

THE GENERAL ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Once they have been nominated, candidates choose their general election campaign strategies based on their perceptions of what the electorate wants, the relative strengths and weaknesses of their opponents and themselves, and their chances of winning. A candidate who is convinced that he or she has a dependable lead may choose very different strategies from those used by a candidate who believes he or she is seriously behind. A candidate who believes that an opponent has significant weaknesses is more likely to run an aggressive, attacking campaign than one who does not perceive such weaknesses.

After the 2016 conventions Hillary Clinton maintained a modest lead over Donald Trump in national polls (although many polls were within the margin of error). Most political observers thought that Clinton would win the election and that the stark differences in campaign styles for the two candidates would make a difference. Chapters 4 through 8 of this book will consider in detail the impact of particular factors (including issues and evaluations of President Obama's job performance) on the voters' decisions. This chapter will provide an overview of the fall campaign—an account of its course and a description of the context within which strategic decisions were made.

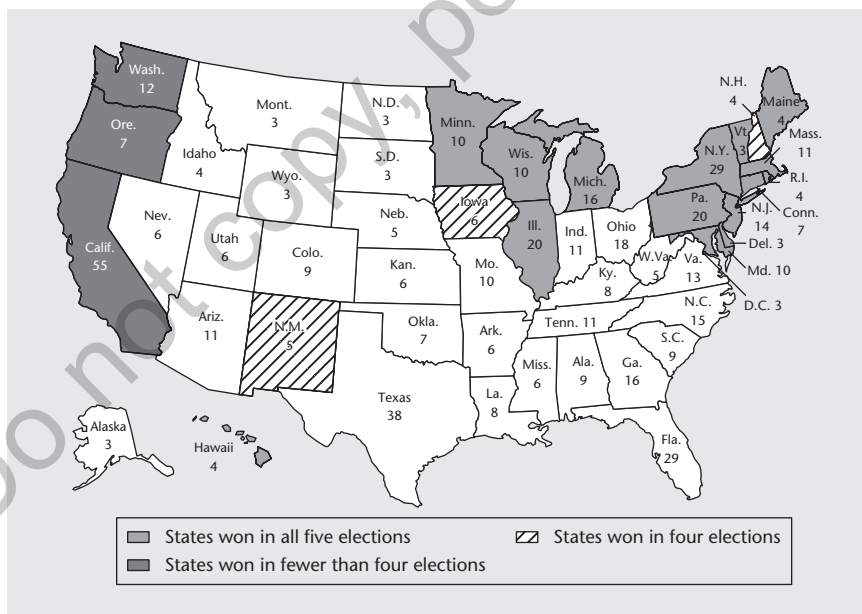
THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND CANDIDATES' CHOICES

One aspect of the strategic context that candidates must consider is the track record of the parties in recent presidential elections. In presidential races the past is certainly not entirely prologue, but it is relevant. From this perspective the picture was slightly more encouraging for the Republicans than for the Democrats. From 1952 through 2012 there had been seventeen presidential elections, and the Republicans had won ten of them. On the other hand the Democrats had won three of the last five races since 1996, and in 2000 they secured a narrow popular-vote margin despite falling short in the Electoral College.

The nature of the American system for electing presidents requires that we examine the state-by-state pattern of results. U.S. voters do not directly vote for president or vice president. Rather they vote for a slate of electors pledged to support a presidential and a vice-presidential candidate. Moreover, in every state except Maine and Nebraska, the entire slate of electors that receives the most popular votes is selected. In no state is a majority of the vote required. Since the 1972 election, Maine has used a system in which the plurality-vote winner for the entire state wins two electoral votes. In addition the plurality-vote winner in each of Maine's two House districts receives that district's single electoral vote. Beginning in 1992 Nebraska allocated its five electoral votes in a similar manner: the statewide plurality-vote winner gained two votes, and each of the state's three congressional districts awarded one vote on a plurality basis.¹

If larger states used the district plan employed by Maine and Nebraska, the dynamics of the campaign would be quite different. For example, candidates might target specific congressional districts and would probably campaign in all large states, regardless of how well they were doing in the statewide polls. But given the WTA rules employed in forty-eight states and the District of Columbia, candidates cannot safely ignore the pattern of past state results. A state-by-state analysis of the five presidential elections from 1996 through 2012 suggests that the Democrats had reason to be hopeful about the effort to win the 270 electoral votes required for victory.

Figure 2-1 States That Voted Democratic in at Least Four Out of Five Elections, 1996–2012, with Number of Electoral Votes



Source: Compiled by authors.

As Figure 2-1 reveals eighteen states plus the District of Columbia voted Democratic in all five of these elections. Only fifteen states were equally loyal to the GOP. (See Chapter 3 on long-term voting patterns.) These perfectly loyal states provided a prospective balance of 242 electoral votes for the Democrats to only 121 for the Republicans. Less problematic for the GOP candidates were the next groups of states. Nine states had voted Republican in every election but one, with a total of eighty-five electoral votes. Balancing these were only three states with fifteen electoral votes that had supported the Democrats in four of the five contests. Thus if each of these state's political leanings were categorized solely on the basis of the last five elections, one might expect that 257 electoral votes were likely to go to the Democrats in 2016, whereas only 206 were as likely to go to the Republicans, placing Clinton fifty-one votes ahead of Trump and only thirteen votes short of the number required to win.

If this past pattern had completely controlled the 2016 election, the GOP ticket would have been at a serious disadvantage. But, of course, things were not that simple, and many factors made Republican chances considerably better than they looked based on these numbers. Most obviously they had *won* two of the four previous elections, and the loss in 2008 occurred in the context of the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, for which many blamed President Bush and his party. Moreover, the economic recovery over the past few years had been modest, and many potential voters were unhappy with the president's performance generally and his stewardship of the economy in particular.

Although most observers thought Clinton had a distinct advantage once Trump secured the Republican nomination, both campaign organizations viewed the same set of states determining the outcome of the election. These would be the "battleground" states, where both campaign organizations would concentrate the lion's share of their time, money, and effort. Indeed, even before the beginning of 2016, the two parties had already focused their attention on a set of twelve or thirteen states, and most of the other states would be largely ignored until election day.² The larger states in this group—particularly Florida, Michigan, Ohio, and Pennsylvania—would be the main focus of their efforts. Many of the non-battleground states, on the other hand—even large ones like California, New York, and Texas—would see little evidence that a presidential campaign was in progress. A state perspective through the lens of the Electoral College would dominate the strategy of the 2016 campaign.³

POLITICAL CONTEXT, OVERALL STRATEGY, AND OPENING MOVES

The strategic choices of candidates and parties are shaped by the particular context of the election. One feature of that context is whether an incumbent is running. Races without an incumbent, like the one in 2016, are very different from those where an incumbent is seeking reelection. In many respects the 2016 presidential race was one of the most bizarre and unprecedented elections in American history. Donald Trump, a political novice, became the presumptive nominee on May 3, when Ted

Cruz withdrew from the race following his defeat in the Indiana primary. Trump later secured enough delegates to officially clinch the Republican nomination for president on May 26, 2016, after besting fourteen other candidates in the primaries. When Hillary Clinton clinched the Democratic nomination two weeks later, she made history as the first woman ever to win a major party's presidential nomination but only after a long and grueling struggle against Vermont senator Bernie Sanders. The fact that both Trump and Sanders had done so well early in the campaign reflected a mix of populist anger and rhetoric that would continue to influence the general election campaign.

