

## **Margin Of Error By Jack Neal**

An Election Game For 1-2 Players  
Playing Time: 15-30 minutes

### **Components**

- 3 Game Boards
- 3 Regular Dice, preferably 1 die of one color and 2 dice of another color.
- 44 Tokens - These may be cubes, buttons, discs, etc., preferably 1 cm in diameter or less.
  - 20 Yellow Tokens (Poll Tokens)
  - 7 Green Tokens (Itinerary Tokens).
  - 5 Red Tokens (Political Action Tokens)
  - 3 Black Tokens (Turn Tokens)
  - 8 White Tokens (Small State Tokens)
  - 1 Blue Token (Vice President Token)
  - For the 2-player variant, an additional 7 Tokens of another color are needed to keep track of your opponent's Itinerary. Additional coins or markers should be used for the Home State Variant.
- Scratch paper (optional - to tally votes at the end.)

### **Introduction**

The modern day American presidential election is a grueling marathon of media activity with millions of dollars spent by lawmakers and lobbyists alike. Your aim in this game is to guide your candidate to victory by decisively campaigning and raising money to win voters in 20 battleground states. Your quest picks up with nine weeks remaining before election day in a statistical dead heat.

## Setup

Place the three game boards out on a tabletop. Take 20 Polling Tokens (yellow) and place one on each state row where the circle is filled in. Place a Black Token on the '1' space on the 'Week Track', one on the '10' space of the Cash Track and one on the 'Choose Actions' space of the 'Turn Track'.

Take the Political Action (red) Tokens, Itinerary Tokens (green), Small State Tokens (white) and VP Token (blue) and place of them separately next to the board.

Decide if you will play as the Democratic (blue) or Republican (red) campaign manager.

The image displays three game boards for the 'Margin of Error' board game. The left board is the main control panel, the middle is the Rust Belt region board, and the right is the Southeast region board.

**Main Control Panel (Left):**

- WEEK:** A track of 20 numbered spaces (1-20). Space 1 is black, space 10 is grey, and space 20 is black.
- CASH:** A track of 20 numbered spaces (0-20). Space 0 is black, space 10 is grey, and space 20 is black.
- TURN:** Five action buttons: 'Choose Actions', 'Collect Fundraising Money', 'Campaign', 'Advertise', and 'Opponent Actions'.
- CHARTS:**
  - Campaign Adjustment:** 0-0, 4-1, 8-2, 12-3, 16-4
  - Final Margin:** 2-3, 3-4, 5-6, 7-0, 8-9, 10-11, 12
  - Costs:** Campaign Stop (\$1 per day), TV Advertising (\$5 per day)
- ACTIONS:** Media Presence (-1, 0, +1, +2), Fundraising (0, D, D+3, D+6), Political Capital (Internet Funds, Endorsements, Media Blitz, Fact Check, Defining Speech)

**Rust Belt Region Board (Middle):**

- Regions:** RUST BELT (1), ATLANTIC (2), PACIFIC (3)
- States:** Pennsylvania (1,2), Michigan (3,4), Wisconsin (5,6), New Jersey (1,3), Virginia (4,5), New Hampshire (6), Washington (1,2), Colorado (3,4), Oregon (5), New Mexico (6)
- Progress:** Each state has a row of colored boxes (blue, yellow, white, red) representing campaign progress.
- Summary:** Democrats have 155 EV, 270 Electoral Votes Needed To Win

**Southeast Region Board (Right):**

- Regions:** SOUTHEAST (4), MIDWEST (5), PLAINS (6)
- States:** Florida (1,3), North Carolina (4,5), West Virginia (6), Ohio (1,3), Indiana (4,5), Iowa (6), Missouri (1,2), Minnesota (3,4), Nevada (5), Montana (6)
- Progress:** Each state has a row of colored boxes (blue, yellow, white, red) representing campaign progress.
- Summary:** Republicans have 157 EV, 270 Electoral Votes Needed To Win

