

7/27/08 11:40 AM

Likely candidates

ZOOM

Your vote really does count! Maybe not in the direct manner of Kevin Costner's new comedy "Swing Vote," the Capra-esque film opening Friday where a presidential election literally comes down to one person's ballot (Costner's, of course).

But it does count at the box office, where political comedies are always campaigning to get your support — and your \$12 for a movie ticket, \$8.50 for popcorn and soda and \$20 for parking. Here are six election flicks and how they fare in the electoral college of comedy.

BULWORTH (1998)

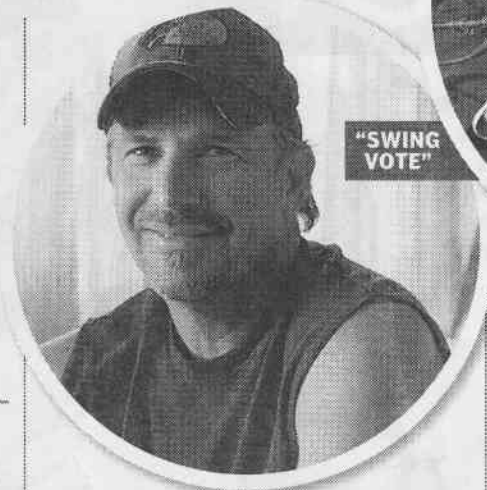
Early polling: Warren Beatty is a suicidal U.S. senator who pays an assassin to off him, but before the deed is done feels free to speak the truth — usually in the form of a hilarious, wickedly un-PC rap. Halle Berry shows up to give him a reason to live.

Election results: A major victory. Beatty gives one of his most delicious comedy performances and the movie is bitingly funny until the poll-driven happy ending.

PRIMARY COLORS (1998)

Early polling: The once thinly veiled novel about Bill Clinton's run for President getting sidetracked by a bevy of mistresses becomes an even less thinly veiled movie about same.

Election results: Ekes out a win with spot-on



"SWING VOTE"

performances by John Travolta as a Clintonesque Southern pol, Emma Thompson as his wife and Kathy Bates as a blunt instrument of an adviser.

ELECTION (1999)

Early polling: Reese Witherspoon REALLY wants to be class president and teacher Matthew Broderick learns too late exactly how determined she is to win.

Election results: A sweeping victory. Director Alexander Payne's satire is pitch-perfect and this is the movie that made everyone realize



"BOB ROBERTS"

Witherspoon was a star — "Legally Blonde" just proved it.

MAN OF THE YEAR (2006)

Early polling: Robin Williams is a TV political satirist, a la Jon Stewart/Bill Maher, who jokingly decides to run for President — until people take him seriously.

Election results: Williams gets a win, thanks to some election booth snafus. But the movie falters on substance. Hopefully, when Jay Leno is deciding his post-NBC career, he won't be screening this film.

BOB ROBERTS (1992)

Early polling: A scathing satire of politics with Tim Robbins as a folk-singing, right-wing politician who might as well have "This guitar kills liberals" stamped on his instrument. People love him even as they seem to ignore the clear message of his tunes.



"HEAD OF STATE"

Election results: Timidity loses the day. Robbins simply can't imagine someone like Ronald Reagan actually believes what he's saying, so he turns Bob Roberts into a cynical, lying bad guy rather than a True Believer. True Believers are scarier.

HEAD OF STATE (2003)

Early polling: Chris Rock as an accidental presidential candidate ready to unleash his laser-smart insight on the issues of the day? Where do we volunteer?

Election results: Instead of taking no prisoners, Rock's candidate seems to take no chances. And he's upstaged by VP nominee Bernie Mac. Oh, well. A black man running for President was probably a fantasy anyway.

Michael Giltz