Clinton had a distinct fund-raising advantage over Trump in the fall campaign. As of July 21, 2016, the Clinton campaign had raised \$264.4 million compared to the \$89.0 million raised by the Trump campaign. Super PACs also contributed a large sum of money to Clinton's presidential campaign by this time, totaling nearly \$122 million. By comparison the Trump campaign had only received about \$5.2 million from super PACs in late July. This trend would continue throughout the fall campaign as Clinton continued to outraise and spend more money than her Republican opponent. When the electoral dust settled, Clinton would ultimately have nearly a 2:1 spending advantage over Trump in the general election campaign.⁴

Much of the \$1.2 billion that the Clinton campaign would ultimately spend during the fall was directed toward television advertising and the get-out-the-vote operation. Her campaign believed that mobilizing voters to go to the polls was key and that being able to outspend her opponent was critical in this strategy. By contrast the Trump campaign raised only about \$646.8 million from individual contributors and super PACs (which was less than any major party presidential nominee since John McCain in 2008). Trump's ability to dominate media headlines and his prolific use of Twitter in an attempt to control the narrative of the campaign were clearly factors in his ability to keep the polls close despite spending considerably less than Clinton in the fall campaign.⁵ One estimate suggests that he may have received as much as \$2 billion worth of free media coverage from the beginning of his campaign through February 2016.⁶

Both candidates faced highs and lows after the primary elections. One of the Trump campaign's biggest challenges came about a month before the Republican National Convention when Donald Trump fired Corey Lewandowski, his initial campaign manager. Lewandowski had been instrumental in Trump's early wins during the primaries, but influential party officials, such as RNC Chairman Reince Priebus, routinely criticized his controversial and divisive campaign style. Lewandowski lacked experience running a national campaign, and many of his critics within the party organization felt that his strategies for fund-raising and staffing the campaign were insufficient to wage a competitive operation against Hillary Clinton, who was clearly excelling in both of these areas. "Republicans across the spectrum welcomed [Lewandowski's] firing as a positive step, but they suggested that it needed to be followed by consistent changes in performance from the candidate himself."⁷

On July 1, the Trump campaign hired Kellyanne Conway as a political advisor, who had previously worked as a super PAC strategist for Ted Cruz's campaign. Conway was a veteran GOP pollster and long-time political strategist who had experience working with Republican lawmakers. Trump had previously offered Conway

a job in 2015, but she turned down the offer to work on behalf of Ted Cruz instead. Conway decided to join the Trump campaign in early May once Cruz dropped out of the presidential race. She was initially brought on board in her long-time capacity of advising Republicans on how to better appeal to female voters.⁸ On August 17, 2016, Conway was named as Donald Trump's campaign manager, making her the first woman to ever be selected to run a Republican presidential campaign. On the same day Steve Bannon, former Breitbart news executive, was appointed as the CEO of Trump's campaign. Bannon has a long history of populist rhetoric, including criticizing the establishment wing of the Republican Party, but is perhaps best known for his tireless crusade against the Clintons.⁹

Amid the controversy and shake-ups within the Trump campaign, Clinton was dealing with her own challenges stemming from a year-long FBI investigation. On March 2, 2015, the *New York Times* reported that Clinton had used a private email server when she was serving as secretary of state during the Obama administration.¹⁰ Clinton defended her use of the private server several days later, claiming it was for convenience, so she could use one device for both business and personal use. On August 11, 2015, the Clinton campaign revealed that her server had been turned over to the Justice Department as per their request. More than nine months passed before the State Department's inspector general issued a report highly critical of Clinton's use of a private email server saying that "she had not sought permission to use it and would not have received it if she had." The report, which had been issued to Congress, undermined some of Clinton's previous statements and gave new political fodder to Republicans and the Trump campaign.¹¹

Based largely on the inspector general's report, Hillary Clinton was interviewed by the FBI in Washington, DC, for more than three hours on July 2, 2016, about her previous use of the private email server. Three days later FBI Director James Comey, who had been at the center of the investigation since 2015, announced that the FBI would not recommend that Clinton be indicted on any charges but called her behavior "extremely careless" with respect to how she handled classified information during her time as secretary of state.¹² Clinton and her Democratic allies praised the decision by Comey, whereas Trump and his followers were highly critical of the outcome, referring to it as a "total miscarriage of justice."¹³ Many Democrats hoped this would put an end to the discussion of emails and private servers, but the topic continued to remain relevant throughout the campaign and would resurface in a big way later on in the fall.

Selecting the Vice Presidents

Most political scientists agree that the presidential candidate's choice of running mates has little or no effect on the outcome of the election because most voters are inclined to vote primarily on the basis of which candidates are at the top of the ticket (and typically along party lines). Nevertheless, the selection of a candidate's vice presidential nominee often receives considerable attention by the media because it invites potential speculation about geographical or ideological balancing on the ticket.¹⁴ The process also tends to occur a few days before the national conventions during the summer, when news coming out of the campaigns is far less regular and the media are looking for anything newsworthy to report upon.

In the days leading up to Donald Trump's choice of a vice presidential candidate, there was considerable speculation about who he would select for the position. Among some of the possible contenders discussed early in the summer were Ohio Governor John Kasich, Oklahoma Governor Mary Fallin, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, and former U.S. House Speaker from Georgia, Newt Gingrich.¹⁵ Although there were potential advantages and disadvantages with respect to each of these picks, many within the establishment wing of the party felt that most of these candidates would be in a good position to mitigate some of the more controversial aspects of the Trump candidacy. At the same time the "right" candidate for vice president might help ensure that Republican voters would not stay home on election day, a worry that had concerned party loyalists ever since Trump had sailed through the Republican primaries.

Just prior to the Republican National Convention, Trump seemed to narrow his choice down to one of three potential vice presidential nominees—Christie, Gingrich, and Indiana Governor Mike Pence. Pence had not been part of the initial discussion of potential nominees earlier in the summer, but he had gained some traction after a series of meetings with Trump, where the two seemed to hit it off. Trump had planned to wait until the convention to announce that Pence was joining the ticket but ended up making the official announcement the Friday before the convention started. Many establishment Republicans were thrilled with the selection of Pence because he was viewed as a "safe" choice who had been a consistent voice of conservative orthodoxy since his early days in talk radio. Pence's selection was also viewed by many as an attempt to shore up support, especially among social conservatives, who remained somewhat skeptical of Trump as the Republican candidate for president and perhaps an opportunity to win over voters in many of the Rust Belt states. According to one initial report, "In tapping Pence, Trump adds to the GOP ticket a politician with ties to the Koch brothers and other influential donors who have so far stayed away from Trump."¹⁶ Pence's prior experience in office may have also helped to appease those Republicans who worried about Trump's lack of executive experience.