## Game Turn

### Choose Actions

There are 9 weeks until the election and each day may be used to campaign, advertise, fundraise and make media appearances. You have 7 days (Itinerary Tokens) to use each week which may be used in any combination for any of the following actions:

- **Campaigning:** You spend 1, 2 or 3 days in any state. The more days you stay in the state, the more likely you are to persuade voters. Each day you spend campaigning costs you \$1. Simply place the appropriate number of Itinerary Tokens in any green state area of the Campaign board. Additionally, your Vice President may campaign in any state and may be placed at this time.
- **Advertising:** You may spend 1, 2 or 3 days airing prime time television ads in any region. advertising can be used to sway large blocks of voters quickly, but it is expensive as each day spent advertising costs \$5. Place the appropriate number of Itinerary Tokens in the region you want to advertise in. You must also campaign one day in the same week in the region you are advertising in.
- **Fundraising:** Money is usually earned by holding fundraisers. Up to 3 days a week may be spent attending fundraisers. There is no cost to fundraising. The more days that are spent raising cash, the more cash you are likely (but not guaranteed) to receive. Place an Itinerary Token for each day you want to spend raising funds in the Fundraising box.
- **Media Presence:** Candidates do better when they are out in front of the spotlight making appearances not related to commercials and photo ops. Days can be dedicated exclusively to this action. Each day spent in front of the media is marked in the Media Presence box with an Itinerary Token. The more of a presence you have in front of the media, the bigger bonus you have when attracting voters via campaigning or advertising.
- **Political Capital:** Candidates may also use their connections to help out their campaign. Each item under Political Capital may be activated once per game. Only one Political Capital action may be used per week. If you want to do any of these actions, mark them with a Political Action Token.

The various actions you can do include the following:

- **Internet Funds:** This action immediately adds \$5 cash to your treasury.
- **Endorsements:** This action allows you to gain 1 point in up to three states. The total Electoral Vote total must be 40 or less. This action costs nothing.
- **Media Blitz:** Advertising costs \$3 per token instead of \$5.
- **Defining Speech:** You may ignore the Safe State Penalty when performing campaigning and advertising checks.
- **Fact Check:** This action neutralizes your opponent somewhat by reducing the number of campaign rolls he may make in the current week by 1. Television advertisement rolls are not eligible for this action.

When your actions have been chosen, move the Turn Token to 'Fundraising.'"

### Perform Fundraising

If you chose to fundraise, roll 1 die. Add the bonus indicated on the chart for each additional Itinerary Token in the Fundraising Box. Take the sum and add these to your Cash. If you have more than \$20, the extra money over \$20 is ignored.

#### EXAMPLE #1 - Fundraising



You have elected to spend two days earning money for your campaign. Since two Itinerary Tokens were placed, the player rolls a die and adds 3 to the result. The player rolled a 4, so \$7 is added to the player's cash.

### Perform Campaigning

**COST:** Each campaign stop (Itinerary Token) costs \$1. Move the Cash token down one space. If you start the turn without cash, the campaign stop is ignored.

**CAMPAIGN RESULTS:** In any order, any states with an Itinerary Token is checked for campaigning. For each token, roll one die. Add any adjustment from the "Media Presence" area to the final result. Consult the "Campaign Adjustment" chart to see how many squares the state's Polling Token may be moved in a favorable direction (to the left for Democrats, to the right for Republicans).

**VICE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGNING:** Your Vice President also campaigns on your behalf. His campaign stops cost you nothing, however, a -1 penalty to roll applies regardless of your Media Presence bonus used on regular campaign rolls.

**GAFFES:** Your candidate commits a "gaffe" if doubles or triples are rolled for a campaign stop. If doubles are rolled, the state's Polling Token is moved in the opposite direction 2 spaces (to the right for Democrats and to the left for Republicans). If triples are rolled, the state's Polling Token is moved back 4 spaces.

You may avoid a gaffe by expending an unused Political Capital Token to ignore one of the dice already rolled. Choose an unused Political Capital space to place your token. Political Actions marked in this manner may not be activated for the rest of the game.

