

BUCKEYE
BATTLEGROUND

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BUCKEYE BATTLEGROUND

*Ohio, Campaigns, and Elections
in the Twenty-First Century*

DANIEL J. COFFEY,
JOHN C. GREEN,
DAVID B. COHEN, AND
STEPHEN C. BROOKS



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PREFACE

AS POLITICAL SCIENTISTS LIVING IN THE quintessential battleground state in American politics, we are frequently called on to comment on elections and politics in the Buckeye State. While there are many excellent sources for citizens and journalists on Ohio politics and history, we felt that a systematic analysis of voting patterns and public opinion was missing, especially an accessible analysis of individual, regional, and county voting patterns. In this analysis, we have strived to be as empirical as possible. At times, our focus on data analysis led us to confirm what many readers may already know about their state and what many citizens understand about the forces that drive election results in the United States generally. In other cases, however, our research led us to surprising findings that may provide readers with a better understanding of the diversity that makes the “Buckeye battleground” so competitive and such a good bellwether for the nation as a whole.

The research that produced this book represents an effort by the entire Bliss Institute at the University of Akron. In fact, we collected enough material to write two books. Some of this work was part of a national research project directed by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University; another source of research was the Akron Buckeye polls, supported by the University of Akron. In addition, many of the students in the Bliss Institute’s applied politics degree program work for national, state, and local campaigns while enrolled at the University of Akron. They provided us with tremendous insight into campaigns

and strategies and often were the genesis for the many ideas that were explored in our analysis.

Thus this book is the product of a collective effort. Some individuals deserve special thanks. Diana Kingsbury devoted most of 2008 and 2009 to piecing together the manuscript, tracking down data and sources, and ironing out wrinkles that had arisen over multiple accumulated drafts. Diana and Anne Hanson played an important similar role in data collection for the 2004, 2006, and 2008 elections. Our many research assistants provided enormous help, including Heidi Swindell, Zach Vierheller, Josh Peterson, Angela Ryan, Brent Lauer, Derek Feuerstein, and Will Miller. David Huskins prepared the maps that appear in the text, while Michelle Henry and Amanda Barna conducted the Akron Buckeye polls, in part through the Center for Marketing and Opinion Research. Daniel Coffey would like to thank the students enrolled in the Ohio Politics Seminar in the summers of 2008 and 2009 for their reactions and helpful feedback to early versions of the manuscript. We would like to thank Janet Lykes Bolois for reviewing and preparing the final version of the text.

Finally, we also want to thank the team at the University of Akron Press for having such unbelievable patience. We owe a debt of thanks to Tom Bacher, Amy Freels, Julie Gammon, Elton Glaser, and Carol Slatter. We also would be remiss if we did not acknowledge the support of our families, principally Mary Coffey, Lynn Green, Dawn Cohen, and Mary Brooks. Without their unwavering support and encouragement, *Buckeye Battleground* would not have been possible.

CHAPTER 1

Buckeye Battleground

AS MIDNIGHT APPROACHED ON NOVEMBER 7, 2004, Americans held their breath: the outcome of the presidential election hung on a handful of states, the largest of which was Ohio. If the Buckeye State went for Republican George W. Bush, he would have a majority of the Electoral College, which would assure him a second term as president. But if Ohioans chose Democrat John F. Kerry, then a new occupant of the White House would be all but certain.

In the early hours of the next morning, Americans started to breathe again—some with sighs of relief and others with gasps of indignation—as it became likely that Ohio would go for Bush. The closeness of the vote delayed Kerry’s concession for a few hours and spawned elaborate conspiracy theories about a “stolen” election. An eventual recount confirmed that Republicans had won Ohio by a very close margin, about 51 percent of the two-party vote, a figure that closely matched Bush’s national popular vote percentage. This was a fitting end for the hard-fought 2004 campaign.

Four years later, Ohio was once again a crucial state, but with opposite results: Barack Obama won the state en route to his historic election as the first African American president. Unlike 2004, Ohio did not play a pivotal role in the Electoral College because Obama won more states than Bush had. However, Obama prevailed by a close margin as well, about 52 percent of the two-party vote, a

figure also close to Obama's share of the popular vote nationally. By winning Ohio, Obama made it virtually impossible for Republican John McCain to prevail in the Electoral College. As it had four years earlier, the state witnessed a hard-fought campaign.

The 2008 Democratic victory in Ohio extended beyond the presidency to three congressional races, building on the Democratic wins in 2006, when the party captured a U.S. Senate and a congressional seat, plus the governorship and all but one of the other statewide offices. In some respects, the "perfect storm" in 2006 was about state and local concerns, but in other respects it reflected the national factors that allowed the Democratic Party to take control of both houses of Congress after twelve years of Republican rule and also ended sixteen years of Republican control of state government.

The Democratic successes of 2006 and 2008 were short-lived. In 2010, the Republicans swept to victory in Ohio, electing a U.S. senator and picking up five congressional seats as well as capturing the governorship and all the other statewide offices. These results reflect in part the broader Republican "wave" associated with a weak economy and other national factors. While the durability of the 2010 results is far from clear, the 2012 presidential election is likely to be as hard fought as the 2004 and 2008 campaigns in the Buckeye State.