On the Democratic side Hillary Clinton waited until the Republican convention ended before naming her own choice for vice president. In the weeks leading up to the conventions, five different individuals had regularly been discussed as potential Clinton nominees for vice president—Virginia senator Tim Kaine, Ohio senator Sherrod Brown, New Jersey senator Cory Booker, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, and Massachusetts senator Elizabeth Warren. Some of these individuals, including Vilsack, were viewed as a safe choice by the Clinton campaign, whereas others—like Kaine and Brown—were considered at or near the top of the list given the strategic advantage that might come from having someone from states like Ohio and Virginia, which were very much in play in the presidential election.¹⁷

In the end Clinton went with the individual that potentially could offer her the greatest strategic advantage on the Democratic ticket, especially in carrying the state of Virginia—Senator Tim Kaine. Other than Vilsack, Kaine was easily among the safest choices for Clinton, and most within the Democratic Party readily acknowledged this. Given his strong ties to the party and his past electoral success in the state of Virginia, Kaine's selection as Clinton's nominee for vice president made a lot of strategic sense. Additionally his fluency in Spanish was definitely a plus in Clinton's attempt to reach out to Hispanic voters.¹⁸ Interestingly enough Bernie Sanders spoke

out the day after the announcement indicating that he would have preferred seeing Clinton select Elizabeth Warren as her running mate rather than Kaine. His comments seemed to reflect others' views from within the left wing of the party who were clearly disappointed by Clinton's selection.¹⁹

FROM THE CONVENTIONS TO THE DEBATES

The Conventions

The Republicans held their convention in Cleveland, Ohio, from July 18 to 21, amid potential protests and turmoil both inside and outside the convention hall. Many worried that the protests outside the convention would be large and unruly but ultimately proved to be much smaller than anticipated.²⁰ On the first day of the convention, tensions within the Republican Party became apparent when officials were forced to adopt the rules of the proceedings by a loud voice vote. Anti-Trump forces within the chamber sought to further derail the proceedings, but things quickly settled down, and no further disruptions were immediately apparent. Perhaps the most conspicuous event at the convention was the sheer number of notable Republicans who willingly chose not to attend, including George W. Bush and his brother Jeb along with John Kasich and John McCain. "From the party's former presidents to the host state governor, many leaders were staying away from the convention stage, or Cleveland altogether, wary of being linked to a man whose proposals and temperament have sparked an identity crisis within the GOP."²¹

This potential identity crisis was further illustrated when Ted Cruz spoke on the third night (July 20) of the convention. Cruz had been an outspoken critic of Donald Trump during the presidential primaries, and many within the party wondered if he would be willing to set aside his differences with the presumptive nominee and publicly endorse him for president. Much of his rhetoric echoed his comments from the campaign, especially when it came to issues such as health care, immigration, religious freedom, and taxes. Near the end of his convention speech, however, he stopped short of endorsing Trump when he offered the following remarks: "If you love our country, and love our children as much as you do, stand, and speak, and vote your conscience, vote for candidates up and down the ticket who you trust to defend our freedom, and to be faithful to the Constitution."²² Many within the party viewed the "vote your conscience" comment as an implicit rejection of Trump as the nominee, which served to further highlight the divisions within the Republican Party rather than signify unity as is typically the case at national conventions.²³

Trump's acceptance speech the following night was a mix of fiery rhetoric and partisan imagery that marked a significant departure from the optimistic tone characterizing Republican convention speeches dating back to the presidency of Ronald Reagan. Early in his speech he remarked, "Our convention occurs at a moment of crisis for our nation. The attacks on our police, and the terrorism in our cities, threaten our very way of life. Any politician who does not grasp this danger is not fit to lead our country." Trump reiterated that he would be the voice of American citizens who felt that they had been left behind over the past eight years. He also said he would take the

necessary steps to keep America safe and bring back prosperity to the nation.²⁴ Finally Trump emphasized that he would present the facts “plainly and honestly. . . . So if you want to hear the corporate spin, the carefully crafted lies and the media myths, the Democrats are holding their convention next week. Go there.”²⁵

The Democratic National Convention met in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the following week. Just prior to the convention, however, WikiLeaks released a large number of hacked emails from the Democratic National Committee suggesting that DNC chairwoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz may have taken steps to help Hillary Clinton win the Democratic primary. These allegations led to significant fallout among Democrats, especially those who had supported Bernie Sanders in the primaries, as some of the emails made several disparaging remarks about Sanders and his campaign manager, Jeff Weaver. The outrage over the emails was enough to force Wasserman Schultz to announce she would be stepping down after the Democratic National Convention in light of her involvement in the scandal.²⁶ The timing of the email leaks did little to support the Democrats’ message of unity following the chaos and discord at the Republican convention the week before.

Once the Democratic National Convention got under way on July 25, it was clear that the rhetoric would be significantly different from the message at the Republican convention the previous week. The speakers, which included a number of prominent Democrats such as former President Bill Clinton, vice presidential nominee Tim Kaine, and President Barack Obama made a strong case for why the country needed to select Hillary Clinton to be the next president. Many viewers agreed that one of the most memorable and impassioned speeches was given by First Lady Michelle Obama on the third night of the convention. In her remarks she mentioned that “this election and every election is about who will have the power to shape our children for the next four or eight years of their lives.” She continued by adding, “I am here tonight because in this election there is only one person who I trust with that responsibility, only one person who I believe is truly qualified to be president of the United States, and that is our friend Hillary Clinton.”²⁷

On the following evening Hillary Clinton made history as she became the first woman to accept the nomination for president of the United States. Her speech was a sharp contrast to the one given by Donald Trump the week before. Clinton emphasized the need for unity as well as putting aside our differences: “We have to decide whether we all will work together so we all can rise together.” She also contrasted her message from that of her Republican opponent, who she mentioned was trying to divide the nation for political gain. In her own words, she stated, “That’s why ‘Stronger Together’ is not just a lesson from our history. It’s not just a slogan for our campaign. It’s a guiding principle for the country we’ve always been and the future we’re going to build.”²⁸ According to the Nielsen ratings, approximately 33.7 million people tuned in to watch Clinton’s convention speech, which was just shy of the 34.9 million who had watched Trump’s speech the week before.²⁹

It is often the case that nominating conventions provide a short-term boost in the polls to the candidate of the party holding them. After all, the party and its candidate receive a lot of attention, and they largely control what is seen and heard during the convention. In 2016, with the conventions so close together, it is difficult to be sure of the effects, but data from a CNN/ORC poll conducted immediately after the

convention gave Trump a bounce of six points, three points ahead of Clinton in a head-to-head matchup.³⁰ Shortly after the Democratic National Convention wrapped up on July 28, an NBC News poll had Clinton leading Trump by eight points (50 to 42 percent) after a narrow lead several days prior following the conclusion of the Republican convention.³¹ Clinton continued to maintain a small but modest lead over Trump during the month of August, when he received a growing amount of negative news coverage.

A series of news stories over the next four weeks would lead to a disastrous August for the Trump campaign. The downward spiral began on the third night of the Democratic convention when Trump tweeted, “If Russia or any other country or person has Hillary Clinton’s 33,000 illegally deleted emails, perhaps they should share them with the FBI!” The campaign was forced to deny that Trump had “encouraged” a foreign nation to interfere with the U.S. election, a concern that would continue to hound them for the foreseeable future. The following evening the parents of Army Captain Humayun Khan, who had been killed in 2004 by an Iraqi suicide bomber, spoke at the Democratic convention and questioned whether Trump had even read the U.S. Constitution before pulling out a pocket-size version and stating, “I will gladly lend you my copy.”³² Trump could not resist the temptation to respond, and the situation continued to escalate over the next few days with most of the media criticism clearly directed at Trump’s mishandling of the situation.

