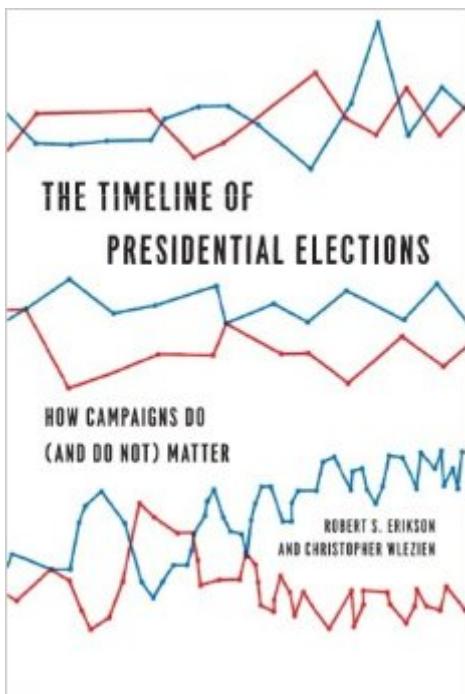


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The Timeline Of Presidential Elections: How Campaigns Do (and Do Not) Matter (Chicago Studies In American Politics)



Synopsis

InÂ presidential elections, do voters cast their ballots for the candidates whose platform and positions best match their own? Or is the race forÂ president of the United States come down largely to who runs the most effective campaign? Itâ ™s a question those who study elections have been considering for years with no clear resolution. In *The Timeline of Presidential Elections*, Robert S. Erikson and Christopher Wlezien reveal for the first time how both factors come into play.Â Erikson and Wlezien have amassed data from close to two thousand national polls covering every presidential election from 1952 to 2008, allowing them to see how outcomes take shape over the course of an election year. Polls from the beginning of the year, they show, have virtually no predictive power. By mid-April, when the candidates have been identified and matched in pollstersâ ™ trial heats, preferences have come into focusâ "and predicted the winner in eleven of the fifteen elections. But a similar process of forming favorites takes place in the last six months, during which votersâ ™ intentions change only gradually, with particular eventsâ "including presidential debatesâ "rarely resulting in dramatic change.Â Ultimately, Erikson and Wlezien show that it is through campaigns that voters are made aware ofâ "or not made aware ofâ "fundamental factors like candidatesâ ™ policy positions that determine which ticket will get their votes. In other words, fundamentals matter, but only because of campaigns. Timely and compelling, this book will force us to rethink our assumptions about presidential elections.

Book Information

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****edit*****Worth mentioning that the authors of this book correctly predicted the 2012 election outcome based upon their prediction model. So I want to reemphasize that, in terms of content quality and value, this book is really a must-read!****end*****First, this book is heavy. By that, I mean that stylistically it reads somewhat like a journal article and some chapters are dense with statistical analysis. But the information is invaluable for those who really want to understand what effects campaigns really have, whether debate performances have ever mattered (a particularly timely topic now), when polls are predictive and when they are not, and what really matters during election season. If the book takes an overly academic approach, it's because the authors felt that their sometimes counter-intuitive arguments required the weight of evidence behind them. And all of the findings in this book are based off of an enormous amount of research conducted over decades. Ultimately, it's a five star book that lost about half a star (shame you can't do half-stars here) just because the writing wasn't always as clear as it could have been. As I said before, it reads at times somewhat like an academic journal article - it communicates the research findings but doesn't always present them in as structured or clear a way as one might like. So that may disrupt the reading experience for some, getting in the way of the content - which is FANTASTIC. It's fascinating and extremely well-supported and researched. The authors are both brilliant political scientists who have been researching the subject matter for decades.

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