph also shows, however, is that an endogeneous relationship between presidential campaigning and the competitiveness of races. As an empirical matter, this means that any correlational estimate of the effect of one on the other is likely to be biased, particularly towards a null result. It also means that there is great value in trying to understand whether other factors might influence the campaign behavior of President Bush, if only to specify an instrumental variable model that might allow us to better understand the effect of such visits on Senate elections.[3] What other factors might predict President Bush's behavior? From our perspective there are two interesting possibilities. The first is whether President Bush campaigned in those states that might help him or his party in presidential politics. The second is whether campaign visits were designed as either rewards for legislative support, or to even cultivate that support from among people who had previously not supported him. We address these possibilities next, particularly interested in finding those variables that might predict campaigning but not general election support (or vice versa).

0.1 Presidential Elections and Midterm Campaigning

Previous research on presidential campaigning suggests that three factors determine the distribution of resources to a state: 1) competiveness, 2) Electoral College votes, and 3) media market costs **?**. If a president is campaigning to improve his chances in future elections, we might expect him to campaign in states that are desirable targets. Since media market costs has more to do with the purchasing of television time, we focus our efforts here on these other two possibilities. As noted earlier, we measure competitiveness with the margin of victory from the preceding election. We measure Electoral College value by comparing measuring how different a state's number of Electoral College votes are from other states that have Senate elections during that same cycle. It is important to be aware of differences between

[3] At this stage of our research, we are not yet prepared to fully resolve this problem and discuss our other results accordingly.

the first set of midterms when President Bush could face re-election, and his second set in which he could at best influence the prospects of another candidate (whom we now know to be John McCain).

Figure 2 shows a box-and-whiskers plot for the competitiveness variable by both year and whether or not President Bush campaigned. In 2002, the states visited by the president were more competitive in the 2000 election than those that he did not visit. Yet despite the clear difference in the medians, the distributions overlap notably. A similar pattern emerges in 2006, though the president is more—rather than less—willing to visit states in which he was less competitive in 2004. Perhaps more importantly, visited races have less variation in the distribution than other races for both years. So while competitiveness does not predict presidential campaign visits, it does seem to hold some potential for explaining Senate election results (particularly because it is temporally prior).

Figure 2: Margin of Victory in Previous Presidential Election by Year and Midterm Campaigning

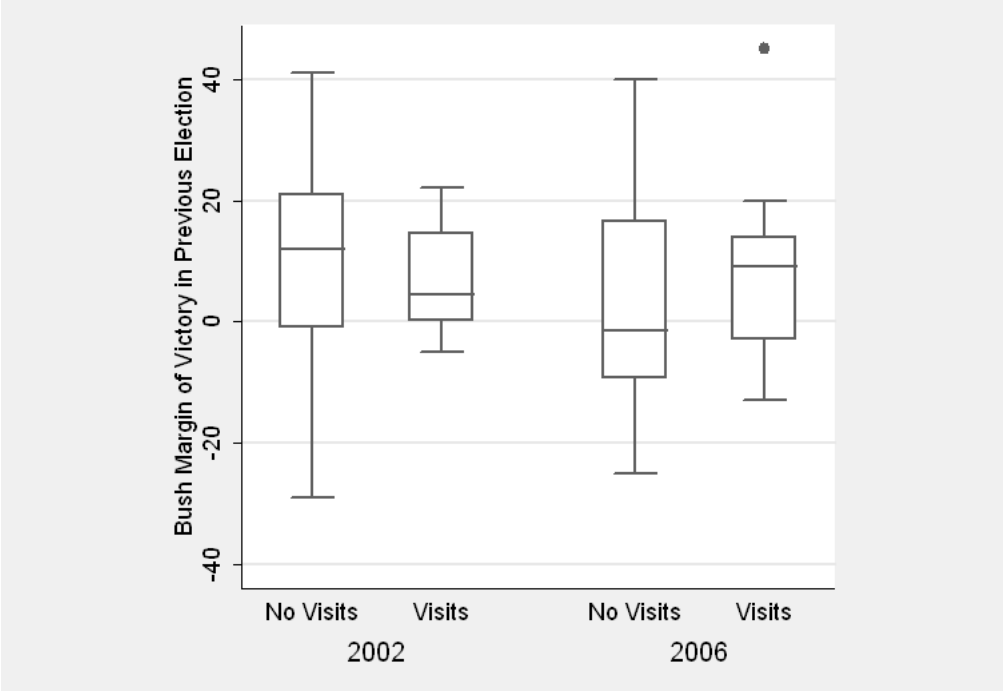
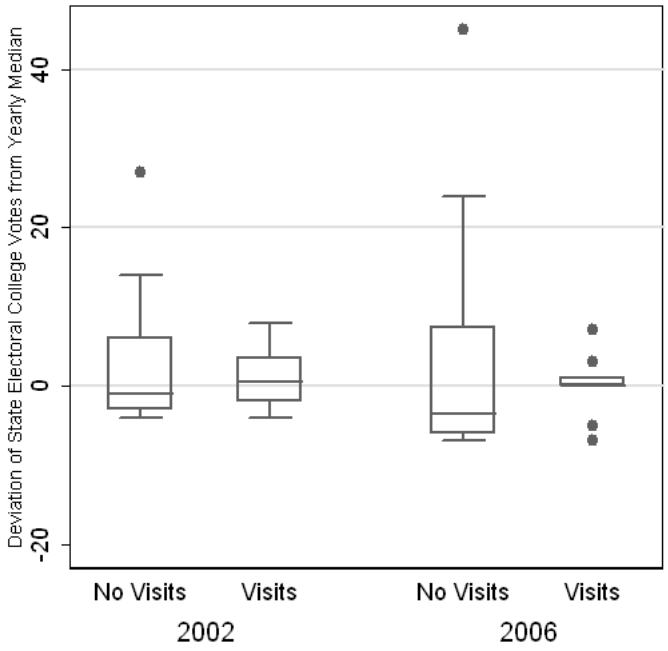