**EXAMPLE #2 - Campaigning**



In the example above, the Democratic candidate has elected to spend a day in Pennsylvania and two days in Michigan. He decided to send his running mate to Wisconsin.

The candidate will therefore roll one die for PA, two dice for MI and then finally one die again for WI. After each roll, he will consult this chart:

Campaign Adjustment			
0 - 0	4 - 1	8 - 2	12 - 3
1 - 0	5 - 1	9 - 2	13 - 4
2 - 0	6 - 2	10 - 2	14 - 4
3 - 1	7 - 2	11 - 3	15 - 4
Doubles - Back 2		Triples - Back 4	

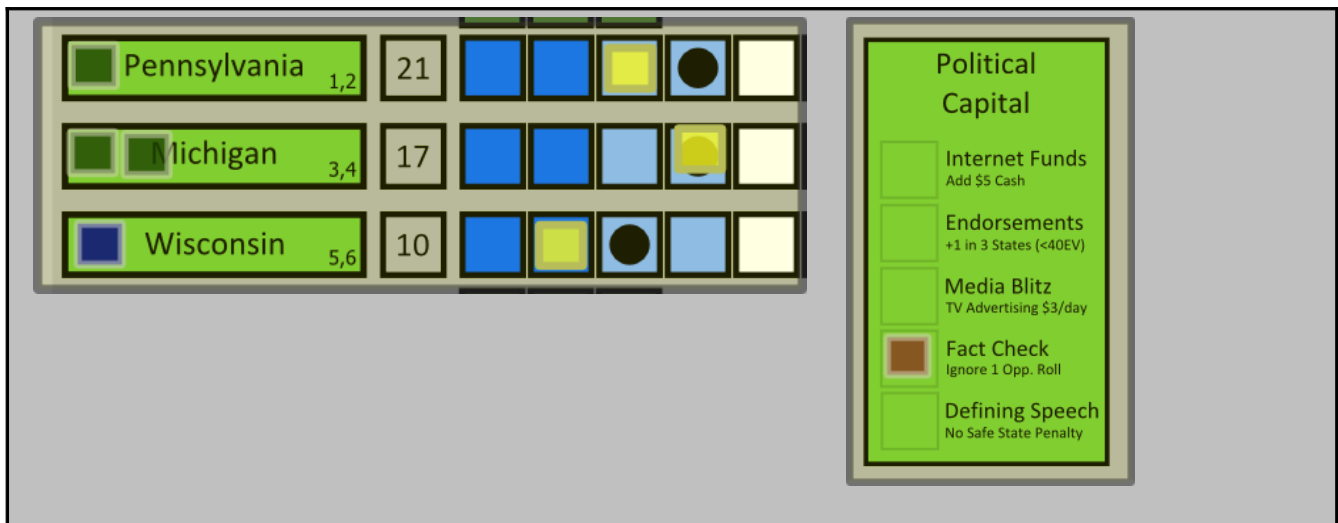
For PA, the candidate rolls a '3' and since there is no Media Presence bonus, the state's Polling Token will move one spot to the left.

For MI, the candidate rolls two '2's! The candidate elects to play a Political Action Token to avoid having the state trend Republican 2 spaces to the right. Since there is no bonus, the remaining die, a 2, means polling stays where it is for Michigan.

The player rolls for Wisconsin last and rolls a '6'. This would usually be worth 2 spaces, however, the Vice Presidential Candidate doesn't receive the same level of publicity. As such, the roll is counted as a '5' and Wisconsin moves its Polling Token 1 space to the right.

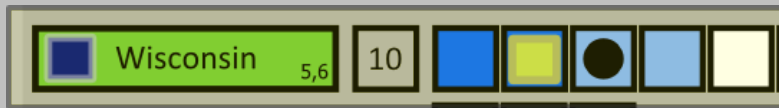
The above campaign would cost \$3. The VP candidate stop is free.

The results are shown below:



“SAFE” STATES: A state is considered “safe” if the state's token is on a dark red or dark blue square. If an opponent tries to campaign in a “safe” state, any extra movement out of that color is ignored.