The election results from 2004 to 2010 were hardly novel, however, because the Buckeye State has long been at the center of national electoral politics. Ohio is perennially listed as a key *battleground* state, the target of intense campaign activities by presidential candidates, national party organizations, and their interest group allies.¹ From the 1840 campaign of "Tippecanoe and Tyler too" to William McKinley's 1896 front porch campaign and Harry Truman's come-from-behind campaign in 1948, the Buckeye State routinely witnessed hard-fought elections throughout American history. Few candidates have reached the White House without prevailing in the Buckeye battleground.

One reason for this campaign attention is that Ohio is a highly *competitive* state at the ballot box, routinely producing closer races than other large states that dominate the Electoral College and membership of Congress. So Ohio was—and still is—a prize worth fighting for in national elections. Another reason is that Ohio is a good *bellwether* state, predicting the winning candidates and parties more often than other large states. When the nation is divided politically, so is Ohio, and when the nation is united, the Buckeye State follows suit.

Not surprisingly, these three characteristics are closely related and often hard to disentangle in any particular contest. After all, a state may attract campaign attention because it is competitive, but it may also be competitive because it attracts campaign attention. Here history is helpful: the Buckeye State's economic and social diversity typically predate the intense interest of particular campaigners. So there is good reason to believe that over the long term, the state's competitive and bellwether character made it a campaign battleground and not the other way around.

In fact, Ohio's role in national politics has changed over time. From the late nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Ohio played a central role in national elections, claiming eight presidents as "native sons," more than any other state. But by the twenty-first century, Ohio had become a key swing state in national campaigns, a fulcrum on which control of the federal government rested for both major political parties. This shift in role is rooted in economic and social changes that reduced the relative size of Ohio's population compared to the nation as a whole (a pattern continued with the 2010 census). Put bluntly, Ohio's "clout" in national elections has declined over the previous century, and if this trend continues long enough, the state's political significance will be reduced. However, these same economic and social changes have maintained Ohio's competitive and bellwether character compared to other large states, so that its diminished votes cannot be taken for granted by

either party. Thus there are good reasons to expect that the Buckeye battleground will continue to be significant in the near future.

This book is about contemporary elections in Ohio, focusing on recent presidential voting behavior and illustrating the key characteristics of the Buckeye battleground. A good place to begin is by putting Ohio's electoral politics in historical and geographic context. This task can be accomplished with a thumbnail sketch of the state's political history and then a brief review of political geography, comparing Ohio to other states and the nation as a whole in recent and past elections.

OHIO'S POLITICAL HISTORY

Ohio was admitted to the Union on February 19, 1803, as the seventeenth state and the first state carved out of the Northwest Territory. Its political history can be usefully divided into four fifty-year periods: the *foundation era*, 1803–53; the *Civil War era*, 1853–1903; the *industrial era*, 1903–53; and the *postindustrial era*, 1953–2003.² These categories imply a fifth *contemporary era* (beginning in 2003), which will be the primary focus of most of the rest of this book. Of course, it is far too early to determine the political characteristics of this new era, especially four decades into the future.

Although crude, the four historical periods cover major developments that influence Ohio elections in the contemporary era. Here a geological metaphor is useful, with each of the four previous eras representing a layer of political “sediment” on which subsequent developments rest. Much as layers of sediment eventually harden into layers of rock, time has solidified the earlier political developments in the state. The more distant political developments serve as the “bedrock” of Buckeye politics, having important but less direct influence on present-day elections. Meanwhile, the more recent developments are less solid but more directly relevant to contemporary and future elections.

The Foundation Era, 1803–53

The Democratic Party of Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson dominated Ohio elections in the two decades after statehood in 1803, reflecting in part the diverse areas of settlement that were combined to form the new state of Ohio. These areas formed the basis for the state's distinctive political regions and their diverse politics. By the 1820s, organized party opposition had developed, first in the form of a faction within the Democratic Party and then in the form of the new Whig Party. The basic structure of American mass-based electioneering was developing at this time, and one consequence was two decades of close two-party competition in Ohio—the foundation of today's Buckeye battleground. The Whigs eventually gained a brief advantage in this competition. In 1840, the first of Ohio's native son presidents, William Henry Harrison, was also the first Whig elected to the White House. In addition, the Whigs won five Buckeye gubernatorial campaigns between 1836 and 1850. However, the debate over slavery soon destroyed the Whig Party, and its last Ohio campaign was in 1853.

These political shifts reflected the initial development of the state. After statehood, Ohio became the “gateway to the West” and its settlement accelerated. Water transport on the Ohio River and Lake Erie was critical to this development, and these waterways were connected by canals between 1817 and 1845. In addition, the National Road was completed across the middle part of Ohio by 1840. As a consequence, the Ohio population soared. In the 1810 census, Ohio had less than a quarter million people, ranking thirteenth among the states, but by the 1850 census it had nearly two million people and ranked third in the nation.

In 1850, nearly nine of every ten Ohioans lived in rural areas, and agriculture was the most important economic activity, supplemented by food processing and a few nascent industries. Cincinnati was the largest city in the state, serving as the principal entry point for migration via the Ohio River. Most of the original migrants were

from the British Isles, including English, Scots, Irish, and Welsh, but after 1820, other northern European groups arrived in large numbers, especially Germans. This ethnic diversity brought with it religious diversity, principally various kinds of Protestantism, a pattern reinforced by the Second Great Awakening, a series of religious revivals in the 1820s and 1830s.