Figure 3 shows the same distributions for the second variable of interest, the relative

Figure 3: Electoral College Votes of States with Senate Elections by Year and Midterm Campaigning



value of a state's Electoral College votes during that midterm cycle. Once again we find that there is little noticeable differences between those states visited by President Bush and the others in either 2002 or 2006. In 2002, the distributions are very similar with almost no differences. And in 2006 the states visited by President Bush are almost all exactly at the median!

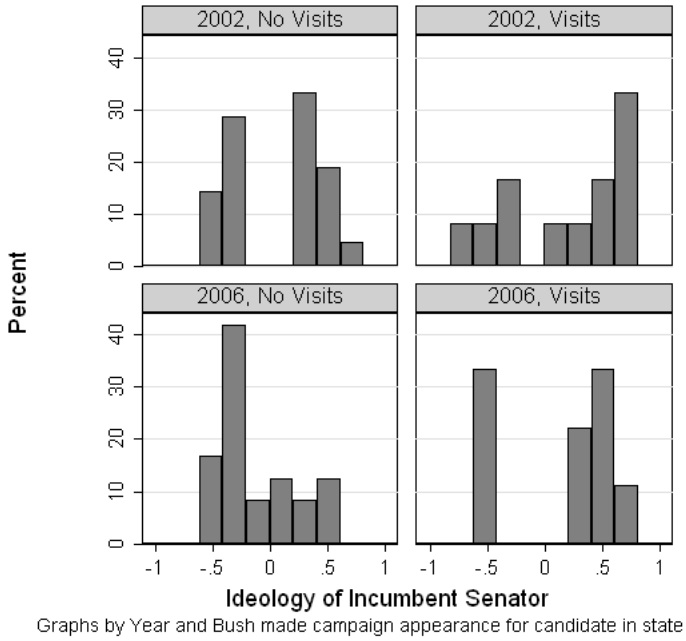
Legislative Strategy and Midterm Campaigning

If midterm campaigning is not affected by the politics of presidential elections, it is possible that presidential politics seep in through the avenue of legislative strategy. Campaign visits might be used as a reward to ideological stalwarts or presidential supporters, particularly as those visits often help legislators raise significant campaign cash

To examine these possibilities, we look at the relationship between two variables and

midterm campaign visits. The first is the well-known NOMINATE score, a measure of Senator ideology. As discussed above, this is the value assigned to the incumbent legislator in the previous year. The distributions for this variable by year and campaign visit are displayed in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Histograms of Incumbent Legislator Ideology by Year and Midterm Campaign Visits



The most striking observation to come from this graph is a difference between the two years. In 2002, there is seemingly little relationship between legislative ideology and the midterm visits by President Bush. While there is a slightly higher likelihood of President Bush visiting a seat where the incumbent is conservative (40% of states with legislators holding a score larger than zero received a visit, compared to 30% of those at zero or smaller, the differences are not substantial. However, in 2006 the President showed a far more notable bias toward visiting states where the incumbent seat was held by a conservative.[4] A difference

[4]Among the three seats in which President Bush visited states with moderate-to-liberal incumbents, two of them were open seat races.

of means test shows this difference to be statistically significant at the .10 level (one-tailed test, $t = -1.52$).

