

PPHA 31720

The Science of Political Campaigns

Fall 2017: Monday, 3:00 PM-05:50 PM

Room: 289B

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Office Hours: Wed. 3pm - 5pm

**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 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 one of the written assignments, students will compete against each other in a competition to predict the outcome of the 2017 gubernatorial general elections in New Jersey and Virginia. Students must provide numerical predictions of the two-party vote share in each of the two gubernatorial elections, 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. The winner of the competition will also be profiled on the Harris website by our office of communications. Students' written reports should be as long or short as necessary to explain and justify their predictions. The level of detail should be great enough that someone could read

the report and reproduce the analyses and predictions. Reports should be submitted online at the course website in pdf format by the end of the day on October 20.

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 from 2016; 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. Students will present their research projects in class on Monday, November 20, and the final research papers should be submitted online at the course website in pdf format by the end of the day on Wednesday, December 6. Research papers should not exceed 20 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. If students prepare for, attend, and engage with every class session, they will be well prepared for the exam.

### Grades:

<b>Assignment</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Contribution to Final Grade</b>
Class Participation		20%
Problem Set 1	October 2	4%
Problem Set 2	October 9	4%
Prediction Competition	October 20	15%
Problem Set 3	October 23	4%
Problem Set 4	October 30	4%
Problem Set 5	November 6	4%
Presentation	November 20	10%
Exam	November 27	20%
Final Paper	December 6	15%

**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.

**Course Introduction**

(September 25, 2017)

This 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. We will discuss the first problem set.

Readings: No readings this week.

## Intro to Polling

(October 2, 2017)

This class will provide an introduction polling. 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.

Problem Set: Please submit Problem Set 1 before class.

Readings:

- Nate Cohn 2016. "We Gave Four Good Pollsters the Same Raw Data. They Had Four Different Results." New York Times, Sept. 20 2016.
- Gelman et. al. 2017: "Disentangling Bias and Variance in Election Polls" (working paper)  
[http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/research/unpublished/pollposition\\_v4.pdf](http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/research/unpublished/pollposition_v4.pdf)  
[https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/20/upshot/the-error-the-polling-world-rarely.html?mcubz=0&\\_r=1](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2016/09/20/upshot/the-error-the-polling-world-rarely.html?mcubz=0&_r=1)
- Peter V. Miller 2017. Is There a Future for Surveys? *Public Opinion Quarterly* 81(S1): 205-212
- Review Chapter 3.3 and 3.4 in Moore, McCabe & Craig "Introduction to the Practice of Statistics".

## Intro to Forecasting (October 9, 2017)

This class will provide an introduction to electoral 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 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.

Problem Set: Please submit Problem Set 2 before class.

### Readings:

*Note: It looks like I assigned a million papers this week, but most of them are very short.*

- James E. Campbell 2017. A Recap of the 2016 Election Forecasts. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50(2): 331-338.
- James E. Campbell 2016. Forecasting the 2016 American National Elections *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4): 649-654.
- Helmut Norpoth 2016. Primary Model Predicts Trump Victory *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Alan I. Abramowitz 2016. Will Time for Change Mean Time for Trump? *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Michael S. Lewis-Beck & Charles Tien 2016. The Political Economy Model: 2016 US Election Forecasts. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- James E. Campbell 2016. The Trial-Heat and Seats-in-Trouble Forecasts of the 2016 Presidential and Congressional Elections. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Robert S. Erikson & Christopher Wlezien 2016. Forecasting the Presidential Vote with Leading Economic Indicators and the Polls. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Brad Lockerbie 2016. Economic Pessimism and Political Punishment. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Thomas M. Holbrook 2016. National Conditions, Trial-heat Polls, and the 2016 Election. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Bruno Jerme & Vronique Jerme-Speziari 2016. State-Level Forecasts for the 2016 US Presidential Elections: Political Economy Model Predicts Hillary Clinton Victory. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):
- Andreas Graefe et. al. 2016. The PollyVote Forecast for the 2016 American Presidential Election. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 49(4):

## Persuasion Campaigns

(October 16, 2017)

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?

Problem Set: No problem set this week. Students should work on forecasting gubernatorial elections.

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

## Political Participation and Get-out-the-Vote Campaigns (October 23, 2017)

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.

Problem Set: Please submit Problem Set 3 before class.

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.

## Fundraising Campaigns

(October 30, 2016)

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.

Problem Set: Please submit Problem Set 4 before class.

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. Toward an Understanding of the Economics of Charity: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *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.
- Joshua L. Kalla & David E. Broockman 2015. “Campaign Contributions Facilitate Access to Congressional Officials: A Randomized Field Experiment”. *American Journal of Political Science* 60(3): 545-558



**Micro-Targeting, Internet Advertising, and New Technologies**  
(November 6, 2016)

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.

Problem Set: Please submit Problem Set 5 before class.

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.

## **Lobbying Campaigns**

(November 13, 2016)

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.

### Readings:

- Blanes i Vidal, Jordi, Miko Draca, and Christian Fons-Rosen. 2012. Revolving Door Lobbyists. *American Economic Review* 102(7):3731-3748.
- 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.
- Hall, Richard L. and Alan V. Deardorff. 2006. Lobbying as Legislative Subsidy. *American Political Science Review* 100(1):69-84.

## **Class Presentations**

(November 20, 2016)

This week students will present their projects. This is an opportunity to get feedback from the other students in the class.

## **Exam**

(November 27, 2016)