

Political Campaigning

Spring 2026

Instructor: Marc Jacob, *Assistant Professor of Democracy and Global Affairs*

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Times: T 3:30pm-6:15pm

Room: B044 Jenkins and Nanovic Hall

Office hours: By appointment

Course Description

Political campaigns are a key component of democratic competition and can influence election outcomes. What role do political campaigns play in elections? And what makes a campaign successful? In the first half of the course, we will explore the theoretical foundations of political choice, the role of institutional environments such as electoral systems, and various forms of political persuasion. The course will draw on empirical examples from democracies worldwide, including Europe, Latin America, and the United States. In the second half, we will engage with campaign strategists and develop their own political campaigns grounded in theoretical considerations and an empirical research project.

Course Objectives

Upon successful completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Analyze competing theories of voter behavior and campaign strategy
- Evaluate how institutional and informational contexts shape campaign dynamics
- Assess the effectiveness of different campaign tools, including persuasion, targeting, and media
- Integrate theoretical insight and empirical evidence into applied campaign design
- Critically reflect on the democratic and normative implications of campaign practices

Course Structure

Assessments

All assignments must be submitted through Canvas unless otherwise noted. Detailed instructions and rubrics will be posted online and discussed in class.

Book Review (15%)

Each of us will write a review of a public-facing book that summarizes its argument, evaluates its contribution, and connects it to course content. You may select a book from this list or suggest a different one.

- Nic Cheeseman & Brian Klaas: How to Rig an Election.
- Christopher Achen & Larry Bartels: Democracy for Realists.
- Sasha Issenberg: The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns.
- David Plouffe: The Audacity to Win.
- Richard Ben Cramer: What It Takes: The Way to the White House.
- Mark Leibovich: This Town.
- Kamala Harris: 107 Days
- Cameron R. Grant: Trump: The Art of the Rally
- Alex Nunns: The Candidate: Jeremy Corbyn's Improbable Path to Power.
- Tim Shipman: All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain's Political Class.
- Frank Stauss: Höllenritt Wahlkampf.
- Alberto Carlos Almeida: O Voto do Brasileiro.
- SY Quraishi: India's Experiment with Democracy: The Life of a Nation Through Its Elections.
- Milan Vaishnav: When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics.
- Sizwe Mpofu-Walsh: Democracy and Delusion: 10 Myths in South African Politics.
- Darren Lilleker & Nigel Jackson: Political Campaigning in the Information Age.
- Bill Kovarik: Spin Wars: Politics and New Media.

- John B. Judis & Ruy Teixeira: Where Have All the Democrats Gone? The Soul of the Party in the Age of Extremes.
- Donald P. Green & Alan S. Gerber: Get Out the Vote: How to Increase Voter Turnout.

Reading Input and Discussion Facilitation (10%)

Everyone of us will help lead one seminar session and will take notes on our reflections on the readings and discussions in class.

Campaign Project and Presentation (10%)

In smaller groups, we will design a campaign strategy for a real or hypothetical race. The projects should include a strategic campaign pitch that includes details on target voter groups, campaign messages, and planned campaign activities.

Final Research Paper (50%)

Your final paper is an individual research paper that formulates a question related to campaigning and evaluates it using theory and evidence. You have two options:

- A research-focuses paper that focuses on a specific case or compares several cases in the area of comparative political behavior and/or comparative campaigning.
- A policy-focused paper that analyzes a real-world campaign based on theory and evidence discussed in class.

Class Attendance and Contribution (15%)

Regular attendance and meaningful participation are essential. This includes contributing to discussions, responding to others' ideas, and engaging during workshops and sessions with our guest speakers.

Course Policies

Accessibility and Accommodations

It is the policy and practice of The University of Notre Dame to provide reasonable accommodations for students with properly documented disabilities. Students who have questions about Sara Bea Accessibility Services or who have, or think they may have, a disability are invited to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services for a confidential discussion by emailing at sarabeacenter@nd.edu or by phone at 574-631-7157. Because the University's Academic Accommodations Processes generally require students to request

accommodations well in advance of the dates when they are needed, students who believe they may need an accommodation for this course are encouraged to contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services at their earliest opportunity. Additional information about Sara Bea Accessibility Services and to learn more about the student process for requesting accommodations, please contact Sara Bea Accessibility Services.