Following campaign rallies in both Ohio and Pennsylvania, Trump then suggested that the election might be “rigged” against him, a charge that he would bring up again later in the campaign. He also referred to Clinton at one of the rallies as “the devil” before suggesting that a crying baby be removed from a campaign event (to which he responded later that he was only kidding).³³ Then, in an August 2 interview with the *Washington Post*, Trump implied that he was not yet ready to endorse House Speaker Paul Ryan or Senator John McCain in their GOP primaries, which only served to further illustrate the deep divisions within the Republican Party.³⁴ During a press conference following Trump’s remarks, President Obama declared Trump “unfit to serve as president” and “woefully unprepared to do this job.” He also challenged Republican leaders to withdraw their support for their nominee in light of the latest series of critical news stories.³⁵

Two days later a new series of polls showed that Clinton had a growing lead over Trump in states such as Florida, Michigan, New Hampshire, and Pennsylvania. Then, on August 5, a new *Atlanta-Journal Constitution* poll showed that Clinton was leading Trump in Georgia, a state that had supported every Republican presidential candidate since Bill Clinton in 1992.³⁶ Republicans were growing increasingly nervous at this point about Trump’s chances of winning, but he showed little or no signs of greater discipline on the campaign trail. The following week a new CNN poll released on August 8 suggested that Clinton had a ten-point national lead over Trump, which further cemented mounting concerns within the Republican Party over Trump’s candidacy.

Trump did little to assuage his critics when he spoke at a campaign rally in Wilmington, North Carolina, the following day. During the speech, he remarked, “Hillary wants to abolish—essentially abolish the Second Amendment. By the way, if she gets to pick, if she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks.” After

the crowd started booing, Trump added, “Although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is. I don’t know.”³⁷ Not surprisingly, Trump’s remark set off a firestorm of protests among Democrats who quickly denounced suggestions of violence against Hillary Clinton or liberal judges. It also attracted the attention of the Secret Service, who takes any type of threat against presidential candidates very seriously. Clinton’s running mate, Senator Tim Kaine, said that Trump’s statement offers “a window into the soul of a person who is just temperamentally not suited to the task.”³⁸ Even Republicans remarked that Trump’s comment was a very poor joke at best.

Still reeling from his comment about the “Second Amendment people,” Trump continued to push ahead by claiming that Obama and Clinton were the “cofounders” of ISIS and that any fallout was clearly their fault. It took several days before Trump backed off of this provocative claim and began referring to it as “sarcasm.” At the same time he continued to mention that the election was “rigged” and that the media was completely biased against him.³⁹ When asked if he might adjust his approach during a CNBC interview in light of poll numbers that continued to trend downward, Trump rejected this suggestion and said that his plan was to “[j]ust keep doing the same thing I’m doing right now.” He went on to add that “[a]nd at the end, it’s either going to work or I’m going to, you know—I’m going to have a very, very nice, long vacation.”⁴⁰

Just days after insinuating that he could actually lose the election, Trump announced the most serious shake-up in his campaign staff since Lewandowski was fired as campaign manager in June. As noted earlier in the chapter, Trump brought Steve Bannon on board as the new CEO of his campaign, which many viewed as a strong signal that Trump wanted to continue to pursue a more aggressive style. Bannon had previously served as the executive chairman of Breitbart News, which had a reputation for hard-hitting conservative news. He also promoted senior adviser Kellyanne Conway to campaign manager. Whether or not these two actions would help to right the ship were not yet clear, but many within the Republican Party believed that it could hardly make things worse at this point in the campaign.⁴¹

Although August proved to be problematic for the Trump campaign, Clinton had to deal with two events in early September that generated much more media attention than her campaign probably would have expected. At a New York City fund-raising event held on September 9, Clinton remarked, “You know, just to be grossly generalistic, you could put half of Trump’s supporters into what I call the basket of deplorables. Right? They’re racist, sexist, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic—you name it. And unfortunately there are people like that. And he has lifted them up.” The following day Trump responded to Clinton’s statement by tweeting, “Wow, Hillary Clinton was SO INSULTING to my supporters, millions of amazing, hard working people. I think it will cost her at the Polls!”⁴² Clinton’s “basket of deplorables” comment may have had a deleterious effect on the polls as the Trump campaign repeatedly used a clip of this statement in campaign ads throughout the fall.

At an event two days later commemorating the victims of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Clinton was recorded nearly collapsing afterward and was helped into her van by Secret Service agents. Two hours later she emerged from her daughter Chelsea’s Manhattan apartment looking refreshed and ready to return to the campaign. Later that day her doctor reported that she was being treated for pneumonia and dehydration. This event in particular renewed concerns about whether Clinton

was healthy enough to serve in office. “The incident, which occurred after months of questions about her health from her Republican opponent, Donald J. Trump, and his campaign, is likely to increase pressure on Mrs. Clinton to address the issue and release detailed medical records, which she has so far declined to do.”⁴³ This issue would continue to come up during the next few weeks as questions of Clinton’s health and “stamina” would be raised by the Trump campaign.

The Debates

In the days leading up to the first presidential debate, the presidential race had tightened up considerably, with Clinton clinging to a narrow two-point lead. Both candidates saw an opportunity for turning their polls around during the debate held at Hofstra University. In preparation for the first debate, Clinton maintained a lighter campaign schedule so that she could review prior debate performances by Trump and brush up on the important issues that would likely come up in the debate. “For her prep sessions, Clinton has reportedly surrounded herself with a team of strategists, including Ron Klain, former chief of staff to Vice President Joe Biden, and Karen Dunn, a Clinton adviser and former White House aide.”⁴⁴ She also sought a variety of media and communication specialists such as Jim Margolis, Mandy Grunwald, and campaign chairman John Podesta, who could help her focus her message during the debate.⁴⁵

In contrast to Clinton, Trump seemed to favor a different style of preparing for the first debate. When asked about his strategies for debating Clinton, Trump often seemed to rely on his comfort and past exposure to the media spotlight. In one of the more revealing statements about his debate preparation, Trump mentioned, “Obviously I will be practicing, but I don’t want to put so much practice in that all of a sudden, you’re not who you are.”⁴⁶ In a story reported by National Public Radio on the debate, it was suggested, “One way Trump may have been preparing already is by giving a number of scripted speeches on the campaign trail in recent weeks, as opposed to the freewheeling style he adopted at rallies through most of the campaign. Those speeches have allowed Trump to practice delivering more measured and detailed versions of his pitch to voters.”⁴⁷

During the actual debate a number of topics were addressed ranging from jobs, gender, national security, and taxes. Early on in the debate, when Trump was asked to clarify a remark he had made that Clinton lacked a certain presidential “look,” he responded by saying, “She doesn’t have the stamina. To be president of this country, you need tremendous stamina. You have to be able to negotiate.” In response to this specific critique, Clinton remarked, “As soon as he travels to 112 countries and negotiates a peace deal, a cease fire, a release of dissidents, an opening of new opportunities in nations around the world, or even spends 11 hours testifying in front of a congressional committee, he can talk to me about stamina.” To this she added, “He tried to change from looks to stamina, but this is a man who has called women pigs, slobs and dogs.”⁴⁸