EXAMPLE #3 - Safe States



Wisconsin is considered a safe state for the Democrats. If the Republican opponent successfully campaigns or advertises in that state, the Polling Token will only move one space to the right no matter what was rolled.

SMALL STATES: The **first** time your presidential candidate campaigns in a “small” state (a state with 9 electoral votes or less) **that you are not winning**, place a Small State Token next to that state on the display. The more small states you campaign in, the more of a bonus you get at the end of the game to sway last minute voters. These states are marked with a gray background under their Electoral Vote count.

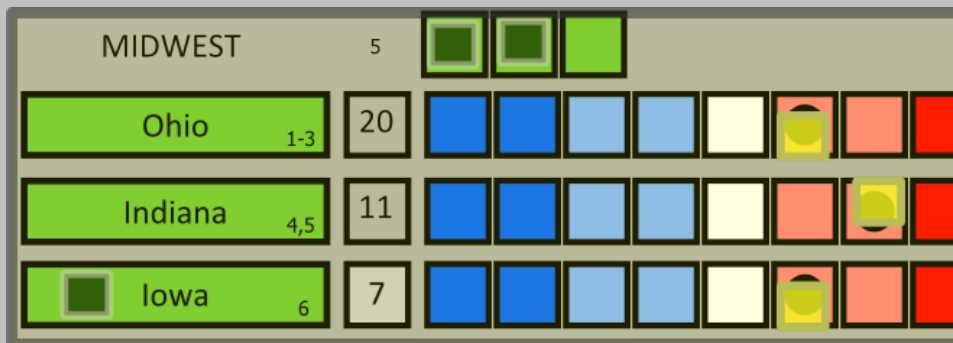
Perform Advertising

**COST:** Each Itinerary Token costs \$5. Move the Cash token down one space. If you start the turn with \$4 or less in cash, the advertising stop is ignored.

**ADVERTISING RESULTS:** Advertising is identical to campaigning except it applies to all states within a chosen region. Any successful campaign stop adjustments are applied to the entire region. Gaffes also apply to advertisements.

Please note that you must campaign in at least one state in the same week in the same region as the advertisement campaign.

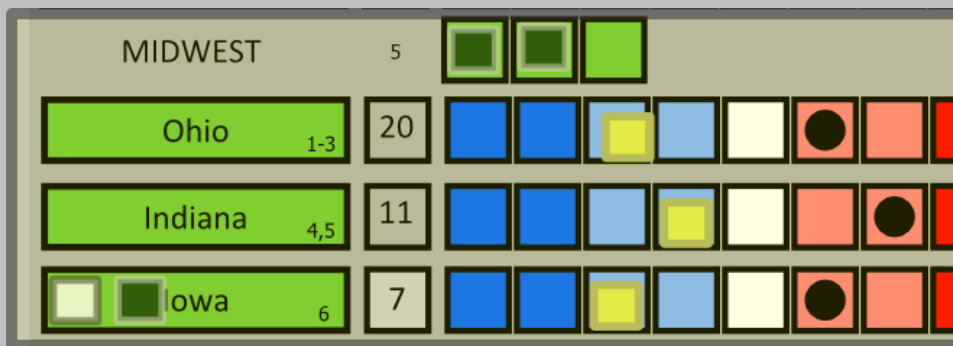
EXAMPLE #4 - Advertising



Earlier, the candidate rolled a '1' for the campaign stop for Iowa, so the Polling Token does not move.

The player then rolls two dice for the advertisement and comes up with an 11. The ad was convincing! Each state in the region moves over 3 spaces. The cost for the advertisement was \$10.