Inclusion

I am committed to and strive to maintain a positive learning environment based on open communication, mutual respect, and non-discrimination. In this class, we will not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, sex, age, economic class, disability, veteran status, religion, sexual orientation, color, or national origin. Any suggestions as to how to further such a positive and open environment will be appreciated and given serious consideration.

Mental Health & Wellness

Care and Wellness Consultants provide support and resources to students who are experiencing stressful or difficult situations that may be interfering with academic progress. Through Care and Wellness Consultants, students can be referred to The University Counseling Center (for cost-free and confidential psychological and psychiatric services from licensed professionals), University Health Services (which provides primary care, psychiatric services, case management, and a pharmacy), and The McDonald Center for Student Well Being (for problems with sleep, stress, and substance use). Reach out to Care and Wellness Consultants to learn more.

Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is a cornerstone of this course and is required at all times. I will not tolerate any form of academic dishonesty. The University's Honor Code serves as a vital reminder of our shared purpose as scholars and members of a broader community. It also provides clear guidelines on policy violations and the associated procedures. Adherence to these principles ensures a fair and enriching academic environment for all.

AI Usage Policy

Generative AI tools (such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, etc.) can be helpful in some cases, for example, to clarify concepts or refine writing. I sometimes use these tools in my own work, particularly for revising statistical code or rephrasing technical language. When used thoughtfully, these tools can support the research and writing process. That said, AI will not be useful for most, if not all, tasks and assignments in this class. AI most likely won't add any meaningful value to your assignment and may distract from

your engagement with the content discussed in this class. If you do use AI, it only has to support but not replace your own thinking and intellectual work. Submissions that rely too heavily on AI, or that substitute AI output for substantive work, will not meet the standards of the course.

Schedule

Week 1

- **Session 1 (01/13): Course Introduction – What Do Campaigns Do?**

- Jacobson, Gary C. (2015): How Do Campaigns Matter? In *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (1), pp. 31–47.

Recommended:

- Axelrod, Robert (1972): Where the votes come from: An analysis of electoral coalitions, 1952-1968. In *American Political Science Review* 66 (1), pp. 11–20.
- Lazarsfeld, Paul Felix; Berelson, Bernard; Gaudet, Hazel (1944): *The people's choice. How the voter makes up his mind in a presidential campaign*. New York: Duelle Sloan and Pearce.

Week 2

- **Session 2 (01/20): Theories of Vote Choice: Party Identification, Ideology, and Evaluation**

- Gehlbach, Scott (2013): *Formal models of domestic politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Chapter 1.
- Healy, Andrew; Malhotra, Neil (2013): Retrospective Voting Reconsidered. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 16 (1), pp. 285–306.
- Hutchings, Vincent; Jefferson, Hakeem J. (2018): The Sociological and Social-Psychological Approaches. In Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse, Mark N. Frankin, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch (Eds.): *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior and public opinion*. London, New York NY: Routledge, pp. 21–29.
- Dowding, Keith (2018): Rational Choice Theory and Voting. In Justin Fisher, Edward Fieldhouse, Mark N. Frankin, Rachel Gibson, Marta Cantijoch (Eds.): *The Routledge handbook of elections, voting behavior and public opinion*. London, New York NY: Routledge, pp. 30–40.
- Jacob, Marc S., and Ugur Ozdemir (2025): Voting for Pre-Electoral Coalitions (Working Paper, Universities of Edinburgh and Notre Dame).

Week 3

- **Session 3 (01/27): Polling, Public Opinion, and Strategic Messaging**

- Zaller, John (1992): *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge University Press, pp. 6–39.
- Achen, Christopher H. (1975): Mass Political Attitudes and the Survey Response. In *American Political Science Review* 69 (4), pp. 1218–1231.
- Bailey, Michael A. (2024): *Polling at a Crossroads*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 1.
- Stoetzer, Lukas F.; Leemann, Lucas; Traunmueller, Richard (2024): Learning from Polls During Electoral Campaigns. In *Political Behavior* 46 (1), pp. 543–564.
- Zaller, John; Feldman, Stanley (1992): A simple theory of the survey response: Answering questions versus revealing preferences. In *American Journal of Political Science*, pp. 579–616.
- Achen, Christopher H.; Bartels, Larry M. (2016): *Democracy for realists. Why elections do not produce responsive government*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Introduction.

