THE ELECTION EXPERIENCE DISCUSSION SERIES WILL BEGIN SHORTLY
THE 2020 ELECTION EXPERIENCE

DO CAMPAIGNS IMPACT VOTING BEHAVIOR DISCUSSION SERIES

WEEK 7 – OCTOBER 21, 2020
UPCOMING EVENTS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 22
THIRD (well second) PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE
8 PM | Virtual through Discord
Join us along with sponsors AASCU & ADP for a virtual debate watch party.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26
VOTER SUPPRESSION: COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS
7 PM | Virtual
The Alan E. Guskin Center for Community and Business Engagement partners with the Kenosha Coalition for Dismantling Racism in presenting COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS: Voter Suppression.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 28
IMMIGRATION, EDUCATION, AND ELECTION 2020
Noon | Virtual Live Streaming

Register for Events at: www.uwp.edu/eeevents
Do Campaigns Impact Voting Behavior?

The Election Experience

Dr. Michael A. Hansen
Campaigns

Total spending in the 2020 Presidential Election could top nearly $11 billion dollars.

• Half the amount needed to completely eliminate homelessness in U.S. (Department of Housing and Urban Development).

• The presidential candidates alone have already spent over $700 million combined, with a combined $230 million cash-on-hand left to spend.

What about legislative seats?

• House of Reps: $1.8-$3 million

• Senate: $10-$16 million

• South Carolina Senate Race - Challenger Jaime Harrison raised $57 million from July to September.
Do campaigns impact voting behavior?

Given this fact, we should be asking ourselves, do campaigns actually impact voting behavior?

Answer(s):

- No
- Maybe
- Yes

The answer is dependent on the response to three questions:

1. Is there a disparity between competitor candidates?
2. What do we mean by “impact”?
   - Choice vs. Turnout
3. What office/position is being filled?
Answer: No.

When do campaigns have no impact?

• Campaigns have limited impact on vote choice in presidential elections.

• Nominating conventions, debates, and other major events have some impact on aggregate public opinion (Holbrook 1992, Holbrook et al. 2012).

• Almost no evidence that campaigns have an impact on individual-level vote choice at the presidential level.

Has anyone ever had their mind changed from a yard sign?
Why do presidential campaigns not impact vote choice?

1. High profile, central nature of the presidential election.
   • Vote decision is made relatively early in the process.

2. The increasing role of partisanship.
   • Voters are increasingly less likely to evaluate an incumbent’s performance objectively.
   • Voters view the success of an incumbent through the lens of partisanship and confirmation bias.
   • The importance of partisanship holds even when exploring the favorite indicator of presidential success for pollsters - economic indicators.
Trump - A case study in partisanship

Trump economic metrics (pre-pandemic):

- Average job gains smaller under Trump than Obama.
- Average unemployment rate declined slower under Trump than Obama.
- Stock market gains were larger in Obama’s first term than Trump’s.
- Government debt exploded under Trump due to his business tax cut (CRS 2019)

Trump economic metrics (post-pandemic):

- Gross Domestic product has decreased almost 40% in 2020 - largest loss in modern history.
- Personal income has decreased 2.7% in 2020.
- Unemployment reached over 15% in 2020 - (October 1st, over 12.5 million people = > 8%).

OUTCOME: Trump currently holds an > 95% approval among Republicans on the economy.
Trump - A case study

- Republican partisanship is the largest predictor of voting for, and supporting, Trump.

- Study after study demonstrate that secondary predictors of voting for Trump are attitudes on race and sex (Abramowitz et al. 2019; Bäck et al. 2020; Bartels 2020; Hansen and Dolan 2020; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Georgeac et al. 2018; Rhodes et al. 2020; Shook et al. 2020; Schaffner 2020; Tien 2017).

- The most important of which being racial resentment attitudes (Abramowitz et al. 2019; Georgeac et al. 2018; Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Rhodes et al. 2020; Shook et al. 2020; Schaffner 2020; Tien 2017).

Racial resentment attitudes are deeply ingrained attitudes that individuals acquire throughout their socialization.

- The predominant agents of socialization impacting racist attitudes are family members and social groups (Goldman and Hopkins 2019).