The political sediments of the foundation era set the basic patterns of electoral competition in Ohio, including the state's five political regions and internal diversity, which are significant factors in the contemporary Buckeye battleground.

The Civil War Era, 1853–1903

Ohio was at the center of the debate over slavery that ultimately led to the Civil War. The Buckeye State hosted many stops on the Underground Railroad for fugitive slaves and produced prominent abolitionists, including John Brown. One important result of the slavery debate was the creation of the Ohio Republican Party in 1854. Drawing support from abolitionists and former Whigs, the first Republican governor of Ohio was elected in 1855, and in 1856, Ohio voted for the first Republican presidential candidate, John C. Fremont.

Ohioans then voted Republican in the next thirteen presidential elections in a row, beginning with Abraham Lincoln in 1860. During this period, five of the state's native sons served in the White House, all Republicans: Ulysses S. Grant (elected 1868 and 1872), Rutherford B. Hayes (1876), James A. Garfield (1880), Benjamin Harrison (1888, the son of William Henry Harrison), and William McKinley (1896 and 1900). In addition, the Grand Old Party won eighteen Ohio gubernatorial elections (and three more if the "Unionist Party" governors from 1861 to 1865 are counted with the GOP). Strong grassroots party organizations came to dominate campaigns in this era.

This Republican strength also reflected Ohio's heavy engagement in the war to preserve the Union. Many of the leading

Northern generals came from Ohio, including Generals Ulysses S. Grant, William Sherman, and William Sheridan. A total of 340,000 Ohioans served in the Union armies, suffering nearly 25,000 deaths from various causes. In the following generation, the Civil War was the touchstone of Ohio politics, typically to the benefit of Republicans and the detriment of Democrats.

These political patterns also reflect economic and social developments in the state. By the 1850s, “railway fever” was rampant in Ohio, and by 1860, the state had nearly three thousand miles of track, the most of any state. The Civil War encouraged industrialization and a rapid pace of technological innovation, exemplified by Thomas A. Edison and the Wright brothers. Ohio joined in the expansion of nearly all of the country’s major industries and participated in the growth of large economic enterprises, typified by the career of Cleveland’s John D. Rockefeller.

All these changes encouraged the development of Ohio’s cities and the regions that they served. Initially, this growth occurred across the state, with many urban centers drawing migrants from the surrounding rural areas. The urban populace increased from about one-quarter of the state’s population in 1870 to a little less than one-half by 1900. The rural-urban migration was accompanied by a high level of immigration from a wide range of European nations, including significant Catholic and Jewish populations. By 1900, Ohio’s more than four million people were fast becoming representative of the nation as a whole.

The political sediments of the Civil War era include the development of the Republican Party and the state’s many cities, important features of the contemporary Buckeye battleground.

The Industrial Era, 1903–53

At the time of Ohio’s centennial in 1903, the Progressive movement was becoming an important force in Ohio and national politics. Its initial electoral impact came within the GOP, where President Theodore Roosevelt sought to regulate large business enterprises

under the rubric of “trust busting.” This controversy culminated in the fractious 1912 election, when Roosevelt returned to the ballot on the Progressive Party (Bull Moose) ticket, splitting the Republican vote and helping to put Democrat Woodrow Wilson in the White House (Wilson won Ohio and reelection outright in 1916). Major political reforms were also introduced at this time, including the direct election of U.S. senators and primary elections for party nominations.

But to some observers in the Buckeye State, Wilson’s election might have seemed like a political fluke caused by Republican divisions. For one thing, an Ohio native son won the White House before (Republican William Howard Taft in 1908) and after (Republican Warren G. Harding in 1920). But profound political changes were on the way: in 1932 the Great Depression swept the Democrats into power under the leadership of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt was reelected in 1936, 1940, and 1944, and his successor, Harry Truman, was elected in 1948. Ohio was part of Roosevelt’s New Deal Electoral College coalition in all these years except 1944 (when the Republican vice-presidential nominee was Ohio governor John Bricker). As a consequence of these changes, Ohio Democrats won seventeen gubernatorial contests in the industrial era. Ohio’s party organizations expanded to accommodate new constituencies, among the most important of which was organized labor, especially the new industrial unions. Unions altered the political landscape in Ohio, bringing a new source of campaign resources and votes, largely for Democrats.

Major economic and social changes were behind the Democratic success in Ohio. The primary source was the growth of manufacturing, especially of vehicles and durable consumer goods produced in large plants owned by large corporations, and eventually strong labor unions. A correlate of the manufacturing surge was a rapid growth in the population. In the 1910 census, Ohio’s population was approaching five million people, and in the 1950 census, it had almost eight million people. For the first time, in 1910, a majority

of Ohioans lived in cities, and by 1950, seven of every ten were city dwellers. Cleveland began this era as the largest Ohio city, and it would reach its high point around 1950 with over nine hundred thousand people, larger than Cincinnati and Columbus combined. Other industrial cities also experienced rapid growth, including Cincinnati, Toledo, Akron, Dayton, Youngstown, and Canton.

Some of this growth came from continued European immigration and movement of rural Ohioans to the cities. Gains also came from internal migration, especially the movement of southerners to work in the Ohio factories during the two world wars. The southern migrants expanded the presence of Evangelical Protestantism and enlarged the African American population in the state. By 1950, Ohio was becoming a microcosm of the nation as a whole.