Week 4

- **Session 4 (02/03): Campaigning in Hybrid and Autocratic Environments**

- Bunce, Valerie J.; Wolchik, Sharon L. (2010): Defeating Dictators: Electoral Change and Stability in Competitive Authoritarian Regimes. In *World Politics* 62 (1), pp. 43–86.
- Simonovits, Gabor; Szucs, Ferenc; Hamrak, Bence (2025): Door to door campaigning in an electoral autocracy: Evidence from Hungary. In *The Journal of Politics*.
- Svolik, Milan W. (2023): Voting Against Autocracy. In *World Politics* 75 (4), pp. 647–691.
- Gandhi, Jennifer; Ong, Elvin (2019): Committed or Conditional Democrats? Opposition Dynamics in Electoral Autocracies. In *American Journal of Political Science* 63 (4), pp. 948–963.

Week 5

- **Session 5 (02/10): Persuasion and Political Messaging – What Moves Voters? & Conversation with Katherine Diggory, former UK Labour Party Campaign Manager**

Katherine Diggory has substantial experience in campaign communications for the UK Labour

Party, where she worked on voter research and the development of communications strategies across multiple high-profile electoral races. She also led constituency outreach for the party and served as Constituency Engagement Manager for a Minister and Member of Parliament, conducting public opinion research and contributing to the development of a long-term communications strategy for the party.

- Chong, Dennis; Druckman, James N. (2007): Framing Theory. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 10: 103–126.
- Kalla, Joshua L.; Broockman, David E. (2018): The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections. In *American Political Science Review* 112 (1), pp. 148–166.
- Broockman, David E.; Kalla, Joshua L. (2023): When and Why Are Campaigns' Persuasive Effects Small? Evidence from the 2020 U.S. Presidential Election. In *American Journal of Political Science* 67 (4), pp. 833–849.
- Baysan, Ceren (2022): Persistent Polarizing Effects of Persuasion: Experimental Evidence from Turkey. In *American Economic Review* 112 (11), pp. 3528–3546.
- Dunning, Thad; Grossman, Guy; Humphreys, Macartan; Hyde, Susan D.; McIntosh, Craig; Nellis, Gareth et al. (2019): Voter information campaigns and political accountability: Cumulative findings from a preregistered meta-analysis of coordinated trials. In *Science advances* 5 (7).
- Coppock, Alexander; Hill, Seth J.; Vavreck, Lynn (2020): The small effects of political advertising are small regardless of context, message, sender, or receiver: Evidence from 59 real-time randomized experiments. In *Science Advances* 6 (36).

Week 6

• Session 6 (02/17): Institutions and Campaign Incentives

- Carey, John M.; Shugart, Matthew Soberg (1995): Incentives to cultivate a personal vote: A rank ordering of electoral formulas. In *Electoral Studies* 14 (4), pp. 417–439.
- Fouirnaies, Alexander (2021): How Do Campaign Spending Limits Affect Elections? Evidence from the United Kingdom 1885–2019. In *The American Political Science Review* 115 (2), pp. 395–411.
- Sudulich, Laura; Trumm, Siim (2019): A Comparative Study of the Effects of Electoral Institutions on Campaigns. In *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (1), pp. 381–399.
- Núñez, Lucas (2025): Encouraging loyalty and defection: The impact of campaigns on tactical voting in Britain. In *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (3), pp. 981–994.
- Eggers, Andrew C.; Vivyan, Nick (2020): Who Votes More Strategically? In *The American Political Science Review* 114 (2), pp. 470–485.

