

PPHA 31720

The Science of Elections and Campaigns

Fall 2023: Mon and Wed, 9:00-10:20 AM (Week 1 Wed and Fri)

Room: Keller 0010

Professor Alexander Fournaies

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Office Hours

Student Appointments: Mon 10:30-12:30pm (<https://calendly.com/alexander-fournaies/>)

Drop-in: Wed 10:30-11:30am

TA: Madeleine Roberts

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Office Hours: TBD

Course Description This course will provide students with an introduction to the science of political campaigns. What works, what doesn't, and how can we develop and evaluate better techniques in the future? The course will discuss traditional campaigning techniques along with new techniques that rely on big data, social networking, new technologies, etc., and we will attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of these different approaches. The course will be targeted at students who may be interested in conducting or working on political campaigns as a practitioner. However, the course should also be of interest to students who simply want to learn more about campaigns, elections, or how to apply scientific thinking to politically-important or policy-relevant questions. The course will focus primarily on electoral campaigns, although many of the lessons will be applicable to other kinds of political campaigns (e.g., lobbying, issue advocacy). This course is open to second-year MPP students. All non-MPP students should seek permission from the instructor before enrolling.

Course Requirements Students are required to read each of the assigned articles and come to class prepared to discuss them. Class participation will constitute 10% of the final grade, and the quality of participation is just as important as the quantity.

In one of the written assignments, students will compete against each other in a competition to predict the outcome of the 2023 US Gubernatorial elections in Kentucky, Louisiana and Mississippi. In particular, students must provide numerical predictions of the two-party vote share in each state, and they must explain in detail and justify how they arrived at those numbers. Numerical predictions from others (e.g., Nate Silver) cannot be used as an input. Students should not share their predictions with each other or coordinate their predictions strategies with one another. These reports will be graded out of 12 points before the election based on the scientific soundness of the prediction method. Additionally, after the election,

the top 3 performers (determined by the lowest total absolute deviations from the observed two-party vote shares) will receive bonus points. The top performer will receive 3 points, second place receives 2 points, and third place receives 1 point. Students' written reports should be as long or short as necessary to explain and justify their predictions. In the assessment, I will put weight on in-depth discussions of predictors, data quality, modeling tradeoffs and model validation. The level of detail should be great enough that someone could read the report and reproduce the analyses and predictions.

Throughout the term, students will conduct an original research project or analysis of a recent campaign. They can work in groups of 2 or 3 students, although expectations increase with the number of collaborators. One option is to conduct an in-depth analysis of a current or recent election or campaign, bring in lessons from the course, collect data from the campaigns, and try to learn something more generally about effective campaign strategy. For example, students could focus on a gubernatorial, state legislative, or mayoral campaign; the campaign of a presidential primary candidate; or a recent election in another country. Students can also look beyond electoral campaigns if this suits their particular interests or if there is a particularly good opportunity to learn from another kind of campaign, e.g., a lobbying campaign, a fundraising campaign, etc. The topic is intentionally left open-ended, so that students can focus on something that suits their interests and career goals. The primary objective is to apply lessons from the course to a question of interest for the students. Research papers should not exceed 15 pages, but they should contain enough detail that the instructor or another student could replicate the work.

Lastly, students will take a brief, written exam on the last day of class. The exam will require students to recall substantive content and methodological lessons from the course and apply them to new problems.

Assignments No late assignments will be accepted.

Assignment	Deadline	Contribution to Final Grade
Problem Set 1	Week 2	5%
Problem Set 2	Week 3	5%
Prediction Assignment	Week 5	15%
Problem Set 3	Week 7	5%
Problem Set 4	Week 8	5%
Exam	Last Day of Class	40%
Final Paper	Week 10	15%
Class Participation		10%

Academic Integrity The Harris School has a formal policy on academic integrity that you are expected to adhere to. Examples of academic dishonesty include (but are not limited to) turning in someone else's work as your own, copying solutions to past years' problem sets, and receiving any unapproved assistance on exams. Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated in this course. All cases of cheating will be referred to the Dean of Students office, which may impose penalties per the Harris School Disciplinary Procedures. If you have any questions

regarding what would or would not be considered academic dishonesty in this course, please do not hesitate to ask.

Diversity and Inclusion Consistent with the University of Chicago's commitment to open discourse and free expression, we encourage students to respect and engage with others of differing backgrounds or perspectives, even when the ideas or insights shared may be viewed as unpopular or controversial. Thought-provoking discourse is facilitated when we not only speak freely but also listen carefully and respectfully to others.

Tentative Course Outline:

The weekly coverage might change as it depends on the progress of the class. However, you must keep up with the reading assignments.

Week 1: Course Overview + Intro to Polling

Class 1: This first class will provide an introduction to the course. We will discuss the need for hard evidence in campaigning and the practical operation of a campaign. In-class exercise on swing states.

Class 2: This class will introduce students to polling, and we will discuss some of the key challenges with polling.

Reading: D. Sunshine Hillygus (2011), *The Evolution of Election Polling in the United States*, Public Opinion Quarterly, Vol. 75, No. 5, 2011, pp. 962–981 [ungated].

Reading: Ariel Edwards-Levy (2020), *How Well Can Polls Predict Who'll Win The Election?*, HuffPost, Aug. 25, 2020. [ungated].

Week 2: Polling and Prediction

Class 1: Using data from real polls, we will discuss different methods for conducting opinion polls along with what can and can't be learned from polls. We will also discuss evidence on the predictability of election results and what that means (if anything) for the role of political campaigns.

