

**AAG Newsletter
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The AAG Washington Monitor

It has been a draining campaign season, but now that Election Day has come and gone and President Bush has won a second term, it's important to think about what the results will mean for geography and the scientific community as a whole. Among the most important impacts of the election for researchers will be federal funding issues and the budget crunch. The president campaigned, though he has not necessarily governed, as a fiscal conservative, and the rumblings in Washington are that with a few exceptions, domestic discretionary budgets are going to be tightened significantly. This is due in large part to the record deficits the government is currently facing.

NSF

At the National Science Foundation (NSF), small increases near the rate of inflation have become the norm in recent years. This is likely to continue over the next few years, though new Director Arden Bement will push for as much funding as he can get. While NSF can be grateful that it likely won't see the extreme budget cuts that other agencies are facing, it is nonetheless disappointing that the significant increases called for in the reauthorization act of 2002 will never materialize. The Geography and Regional Sciences program, under the able leadership of Tom Baerwald and Greg Chu, has been successful at joint funding with other programs and with NSF cross-directorate initiatives of late, and hopefully that trend will continue.

USGS

Things could be tough at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS). For the past several years, the administration has been trying to hold the agency's appropriation around \$920 million. While Congress has seen fit to increase this figure slightly on a year-by-year basis, the fact remains that the survey's budget is likely to be flat-lined for the immediate future. This could hinder the agency's efforts to become more

interdisciplinary and enhance the Geography Program Division and the new National Geospatial Programs Office. This latter office was created by USGS Director Chip Groat in August to allow the agency's geography program to focus on research and to enhance the survey's geographic data leadership. It has been charged with overseeing the National Map.

ROI of Basic Research

Another major item worth watching is the continued implementation of the President's Management Agenda. Since he took office, President Bush has been focusing on the effectiveness and the return on investment (ROI) of all federal outlays. To do this, the administration has been using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART), a set of thirty questions aimed at measuring the relevance, quality, and performance of all government programs on a yearly basis. The PART scoring is used primarily for setting budget priorities. This has raised flags in the scientific community, where concerns abound about the difficulty of measuring the performance and ROI of basic research, the results of which may often not be apparent for several years.

Marcus Peacock, Associate Director at the U.S. Office of Management and Budget has sought to reassure science advocates, asserting that the PART system doesn't hold basic research to an unrealistic standard. He has noted that several of the PART questions are tailored for use in evaluating accounts that fund basic research and has stated that failure can sometimes be considered an acceptable outcome of basic research. Furthermore, Peacock told a National Academies committee that federal research and development programs generally get high PART scores and that the House Science Committee has supported the use of PART to evaluate basic research spending.

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Geographic Polarization

As a final note about the election returns, it's clear that the country is sharply divided on a geographic basis. While President Bush swept the Plains and the South, Democrats abound on the coasts and in the Midwest's industrial centers. Several maps have attempted to depict voting patterns in ways that reflect a closer division within states, or that weight voting results by population rather than area. One of these is below. For other

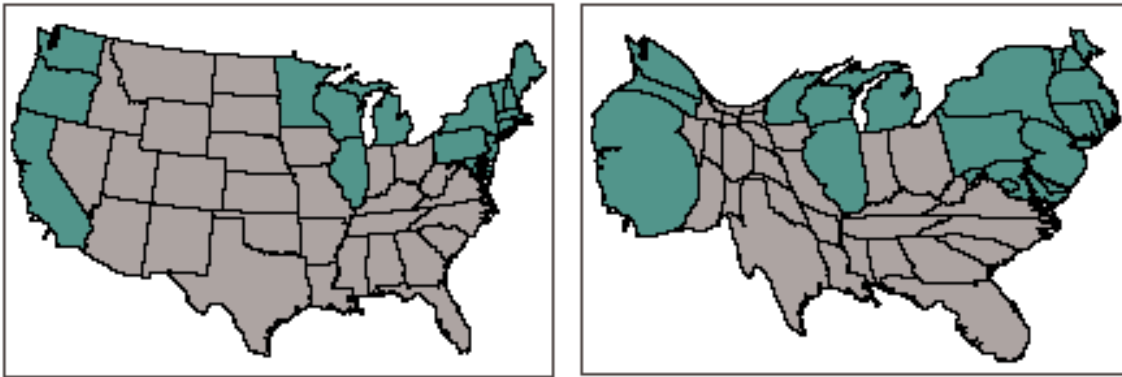
innovative cartograms of the election results—similar to the cartograms pioneered by geographer Waldo Tobler in the 1970s—visit www.personal.umich.edu/~mejn/election/.

It will be incumbent upon the president in the next four years to govern in a manner that acknowledges these divisions and seeks to unify the nation after a second bitter presidential election. The political capital may be on his side but we all hope he can focus his second term on

being a leader for all of America, and the world as well. The AAG will be working hard to ensure that geography's voice is heard.

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Left: Traditional election results map. Right: Cartogram of 2004 election results with population determining the size of the state (i.e. greater population, larger state). Democratic states in green, Republican states in gray. Maps by Michael Gastner, Cosma Shalizi, and Mark Newman, University of Michigan.