Week 7

- **Session 7 (02/24): The Anatomy of Electorates – Preference Distributions and Structural Pivotality**

- Ashworth, Scott; Fowler, Anthony (2020): Electorates versus Voters. In *Journal of Political Institutions and Political Economy* 1 (3), pp. 477–505.
- Gelman, Andrew; Goel, Sharad; Rivers, Douglas; Rothschild, David (2016): The Mythical Swing Voter. In *Quarterly Journal of Political Science* 11 (1), pp. 103–130.
- Campbell, James E. (2008): Do Swing Voters Swing Elections? In William G. Mayer (Ed.): *The swing voter in American politics*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 118–132.
- Jacob, Marc S. (2025): Democratic Pivots: Electoral Coalitions and the Prospects of Democracy, Draft Chapter 2.
- Mayer, William G. (2008): What Exactly Is a Swing Voter? Definition and Measurement. In William G. Mayer (Ed.): *The swing voter in American politics*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 1–31.
- Smidt, Corwin D. (2017): Polarization and the Decline of the American Floating Voter. In *American Journal of Political Science* 61 (2), pp. 365–381.
- Weghorst, Keith R.; Lindberg, Staffan I. (2013): What Drives the Swing Voter in Africa? In *American Journal of Political Science* 57 (3), pp. 717–734.
- Shino, Enrijeta; McKee, Seth C.; Smith, Daniel A. (2024): The fall of Trump: mobilization and vote switching in the 2020 presidential election. In *Political Science Research and Methods* 12 (2), pp. 229–248.

Week 8

- **Session 8 (03/03): Negative Campaigning – Norms, Strategy, and Effectiveness**

- Lau, Richard R.; Rovner, Ivy Brown (2009): Negative Campaigning. In *Annual Review of Political Science* 12 (1), pp. 285–306.
- Geer, John Gray (2006): *In defense of negativity. Attack ads in presidential campaigns*. Chicago, Ill., London: University of Chicago Press. Introduction.
- Costa, Mia (2021): Ideology, Not Affect: What Americans Want from Political Representation. In *American Journal of Political Science* 65 (2), pp. 342–358.
- Jacob, Marc S.; Lelkes, Yphtach; Westwood, Sean J. (2025): Entrepreneurs of Conflict: A Descriptive Analysis of When and How Political Elites Use Divisive Rhetoric. Working Paper (University of Notre Dame, University of Pennsylvania, and Dartmouth College).

Week 9

- No Class – Spring Break

Week 10

- **Session 9 (03/17): Campaigning in the U.S. & Guest Session with Anna Greenberg, Senior Partner at Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research**

Anna Greenberg, Ph.D. joined Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research in 2001 after teaching public opinion and survey research methodology at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government. She was the lead pollster in many successful campaigns including for Senator Mark Kelly, Senator John Hickenlooper, Senator Michael Bennet, Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham, Governor Tom Wolf, Governor Ned Lamont, Congresswoman Lizzie Pannill Fletcher, Congresswoman Kim Schrier, Congressman Don Davis, Congresswoman Marilyn Strickland, Congressman Matt Cartwright, Congresswoman Julie Johnson, and Mayor Kirk Watson. She worked with former Congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords in her races for Congress and helped launch her organization to prevent gun violence. In 2014, Greenberg won the "Pollster of the Year" award from the AAPC for her work with Mayor Bill de Blasio's campaign for mayor of New York City. Greenberg holds a BA in Government from Cornell University and Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of Chicago.

- Erickson, Robert S.; Wlezien, Christopher (2012): *The timeline of presidential elections. How campaigns do (and do not) matter.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press. Chapter 3.
- Broockman, David E.; Kalla, Joshua L.; Caballero, Christian; Easton, Matthew (2024): Political practitioners poorly predict which messages persuade the public. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 121 (45), e2400076121.
- *The New York Times*. 2015. "The Partisans Are Wrong: Moving to the Center Is the Way to Win."
- Bonica, Adam. 2025. "The New York Times Argues "Moving to the Center Is the Way to Win." But the Data Shows the Strategy Is Tapped Out."

Week 11

- **Session 10 (03/24): Media Effects, Information Environments, and Misinformation**

- Nyhan, Brendan; Reifler, Jason (2010): When Corrections Fail: The Persistence of Political Misperceptions. In *Political Behavior* 32 (2), pp. 303–330.
- Lazer, David M. J.; Baum, Matthew A.; Benkler, Yochai; Berinsky, Adam J.; Greenhill, Kelly M.; Menczer, Filippo et al. (2018): The science of fake news. In *Science* 359 (6380), pp. 1094–1096.
- Bevan, Shaun; Krewel, Mona (2015): Responsive elections: The effect of public opinion on political campaigns. In *Electoral Studies* 40, pp. 548–555.