The political sediments of the industrial era include the modern Democratic Party and Ohio's eight large industrial cities, also important features of the contemporary Buckeye battleground.

The Postindustrial Era, 1953–2003

In 1953, the first Republican president in almost a quarter century, Dwight D. Eisenhower, took the oath of office. Eisenhower had defeated Robert A. Taft (the son of President Taft and the last serious prospect for a GOP native son president from Ohio) for the nomination and then carried the Buckeye State. In this era, the Republicans recovered their modest advantage in the Buckeye battleground, winning eight presidential and nine gubernatorial elections.

Beginning in the 1950s, elections were increasingly characterized by “candidate-centered” campaigns—organized and led by the candidates themselves—rather than the party-centered campaigns of the past. This trend was encouraged by innovations in communication technology, such as television. One result was the dominance of larger-than-life politicians such as Republican James Rhodes, who served a record of four four-year terms as Ohio governor, and

Democrat Vernal Riffe, who served a record ten consecutive terms as speaker of the Ohio state legislature. Another result was that the Buckeye battleground became more complex.

The politics of this era reflects the decline of the manufacturing sector. Technological innovation and global competition undermined the factory system of the industrial era, with parts of the state joining the Rust Belt. During the postindustrial era, unlike the previous eras, the national centers of economic innovation, such as petrochemicals and computers, were largely located outside of Ohio. At the same time, new trends in immigration, including Latino immigration, largely bypassed Ohio, and the state began to experience net out-migration of population. As a consequence, Ohio's population grew at a much slower pace than the rest of the country. Although Ohio's population exceeded eleven million people in the 2000 census, it ranked seventh among the states compared to fifth in 1950.

After 1970, all of Ohio's major cities lost population except for the state capital, Columbus, which became the largest Ohio city with more than six hundred thousand people. The growth of the Columbus area illustrated a trend from urban to suburban residence and the creation of large metropolitan areas. Fueled by the private automobile, the industrial cities steadily lost population to their less densely populated hinterlands, ironically repopulating nearby rural areas with "suburbs" and far flung "exurbs." A significant component of this shift was the expansion of knowledge workers, highly educated providers of professional services (such as lawyers, computer programmers, scientists, teachers, and social workers), heavily concentrated in the public and nonprofit sectors. These changes brought new kinds of political conflict to Ohio politics, including disputes over cultural and moral values. However, these developments allowed Ohio to remain a fairly accurate microcosm of the country when it marked its bicentennial in 2003.

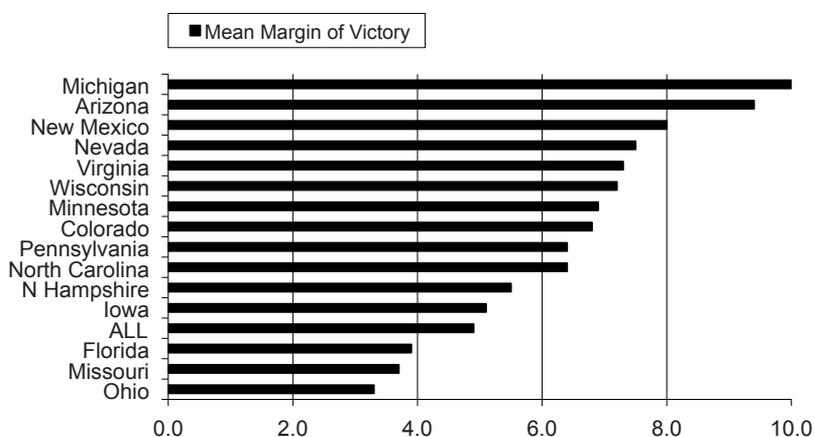
The political sediment of the postindustrial era is still relatively unsettled, with its trends leaving Ohio (and the nation) sharply

divided politically. Thus the contemporary era began with a new set of factors at work in the Buckeye battleground.

POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY: COMPARING OHIO AND OTHER STATES

How does Ohio compare to other states in terms of voting behavior? In the contemporary era, Ohio is among the most competitive and best bellwether states. Figure 1.1 illustrates this pattern by reporting the fifteen most competitive states, measured by the mean margin of victory in the 2004 and 2008 presidential elections (that is, the difference between the major party winner and loser). All these states showed an average margin of victory of 10 percentage points or less in the elections won by Republican George W. Bush and Democrat Barack Obama, with the states listed in declining order from the largest to smallest margin. Most analysts would agree that a victory of 10 percentage points or less constitutes a competitive election.

