

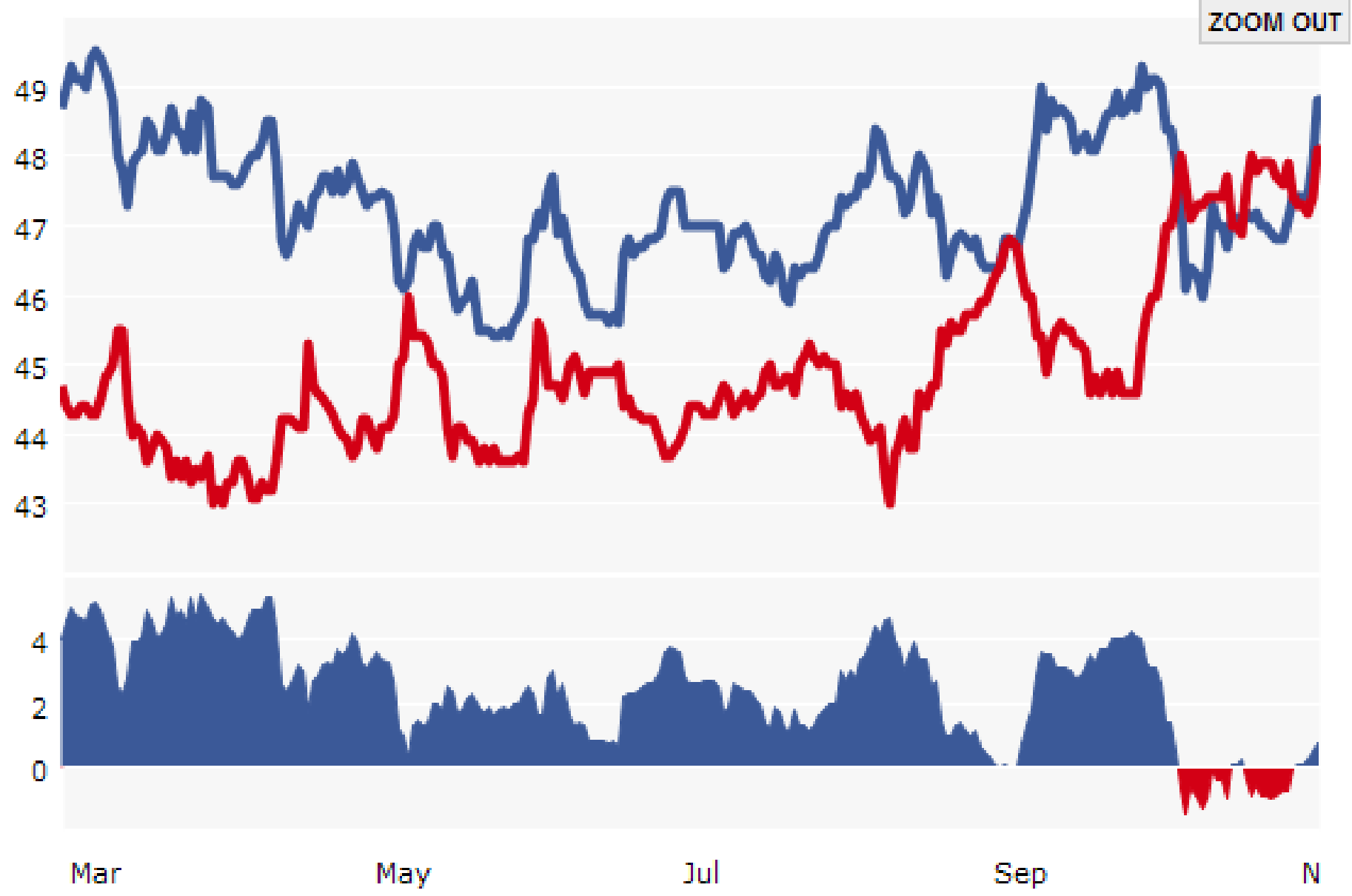
★ US ELECTIONS ★

THE GENERAL ELECTION

2012

General Election: Romney vs. Obama

48.8 Obama (D) +0.7
48.1 Romney (R)



THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN

Summer 2012

- much campaign activity, little poll movement
- = *dynamic equilibrium* with 1.5% Ob lead maintained May 1st to start of GOP Convention on August 27th