Throughout the course of the debate, both candidates managed to get in a few memorable one-liners when answering questions and discussing their specific policy positions. When asked if he would release his tax returns, Trump repeated the refrain

that he was facing a routine audit that precluded him from distributing this information. The moderator challenged this assertion, to which Trump responded by saying that he would go against his lawyers' wishes and release his returns if Clinton agreed to release approximately 33,000 emails that had been deleted from her private server.⁴⁹ Later on in the debate, when discussing his plans to lower taxes on wealthy Americans while also mixing in additional critiques of Clinton, she remarked, "I have a feeling that by the end of this evening, I'm going to be blamed for everything that's ever happened," to which Trump replied, "Why not?"⁵⁰

The audience for the first presidential debate was substantial. In total approximately 84 million viewers tuned into the thirteen stations that carried the debate live, making it the most watched presidential debate in American history. In reality the viewership was even higher because many individuals ended up watching the debate online.⁵¹ By the next morning the media consensus was that Clinton was the winner of the first debate. According to a Gallup poll released later in the week, "Americans who saw the debate believed Clinton was the runaway victor, 61 percent to Trump's 27 percent."⁵² Clinton also seemed to dominate Trump on several dimensions. "On all the characteristics Gallup asked voters about, Clinton prevailed over Trump: she appeared to be more inspiring (46 percent to Trump's 34 percent), was more likable (55 to 36 percent), appeared presidential (59 percent to 27 percent), and exhibited a better understanding of the issues (62 to 26 percent)."⁵³

Next in the debate sequence was the vice-presidential debate held on October 4. Not surprisingly, it received far less attention than the presidential events. Trump's running mate, Mike Pence of Indiana, sought to soften his image and "put a calmer, gentler face on the 2016 Republican ticket."⁵⁴ Senator Tim Kaine, in contrast, used the forum to remind voters about all of the negative comments Trump had made on the campaign trail and asked Pence to explain them. As a former talk-radio host, Pence was able to deflect most of Kaine's criticisms, and a CNN/ORC poll that came out days later suggested that 48 percent of those who tuned into the debate thought Pence had won compared with only 42 percent saying Kaine won.⁵⁵ In the end, however, it did little to move poll numbers for the two presidential candidates, as is typically the case.⁵⁶

Just days before the second presidential debate, a shocking news story broke that turned out to be the first "October surprise" in the campaign. "Trump's campaign was sent reeling on Friday after a private tape was published in which the reality TV star bragged about groping, kissing and attempting to have sex with married women—and said he was entitled to do so because he's a 'star.'"⁵⁷ The *Washington Post* first reported the story, indicating that the video was from a 2005 *Access Hollywood* interview that host Billy Bush conducted with Trump.⁵⁸ Following the release of the shocking video, described by some as the worst October surprise that any campaign has ever suffered, there were immediate calls for Trump to step down as the Republican nominee. Numerous insiders expressed concerns that they did not know how their candidate could survive this.⁵⁹

In response to the firestorm of criticism that erupted, Trump issued a rare apology late Friday evening. "I never said that I'm a perfect person nor pretended to be someone I'm not. I've said and done things I regret and the words released today on this decade old video are one of them. Anyone who knows me knows these words don't reflect who I am. I said it, I was wrong, and I apologize." Had Trump stopped

there, the fallout might have been very different. But Trump continued with the following controversial remarks, “I’ve said some foolish things but there’s a big difference between the words and actions of other people. Bill Clinton has actually abused women and Hillary has bullied, attacked, shamed, and intimidated his victims.”⁶⁰

Not surprisingly these extra remarks set off additional protests that did little to silence critics of Donald Trump in the days ahead. In fact as many as nine different women came forward following the release of the tape claiming that Trump had assaulted them at some point in the past.⁶¹ Although some within the Trump campaign questioned the timing of these charges and accusations, they forced Trump and his team to immediately go on the defensive. Trump responded to the growing criticisms by tweeting, “The media and establishment want me out of the race so badly—I WILL NEVER DROP OUT OF THE RACE, WILL NEVER LET MY SUPPORTERS DOWN.”⁶²

Two days later the second presidential debate took place in St. Louis, Missouri. Still stinging from news stories surrounding the tape, Trump elected to go on the offensive by inviting several women who had made sexual harassment accusations in the past against Bill Clinton to attend the debate and sit in the front row. The subject of the 2005 tape came up early on in the debate, and Trump continued to downplay his comments—“It’s just words, folks”—whereas Clinton used his remarks to remind the audience how little respect he had for women. She also added, “He never apologizes for anything to anyone.”⁶³ Later on in the debate, when Clinton stated it was a good thing Trump is not in charge of the law, Trump responded, “Because you’d be in jail.”⁶⁴ In the aftermath of the debate, the public’s view of the results were much closer than after the first debate, with respondents to an NBC poll choosing Clinton as the winner by 44 to 34 percent.

The final presidential debate, on October 19, was supposed to focus on entitlements and the debt, immigration, the economy, and the Supreme Court, but the discussion quickly veered off into Russian influence in the campaign, whether the election was rigged, and the candidates’ fitness to be president. At one point, while discussing Russia’s role in the presidential election, Clinton remarked, “Russia is trying to influence the election. Putin would prefer to have a puppet,” to which Trump immediately responded, “You’re the puppet.” Later on in the debate, when asked repeatedly by the moderator whether Donald Trump would accept the results of the election, he simply responded by saying, “I will look at it at the time. I will tell you at the time. I will keep you in suspense.”⁶⁵ Finally, while Clinton was answering a question about social security taxes at the end of the debate and remarking that her “social security payroll contributions will go up as will Donald’s assuming he can’t figure out how to get out of it,” Trump leaned into the microphone and stated, “Such a nasty woman.” This comment served to undermine his earlier remarks about respecting women and became a rallying cry for women in the waning days of the campaign.⁶⁶ According to a CNN/ORC poll, Clinton was the winner of the debate by a thirteen-point margin, giving her a clean sweep over Trump in all three presidential debates.⁶⁷

The consensus among political scientists is that presidential debates usually do not have a significant impact on a race.⁶⁸ The most prominent explanation is that by the time the debates occur, the vast majority of voters have made up their minds and are thus unlikely to have their position reversed by the event. There are, however, a

few exceptions where some analysts perceive a greater impact. These include 1960 (Kennedy vs. Nixon), 1976 (Ford vs. Carter), 1984 (Reagan vs. Mondale), and 2012 (Obama vs. Romney).⁶⁹ Robert Erikson and Christopher Wlezien took a systematic look at the ten presidential elections with debates (1960 and 1976–2008), comparing the poll standings of candidates before and after the debates. They found that with one exception, the pre-debate polls were closely matched by the post-debate polls (the exception was 1976, when Carter was already in decline before the debates and the decline persisted). They conclude that debates do not have as great an impact as the conventions (the effect of which they find to be substantial) but that they may have as much or more effect than other campaign events.⁷⁰

It appears, however, that 2016 may be another exception. Data from Real Clear Politics (which averages results for all major polls over a time interval) shows that on September 26, the day of the first debate, Clinton had a 2.3 percent lead in the poll averages, while on October 19 (the last debate's date), Clinton led by 6.5 percent.⁷¹ That amounted to a four-point swing in favor of Clinton during the course of the debates, which initially suggested that Trump might have a difficult time turning the tide around before the election.