Figure 1.1. Presidential margin of victory, 2004 and 2008

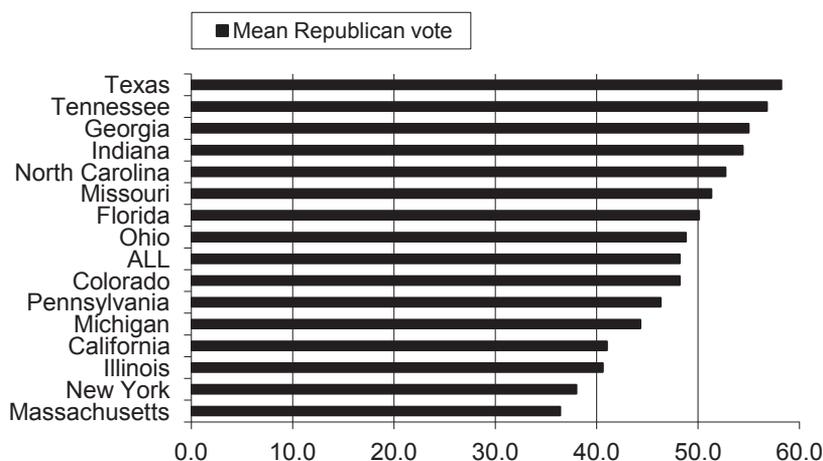


The first thing to note in figure 1.1 is the position of Ohio at the bottom of the list of states, with the average margin of victory being the smallest across these two close elections (3.3 percentage points). In fact, Ohio is lower than the average for the nation as a whole in these elections (4.9 percentage points). By this measure, the Buckeye State is one of the most competitive states in contemporary presidential elections and especially among large states (Ohio had 20 electoral votes in these elections). Other competitive states include Missouri (3.7 percentage points) and Florida (3.9 percentage points). Florida is also a large state (with 27 electoral votes), but note that the other large states in figure 1.1, such as Pennsylvania (21 electoral votes) and Michigan (17 electoral votes), were much less competitive. The remaining states on this list had markedly fewer electoral votes.

So the Buckeye battleground was highly competitive in the contemporary era, with only two large states, Florida and Pennsylvania, coming close. But what about the partisan results of these elections? Figure 1.2 reports the mean Republican presidential vote in 2004 and 2008 for fifteen states that cover the range of results, listed in declining order. The most Republican state was Texas (an average of 58.2 percent) and the least Republican state was Massachusetts (36.4 percent).

Ohio is found right in the middle of figure 1.2 (with an average of 48.8 percent Republican), almost identical to the national average (48.2 percent). The most accurate state in the elections was actually Colorado, matching the national figure exactly. But note that the Buckeye State is the closest to the national average among the large states—with New York (38 percent Republican and 31 electoral votes), Illinois (40.6 percent and 20 electoral votes), California (41.0 percent and 55 electoral votes), Michigan (44.3 percent and 17 electoral votes) and Pennsylvania (46.3 percent and 21 electoral votes) being less Republican, and Florida (50.1 percent Republican and 27 electoral votes) and Texas (58.2 percent

Figure 1.2. Republican presidential vote, 2004 and 2008

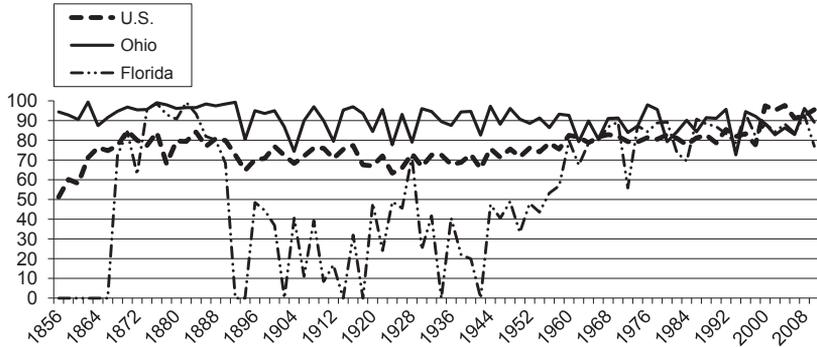


and 34 electoral votes) being more Republican than the nation as a whole.

So the Buckeye battleground was a good bellwether of presidential elections in the contemporary era, with only two other large states, Florida and Pennsylvania, coming close. Of course, no state is a perfect bellwether of elections all the time, given the many factors that influence actual presidential ballots.³ In this regard, Ohio has its own political bias: the Buckeye State has leaned slightly Republican since the Civil War era, a point that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (and which explains why the figures in this chapter report the Republican vote for various offices).

Taken together, the state patterns in figures 1.1 and 1.2 help explain why Ohio has been a battleground state in contemporary presidential elections. Of the three largest states, California and New York are reliably Democratic (along with most of the other New England and mid-Atlantic states), while Texas is reliably Republican (along with most of the other southern and plains states). This partisan division leaves a handful of states that are actually

Figure 1.3. Composite index of electoral competition, 1856–2010



competitive, and it makes sense for Republicans and Democrats alike to target such states for intense campaign activity. Ohio is at the top of such a list, along with Florida and Pennsylvania, because of its large size, high competitiveness, and even partisan division.

If Ohio is a highly competitive state in the contemporary era, what about the past? Figure 1.3 plots a composite score of electoral competitiveness of the nation as a whole (dashed line) and Ohio (solid line) for elections from 1856 to 2010; Florida also is included to provide a basis of comparison (dotted and dashed line). The index presented includes the two-party vote for president, congress member, senator, and governor. A score of 100 would be a perfectly competitive election and a score of 0 would be a completely uncompetitive one.⁴

Figure 1.3 shows that Ohio has been a highly competitive state for a long time, typically scoring well above the nation as a whole and falling below the national figure on only a handful of occasions. Note the striking difference between Ohio and Florida: until the 1960s, Florida elections were typically much less competitive than Ohio elections, only matching the Buckeye State in recent times.