Key features of the Campaign

- **Economy** - Incumbents v hard to beat given modest econ growth or better
 - but summer of 2012 saw growth dropping from 2% to 1.3%, and unemployment ticking up in May to 8.2% - still higher than when Ob became President.
 - 52% of voters said Econ/jobs most imp issue – no other issue over 9%. Media also focused on it.
 - however, other econ measures, incl low inflation, better for Ob. – most forecasters models still saw him as the favourite

THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN

- **Partisanship** – in an increasingly partisan USA, Dems and Repubs quickly rally to their candidate, even if they didn't support them in the primaries
 - esp true of Romney; immediately after Santorum dropped out in April, polls found 90% of Republicans supported Romney vs Obama.
 - So polls likely to be v stable, only a small subset of voters really up for grabs.
- **Campaigns** – both focused on the economy, believing it was on their side – 82% of their ads referred to jobs.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=70tav9QveOM>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9Yqj3tvcQc> & <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yR6JM6eUOvw>
 - this is unusual, as usually one candidate will ben from economy, while the other tries to make other issues more signif
 - But diff emphases:
 - Ob emph jobs growth and recovery from deep Depr for which GOP/Bush was resp
 - Romney emph how bad things still were, Ob to blame, Romney would be able to create many more jobs, linking this to smaller govt. + Romney also emph dealing with the deficit more than Ob did.
 - Key advantages for Obama:
 - was that Bush still largely blamed for bad economy (51% blamed Bush, vs 43% blaming Ob in June 2012)
 - + poss undecided voters who blamed Ob didn't nec prefer Romney's ideas as an alternative: few understood his econ plan or felt he could make a diff compared to Ob
 - + many voters thought Romney didn't understand/care enough about ordinary folk (51% though Ob did, only 35% thought Romney did)

THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN

Gaffes

- lots of focus on candidates' alleged blunders in summer 2012
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ud3mMj0AZZk>
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GhL6eeeSMo>
- little evidence these changed the polls:
 - many citizens not even aware of them
 - and those who were often partisans who reacted in predictable ways
- + dynamic equilibrium – any effect of gaffes was cancelled out by embarrassments to the other candidate
 - e.g. – Obama's "private sector doing fine" (June) and "you didn't build that" (July)
 - Romney in Europe, over Olympics, Palestinians (July)

THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN

Obama's summer strategy

- Frontload ads, incl targeting Romney over Bain (closures, outsourcing, job losses) - define him negatively
 - built on Perry, Gingrich primary attacks, controversy over Romney's reluctance to release full tax returns going back several years
 - attack began in July, overall 1/4 of Ob's summer ads referred to Bain, (2/3 of Priorities' USA's ads)
- Ob had ad advantage through May, June and first half of July, after which Romney & SuperPAC allies gained lead through to end of August
- Overall Ob's Ad blitz appeared not to shift polls at all, and it didn't even seem to make people see Romney more negatively
 - largely due to dynamic equilibrium of evenly matched campaigns
 - plus studies find ads only shift opinions for v short periods (really only a day or so, effect wears off entirely after 5 days) – unless one side has big adv, not true in 2012 (but truer in 2008)

THE SUMMER CAMPAIGN

Romney's Vice-Presidential Pick - Paul Ryan

- shifted focus on to size of govt, deficit
 - polls suggested that this might be popular
 - but only in abstract – when voters asked about specific programmes they oppose cuts
 - and Ryan associated with Medicare cuts proposals. This cd potentially play into Ob hands, as Dems “own” these issues.
 - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b9XkVonSlxk>
 - Most voters didn't know who he was, as they found out, few became more favourable towards Romney campaign
 - but VP picks historically make little/no difference to the election result