THE END GAME AND THE STRUGGLE OVER TURNOUT

The Final Two Weeks

In the days following the third debate, both candidates continued to campaign in swing states around the country, repeating their respective messages about how each of them offered a better alternative for the country than their opponent. Clinton seemed to capitalize immensely on her final debate performance as a ABC News tracking poll that came out a few days following the third debate showed her leading Trump 50 percent to 38 percent in a four-way race (with Libertarian Party nominee Gary Johnson earning 5 percent and Green Party nominee Jill Stein earning about 2 percent in the poll). The poll reflected the highest level of public support for Clinton of any survey taken by ABC News during the fall and the lowest for Trump.⁷² Some analysts interpreted this new poll as evidence that Clinton was making inroads among voters that had traditionally supported Trump throughout the fall campaign.⁷³

The good news for the Clinton camp ended up being short-lived, however, as potentially unsettling news broke just eleven days before the election. “The FBI on Friday dropped a bombshell on Hillary Clinton’s campaign less than two weeks before Election Day, with Director James Comey telling lawmakers that the agency is reviewing new evidence in its investigation into her use of a private email server as secretary of state.”⁷⁴ The new evidence was prompted by an investigation into an unrelated case where the FBI discovered emails that could be relevant to Clinton’s case. Although Comey did not elaborate on where the emails originated from, it was later learned that they were discovered “out of the probe into (former Congressman) Anthony Weiner, the estranged husband of Clinton aide Huma Abedin who is under investigation for allegedly sexting a teenage girl.”⁷⁵ According to a *New York Times*

story, the FBI seized several devices from Weiner as part of their ongoing probe and discovered the additional emails.⁷⁶

News of the renewed FBI investigation into Clinton's emails broke as she was on the way to a campaign event in Iowa, where she waved off reporter's questions as she was getting off the plane. "Clinton's campaign initially appeared blindsided by the development."⁷⁷ Nevertheless, it did not take long before her surrogates began hitting back about the news, especially given the close proximity to the November election. Clinton's campaign chairman, John Podesta, referred to the timing of the announcement as "extraordinary." In an interview on MSNBC, Brian Fallon, Clinton's national press secretary said, "It boggles the mind why this step was taken today. As it is, we now have the worst of all worlds here. He aired this in an extraordinary step and the public doesn't have any way to judge the significance of this and what it has to do with Clinton."⁷⁸ Tim Kaine, Clinton's running mate, also mentioned that he found the FBI's handling of the renewed investigation as "very, very troubling" and that the FBI "should give a clear accounting of what's going on right now."⁷⁹

While the Clinton team was scrambling to deal with the late-breaking October surprise, Trump took full advantage of the situation when the news broke. During a campaign rally in New Hampshire, Trump led off by saying, "Hillary Clinton's corruption is on a scale that we have never seen before. We must not let her take her criminal scheme into the Oval Office. I have great respect for the fact that the FBI and the Department of Justice are now willing to have the courage to right the horrible mistake that they made."⁸⁰ Trump's comments were met with cheers of "lock her up," a now common refrain at his campaign rallies. He continued his remarks by adding, "This was a grave miscarriage of justice that the American people fully understood, and it is everybody's hope that it is about to be corrected."⁸¹

In the days following Comey's announcement, the polls for the presidential race began to tighten up significantly. What started out as a five-point advantage for Clinton on the day the story broke quickly turned into a narrow one-point lead over Trump according to polling trends on Real Clear Politics.⁸² Clinton continued to try to downplay the story in the days before the election, whereas the Trump campaign repeatedly emphasized it at campaign rallies around the country. When FBI Director Comey announced on November 6, two days before the election, that his agency's review of the new emails did not change his previous conclusion that Clinton should not be prosecuted for her behavior, many on both sides wondered if the damage had already been done.⁸³

Mobilizing the Vote

In 2004 the Republicans had a distinct advantage with respect to mobilizing and turning out voters on election day. The Democrats significantly reversed this trend in 2008, leading to the highest turnout in a presidential election since 1968.⁸⁴ Four years later the Democrats' voter identification and mobilization efforts took a big leap forward in terms of both technology and effort.⁸⁵ When Jim Messina took on the job of Obama's campaign manager, he said: "We are going to measure every single thing in this campaign."⁸⁶ Messina "hired an analytics department five times the size that of the 2008 campaign."⁸⁷ These analysts believed that the product of their efforts—their

data—was the principal advantage President Obama had over his opponent, and they guarded it diligently.

In 2016 both parties continued using new data analytic techniques to mobilize voters, but this strategy has become increasingly difficult as the country has become more polarized. In the past campaigns sought to persuade undecideds to go to the polls, while they simultaneously reached out to loyal partisans to vote. More recently, however, candidates and parties have had to adapt to a new reality in light of the decreasing number of “swing voters.” “The goal is now to mobilize the most loyal voters rather than lure in the undecided or persuade the other party’s voters to change sides.”⁸⁸ One direct consequence of this change is that an increasing number of voters tend to be stronger partisans who are less likely to defect than independents or those who only weakly lean toward one party in particular.

The shift away from persuasion to one of increasing turnout among loyalists had vastly different effects across the two campaigns. “For the Trump campaign, this mobilization strategy meant trying hard to inspire disenchanted working-class whites in heavily Republican areas, giving them something to get excited about in Donald Trump’s anti-establishment white identity politics.”⁸⁹ Trump did not attempt to reach out to voters who were not already disposed to vote for him as his campaign recognized the futility of such effort. Clinton, on the other hand, sought to repeat the success of the Obama campaign in 2008 and 2012 in getting voters to turn out on election day. “For Democrats, this meant investing in large-scale get-out-the-vote operation on the premise that the ‘Obama coalition’ of black and Hispanic voters and young educated whites could be sustained by enough field offices and data analytics.”⁹⁰

Whereas the Trump campaign was relying largely on the support of white voters to win the election, Clinton and her surrogates recognized the value of reaching out to a broad coalition of ethnic voters, including Hispanics. Even before Trump emerged as the Republican nominee, the Democrats had been laying the groundwork to attract new Hispanic voters by spending millions of dollars in outreach efforts. Clinton also saw an advantage in carefully positioning herself on immigration, especially when it came to the issue of how to deal with undocumented immigrants. “From the beginning of her campaign, Mrs. Clinton and her team saw untapped potential in the 27 million Hispanics who would be eligible to vote in 2016, a 26 percent increase since 2012.”⁹¹ Although turnout among Hispanics is traditionally lower than among other groups, the task was perhaps easier in 2016 in light of Trump’s repeated assertions about illegal immigration as well as his description of immigrants as “murderers and rapists.” Indeed her efforts appeared to pay off during the initial weeks of early voting. “Energized by anger at Mr. Trump and an aggressive Democratic campaign to get them to the polls, Latinos are turning out in record numbers and could make the difference in the outcome in several highly contested states.”⁹²

One can see the differences in the candidates’ campaign strategies as reflected by their placement of presidential campaign field offices during 2016 as shown in Figure 2-2 (data from 2012 is included for comparison purposes). For instance Clinton had 511 field offices across the country in forty-nine different states with Wisconsin being the only exception. In twenty-seven of these forty-nine states, she had only one field office, presumably because these states were not considered competitive electorally. In contrast Trump had only 145 field offices across the country in eighteen total

states. In five states he had only one office, and in thirty-two he had none. Although the pattern for the placement of Trump's field offices is less clear, it appears that many were located in the Midwest or mid-Atlantic region, where the Trump campaign believed those states were in play.⁹³ Overall the 2016 placements reflect a significant decline from the 2012 campaign, in which both candidates had more field offices—Obama had a total of 755 offices across the country, whereas Romney had 283, nearly twice as many as Trump in 2016.