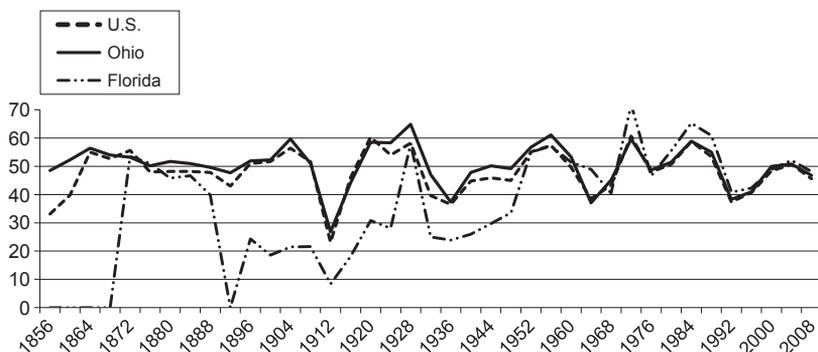
The average competitiveness index for Ohio over the entire period was 90.7 (out of 100), while the mean index was 76.6 for the

country as a whole and 53.9 for Florida. In the Civil War era, Ohio's average competitiveness score was 94.5, declining slightly in the industrial and postindustrial eras to 89.9 and 88.3, respectively, but still tending to exceed Florida and the nation as a whole. Interestingly, in the contemporary era the nation as a whole was a bit more competitive (94.2) than either Ohio (88.6) or Florida (85.3) due to offices below the presidency included in the index. (The state was also quite competitive in the foundation era, but incomplete election records make a direct comparison difficult.)⁵ So competition is not a new characteristic of the Buckeye battleground. Indeed, the biggest change has been the steady increase in competitive elections elsewhere in the country (such as in Florida).

Has Ohio been a good bellwether state historically? This question can be addressed by looking at the votes for the major offices included in the competitiveness index (president, congress member, senator, and governor).⁶ Figure 1.4 plots the percent of the total presidential vote cast for Republican candidates nationally (dashed line) and Ohio (solid line) from 1856 to 2008 (minor party ballots are included in the calculation). As before, Florida is included for purposes of comparison (dotted and dashed line).

This figure reveals the modest partisan bias of Ohio alluded to before: the Buckeye battleground has tended to tilt slightly toward

Figure 1.4. Republican percentage of Ohio and national presidential vote, 1856–2008



the Republicans over this period of history. For example, since 1856 the Buckeye State has on average voted 50.5 percent Republican in presidential elections compared to 48.0 percent for the nation as a whole, a modest advantage of 2.5 percentage points.⁷ Overall, Florida has been much less Republican, at 35.6 percent.

However, this modest Republican advantage at the polls has declined over time: the average GOP presidential vote was 51.6 percent in the Civil War era (for a 3.8 percentage point advantage); 50.1 percent in the industrial era (a 2.7 percentage point advantage); and an even 50.0 percent in the postindustrial era (a 1.0 percentage point advantage). (The Ohio presidential vote was closely associated with the national vote in the foundation era as well.) Thus, Ohio became more evenly divided in the partisanship of its vote even as it lost population and electoral votes. Indeed, Florida had become more Republican than Ohio by the postindustrial era (52.5 percent).

From this perspective, George W. Bush's 50.8 percent in 2004 was a little lower than the performance of previous Republican presidential candidates in the Buckeye battleground but a bit above the average for the postindustrial era. Meanwhile, John McCain's 46.8 percent in 2008 was far below the historical performance of his party. However, both of these figures closely resemble the national vote in 2004 and 2008, respectively.

Taken as a whole, figure 1.4 reveals a striking similarity between the yearly patterns of the Ohio and national presidential vote. Indeed, the largest differential is in 1856, with the very first Republican presidential candidate. The GOP bias of the Buckeye battleground can be seen in the slightly higher GOP vote in good Republican years (such as 1904, 1928, 1956, and 1984) than the national vote—but also in good Democratic years (such as 1912, 1936, 1964, 1992, and 2008).

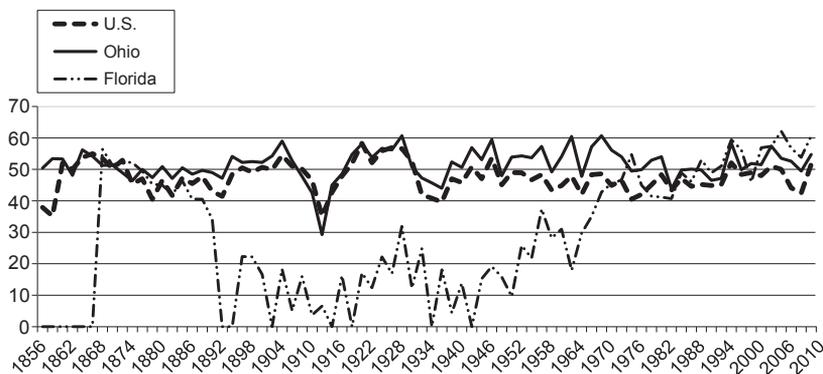
Despite these impressive patterns, Ohio has not always voted for the eventual winner of the Electoral College. In the foundation era, the state backed losing candidates four times (1824, 1836,

1844, and 1848), all in elections that involved the vicissitudes of the Whig Party or predecessor factions.⁸ In this regard, Ohio performed only slightly better in the Civil War era, failing to back the national winner three times (1856, 1884, and 1892). The situation improved in the twentieth century, with the Buckeye State missing just once in the industrial (1944) and postindustrial (1960) eras. However, the state has been perfect in the contemporary era. Thus, Ohio has become a more accurate presidential bellwether over the course of its history.

