The Science of Political Campaigns
PPHA 31720

University of Chicago
Harris School of Public Policy Studies
Autumn 2014

Mondays, 3:00-5:50 p.m., Room 224

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Summary

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 and required for those who plan to earn a Certificate in Political Campaigns. 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 20% of the final grade, and the quality of participation is just as important as the quantity.

In addition to the assigned readings, students will conduct an in-depth analysis of one election throughout the course of the term. Students should pick a U.S. election for which a campaign is currently being conducted that will be decided on November 4th. Students can select a particular congressional race, gubernatorial race, mayoral race, state referendum, etc. Students may also select a set of closely related races (e.g., all state house races in a particular state), and conducting a broader analysis of the entire set of races. Students are free to select a race or set of races for which they have a personal connection, have inside information, etc., but they should also look for interesting opportunities to learn about campaigns more broadly.

First, students will write a brief memo identifying the election (or set of elections) that they plan to focus on. They should provide brief background on the race and reasons that it will be interesting to study. This memo should fit on a single page and should be submitted to the course website by October 12th. It will constitute 5% of the final grade.

Next, students will attempt to predict the outcome of the election (the vote share, not just the binary outcome) that they are studying. They should use all original information available at the time, but they should not use statistical models generated by another analyst (e.g., Nate Silver). The methods used to generate this prediction should be transparent and well justified. A brief report, no

longer than 5 pages, summarizing and justifying this prediction should be submitted on the course website by October 19th. It will constitute 15% of the final grade.

Then, students will write a brief report on campaign strategy in the race that they are studying. They should discuss what the campaigns appear to be doing, and what they would do differently if they were working for one of the candidates or sides. These proposals should be specific. How much money do you have at your disposal? How would you allocate it across different campaign methods? What messages or issues would you focus on? If you are pursuing television advertising, what media markets, time slots, networks, etc. would you target? If you are pursuing individual contacts, who would you target and why? This report should be no longer than 5 pages and should be submitted on the course website by October 26th. It will constitute 15% of the final grade.

The next week, students will design their own field experiment to test an interesting and open question about campaigns. The experiment can be designed within the context of the particular election being studied, but this need not be the case. Students should not simply replicate a field experiment that has already been conducted. They should address questions that have not yet been answered that could be addressed within the context of a large-scale campaign. This report should also be no longer than 5 pages and should be submitted on the course website by November 2nd. It will constitute 15% of the final grade.

After the election under study is decided, students should analyze it to explore whether anything can be learned about campaigns and elections in general. For example, is there any evidence about the effectiveness of different campaign strategies or messages? Can any data (perhaps polling data over time or voting data across different geographies) be analyzed in order to shed light on the election result? Was the prediction of the election result off, and are there any explanations for the disparity? If possible, students should talk to operatives within the campaign, dig up original sources, etc. This analysis is open ended, allowing students to pursue questions of particular interest to them. This final analysis should be closely connected to the topics discussed in class. Can the academic literature on campaigns shed light on this particular race and vice versa? In class on November 24th, students will prepare slideshow presentations and discuss the analyses that they have conducted throughout the term. They will also compile their final analyses into a written report (no longer than 15 pages) and submit it on the course website by December 10th. The presentation will constitute 10% of the final grade, and the final report will constitute 20%.

Assignment	Deadline	Contribution to Final Grade
Class Participation		20%
Introductory Memo	10/12	5%
Prediction Report	10/19	15%
Strategy Report	10/26	15%
Field Experiment Design	11/2	15%
Presentation	11/24	10%
Final Analysis	12/10	20%

October 6. Course Introduction

This class will provide an introduction to the course. We will discuss the need for hard evidence in campaigning, the practical operation of a campaign, and the promise and limitations of big data and new technologies.

Readings:

Issenberg, Sasha. 2012. A More Perfect Union: How President Obama's Campaign Used Big Data to Rally Individual voters. *MIT Technology Review.*

Nickerson, David W. and Todd Rogers. 2014. Political Campaigns and Big Data. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 28(2):51-74.