As noted earlier Clinton had a distinct fund-raising advantage over Trump in the general election, which continued into the final month of the presidential campaign. This, in turn, led many to believe that Clinton would have an edge in getting voters to the polls. During the third quarter of 2016, Clinton's joint fund-raising with the Democratic National Committee yielded slightly more than \$261 million based on Federal Election Commission reports. "By comparison, the equivalent Trump Victory Fund, which coordinates with the Republican National Committee and state parties, raised less than one-quarter of Clinton's haul—\$61 million."⁹⁴ Nevertheless, Trump did receive a tremendous amount of free media coverage over the course of the primary and general election campaign as a result of his "celebrity" status. "According to data-driven analytics firm mediaQuant, Trump received around \$5 billion in free media coverage, more than twice that garnered by Clinton."⁹⁵ How that much free coverage from the media would translate into increased voter turnout was unclear in the days leading up to the election.

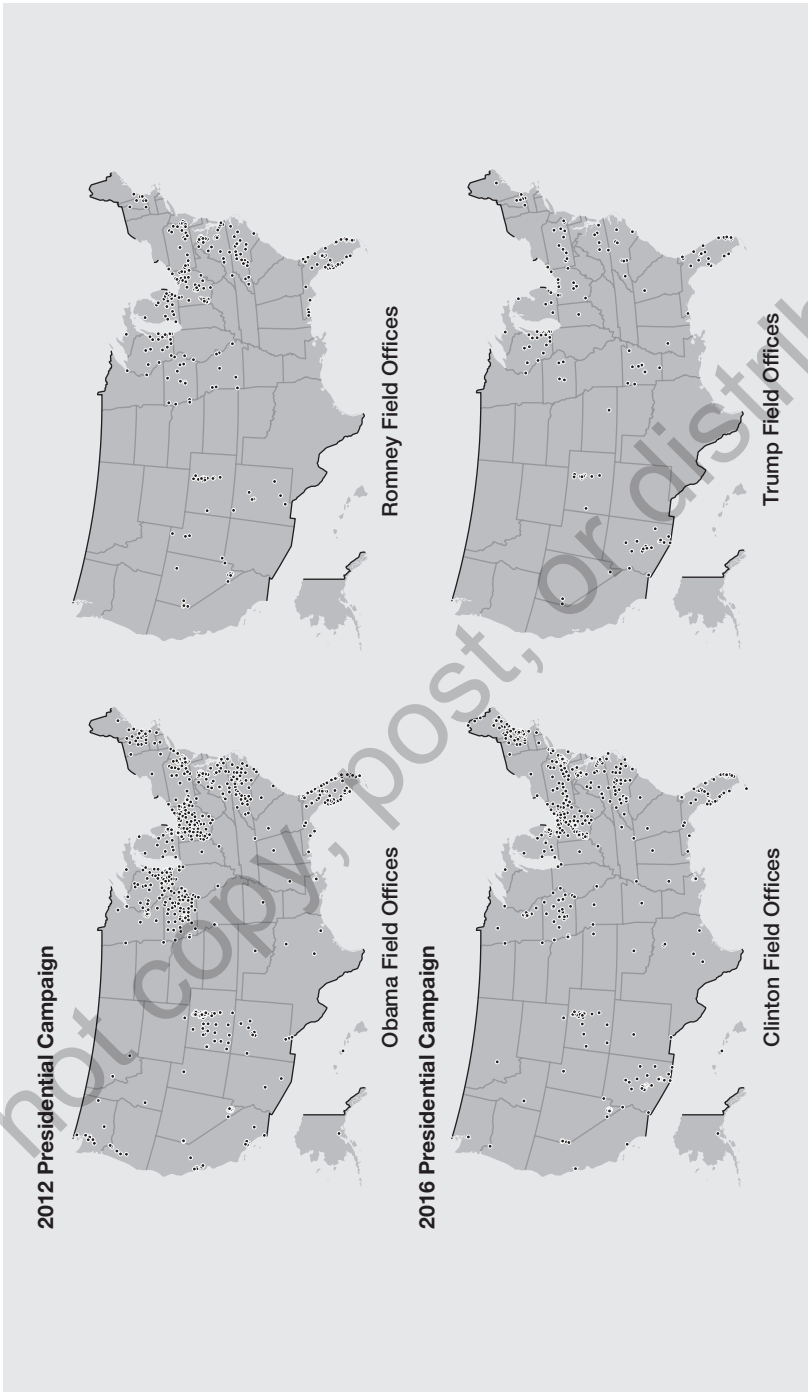
The Final Days

As noted the Real Clear Politics average of polls showed Clinton with slightly more than a five-point lead over Trump two weeks before the election. Once news broke of the FBI's renewed interest in Clinton's emails, however, the presidential race immediately began to tighten up. By November 3, Clinton's lead over Trump had been reduced to 1.3 percent. Then, over the next few days, Clinton began to open up a small lead, and on election day, she led by a margin of 3.2 points in the poll average. It was hardly a safe cushion, and the outcome remained in doubt, but many Democrats felt a growing confidence that Clinton would eventually win. The fact that the race had tightened up considerably gave both candidates reason to be optimistic, and the campaigns launched the final effort to appeal to voters in the last days before the election.

As is often the case, presidential candidates maintain a rigorous schedule during the last weekend before an election in an attempt to deliver their personal message to voters one last time. "Hillary Clinton and Mr. Trump used the final Saturday before Election Day to make their closing pitches to voters, with Mrs. Clinton in South Florida and Philadelphia and Mr. Trump dashing to four states across three time zones—the sort of barnstorming tours presidential candidates have traditionally made in the last 72 hours before Election Day."⁹⁶ Both candidates and their surrogates also spent a considerable amount of time in New Hampshire just prior to the election given its status as an important swing state.⁹⁷

During the closing days of the campaign, Clinton avoided discussing her emails as well as Comey's decision to reopen the investigation so close to election day. Instead

Figure 2-2 Location of Presidential Campaign Field Offices, 2012 and 2016



Source: Field office information and addresses were gathered by the authors from the official campaign websites on the weekends before the respective election days. The authors used Google Maps to identify the longitude and latitude coordinates for each office.

she spent most of her time on the campaign trail talking about salient issues such as raising the minimum wage, providing affordable child care, and granting tuition-free college education for the middle class. She also sought to reassure voters that in light of the harsh rhetoric used throughout the fall campaign, it was important for the next president to find a way to bridge the growing divide in this country. “We will have some work to do to bring about healing and reconciliation after this election. We have to begin listening to one another and respecting one another.”⁹⁸

Trump’s message in the final days sought to reiterate many of the same themes that he had emphasized throughout the campaign. In addition to reiterating the claim that Hillary was “too corrupt” to be president, he discussed the importance of cutting taxes on businesses to help stimulate the economy, increasing funding for the military, terminating NAFTA, and building the wall along the Mexican border. Trump also reemphasized the need to deal with what he perceived as the growing immigration problem in the country. At one campaign stop over the weekend in New Hampshire, he declared, “And we will keep radical Islamic terrorists the hell out of our country.”⁹⁹

DID THE CAMPAIGN MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

It is appropriate to ask whether the general election campaign made any difference, and the answer depends on the yardstick used to measure the campaign’s effects. Did it determine the winner? Did it encourage voters to go to the polls? Did it affect the choices of a substantial number of voters? Did it put issues and candidates’ positions clearly before the voters? Would a better campaign by one of the major party candidates have yielded a different result? Did the campaign produce significant events that will have a lasting impact on American politics? We cannot provide firm answers to all of these questions, but we can shed light on some of them.