However, Ohio’s record is perfect when it comes to electing *Republican* presidents: no Republican has ever reached the White House without carrying the Buckeye State. In fact, in all five cases since 1856 when Ohio failed to vote for the presidential winner it was because of Republican victories in the state in the face of Democratic victories at the national level.

What about the vote for the U.S. House of Representatives? Figure 1.5 plots the Ohio and national Republican congressional vote from 1856 to 2006. In these elections, Ohioans voted 51.6 percent Republican compared to the national congressional vote of 47.5 percent. So the Buckeye State was a bit more Republican in congressional elections than in presidential contests (4.1 percentage

Figure 1.5. Republican percentage of Ohio and national congressional vote, 1856–2006



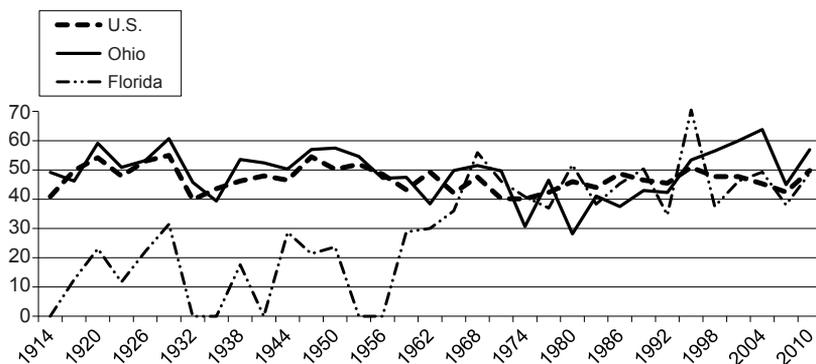
points compared to 2.5 percentage points in presidential elections). Overall, the Florida congressional vote was less associated with the national congressional vote than for the presidential vote. However, the Sunshine State came to resemble Ohio in this regard during the postindustrial and contemporary eras.

The small Republican advantage in the Ohio congressional vote increased from the Civil War era (50.8 percent) to the industrial era (51.3 percent) to the postindustrial era (52.4 percent). (Although the records of the House vote in the foundation era are incomplete, the Ohio congressional vote was also associated with the national congressional vote.) From this perspective, the GOP congressional vote of 54.7 percent in 2010 was above the historical norm, while the 49.5 percent in 2008 was below it. Note that the patterns in figure 1.5 resemble the patterns in figure 1.4 for the presidential vote.

Unlike the Electoral College, the Buckeye battleground is not a particularly good bellwether for party control of the House of Representatives. Overall, Ohio picked the party that won control of the House just two-thirds of the time since 1856, failing to do so in twenty-six contests. And Ohio has become less of a congressional bellwether over the course of its history: it missed three times in the Civil War era, seven times in the industrial era, and fifteen times in the postindustrial era. Of particular note is the period from 1954 to 1982 when the GOP held a majority of the Buckeye State congressional delegation while the Democrats controlled the Congress. One reason for these patterns is the gerrymandering of congressional districts. Such gerrymandering has been used to good effect by both major parties when they controlled Ohio state government. It helped the Republicans after the 1990 and 2000 censuses, and it will surely benefit the GOP again after the 2010 census.

Figure 1.6 plots the Republican ballots in U.S. Senate races. This series reflects the fact that senators were not elected by popular vote until 1912 and that 1914 was the first such election in Ohio. There was somewhat more variation in the Ohio senate vote when compared to the national senatorial vote. Republican senatorial

Figure 1.6. Republican percentage of Ohio and national senatorial vote, 1914–2010



candidates often did much better than the copartisans nationwide in good Republican years (such as in 1920, 1928, 1968, and 2004). But unlike the presidential and congressional vote, Republican senatorial candidates often perform below their copartisans in good Democratic years (such as 1916, 1934, 1974, and 1992). Thus the Buckeye battleground is less of a bellwether for the senatorial vote than for the presidential and congressional votes. The Florida senatorial vote is highly variable as well, matching the national Republican vote poorly overall. However, the Sunshine State moved in a Republican direction in the postindustrial and contemporary eras.

Overall, Republican senatorial candidates have averaged 49 percent of the vote in Ohio since 1914, a bit ahead of the 46.9 percent nationally. Buckeye State Republicans did better in the industrial era (52.1 percent) than in the postindustrial era (45.2 percent). In this regard, Senator Mike DeWine’s losing 45 percent in 2006 was below the average for his Republican predecessors but about equal to his copartisans in the postindustrial era—and above the 2006 national Republican senatorial vote (when the Democrats took control of the U.S. Senate). However, Senator Rob Portman’s 56.9 percent was higher than the historical figure for Ohio and the 2010 national Republican senatorial vote (when the GOP fell short of

taking control of the chamber). Prior to 1914, Ohio senators were appointed by the state legislature, and the pattern of their partisanship shows a similar instability in both the Civil War and foundation eras.