Class 2: Intro to prediction. This class will provide an introduction to electoral forecasting.

Reading: Will Jennings & Christopher Wlezien (2018), *Election polling errors across time and space*, Nature Human Behaviour 2 276–283. [gated]. [ungated].

Reading: Andrew Gelman, Jessica Hullman & Christopher Wlezien (2020), *Information, incentives, and goals in election forecasts*, Working paper. [ungated].

Week 3: Prediction and Model Validation

Class 1: We will implement simple predictive models using OLS, and we will discuss how to measure and compare the performance of different models. Lastly, we will discuss the key predictors of elections and what they mean for campaigns and voter behavior.

Class 2: We will discuss different validation techniques and test the performance of different simple models.

Reading: Ethan Bueno de Mesquita & Anthony Fowler (2021), *Chapter 5: Regression for Describing and Forecasting*, *Thinking Clearly with Data*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey. [ungated].

Reading: Kosuke Imai (2017), *Chapter 4: Prediction*, *Quantitative Social Science - An Introduction*. Princeton University Press. New Jersey. [ungated].

Week 4: Persuasion Campaigns

How do voters choose which candidates to support, and how can campaigns influence this choice? We will discuss foundational research on vote choices as well as empirical evidence on the effectiveness of different campaign strategies. Which media are most effective for reaching and influencing voters? When should campaigns deploy ads? Are negative or positive advertisements more effective? How should campaigns decide on their respective issues and messages? Can we empirically assess the effectiveness of different strategies in the middle of a campaign?

Reading: Kalla and Broockman (2018), “The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments”, *American Political Science Review* 112(1): 148-166.. [gated].

Reading: Gerber, Alan S., James G. Gimpel, Donald P. Green, and Daron R. Shaw. 2011. “How Large and Long-lasting are the Persuasive Effects of Televised Campaign Ads? Results from a Randomized Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 105(1):135-150. [gated].

Week 5: Political Participation and Get-out-the-Vote Campaigns

How do individuals decide whether to turn out to vote, and how can campaigns mobilize their supporters? We will discuss theories of political participation and empirical evidence on which mobilization methods are most effective.

Reading: Gerber, Alan S., Donald P. Green, and Christopher W. Larimer. 2008. “Social Pressure and Voter Turnout: Evidence from a Large-scale Field Experiment.” *American Political Science Review* 102(1):33-48. [gated].

Reading: Todd Rogers, Donald P. Green, John Ternovski, Carolina Ferreros Young. 2017. “Social pressure and voting: A field experiment conducted in a high-salience election.” *Electoral Studies*

46(1):87-100. [gated].

Reading: Gerber, A. S., & Green, D. P. (2017). “Field experiments on voter mobilization: An overview of a burgeoning literature.” In *Handbook of Economic Field Experiments* (Vol. 1, pp. 395-438). North-Holland

Week 6: New Technologies

New technologies hold significant promise for campaigns. In this class, we’ll discuss evidence on the effectiveness of these strategies along with potential pitfalls.

Reading: Broockman, David E. and Donald P. Green. 2014. “Do Online Advertisements Increase Political Candidates’ Name Recognition or Favorability? Evidence from Randomized Field Experiments.” *Political Behavior* 36:263-289. [gated].

Reading: Bond, Robert M., Christopher J. Fariss, Jason J. Jones, Adam D. I. Kramer, Cameron Marlow, Jaime E. Settle, and James H. Fowler. 2012. “A 61-million-person Experiment in Social Influence and Political Mobilization.” *Nature* 489:295-298. [gated].

Reading: Aaron Schein, Keyon Vafa, Dhanya Sridhar, Victor Veitch, Jeffrey Quinn, James Moffet, David M. Blei, Donald P. Green (2020) “A Digital Field Experiment Reveals Large Effects of Friend-to-Friend Texting on Voter Turnout”. Working paper. [ungated].

Week 7: Fundraising Campaigns

Raising money is an important component of most campaigns, and fundraising can be studied and optimized in the same ways as other aspects of campaigning. In this class, we will discuss the psychology of charitable giving and experimental evidence on the most effective ways to raise money.

Reading: Landry, Craig E., Andreas Lange, John A. List, Michael K. Price, and Nicholas G. Rupp. 2006. “Toward an Understanding of the Economics of Charity: Evidence from a Field Experiment.” *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121(2):747-782. [gated].

Reading: Ricardo Perez-Truglia & Guillermo Cruces(2017): “Partisan Interactions: Evidence from a Field Experiment in the United States” *Journal of Political Economy* 125(4): 1208-1243. [gated].

Week 8: Lobbying Campaigns

The lessons from electoral campaigns may be useful for other political campaigns as well. Policy innovators may need to persuade and mobilize donors, lawmakers, elites, etc. in order to achieve their goals. In this class, we will discuss lobbying campaigns and the limited evidence on what

strategies are or are not effective for influencing policymakers.

Reading: Blanes i Vidal, Jordi, Miko Draca, and Christian Fons-Rosen. 2012. Revolving Door Lobbyists. *American Economic Review* 102(7):3731-3748. [**gated**].

Reading: Butler, Daniel M. and David W. Nickerson. 2011. “Can Learning Constituency Opinion Affect How Legislators Vote? Results from a Field Experiment.” *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 6:55-83. [**ungated**].

Thanksgiving Week: No class

Week 9: Review Session and Exam

In the class on Tuesday we will finish up the class, review the material, and talk about the exam and final paper.

In the final class on Thursday, students will take an in-class exam.