THE GENERAL ELECTION

Larger shifts in polls in autumn campaign

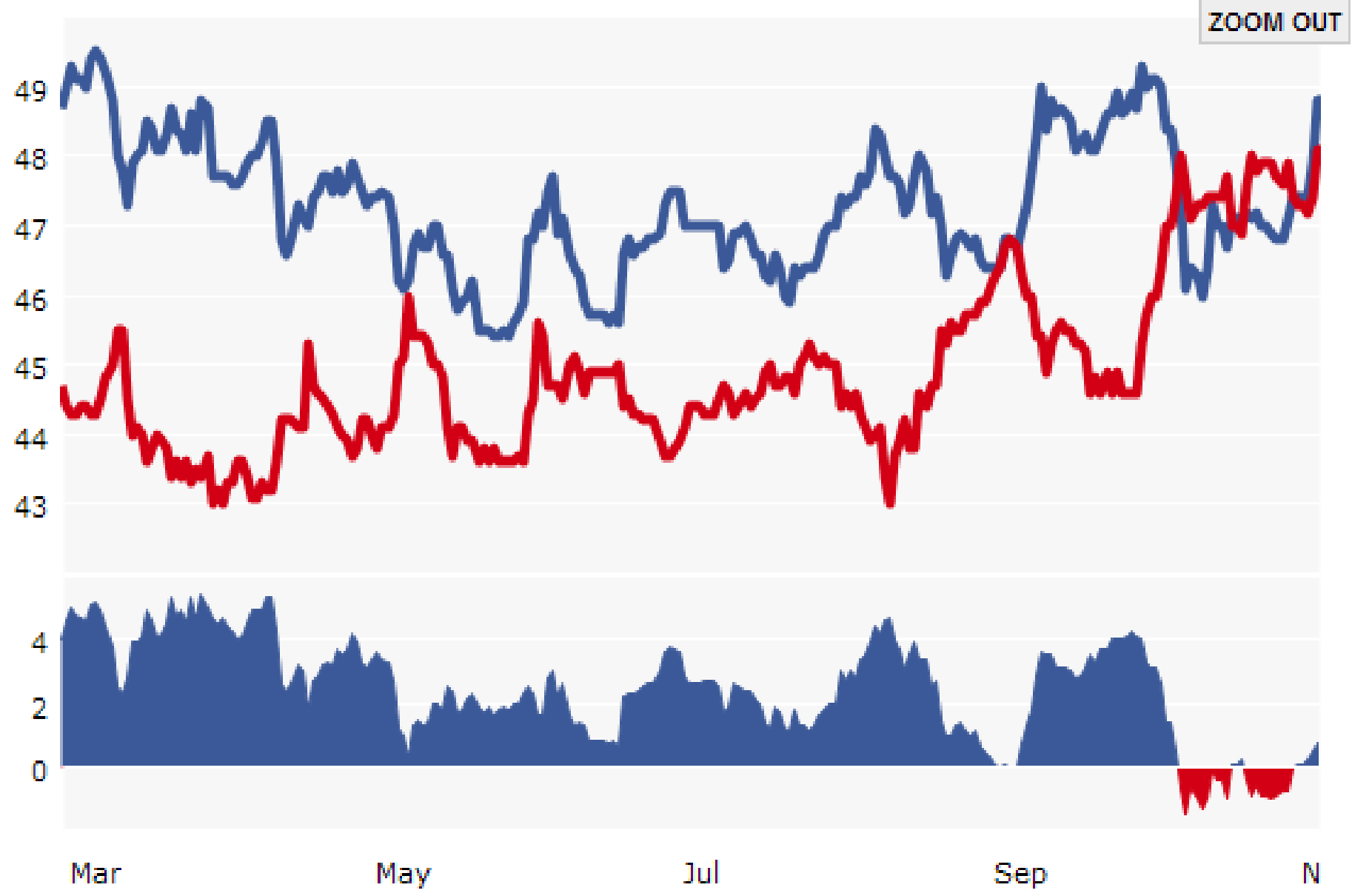
- but not nec due to events seized on by media – 47%, Benghazi, Hurricane Sandy - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-19631430>
 - Mostly devs cancel each other out – waverers might shift support from a candidate to “undecided”, but later devs often bring them back as partisans rallied around party nominee.
- Party Conventions key but debates also significant, although not lasting

Conventions -

- Usually lead to bounce of 5-6% for candidate
 - despite lack of drama/surprises – due to stage management for TV and positive coverage + lack of competition (temp media imbalance) from other party.
 - And unlike other events, conv effects tend to last in the polls until election day.
- Challenging candidate has 1st conv, often receives bigger bounce as less known to voters, also tends to “correct” race if polling out of line with fundamental factors (e.g. econ)
- But in 2012 Romney got no bump from conv, while Ob gained 3%
 - was this because DNC was better? – cd be (Ann vs Michelle, Bill vs Clint), ltd evidence.
 - May be just that they were unusually close together so any adv Romney got dissipated v quickly while Ob’s lasted. So in early Sept Ob moved from c1.5% lead to c4% lead.
 - Or any positive effect for Romney undermined by 47% video?