Regarding the outcome and voters’ decisions, it seems clear that the campaign did indeed have an effect.¹⁰⁰ As noted the relative standing of the candidates ebbed and flowed from the conventions to November, and these changes seemed to be linked in part to events in the campaign. Both candidates clearly got a boost from their respective conventions, but Clinton’s seemed to last longer, especially given the series of gaffes that Donald Trump and his campaign endured during the month of August. Clinton also seemed to do well in each of the three debates after a rough start in September. However, the renewed investigation by the FBI into Clinton’s emails with less than two weeks until the election clearly affected the closeness of the race, especially because the FBI did not seem to be investing equal time into allegations that Russia might be trying to influence the presidential election. In the final few days of the campaign, most of the undecideds seemed to move toward Trump, which may have played a key role in him carrying states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin in the Rust Belt.¹⁰¹

Perhaps the best evidence of the campaign’s impact relates to turnout. As noted earlier many Republicans thought they had an advantage in 2016 because the Democrats had controlled the White House for the previous eight years and the electorate would be less favorable to them than it had been in either 2008 or 2012. Although Trump’s missteps throughout the fall left a number of Republicans worried

about the election outcome, the returns coming in at and around 9:00 p.m. on election night seemed to suggest the race would be a lot closer than expected. In key states such as Michigan, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Virginia, and Wisconsin, the race was simply too close to call based on exit poll data, suggesting that much of the previous polling in these states had been mistaken. If turnout among white voters was higher than expected across these states and African Americans and Hispanics did not turn out in as great of numbers as some anticipated, there was a chance that Trump could turn the tide in the election. In the end this is what happened as exit polls showed Trump won the white vote by a record margin (58 to 37 percent) and turnout among ethnic groups and women was lower than expected.¹⁰²

The success of the presidential candidates' mobilization effort is indicated by the turnout data compiled for 2012 and 2016 by Michael McDonald of the University of Florida.¹⁰³ The data show that the national turnout rate increased by 1.6 points, from 58.6 percent to 60.2 percent. The increase, however, was not equal across the battleground states. Table 2-1 lists the thirteen battleground states and their turnout in the two elections. In seven of the thirteen states, turnout increased relative to 2012, whereas it declined in the remaining six. Trump ended up winning a majority of the battleground states—including key Rust Belt states that traditionally vote for the Democratic candidate—which is surprising given the limited number of field offices in many of these states relative to Clinton and despite lingering concerns about his ability to win. At the same time it appears that Trump did better in states with slightly lower-than-average turnout.¹⁰⁴

There is also the question of whether a better campaign by a candidate, specifically by Clinton, would have led to a different result. Many observers expressed the view that a better campaign by Clinton could have carried the race. "In anointing Clinton, the Democrats went all in with a candidate despised by a good portion of the country. . . . Warning signs of trouble came early and often in her campaign, but she failed to heed them. She was overly cautious, effectively staying on a course of political destruction rather than learning from mistakes along the way."¹⁰⁵ Critics also claimed that her campaign did not go far enough in attempting to reach out to voters who had supported Sanders over her in the primary by making a bolder vice presidential pick such as Sanders or Elizabeth Warren. "Failing to fire up her own side only exacerbated how much she fired up her opposition. . . . Her incendiary 'basket of deplorables' and other remarks flourished on the internet and fit into the narrative of people who spread an anti-Hillary gospel."¹⁰⁶

Some were even of the dubious opinion that had Sanders won the Democratic primary, he might have had a better shot of defeating Trump in the election. When asked by the *Washington Post* several days after the election if he could have beaten Trump, Sanders responded by simply saying, "I hesitate to be a Monday morning quarterback. In my heart of hearts, I think there's a good chance I could have defeated Trump, but who knows."¹⁰⁷ When his wife Jane was asked the same question the week before on CNN, she replied, "Absolutely, but it doesn't matter now."¹⁰⁸ Not everyone shared these opinions about Sanders's likely victory over Trump in the election, however. At least one postelection commentary criticized this perspective by saying that most of the candidates that Sanders endorsed ended up underperforming in the

Table 2-1 Change in Turnout in Battleground States and Nationally, 2012–2016

	Turnout	Turnout	Change 2012–2016
	2012	2016	
National	58.6	60.2	+1.6
Colorado	70.6	72.1	+1.5
Florida	63.3	65.8	+2.5
Iowa	70.6	69.0	-1.6
Michigan	65.4	65.7	+0.3
Minnesota	76.4	74.8	-1.6
Nevada	56.5	57.3	+0.8
New Hampshire	70.9	72.5	+1.6
New Mexico	54.8	55.2	+0.4
North Carolina	65.4	65.2	-0.2
Ohio	65.1	64.2	-0.9
Pennsylvania	59.5	63.0	+3.5
Virginia	66.6	66.1	-0.5
Wisconsin	72.9	69.4	-3.5

Source: Data are from the United States Elections Project, <http://www.electproject.org/>, accessed February 7, 2017.

election, which says a lot about how he might have done himself had he been on the ballot instead of Clinton.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, this perspective fails to account for the fact that Clinton won the popular tally by more than 2.86 million votes but ended up losing the Electoral College as a result of near misses in states like Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Wisconsin, where she failed to spend time or money in the waning days of the campaign.¹¹⁰

Additionally campaigns without an incumbent are usually close, and close elections can go either way. One should not expect the positives from Obama's performance to easily transfer to Clinton, his former secretary of state. Nevertheless, Clinton did carry the popular vote despite failing to achieve a majority in the Electoral

College (like Al Gore did in 2000). This was the seventh presidential race with no incumbent since the Second World War (the others were 1952, 1960, 1968, 1988, 2000, and 2008). The elections of 1960, 1968, and 2000 were closer races in terms of the popular vote, and even though Bush's father won fairly easily in 1988, he had trailed in the polls that year as well.

Finally, and perhaps most consequential for the outcome of the election, Clinton seemed to be at a strategic disadvantage as a result of having to run against Sanders in the primary and having both Gary Johnson and Jill Stein in the race during the fall campaign. Many Democrats who had strongly supported Sanders, especially younger voters, seemed to reluctantly embrace Clinton once she won the Democratic nomination. In the fall Johnson and Stein were polling as high as 8 and 4 percent, respectively, in some pre-election polls, which may indicate that voters were looking for candidates other than Clinton and Trump to support in the election. The fact that Johnson earned at least 2.4 percent of the vote in very close states like Pennsylvania and Michigan may have been just enough to shift the Electoral College vote in favor of Trump.