

Constructing Camelot: John F. Kennedy and the 1946 Massachusetts Special Congressional Election

Jamie Engel | Department of Political Science | Boston University

Thesis

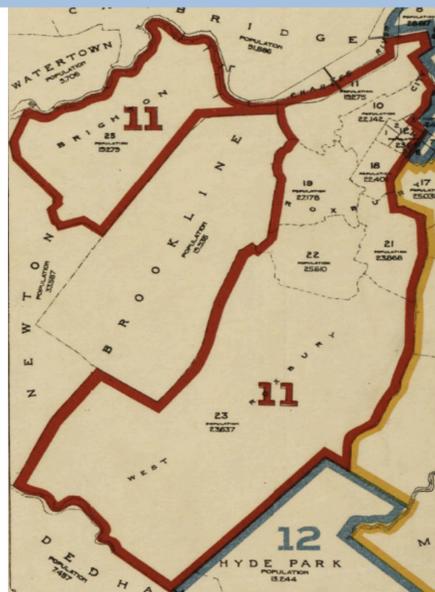
The 1946 John F. Kennedy congressional campaign was successful because of the unique organization, image, and opportune timing of the congressional race. By obtaining a better understanding of the people, the stories, and the nuances of the Eleventh Congressional District, Kennedy was able to alter his campaign approach and win the election.

Sources

- John F. Kennedy Presidential Library
 - Pre-Presidential Papers
 - David F. Powers Personal Papers
 - Oral Histories
- Library of Congress

The Eleventh District

- Ward 1: East Boston
- Ward 2: Charlestown
- Ward 3: The North End
- Ward 22: Brighton & parts of Cambridge
- Wards 1,2,3: Somerville
- Two Major opponents:
 1. Mike Neville
 2. John Cropper



Campaign Platform

1. Housing
 - Immediate housing for veterans
 - Long-term housing for homeless
2. Price Control
 - Aligned with prominent Democrats (Eleanor Roosevelt) to continue price control
3. National Health
 - Adequate care for all
4. Labor
 - Living minimum wage, good working conditions, reasonable working hours
5. Foreign Policy
 - Avoid war at all costs and strengthen UN

Campaign Strategy

1. Decentralized campaign model
 - Neighborhood secretaries instead of one campaign manager
 - Broad strategy set by campaign advisors but customized by ward secretaries in order to maximize reception by constituents
2. Strategy of coming in second
 - Two major opponents were from two large parts of district and many of the neighborhoods were dominated by hometown candidates
 - Kennedy strategy was to garner enough votes to come in second in each neighborhood which would win him the election
3. Image
 - Perpetuate image of youthful veteran who understands the plight of the working man
 - Campaign motto: "The New Generation Offers a Leader"
4. Re-tool campaign activities
 - House Parties/Kennedy Teas
 - Knock on every door

Conclusions

- Kennedy utilized many different techniques to propel himself into congress
- Capitalized on the changing political views of the nation
- Kennedy was elected during one of the largest Republican sweeps during the 20th century
- Employed these strategies in subsequent campaigns