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THE GENERAL ELECTION

Debates

- Historically, ltd evidence that debates really affect the race – partisans tend to believe their candidate won.
 - 1960 and 2000 best e.g.s of where debates may have helped the challenger in v tight races, but both ambiguous
 - media reaction (e.g. Bush confounding expectations) may be more significant than the actual debate.
 - Overall, debates can shift polls slightly but seldom if ever prove decisive.
- Denver got 70M TV viewers – largest ever - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-19787806>
 - v substantive/wonky and on paper appears pretty even
 - but media decided Romney dominated & also hailed an new, more moderate stance, and even Dems conceded Ob had been poor.
 - Post debate polls said av 57%-24% Romney win, but the figures for two days later gave it more heavily to Romney (av 72% -20% so media reaction seem to have infl public).

THE GENERAL ELECTION

Debates cont.

- These perceptions reflected in overall polling, Ob dropping and Romney gaining to tie the race (=c4% overall) – some polls put Romney slightly ahead.
- Had Ob thrown the election away?
 - not necessarily – Romney’s gains largely came from undecided voters, apparently former Republ voters who had wavered after the 47% video and now came back. Ob lost some Dems to undecided.
 - And change also effected by polls weighting likelihood to vote – debate energised Republicans who reported higher likelihood now, while Dems dropped off a bit.
- But Romney gains unwound in later weeks
 - good Oct jobs report (unempl down to 7.8%) helped Ob
 - while Ob’s later debate performances were sharper, plus media keen to see him bounce back – so waverers returned and a small Ob lead re-established itself (<1%), with somewhat bigger leads in most battleground states.
- So debates overall fit historical pattern – did shift the polls, tightening them in Romney’s favour, but not proving decisive.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

- In **final three weeks**, many claims of Romney's momentum
 - but media creation + wishful thinking by Republicans who couldn't believe Americans might prefer Ob. and openly sceptical of the accuracy/bias of polls' consistent message.
 - Actually Ob increased his slight lead, and held on to his advantage in the battleground states.
- **Hurricane Sandy** appeared to dramatically intervene in the race
 - 131 deaths, billions in damage
 - it allowed Ob to look Presidential, including with Chris Christie
 - upset Romneys' closing campaign events (but only briefly).
 - Drew attention to Romney's little-noticed earlier policy of privatising disaster relief.
 - But no real effect in polls, even in hardest hit states of NY and NJ.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

The Ad Blitz

- a late ad blitz always part of Romney strategy, aware that ad effects are fleeting and a late surge might be most effective.
- Overall, Ob out-advertised Romney during campaign
 - but Dem groups (Priorities USA) greatly outgunned by SuperPACS supporting Romney.
 - Dems had an aggreg adv through summer (when Romney needing to raise more funds after heavy primary spending) and into mid-Oct
 - but GOP advertising advantage 22nd Oct to Election day – e.g. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VuAsh0G2Oqc>
- Had been Dem fears Ob wd be outspent by Romney + SuperPACS (Restore our Future, Crossroads, RNC), after the 2010 *Citizens United* Supr Ct decision - but
 - Ob able to raise huge amounts of money too – c\$1Bn by each side
 - SuperPACS hindered by not getting the same favourable ad rates the candidates receive.
 - Ob campaign use data to target niche markets better than Romney's, getting cheaper rates and more benefits from their ad spending
 - + Ob campaign bought ads further ahead, whereas Romney buys were more short-notice and so at higher cost.

THE GENERAL ELECTION

Ads continued

- Research shows that an *imbalance* in ads *does* affect support:
 - 5 ads per day advantage per head increased Romney's vote share by c4%
 - but effects v short-lived, really only signif for a day, gone after 5 days
 - and v hard in evenly matched campaign (cf greater disparities in 2008) for either side to get a lasting imbalance, even in particular key states/TV markets
 - even during Romney's last week ad blitz, he only had an advantage of 5 ads per day per head in 3% of TV-market days across the country.
 - Romney actually had an adv of 1 ad per head in only 25% of market days across the country that week.
 - Given the finite amount of TV ad space and continuing heavy ad spending by Obama, not enough scope for Romney to gain a signif advantage
- So although huge amounts spent on ads by both sides, they largely neutralised each other, with no adv gained either by Ob LT ad lead earlier in the campaign, or by Romney's late blitz.
- also noteworthy that early voting rules meant that c32% of votes had already been cast before the last week when Romney ad blitz began.

