

## POLITICS &amp; GOVERNMENT

# George Bush and the Rain God

**THE SOURCE:** "The Republicans Should Pray for Rain: Weather, Turnout, and Voting in U.S. Presidential Elections" by Brad T. Gomez, Thomas G. Hansford, and George A. Krause, in *The Journal of Politics*, Aug. 2007.

SOME POLITICAL BROMIDES ARE actually true. Rain really does help Republicans. Snow does too. A survey of the weather in 3,000 counties on every presidential election day from 1948 to 2000 showed a strong correlation between unusual precipitation and the performance of the Republican presidential candidate. For each inch of rain above the norm, the GOP's nominee got an extra 2.5 percentage points of the vote; for each corresponding inch of snow, 0.6.

The Republicans, explain Brad T. Gomez, Thomas G. Hansford, and George A. Krause, political scientists at the University of Georgia, University of California, Merced, and the University of Pittsburgh, respectively, have more "core" voters, who tend to turn out like postmen, despite rain, snow, sleet, and hail. According to conventional theories, Democrats draw greater numbers of "peripheral" voters, who are more likely to stay home when it snows or pours.

The weather may have altered Electoral College totals, the authors write, but in most contests

between 1948 and 2000, the outcome was so lopsided that it wouldn't have made any difference. In 1960 and 2000, however, sunshine and raindrops may have dictated the outcome. The 1960 election, in which John F. Kennedy defeated Richard M. Nixon by a narrow margin, might have gone the other way if the weather hadn't cooperated. Had parts of the country had rain and snow that November 8, Kennedy could well have been the loser in close contests in Delaware, Illinois, Minnesota, Missouri, New Jersey, New Mexico, and Pennsylvania, and lost the election. Instead, it was clear in New England, the South, and the West Coast, with only light rain and snowflakes in between.

In 2000, unseasonable rain sprinkled some Florida counties on election day, even as the Al Gore campaign struggled with a butterfly ballot and other snafus that cut into their totals. With only 537 votes determining the

A little rain or snow on Election Day in 1960 probably would have cost John F. Kennedy the presidency.

winner, even the small amounts of rain that fell on crucial precincts may have dampened the political fervor of enough peripheral voters to turn the tide.

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# Janus of Jurisprudence

**THE SOURCE:** "The Myth of the Balanced Court" by Cass R. Sunstein, in *The American Prospect*, Sept. 2007.

THE OLDEST AND LONGEST-SERVING justice on the U.S. Supreme Court, John Paul Stevens, is considered its most liberal member. In 1980, he was the institution's middle-of-the-roader, squarely in the ideological center of the nine justices. In the intervening decades, "Stevens hasn't much changed," writes Cass R. Sunstein, a law professor at the University of Chicago. What has changed is the left wing of the court. It has vanished.

Justices Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas are the visionaries of today, Sunstein says. Justices William Brennan and Thurgood Marshall once looked ahead and believed that the Constitution banned the death penalty in all circumstances and created a right to education, as well as abortion. Today, Scalia and Thomas envision a nation where affirmative action laws have been wiped off the books, campaign finance restrictions have been lifted, and abortions are rare.

Justice Anthony Kennedy, nominated to the Court by President Ronald Reagan, now casts