A Small State Token is placed in Iowa since it was a state with less than 10 Electoral Votes and the Candidate campaigned there. This is reflected in the result below:



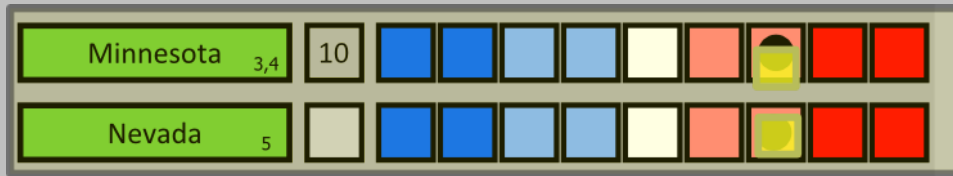
Opponent Actions

At the end of each week, your opponent also gets to campaign and advertise as well. The number of campaign stops and advertisements is determined by the current week. The small number on the Week track indicates the number of campaign stops while an asterisk indicates whether an television ad is created.

For a campaign stop, two different colored dice are used. The first die is used to look up the region number which is printed on the board. The second die is used to look up the state. If a state is not safely for your opponent, the state's Polling Token is moved over two spaces in favor of your opponent. If a selected state is safely yours, the standard "Safe State" rules apply. If the selected state *is* safe for your opponent, the next state going down the list is used.

**EXAMPLE #5 - Opponent Actions - Campaigning**

It's the end of Week #1, and the results of your opponent's campaign are resolved. Two campaign stops must be performed for your opponent.



Two dice, a red and a white, are rolled with the result of a 6 and a 3. The campaign board is consulted and the Plains (6) and Minnesota (3) is rolled. The Polling Token is moved 2 spaces to the right.

The second roll yields a '6' and a '4'. Minnesota is again used, however, since Minnesota is now a safe Republican state, the next state in line, Nevada, is adjusted.



For an opponent advertisement (weeks 3, 6 and 9), two dice are used. If doubles are not rolled, choose the region that is more harmful to your candidate. All Polling Tokens are moved over 2 spaces. If doubles were rolled, all states in the region are moved 3 spaces. If all states are safe in a region, the next region down the list is used.

An example is provided below:

**EXAMPLE #6 - Opponent Actions - Advertisements**

It's the end of Week #3, and your opponent gets to perform a media blitz on all the states in a region. You roll 2 or 3 which turns up the Atlantic and Pacific regions.

ATLANTIC		2	■	■	■								
New Jersey	1-3	15	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Virginia	4,5	13	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
New Hampshire	6	4	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
PACIFIC		3	■	■	■								
Washington	1,2	11	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Colorado	3,4	9	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Oregon	5	7	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
New Mexico	6	5	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

The most damaging region is selected which is arbitrarily determined to be the Atlantic. Each Polling Token is moved two spaces to the right. The end result is shown below:

ATLANTIC		2	■	■	■								
New Jersey	1-3	15	■	■	●	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Virginia	4,5	13	■	■	●	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■
New Hampshire	6	4	■	■	●	■	■	■	■	■	■	■	■

*Clean Up*

After your opponent has moved, collect the Itinerary Tokens for placement in the next round.

## End Of The Game

At the conclusion of the ninth week, voters decide which candidate they support.

**LAST MINUTE CAMPAIGNING:** For every Small State Token on the board, you may campaign in any state using the usual campaign rules with the following exceptions:

- Any doubles or triples are ignored. (No gaffes!)
- No bonus or penalty is applied to these rolls.

### EXAMPLE #7 - Last Minute Campaigning



In the example above, the Democratic Candidate is trying to sway Missouri. Therefore, he places two of his Small State Tokens on Missouri. He rolls a standard campaign roll of 5 with no bonus. This moves Missouri one space to the left.

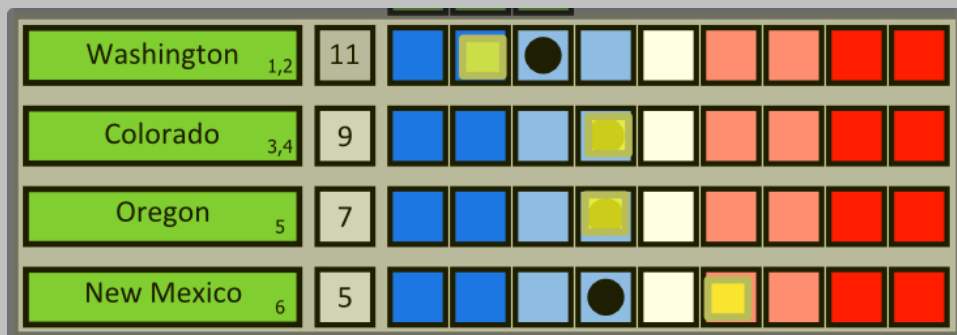


**FINAL VOTE ADJUSTMENT:** For every state that is not "safe", roll 2 dice. Using the "Final Margin" chart, move the state's Polling Token in the direction indicated. A '+' is a favorable move while a '-' is an unfavorable move.