DECISION-MAKING IN 2012

When voters decided

- 69% of voters decided on a candidate before September. President Obama leads among this group by eight points, 53% to 45%.
 - Mitt Romney was unable to make up the gap because the president did progressively better among late-deciding voters.
- 9% of voters decided on a candidate in September - before the presidential debates, the final unemployment reports or Hurricane Sandy. Mitt Romney won among this group by eight points, 53% to 45%.
- 11% of voters decided whom to support in October. President Obama took this group by two points, 50% to 48%.
- 6% of voters made up their minds in the last few days, breaking 50%-44% for Obama - a six point margin.
- Finally 3% of the voters waited until Election Day before making up their minds. President Obama won this group by nine points, 52% to 43%.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

Different explanations of Obama's victory:

1. Fundamentals

- Economy
- Incumbent Advantage
- Partisanship
- Electoral College Bias

2. Obama's "Gifts" to key demographic groups

3. Romney too conservative

4. Romney not likeable enough – the “empathy” gap

5. Race and Religion

6. Obama's better campaign

1) Fundamentals

- Economy + partisanship + advs of an incumbent (perhaps worth 3%) + Electoral College bias to the Democrats
- all predictable from a year out.
- + both campaigns' focus on jobs/the economy and shortcomings of their rival raised salience of both issues for voters

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

1a) Fundamentals – The Economy

- slow but steady econ recovery, better than Carter and Bush Snr, but lower than most Pres incumbents who won re-election
- Polls v consistent for a year beforehand – c52% of decided voters for Obama
- But econ change cd have shifted this
 - another downturn in Romney's favour (as looked possible when unempl went up slightly in early summer)
 - faster growth/unempl drop in Ob's – (perhaps why he pulled away slightly in last few weeks of campaign?).
 - (however, such dramatic econ changes are uncommon in election years)

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

1b) Partisanship

- c80% of party supporters had chosen their candidate a year out, and remained loyal throughout campaign (see graphs).
- When devs led partisans to waver, they didn't switch to the rival candidate, but to undecided (or other). And later devs/campaign events brought waverers back
- Role of campaigns to reinforce this existing partisanship
 - poll evidence shows Dems “strongly favourable” view of Ob increasing from 60% to 68% over the year
 - while Dem “strongly unfavourable” views of Romney went from 39% to 66%.
 - Republican unfav views of Ob did stay steady at 78%, but “strongly fav” views of Romney went from 39% to 66% over the year.
 - Partisanship also served as a filter through which economic news was viewed.

From *The Gamble* by John Sides and Lynn Vavreck

The Stability of vote intentions December 2011 to November 2012

Of self-reported voters

Dec 2011 vote intention	December sample	Obama	Romney	Other
Obama	44%	95%	3%	2%
Romney	41%	5%	92%	3%
Other or undecided	15%	41%	40%	19%
Democrats	48%	89%	8%	3%
Republicans)	42%	7%	88%	4%
Independents (excl leaners)	10%	45%	42%	13%

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

Partisanship cont. - **Persuadable voters**

- 19% of those polled in Dec 2011 were undecided/other and potentially persuadable by the campaigns – but nearly half of these were not registered to vote.
- In the end, this group (15% of Nov 2012 voters) split v evenly (41% Ob, 40% Romney, 19% Other) – so they didn't “break for the challenger”.
- And Independents (10% of Nov electorate) broke 45%-42% for Obama
- In fact, most of these voters were “soft partisans” who predictably broke for the party they leaned too, their predisposition reinforced by the campaigns (71% of persuadable Dems broke for Ob, 69% of persuadable Republicans for Romney – but this group turned out at a higher rate, hence 41%-40% overall)
- One campaign effect was that in battleground states Obama did c4% better with persuadable voters, so campaign activity can have some difference – but not nec enough to be decisive.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

