



How to Run for President in 1860

Six Rules for an Effective Campaign

1 Don't Campaign (at least not in person) —

While nominees actively campaigned for other offices, the Presidency was still considered too sacred to be jockeyed for. Stephen Douglas, who undertook two stump speaking tours in 1860, was thought either opportunistic or desperate for his efforts.

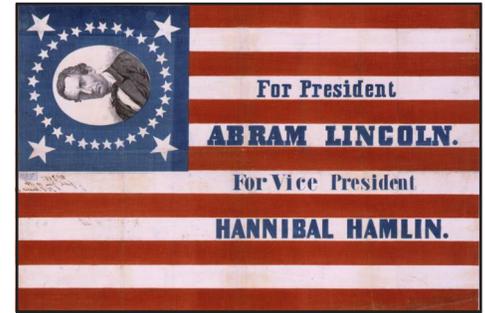


Image Courtesy Library of Congress

2 Remember: *Location, Location, Location* —

Campaigns were primarily local and focused on local issues. For example, while Republicans focused on slavery in the solidly northern states, they chose to highlight other issues (such as an industry supporting economic tariff) in battleground states like Pennsylvania.

3 When Possible, *Fuse* —

While Lincoln had solid bases of support, local wings of the other three parties scrambled to oppose him. This resulted in “fusion tickets,” which advanced Douglas as Lincoln’s sole opponent in Rhode Island, New York, and New Jersey and achieved partial fusions in Pennsylvania (mostly Douglas-Bell) and Texas (Douglas-Bell). National fusion under a separate candidate was discussed, but abandoned early in the campaign.

4 The *College* is Key —

Lincoln’s opponents were hemmed in by varied state populations and the resulting math of the Electoral College. Of 303 total votes at stake there: New York, Ohio, and Pennsylvania held 85 (28%); while 71 were up for grabs in battlegrounds like Illinois, Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, Missouri, and Virginia (23%). No slave state marshaled more than 15 votes alone and the eleven Breckinridge states only had 72 combined (23%). 152 electoral votes were needed to win the White House.

5 The *Dirtier*, the Better —

Politicians and the press were merciless mudslingers during this period in American political history. The press (often newspapers run by party members) could be brutal with their insults and charges.



1860's Republican National Convention.
Image Courtesy Library of Congress.

6 Have Fun —

Political campaigns were (as they remain today) gatherings to discuss and debate the issues. But during this time, they were also celebrations of the democratic process. Party gatherings were often supplemented by parades of supporters, while alcohol-laden soirées and elaborate fireworks demonstrations punctuated the festivities.