October 13. Polling and Prediction

This class will provide an introduction to polling and forecasting. We will discuss various approaches to predicting individual election results, aggregate election results, individual voter support, etc. along with the inherent challenges of prediction. 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. Lastly, we will discuss the key predictors of elections and what they mean for campaigns and voter behavior.

Readings:

Campbell, James E. 2014. Forecasting the 2012 American National Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4):610-613.

Campbell, James E. 2014. Forecasting the Presidential and Congressional Elections of 2012: The Trial-Heat and the Seats-in-Trouble Models. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4):630-634.

Hibbs, Douglas A. 2014. Obama's Reelection Prospects under "Bread and Peace" Voting in the 2012 US Presidential Election. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4):635-639.

Klarner, Carl E. 2014. State-Level Forecasts of the 2012 Federal and Gubernatorial Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 45(4):655-662.

October 20. Primer on Voter Behavior

The goal of a political campaign is to persuade individuals and mobilize them. In order to do this, we must first understand as much as possible about individual voter behavior. For example, in the context of electoral campaigns, we'd like to know how voters typically choose which candidate to support and how they decide whether to turn out to vote. This class will provide a brief introduction to these topics, and the next two weeks will delve more deeply into specific evidence on the effectiveness of persuasion and mobilization campaigns.

Readings:

Delli Carpini, Michael. 2005. An Overview of the State of Citizens' Knowledge about Politics. *Communicating Politics.* Ed. Mitchel McKinney. Peter Lang Press.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, Jonathan Rodden, and James Snyder. 2006. Purple America. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20(2):97-118.

Lenz, Gabriel. 2009. Learning and Opinion Change, Not Priming: Reconsidering the Priming Hypothesis. *American Journal of Political Science* 53(4):821-837.

October 27. 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?

Readings:

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.

Huber, Gregory A. and Kevin Arceneaux. 2007. Identifying the Persuasive Effects of Presidential Advertising. *American Journal of Political Science* 51(4):957-977.

Vavreck, Lynn. 2014. Want a Better Forecast? Measure the Campaign Not Just the Economy. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 47(2):345-347.

November 3. 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.

Readings:

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.

Green, Donald P., Mary C. McGrath, and Peter M. Aronow. 2013. Field Experiments and the Study of Voter Turnout. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 23(1):27-48.

Rogers, Todd, Craig R. Fox, and Alan S. Gerber. 2013. Rethinking Why People Vote: Voting as Dynamic Social Expression. *Behavioral Foundations of Policy*, Princeton University Press.

November 10. 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.

Readings:

List, John A. 2011. The Market for Charitable Giving. *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 25(2):157-180.

Landry, Craig E., Andreas Lange, John A. List, Michael K. Price, and Nicholas G. Rupp. 2006. *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 121(2):747-782.

Ansolabehere, Stephen, John M. de Figueiredo, and James M. Snyder Jr. 2003. Why is There so Little Money in U.S. Politics? *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 17(1):105-130.

November 17. Election Administration and Campaign Finance Law

　　　　To run an effective campaign, one must understand the relevant laws and administrative idiosyncrasies. This class session will introduce students to the administration of elections and various legal aspects of campaigns including campaign finance law.

Readings:

Berinsky, Adam. 2005. The Perverse Consequences of Electoral Reform in the United States. *American Politics Research* 33:471-491.

Burden, Barry C., David T. Canon, Stephane Lavertu, Kenneth R. Mayer, and Donald P. Moynihan. 2013. Selection Method, Partisanship, and the Administration of Elections. *American Politics Research* 41:903-936.

Hall, Andrew B. 2014. How the Public Funding of Elections Increases Candidate Polarization. Working paper.

November 24. Class Presentations

December 1. Micro-Targeting, Internet Advertising, and New Technologies

　　　　New technologies including big data, internet advertising, and social networking hold significant promise for campaigns. In this class, we'll discuss evidence on the effectiveness of these strategies along with potential pitfalls.

Readings:

Hersh, Eitan D. and Brian F. Schaffner. 2013. Targeted Campaign Appeals and the Value of Ambiguity. *Journal of Politics* 75(2):520-534.

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.

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.