1c – Incumbency Advantage favoured Obama

- Rare for an incumbent not to win a 2nd term – only Ford, Carter, Bush Snr since 1932
- Voters risk-averse, stick with acceptable office-holder, stability – switching support away from the candidate you voted for 4 years previously is psychologically difficult.
- Incumbent Pres can stress experience, esp in foreign affairs, over untested opponent – did Romneys' gaffe-strewn European tour play into this factor?
- Value of “Rose Garden” status /elevated stature as national leader – compared to largely unknown challenger (N.B. unlike in Parl systems, no well-known leader of official Opposition to build up voter trust, offer an alt over several years – in USA most voters only learn about challenger in the months before Gen Election, though Romney familiar after 2008)
- Incumbents usually unopposed for renomination by party vs challengers who may be damaged by bitter primary fight (e.g. Romney “vulture capitalism” attacks by Gingrich and Perry)
- Incumbents also don't have to spend money on primaries, whereas challenger can have exhausted funding – this gave Obama an advantage in early summer 2012 while Romney had to raise fresh funds.
- 1st term incumbent has option of blaming predecessor for continuing problems, argue the job needs more time to be done – & many voters seemed still to blame Bush for bad economy in 2012.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

1d Electoral college advantage for Democrats

- In past 20 years, Elect Coll map has favoured Democrats, with most of the big population states safely blue in Presidential elections
 - esp California (55 out of the 539 electors, or out of the 270 needed to win the Presidency), New York (29) and Illinois (20)
 - Democrats also have a good number of safe medium-pop states (e.g. New Jersey – 14 votes, Massachusetts – 14, Washington – 12, Minnesota 10, Wisconsin – 10, Maryland -10)
 - While Republicans can only rely on Texas among the high population states (38 votes)
 - and although the GOP can count on Georgia – 16 votes, most other safe southern red states have fewer than 10 votes, and the big red block of 8 plains states (e.g. S Dakota, Montana, Nebraska) yields only 31 electoral college votes in total.
- This means most elections come down to Florida -29 votes, and the industrial Mid-West – Michigan -16, Ohio - 18, Pennsylvania - 20 – and most of these have leaned Democrat since 1992.
- So Obama had an easier route to victory than Romney, especially as formerly red Virginia -13 and North Carolina – 15 were now swing states which had voted for Obama in 2008, along with Indiana – 11 in the Mid-West.
- In the end Obama won 332 Electoral College votes, losing Indiana and N Carolina from his 2008 map – he could also have lost Florida, Virginia and Ohio to Romney and still been re-elected President.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

2) **Gifts** – to key groups – Romney expl post-election - e.g. auto bailout, Obamacare incl repro rts, residency for children of illegal immigrants, forgiving student debt

- Not v convincing expl. Comparing how demographic groups voted in 2008 and 2012 shows Ob lost a few % support with nearly all of them, quite evenly, so fundamentals esp econ appear much more important – Latinos (4% up) & Asian-Americans (11% up) the key exceptions.
- Analysis suggests auto bailout didn't help Ob in rustbelt, nor did “war on women” controversy appear to shift many votes (maybe some pro-choice *men* 1% towards Ob, but not women),
- With Latinos – did Romney repl them by running to Perry's right on immigration in the primaries? – or did Ob's gifts attract them? Evidence weak re gifts and on Romney specifically – but some suggestion Republican positions/failure to reach out may have alienated Latinos more broadly.
- *Obama Ad* – http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33NT0_MgsVU

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

3) **Romney too conservative** – forced to move too far to right in primaries, became unelectable.

- Actually Romney perceived as ideologically closer to average voter than Ob (52% to 38% just before Election Day).

4) **Romney not likeable enough** – empathy gap, vulture capitalism, tax issues, etc. –

- Romney viewed less favourably in August 2012 than Ob – and less favourably than any other nominee since 1984
- Ob campaign worked hard on this in early summer – was that critical? And should Romney campaign have done more to address empathy issues?
- Exit poll found 21% of voters selected “cares about me” as the most important from a list of character traits a Pres should have – and these voters broke for Obama 81% to 18% (but causation?)
- But Romney’s “favorability” polling narrowed the gap on Ob during October, apparently following his 1st debate performance – but this appears to be “soft” Republican supporters coming to like him more, no change among indeps. Romney still behind Ob on these measures on Election Day.
- Modelling suggests a more empathetic, favourably perceived Romney might have gained up to 1% on Obama – not enough to be decisive.
- This is consistent with previous election studies – Republican candidates tend to consistently viewed as less empathetic than Dems, but have managed to win anyway. Only in 2000 was candidate favourability a possibly decisive edge for Bush.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