If you are the Democratic Candidate: If the state's Polling Token ends on the left side of the chart (a blue square), the state is won. If a state starts the game leaning Democratic (i.e., a circle in the blue square) and the Polling Token is currently in the center white column, the state is also won.

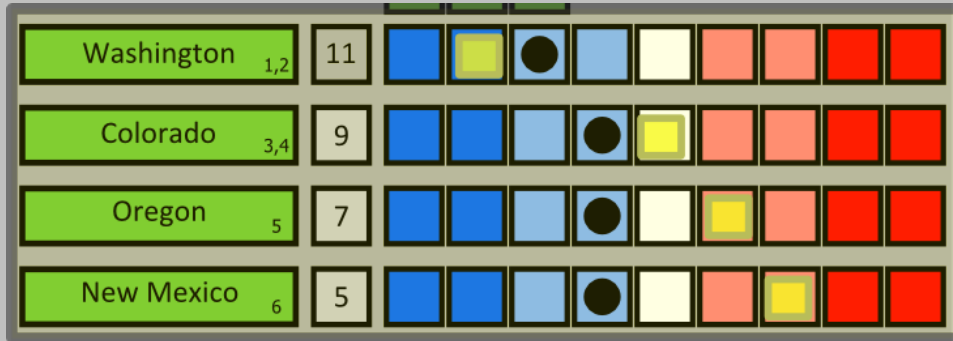
If you are the Republican Candidate: If the state's Polling Token ends on the right side of the chart (a red square), the state is won. If a state starts the game leaning Republican (i.e., a circle in the pink square) and the Polling Token is currently in the center white column, the state is also won.

### EXAMPLE #8 - Final Vote Adjustment and Winning States.



In the example, voters are going to the polls. Washington is a safe state and does not receive a

roll. The player rolls a '6' for Colorado which moves then 1 space to the right. Oregon rolled a '4' which moves them two spaces to the right. The roll for New Mexico was a '7' which kept it squarely in the Republican camp.



Now it's time to add up the votes. Washington would be won by the Democratic candidate. Colorado would go for the Democratic candidate as well since it started out the game leaning blue. Oregon and New Mexico would go to the Republicans.

The Democratic candidate would earn 20 Electoral Votes in the Pacific region.

Starting with 155 Electoral Votes for the Democratic candidate or 157 Electoral Votes for the Republican candidate, add each winning state's Electoral Votes to the running tally.

If you have a total of 270 or more votes, you have won the election!

## **Variants**

### *Two Player Game*

The two player game is played identically to the regular version with the following exceptions:

- The player with the most money at the beginning of the week goes first.
- During a turn, the player with the most number of Itinerary Tokens (days left) goes first. This person continues their turn until they have fewer tokens than his opponent.
- No Opponent Rolls are performed.
- Campaigning, fundraising and advertising are performed in any order.

### *Home States*

At the beginning of the game, randomly determine a home state for you and your opponent. Each campaign action in that state by an opponent is halved, rounding down. For example, a usual campaign result of 2 will only move a state's Polling Token 1 point, whereas a result of 1 will not move the Polling Token at all.

## **Credits**

This game was inspired by many games created over the years, political and otherwise. I would like to specifically credit the designers and contributors to Z-Man's *1960 - The Making of a President* and *Campaign Manager 2008*, 3M's, *Mr. President* and Scott Sisk's *Total Pro Golf*. Elements from each of these games guided the design of this game.

Special thanks to all who have supported and helped me.