- McCabe, Stefan D.; Ferrari, Diogo; Green, Jon; Lazer, David M. J.; Esterling, Kevin M. (2024): Post-January 6th deplatforming reduced the reach of misinformation on Twitter. In *Nature* 630 (8015), pp. 132–140.

Week 12

- **Session 12 (03/31): Campaign Experiments and the Empirical Study of Influence**

- Gerber, Alan S.; Green, Donald P. (2012): *Field experiments. Design, analysis, and interpretation*. New York: W. W. Norton, Chapter 1 & 12.
- Golden, Miriam; Gulzar, Saad; Sonnet, Luke (2025): Political Responsiveness, Information Provision, and Capacity Gaps. In *Comparative Political Studies* (first view).
- Gerber, Alan S.; Green, Donald P. (2000): The effects of canvassing, telephone calls, and direct mail on voter turnout: A field experiment. In *American Political Science Review* 94 (3), pp. 653–663.
- Aggarwal, Minali; Allen, Jennifer; Coppock, Alexander; Frankowski, Dan; Messing, Solomon; Zhang, Kelly et al. (2023): A 2 million-person, campaign-wide field experiment shows how digital advertising affects voter turnout. In *Nature human behaviour* 7 (3), pp. 332–341.
- López-Moctezuma, Gabriel; Wantchekon, Leonard; Rubenson, Daniel; Fujiwara, Thomas; Pe Lero, Cecilia (2022): Policy Deliberation and Voter Persuasion: Experimental Evidence from an Election in the Philippines. In *American Journal of Political Science* 66 (1), pp. 59–74.

Week 13

- **Session 13 (04/07): Workshop – Campaign Concepts and Strategy Pitches**

Deadline

Campaign pitch due on Friday, April 10, 5 p.m.

Week 14

- **Session 14 (04/14): Digital Strategy, Microtargeting, and the Future of Campaigning**

- Hersh, Eitan (2015): *Hacking the electorate. How campaigns perceive voters*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press. Chapters 1–2.

- Bhatti, Yosef; Dahlgaard, Jens Olav; Hansen, Jonas Hedegaard; Hansen, Kasper M. (2019): Is Door-to-Door Canvassing Effective in Europe? Evidence from a Meta-study across Six European Countries. In *British Journal of Political Science* 49 (1), pp. 279–290.
- Foos, Florian (2024): The use of AI by election campaigns (Working Paper, London School of Economics).
- Bonilla, Lauren; Shagdar, Tuya (2018): Electoral gifting and personal politics in Mongolia's parliamentary election season. In *Central Asian Survey* 37 (3), pp. 457–474.
- Kernell, Georgia (2009): Giving Order to Districts: Estimating Voter Distributions with National Election Returns. In *Political Analysis* 17 (3), pp. 215–235.
- Gibson, Rachel K. (2015): Party change, social media and the rise of 'citizen-initiated' campaigning. In *Party Politics* 21 (2), pp. 183–197.
- Fitzpatrick, Jasmin; Nostitz, Felix-Christopher von (2024): Reaching the Voters: Parties' Use of Google Ads in the 2021 German Federal Election. In *Media and Communication* 12, Article 8543.
- Roemmele, Andrea; Gibson, Rachel (2020): Scientific and subversive: The two faces of the fourth era of political campaigning. In *New Media & Society* 22 (4), pp. 595–610.

Deadline

Book review due on Wednesday, April 15, 5 p.m.

Week 15

- **Session 14 (04/21): Book Workshop and Class Wrap-Up**

Week 16

Individual Feedback Opportunity

During Week 16, I will offer a large number of meeting slots for you to meet with me individually and talk about your projects. Please feel free to book than more than one slot. Sign-up details will be posted on Canvas.

- **Session 15 (04/28): No in-class session**

Deadline

Final paper due on Tuesday, May 5, 5 p.m.

Invitation

Join us for the **Global Democracy Conference** on May 19-20 on the Notre Dame Campus!