5) Race & Religion

- was bias vs Afr-American less significant than anti-Mormon feeling?
 - Some evidence from both 2008 and 2012 that Ob lost up to 4% due to racial bias
 - V little evidence that anti-Mormon bias actually hurt Romney.
 - Although first election when black turnout % was higher than white

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

6) **Obama's great campaign** – strategy incl early ads – “air war”; and “ground game” - strong field operation, use of social media, etc. vs weaker Romney operation

- Ob ground game in 2008 and 2012 lauded as the best in American electoral history
- esp credited for sophisticated marriage of data analysis with grassroots activity
- Ob much better coverage of battleground states – 786 field offices vs 284 for Romney – and Ob's dedicated to his campaign, whereas Romney's were RNC offices supporting all Republican candidates
- Ob also opened field offices much earlier than Romney – indeed some never shut after 2008 campaign; 4 years spent studying/applying what had worked in 2008
- Ob aim to target key subsets of likely Dem voters and get them to the polls, (including in early voting) NOT to persuade Republicans or indeps to switch sides – so Ob offices in Dem-leaning places, Romney by contrast more likely to put offices in swing areas
- Swing *against* Ob 2008 to 2012 actually v even across the country, no diff in battleground states where he poured his resources – but turnout of Dem vote was affected, perhaps 250 000 higher overall as result of field operation in battleground states.
- In 2008, studies found that Ob's big field office advantage over a less organised & much worse funded McCain probably made difference in 3 swing states (NC, FL, IN)
- In 2012 only in FL might Ob's superior field operation have been the winning difference.

WHY DID OBAMA WIN?

CONCLUSION - Electioneering vs the Fundamentals –

- Campaigning not irrelevant, but most voters are partisans and not readily persuadable
- Ads can shift voter intention, but only if there is a substantial imbalance, and only in the very short term (essentially 1-2 days)
- Given Ob and Romney campaigns very evenly matched in funds, professionalism, they largely cancelled each other out, allowing the fundamentals to dictate the result.

– Overall, Obama *didn't win* because:

- He'd given “gifts” to key demographic groups
- Or because Romney was too conservative
- Or because Romney was a Mormon
- Or because Romney made some gaffes

none of these factors seems significant

– Obama *was* actively disadvantaged by his race

– But *not* disadvantaged in terms of money – no overall big ad imbalance in Romney's favour (despite predictions and Dem fears about SuperPAC dollars earlier in 2012)

– Obama gained somewhat because:

- He was perceived more favourably than Romney (maybe gaffes reinforced this factor?)
- And he had a better ground game
- Electoral College geography favours Democrats at present – popular vote could have been a tie and Ob would still have been re-elected.

but these factors not decisive in the end

– Obama essentially won because the environment favoured him:

- Econ growing slowly, but enough to fit a strong hist pattern predicting victory for incumbent
- Campaigns both focused on econ/jobs – reinforcing salience of issue that favoured Obama
- And high partisanship meant v few persuadable voters for Romney to swing to his side – campaigns really about rallying partisans and bringing back waverers.

TURNOUT 2012

- **Voting Age Population turnout = 53.6%, down from 56.9% in 2008**
- Voting Eligible Pop turnout = 58.2%, down from 61.6% in 2008
 - See http://elections.gmu.edu/voter_turnout.htm for data and analysis
- Turnout issues - <http://nbcpolitics.nbcnews.com/news/2012/11/09/15054671-turnout-down-from-2008-too-soon-to-tell?lite>
- <http://www.wptv.com/dpp/news/political/popular-vote-election-results-2012-voter-turnout-lower-than-2008-and-2004-report-says> - includes some states' data
- Analysis of demographic groups - http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/elections/how_groups_voted/voted_08.html
- Black turnout - <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/11/09/opinion/martin-black-vote/index.html>
- Tech issues - <http://www.theatlantic.com/technology/print/2012/11/when-the-nerds-go-marching-in/265325/>