Although this finding does not help resolve the larger endogeneity problem, it does provide an interesting bit of substantive insight into the Bush Administration's presidential visits. This is nicely illustrated by comparing the types races with moderate or liberal incumbents visited by President Bush in 2002 and 2006. In both years these seats were all held by incumbent Democratic legislators, but in 2002 only one was an open seat race (vacated at Paul Wellstone's unfortunate death) whereas in 2006 two of the three were open seats. While this is not a substantial number of cases on which to build a systematic argument, it highlights the *increased* importance of competitiveness in 2006 when the president was not popular. Rather than go into more seats with endangered incubments, he stuck to races with endangered conservative incumbents and a handful of open seats where he did not have to deal with incumbent Democrats.

Figure 5: Electoral College Votes of States with Senate Elections by Year and Midterm Campaigning

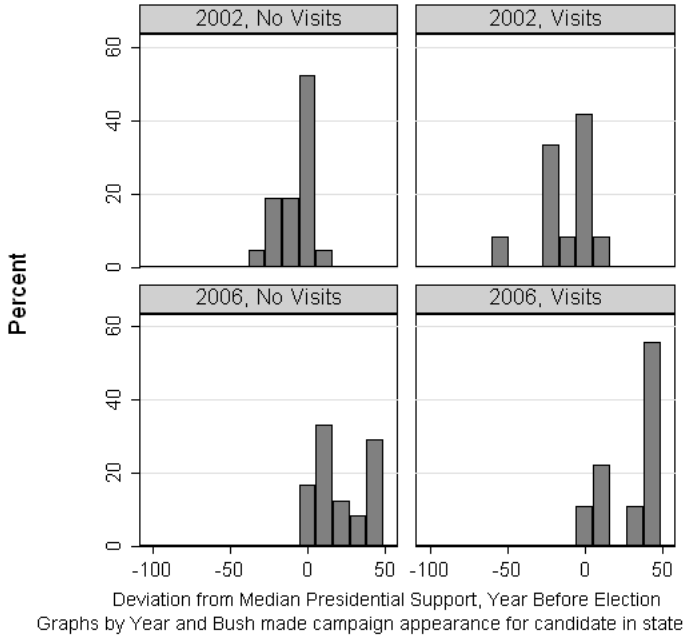


Figure 5 shows the effect of our other variable – presidential support in the preceding year. Here a similar pattern emerges, with there being almost no difference in the distribution on this variable across states visited by President Bush and others in 2002. In 2006, the president was more likely to avoid seats held by non-supporters than those held by supporters. While he did visit a few states in the 30-40 range, the vast majority of those seats he visited had been held by incumbents who stuck by the unpopular president.[5]

Although there are some obvious idiosyncracies in how these legislative variables bleed into presidential campaigning, the analysis in this section does suggest a way in which presidential popularity (or perhaps lame-duck status) might influence the calculus underling such decisions. Competitveness is still the overriding factor—President Bush visited 72% of all open seat races, compared to 24% of those held by incumbents— but the evidence suggests that legislative politics influences these calculations at the margins when the president is less popular.

The Effects of Presidential Politics on Midterm Elections

Our investigation into the causes of midterm campaign visits provides some substantive insight into the strategies used by the Bush Administration. Unfortunately there is not enough to provide a clear solution to the methodological issues that arise in trying to determine the effect of presidential visits on Senate elections. That said, our expectation based on the earlier analyses is that the consequence of the endogeneity should be to bias any estimates toward zero or negativity.[6] With this in mind, our larger goal is to examine the effect of presidential politics more more broadly defined on Senate elections during the Bush Administration.

Toward that end, we examine three possible ways that the fate of Republican senato-

[5] A one-tailed t-test (-1.49) again verifies that this result is significant at the .10 level.

[6] Indeed, we see this as being equivalent in form to the well-studied endogeneity bias in studying incumbent spending, one which the effect is always to *underestimate* effects rather than overestimate them.

rial candidates were balanced by the decisions of the Bush Administration. In addition to presidential campaign visits, we also consider the possibility that underlying popularity of the president and support for his legislative agenda might also affect elections. To keep our focus on presidential poolitics, we use a minimal set of control variables to capture other elements of the electoral context. These are whether or not there is a Republican incumbent in the race and whether or not the seat is open.[7] We provide our results from an ordinary least squares regression model in Table 2, estimated separately for 2002 and 2006.