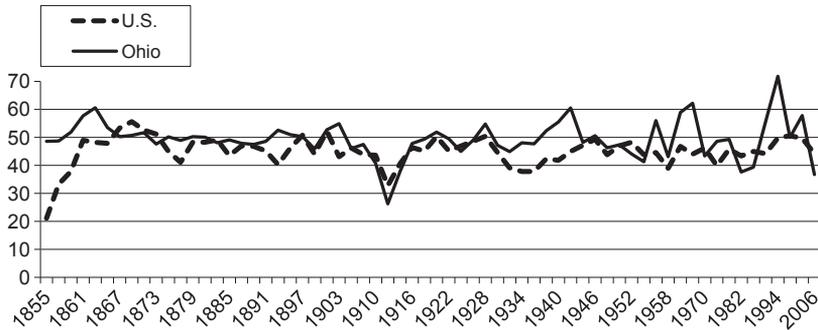
Not surprisingly, Ohio has not been a particularly good bellwether for party control of the Senate, voting with the party that took control of the U.S. Senate just 59 percent of the time—a far cry from the Buckeye record with regard to the presidency. This pattern may reflect the nature of the U.S. Senate, with one-third of its members elected every two years, and the vast differences among the states.

Because of the potential impact of state offices on federal elections, it is worth taking a look at the vote for Ohio governor. Figure 1.7 plots the Republican gubernatorial vote for Ohio and the nation from 1855 (when the first Republican ran for governor in the Buckeye State) to 2006.

From a national perspective, gubernatorial elections are far more complex phenomena than presidential elections. For one thing, governors are chosen at different intervals with varying term lengths, depending on the state. This factor has been especially notable in the Buckeye battleground. From 1855 to 1905, Ohioans elected their governors in “off-off” years—the odd-numbered years between the presidential and congressional elections. Between 1908 and 1956, Ohio governors were chosen in “even” years, during both presidential and congressional elections. And in 1958, the governor’s term was lengthened from two to four years and fixed on nonpresidential years. Similar problems prevent including the Florida gubernatorial results. For the purposes of figure 1.7, the Ohio gubernatorial vote is compared to other gubernatorial elections in the same year.

Overall, Ohioans voted 49.4 percent Republican for governor, compared to 45.0 percent of the national electorate (4.4 percentage point GOP advantage). The Republicans did best in the Civil

Figure 1.7. Republican percentage of Ohio and national gubernatorial vote, 1855–2006



War era (50.7 percent) and less well in the industrial (47.4 percent) and postindustrial (47.6 percent) eras. Republican Ken Blackwell’s 37.6 percent in 2006 was far below the performance of previous GOP candidates, while John Kasich’s 49 percent was more typical.

The Ohio gubernatorial vote is not as closely associated with the national gubernatorial vote. In this regard, the gubernatorial vote resembles the U.S. Senate vote—a pattern that makes intuitive sense given that both offices are elected statewide and not always in presidential years. Not surprisingly, Ohio has been a poor bellwether in predicting the partisan control of the nation’s state houses, matching the national result only about one-half of the time since 1855.

The party control of the Ohio governorship has changed across the eras. In the Civil War era, the GOP won 72 percent of gubernatorial elections (or 84 percent if the Civil War Unionist governors are counted as Republicans), but then just 33 percent in the industrial era. (The foundation era resembled the industrial era, with alternatives to Democratic candidates also winning about one-third of the time.) However, in the postindustrial era the GOP won 60 percent of the gubernatorial contests. In the contemporary era, both parties have won a gubernatorial contest.

PLAN OF THE BOOK

In sum, Ohio is (and has been) a perennial battleground state because it is (and has been) a highly competitive and bellwether state, especially when compared to other large states and particularly in presidential elections. The rest of this book will investigate what factors explain these patterns within the Buckeye State. Working primarily with the presidential vote and drawing on the scholarly literature, the discussion is centered on four factors: region, demography, political attitudes, and campaign contacts. Each of these factors contributes to a fuller understanding of the Buckeye battleground in the contemporary era.

Chapter 2 takes a careful look at an important reason for Ohio's electoral tendencies, its regional diversity. The chapter will discuss why regionalism matters and describe the five major regions within contemporary Ohio. After this chapter has illustrated the impact of the "Five Ohios" on the vote, the subject of regionalism will be carried forward throughout the rest of the book.

Chapter 3 looks at the demographic diversity within Ohio, paying particular attention to measures of socioeconomic class (such as income and education), culture (such as race and religion), and life cycle (such as gender and age). Using census and survey data, the chapter will show the impact of demography on the presidential vote.

Chapter 4 turns to the political attitudes that arise from region and demography, including partisanship, political priorities, and issue positions. Using recent survey data, this chapter covers the political views of the state in recent presidential elections. This discussion will illuminate how Ohio's diversity is translated into choices at the ballot box.

Chapter 5 covers political campaigns and looks at evidence of how the major political parties and their candidates deploy resources across the state, seeking to contact and mobilize voters. This evidence reveals the extent to which election campaigns

target the regional, demographic, and attitudinal diversity of the Buckeye battleground as part of waging competitive campaigns.

Chapter 6 offers an overview of the relative importance of region, demography, political attitudes, and campaign contacts to the 2004 and 2008 presidential votes in the Buckeye State. These patterns demonstrate the relative impact of these examples of the state's diversity in defining Ohio politics. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the book's findings and reviews the prospects for the future of the Buckeye battleground.