



The day the leader of the free world is sworn (or re-sworn) in to office next January has been nearly four years in the making. President George W. Bush will stay on for a second term, or John Kerry will return the White House to the Democrats. And those who have been watching this campaign unfold over the past year are eager for its outcome.

If only we had a crystal ball to see what's in store for the country. Well, maybe we do. Sure, there are complex and genuinely scientific formulas used by political scientists, but those just aren't very interesting. Predictors such as the candidates' heights, Halloween costume sales, women's fashion and one critical football game are weird at best, but when they're so frequently on the mark, they're also hard to ignore.

Standing Tall

Sure, the economy makes a difference, and whether the United States is at war or at peace might affect the outcome of the race. But if you're wagering, look to the height of the candidates before the stock market, unemployment or military commitments. In fact, of the 14 presidential elections since 1948, the taller candidate won 11 of them. One of the exceptions was the 2000 election (of course, many Americans claim that the taller candidate, Al Gore, didn't *really* lose).

by **STEPHANIE CONNER** • photo by **KEN EASLEY**



race, nothing about politics feels scientific

PREDICTION

Could the rise and fall of hemlines help determine our country's



That said, the “presidential height index” has been a reasonably accurate predictor over the years, and while it’s easy to cast height aside, political consultant B.J. Rudell says that it might reflect a trait that voters really do look for: virility.

“We like virile candidates,” says Rudell, a political analyst for CNN and FOX News and author of the book *Only in New Hampshire: My Journey on the Campaign Trail*. “We don’t want bookish, diminutive leaders. We want virile, charismatic leaders.”

William Mayer, Ph.D., author of *The Frontloading Problem in Presidential Nominations* and *The Making of the Presidential Candidates*, says it’s possible for him to imagine that, at some level, voters might find taller candidates more presidential. “Height works out often enough that you wonder if it’s actually whimsical,” he says.

This year, Bush stands 5’11” to Kerry’s 6’4”.

But while height may be a predictor, Rudell says, “it’s not an absolute.” Economic troubles, military failures and White House scandal will usually overshadow most other factors. Likewise, immense success will dwarf a lack of virility. For example, in 1932, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was first running, television cameras and photographers were nowhere to be found. If the voting public had learned of FDR’s disability then, he might never have been elected. However, Rudell adds, had that information come out in 1944 after FDR had proven himself as a strong leader, it wouldn’t have made a difference.

Masquerading as the President

Slightly less explainable, Halloween costumes also appear to be a decent way to predict the winner. However, we’ll have to wait until Oct. 31 to learn the outcome of that race. It seems that the candidate whose mask sells best has been declared the winner every time since 1980, according to anecdotal evidence.

“I’m really baffled by that,” Rudell says.

Yeah, we were, too. The truly baffling part is finding out what might be causing this phenomenon. Could it be that the most popular candidate would naturally sell the most masks—and would also win? Hard to tell, but the statistics might be slightly skewed, Rudell notes, because there have been two re-election races since 1980. That is, when Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton were running for re-election, they would’ve been more popular than their opponents anyway.

Further confusing things, Rudell suggests that theoretically it might even come down to what the stores happen to have in stock. Is it possible that retailers check out the polls in advance and buy more masks of the more popular candidate?

If that’s the case, your local costume shop might be just as good—or even better—at predicting the outcome as political pundits. After all, in 2000, more Bush masks reportedly sold.

Skirting the Issue

Throughout history, hemlines of skirts have risen and fallen nearly as often as the stock market. Could fashion help determine our country’s next leader? If we’re taking height and Halloween costume sales into consideration, why the heck not?

A survey of women’s fashion in this country reveals longer skirts in the 1950s, an era when Republican Dwight D. Eisenhower lived at 1600 Pennsylvania Ave. And in the 1960s, when shorter skirts were in vogue, Democrats John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson ran the nation. In the ’70s, when Richard M. Nixon came to power, longer skirts were back in fashion.

Will Kerry intercept the presidency? The outcome of the pre-election Green Bay Packers–Washington Redskins game could successfully predict the outcome at the polls.



next leader?

This year, it's safe to say that miniskirts are back, which bodes well for Kerry.

Sports and Politics Collide

Just when you thought it couldn't get any weirder, we've found a predictor that is as odd as it is accurate: the Washington Redskins game immediately before the election. If the Redskins lose or tie (which was possible back in 1932), the party currently occupying the White House gets the boot, while a Redskins win signals the reigning party's victory.

Just how accurate is this theory? Try 100 percent. It has been correct since 1932—that's 18 presidential elections. So, if the Washington Redskins lose to the Green Bay Packers on Sunday, Oct. 31, Kerry's chances look even better.

But Mayer points out that there are an infinite number of predictors—"How hot it was on Nov. 1, what day of the week Oct. 1 fell on, how well the stock market is doing and which team won the World Series," he says. "You could go on and on."

If you come up with a list of about 1,000 of these "predictors," he says, half of them will work in any given year just by sheer luck of the draw. A quarter of them might be accurate twice in a row; 30 in five consecutive elections. So statistically, eight would hold true seven elections in a row. "It's a coincidence," Mayer says. That's the explanation for the Redskins' ability to predict the winner—a random coincidence.

Back to Reality

Regardless of these predictors or what they represent, the presidential election comes down to some combination of all of

Is President Bush a long shot to maintain the White House now that shorter skirts are back in style?

them. Oh, and some real issues, too. This year, what will those critical issues be? War, terrorism and Bush's ability to lead his party are important, Rudell says, but not nearly as critical as the state of the economy.

When a president is up for re-election, the race often becomes a referendum on his presidency. The Bush Administration has defensible policies, Mayer says, but adds that it has just been terrible at communicating with the public. The economy looks good, he says, and assuming that the transfer of power in Iraq works out reasonably well, the Bush campaign should be in a pretty good position.

The economy is a big part of every presidential election, Rudell says. To explain, he borrows late President Ronald Reagan's campaign question: Are you better off today than you were four years ago? Rudell reminds us that Clinton had an easy time in 1996 when the economy was swinging up, while Bush Sr. couldn't pull off a re-election victory despite success in the Gulf War—all because of a lackluster economy. "It's a question of whether voters feel confident in how the president has done," Rudell says. "If people feel less secure about their wallets, then they think the other person couldn't do much worse."

But considering the height and hemline factors, if you're insecure about your wallet, you just might want to put your money on Green Bay this Oct. 31. •

WACKY WAYS to choose the WINNER

Bush and Kerry are spending millions campaigning to lure voters. What they may not know is that based on our, um, unscientific predictors, the election outcome may already be in the cards.



FACTOR	1996		2000		2004	
	ADVANTAGE	WINNER	ADVANTAGE	WINNER	ADVANTAGE	WINNER
Height	Clinton	Clinton	Gore	Bush	Kerry	?
Mask	Clinton	Clinton	Bush	Bush	Unknown	?
Hemline	-----*	Clinton	Bush	Bush	Kerry	?
Redskins game	Clinton	Clinton	Bush	Bush	Unknown	?

SOURCES: NATIONAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE, BUSH AND KERRY CAMPAIGN WEB SITES, LOS ANGELES TIMES, THE WASHINGTON POST, FASHION-ERA.COM
*SOME FASHION EXPERTS SUGGEST THAT NO LENGTH WAS PARTICULARLY POPULAR AND THAT WOMEN WERE ENCOURAGED TO SIMPLY CHOOSE THEIR PREFERRED LENGTH.