First consider the results for 2002. Although the model does a good job of explaining the variance in our 33 cases, only one of the variables in the model is statistically significant.

Table 1: Effect of Presidential Politics on Midterm Election Results

	2002		2006		Difference	
Variables	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
Bush Electoral Success	0.32	0.14**	0.40	0.16*	0.08	0.21
Bush Campaign Visits	-3.26	3.83	-2.46	4.35	0.80	5.79
Presidential Support	0.01	0.10	-0.31	0.16**	-0.32	0.19*
Open Seat	12.69	7.05*	4.11	11.12	-8.58	13.10
Republican Incumbent	22.73	7.81**	38.41	9.77**	15.69	12.48
Constant	38.79	3.32**	40.60	4.25**	1.81	5.38
N	33		33		66	
F	12.63*		10.28		0.21	
Adjusted R^2	0.65		0.59			

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, two-tailed tests.

Discussion

While our analysis led us to mostly null results (and at times unexpected results), this is merely a preliminary examination of the Bush administration's campaigning choices in the midterm elections and what effect those choices may have had on the elections. However, some cursory conclusions can be made. As expected, President Bush campaigned in states

[7] We have checked our results with additional controls for spending by the candidates, but our results do not change. We opt for the simpler model in the interest of parsimony.

Table 2: Effect of Presidential Politics on Midterm Election Results

	2002		2006		Difference	
Variables	β	s.e.	β	s.e.	β	s.e.
Bush Electoral Success	0.12	0.14	0.36	0.15*	0.24	0.21
Bush Campaign Visits	12.86	6.43*	10.79	8.03	-2.07	10.22
Presidential Support	0.26	0.12	-0.20	0.17	-0.46	0.20*
Open Seat	7.60	6.46	4.61	11.53	-12.21	12.92
Republican Incumbent	12.27	7.75**	35.74	9.42**	23.47	12.41*
Campaign * Support	-0.29	0.10**	-0.21	0.11	0.08	0.15
Constant	32.53	3.61**	37.01	4.46**	4.48	5.71
N	33		33		66	
F	15.00*		10.05*		2c0.49	
Adjusted R^2	0.72		0.63			

* $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, two-tailed tests.

with close races. This dispels the idea that presidential visits (at least by this president) are intended to be merely ornamental favors to the candidate; the president visited states where he believed he could make a difference, not states where the candidate was sure to win or lose.

Presidential campaigning for certain Senate candidates in 2002 did not seem to have much of an impact; there was no real difference between candidates he campaigned for and candidates he did not campaign for. Surprisingly, in 2006, President Bush had a slight positive impact (though not statistically significant) on the elections of the candidates he did campaign for. There is not much of a difference between the states, and President Bush's success in the previous election also did not appear to have much of an impact, so there is no real evidence that presidential campainging for Senate candidates is a result of the president's personal electoral strategy.

However, his campaign strategy could have been influenced by his wider legislative agenda. Preident Bush made campaign appearances for candidates who supported his agenda at least a large majority of the time, and he also make appearances for challengers of liberal Democrats. We conclude that President Bush ultimately influenced at most three races–

Norm Coleman, Greg Ganske, and potentially Jim Talent. Despite his intention to impact the Senate races, the impact of President Bush's midterm campaign strategy has been mainly symbolic.

This leads us to a few preliminary conclusions about the Bush administration. First, the president does not appear to change his campaign strategy much between 2002 and 2006. Most likely this is because political considerations - particularly the competitiveness of the race - matter most and everything else matters at the margin. What that suggests is that presidential popularity may not impact things as much as we might expect otherwise. Second, Bush's popularity in 2002 probably did impact presidential elections. In part this occurred in those places where the president visited, though his ability to influence many races is limited by the above factors. Past this, support of the president was influential in those states where the president did not campaign. Here it was only through support of the president's legislative agenda that seemed to matter heavily.

In the future, we intend to extend our analysis to include more midterm elections and different presidents. Aside from competitiveness, is there anything that different presidents may commonly look for when deciding which Senate candidates to make appearances for? In particular, we will focus more on discerning the president's legislative agenda and what effect it has on his campaign strategy.

References