

OPINIONExtra

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PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION PREDICTOR

And the winner is . . .

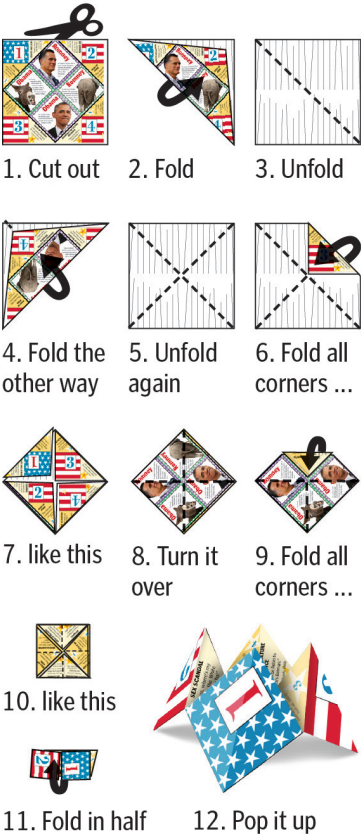
IN 2007, statistician Nate Silver applied Sabermetrics — a numbers-based approach to predicting baseball performance — to the presidential election. He successfully predicted the outcomes in 49 states and went on to correctly predict all 35 Senate races that year. This shot him to political fame, because that level of accuracy feels comforting in a situation where the stakes are so high and the outcome so unknowable. But the joy of politics is still unpredict-

ability — for all the guessing and numbers and extrapolation, there is no way to know with certainty what's going to happen Nov. 6. So, in the Sabermetrics spirit of leaving emotion out of the equation — while also in the cable-news-talking-head spirit of willfully ignoring all data — we bring you a few totally unbiased games with which to predict the 2012 presidential election. For more, go to www.bostonglobe.com/opinion. — HEATHER HOPP-BRUCE

1. THE ORIGAMI FORTUNE TELLER (ELECTION SHENANIGANS EDITION)

The “cootie catcher” you remember from childhood can also predict how gaffes, scandals, and dirty tricks affect elections.

1 To make the origami fortune teller:



2 To play:
1. Pick a number from closed catcher; open and close that many times. 2. Pick an election-year shenanigans possibility; note number in star and open and close catcher again that many times. 3. Pick another shenanigan; open that flap and see who the winner is!

Waaaay too complicated?
Video instructions can be found at www.bostonglobe.com/opinion

1

DEBATE ZINGER
“Senator, you’re no Jack Kennedy.”
(Lloyd Bentsen to Dan Quayle, 1988)

2

SEX SCANDAL
“Ma, ma, where’s my pa?,” “Off to the White House, ha ha ha!”
(about Grover Cleveland, 1884)

Obama
The president’s new slogan “You didn’t bomb that!” convinces Dick Cheney to ditch the “pacifist” GOP, taking masses of swing-state hawks with him.

Romney
He surges to victory after a piece of toast thought to resemble Ronald Reagan comes off the grill in a New Hampshire diner.

3
ATTACK AD
“John Kerry is no war hero.”
(Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, 2004)

4
CRISIS OF RELIGION
“I’ve committed adultery in my heart many times.”
(Jimmy Carter 1976)

2
MADE-UP WORD
“They misunderestimated me.”
(George W. Bush, 2000)

4
DRUG ALLEGATION
“I didn’t inhale, and I didn’t try it again.”
(Bill Clinton, 1992)

Obama
A last-minute ad blitz funded by the grateful Avery binder company hits a walk-off home run for the GOP.

Romney
He crushes it after the Romney camp accidentally distributes “Condi 2016” bumper stickers in Ohio.

4
AWKWARD POP CULTURE REFERENCE
“I want to be Robin to Bush’s Batman.”
(Dan Quayle, 1988)

2. COIN TOSS

How to get a fair toss from a biased coin, according to one of the world’s greatest mathematicians, John von Neumann: “Toss the coin twice. If the results match, start over, forgetting both results. If the results differ, use the first result, forgetting the second.”



Speaking of games with coin tosses: Since 1936, the outcome of the Washington Redskins’ last home game before an election presaged the winner. If the team lost, so did the incumbent. The streak was broken in 2004 when the Redskins lost, but George W. Bush bested John Kerry. **Note:** On Nov. 4, the Redskins host the Panthers.

3. MASH

This classic pre-teen game is traditionally used to predict future fortune, career, and romance, though it can just as easily (and no less accurately) be modified to foretell election outcomes.

1 Player
1 makes hash marks in the center square until Player 2 says “stop!”

2 Using the number of hash marks created, Player 1 starts on the letter “M” and counts clockwise, crossing off each item the number falls on, skipping items that have already been eliminated. When there is only one item left in a category, it is circled. When all categories have only one item, details of the election are revealed.

The winner’s policies will result in you living in a . . .

MASH
Mansion Apartment Shack House

Winner
Obama!
Romney!
Obama!!
Romney!!

Margin of victory
Thorough drubbing
Pending Supreme Court decision
Squeaker
George W.-style “mandate”

Economy in three years
Sloooowly improving
#@% Democrats ruined it
#@% Republicans ruined it
Free Smart Cars for everyone!

Nov. 6 highlights
Joe Biden F-bomb
Testy Ryan-Norquist exchange
Costume malfunction
Massachusetts elects Charlie Baker US Senator in an avalanche of write-in votes

A head for politics: For those well beyond their MASH days, it will be small consolation to know that hairlines are considered by some to predict presidential elections. Historically, the theory goes, the candidate with the most hair wins. Recent outcomes, however, have dealt a blow to this idea (see right).



John Kerry in 2004



The height of power: Those who voted for Ross Perot bucked a trend; the Presidential Height Index Theory states that, since the first televised debate in 1960, the taller of the candidates has won in all but two elections. But even before TV, some notable figures were quite tall, such as Abraham Lincoln at 6-foot-4.

Using this gauge, Romney would win; at 6-foot-2, he’s 1 inch taller than Obama.

At 6-foot-4, the second-tallest all-time presidential election loser was ...

4. THE SPINNER

Less fun than spin-the-bottle but more fun than losing at “Wheel of Fortune,” the candidate spinner has as much predictive logic as, say, depending upon a large rodent to predict winter’s duration.

1 Cut circle on corresponding dotted lines:
2 Place circle over the top of the cardboard on a children’s board-game spinner (Chutes and Ladders works well):
3 Spin the arrow. Seems arbitrary? So is the voting equipment in Florida. If the arrow doesn’t stop on your favored candidate, make it the best out of three. Or best out of five. Or whatever it takes.



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