- Obviously, the origins of these attitudes makes it highly unlikely that a 30 second campaign advertisement eliminates these attitudes…. or any other campaign activities for that matter.
Answer: Maybe

• For presidential campaigns, the tactic with the most potential to impact an election is through increasing, or depressing, voter turnout.

• Democratic campaigns - increase voter turnout.
  • Before election day, inform voters on how to register, request an absentee ballot, fill out the ballot, return the ballot.
  • On election day, inform people of their polling location and help people get to the polls.

• Republican campaigns - depress voter turnout.
  • Before election day, spread misinformation regarding voting early and by mail, and put up fake ballot boxes.
  • On election day, lobby local governments to limit the number of polling locations.

• The presidential election could potentially be won or lost based on turnout.
Voter turnout

How can campaigns increase voter turnout?

• Telephone calls have almost no impact on increasing voter turnout (Gerber and Green 2000).

• Direct mail has only a slight positive impact of 2.5% on increasing voter turnout (Gerber and Green 2000).

• Door-to-Door canvassing has the largest impact on voter turnout - 9.8-12.8% (Gerber and Green 2000).

• Reminder calls - After making initial contact with a voter, reminder calls increase voter turnout by an additional 1.2% (Gerber et al. 2020).

Canvassing in the time of COVID-19

• Schein et al. (2020) find that friend-to-friend text messages (OUTVOTE) encouraging people to vote increases voter turnout around 12%.
Answer: Yes.

Campaigns have the largest potential impact on state-wide and local-level elections.

- Voters know relatively little about state and local level governmental institutions in general.
- Voters know relatively little about state-wide and local-level elections in particular.
- An overwhelming majority of voters cannot identify a member of their local level legislative body (city council, county board, village board, etc).
- Therefore, campaigns could play a crucial role in disseminating information to voters about these elections and candidates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wisconsin Local Governments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Local Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Campaign Advertisements

• Gerber et al. (2011) - campaign advertisements

• In 2006, incumbent Governor of Texas - Rick Perry - allowed political scientists to direct $2 million dollars worth of campaign spending.

• The spending was used on radio and television ads in 18 out of 20 media markets in Texas - randomized.

• Experimental design - the ads were displayed across programing stations and during a range of shows.

• Then, the scholars conducted brief telephone interviews with over 1,000 registered voters.
Campaign Advertisements

Gerber et al. (2011) Findings:

- Radio ads had no impact.

- Television campaign ads have a large and statistically significant effect on voter preferences.

- The effects of television advertisements dissipate rapidly - last less than a week.

Sides et al. (2020) - impact of television advertisements.

- Down ballot races (local level).

- Labour day - only have an effect closer to the election for these lower level offices.
Campaign appearances

• Governor Rick Perry during his 2016 Governor’s race allowed two different political scientists to conduct a study using his campaign.

• Shaw and Gimpel (2014) - randomize the governor’s campaign appearance schedule.

• After the appearance - public opinion, media coverage, and volunteer data.

Findings:

• Appearances increased public support for Perry, but also dramatically increased support for the opposition.

• Appearance effect persisted for only 1 week.

• Tone of media coverage of the appearance has no impact on voters.

• The appearances were most helpful for generating contributions and volunteers.
Summary

• Presidential campaigns have relatively little impact on individual level vote choice.

• However, presidential campaigns can impact the overall result by slightly increasing or depressing voter turnout.

• At the local level, campaigns could play a potentially greater role by providing voters with crucial information.

• Only when there is massive disparity in the spending of candidates, does campaign spending have a large impact.
Net Impact - Aggregate

Given the amount of money spent in all elections during an election season, is the amount of money worth it?

Answer: No!

- Kalla and Broockman (2017) analyze 49 field experiments on campaign effects and find that the net effect of campaigns, across office levels, is zero.

Conclusion: The U.S. would benefit greatly from election spending restrictions.

- Amount of money spent is astronomical and widely wasted - net zero effect.
  - Limited job creation since an overwhelming amount of money is spent on advertisement platform.
    - Example: Michael Bloomberg spent almost $2.3 million dollars airing one ad nationally 164 times.
  - The bulk of campaign workers are volunteers.
Questions - Thank you!