Do Campaigns Matter?
The US Presidential Campaign in Comparative Perspective

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Time: Tuesdays, 14.00 - 15.45
Location: AFL-E-003

"I've always felt it [data] was overrated [...] Obama got the votes much more so than his data processing machine. And I think the same is true with me."
Donald J. Trump, Interview with the Associated Press, 10 May 2016.

Aims of the Course
This course takes the example of the 2016 US Presidential Election campaign, the race between Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, to introduce students to the main theories and methods of studying modern election campaigns in the United States and in Western Europe. Students further learn about the major cornerstones of a modern, data-driven election campaign, and gain the skills to evaluate different campaign tactics and strategies. The course addresses the question if and how campaigns matter. It aims to equip students with an understanding of both the larger social and political trends, and the methods and science driving the 2016 Presidential Election.

Teaching
Florian Foos has worked with political campaigns in several countries to identify the effects of campaign interventions on political activism, voter persuasion and electoral mobilization. The course features distinguished guest speakers working in politics and campaign analytics on both sides of the pond including Kevin Collins (Director of Research, Analyst Institute, Washington DC), Rowenna Davis (former Labour Parliamentary Candidate, Southampton), and Marco Kistler (Head Movement Politics, Swiss Social Democratic Party, Bern).
Learning Outcomes

- Gain advanced knowledge of US politics, and understand the theoretical foundations of research on election campaigns.
- Gain the ability to compare the 2016 campaign across time and space.
- Gain the skills to critically evaluate claims made in the media about the impact of campaigns and campaign events.
- Gain a firm understanding of different methods of studying electoral behavior and campaign effects.
- Be able to apply one or more methods of studying campaign effects in an original research paper, your BA thesis.
- Learn to analyze big data used by real-world campaigns for targeting and impact evaluation.
- Learn how to evaluate polls and to critically judge the “state of the race”
- Learn to communicate your knowledge to an interested, but non-expert audience in form of a blog post.

Election Night

We will watch Election Night on Tuesday 8 November together. Throughout the evening we will stream classics of the campaign movie genre and watch the results come in accompanied by pizza and drinks.

Evaluation

Fall Term

20% 2 Classroom Quizzes, 30% Blog Entry, 50% BA-Thesis Research Design

Spring Term

100% of your mark will consist of your BA-thesis of 8’000-10’000 words. You can choose to write on any of the topics or a combination of topics discussed in the seminar. The thesis will be based on quantitative/qualitative analysis of original campaign data and/or electoral data sources.
Evaluation Timetable Term 1

• Week 6: Quiz 1

• Week 10: Quiz 2

• Weeks 3-10: Each student is asked to write one blog entry of 1000 words on a topic of interest related to the US Presidential campaign. The order of blog posts is determined at random.

• 06/01/2017 Submission of Research Design.

Required reading

Texts marked as Compulsory Reading are exactly that. I expect you to have read these papers, book chapters or blogs before coming to class. Supplementary Reading is not compulsory, but will cover additional aspects of the topic that will be raised in class. Those readings will help you get a more in-depth understanding of the topic and they are a great place to start if you would like to write a blog post or your final research design paper on this topic.

Books:

• Albertson, Bethany and Shana Kushner Gadarian. Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World. New York: Cambridge University Press (available online through University network).


**Online Resources**

**Election Predictions and Poll Aggregators**

• FiveThirtyEight: [http://fivethirtyeight.com](http://fivethirtyeight.com)

• The Upshot: [http://www.nytimes.com/upshot/?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/upshot/?_r=0)

• HuffPolster: [http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster](http://elections.huffingtonpost.com/pollster)

• RealClearPolitics: [http://www.realclearpolitics.com](http://www.realclearpolitics.com)

**Data Journalism**


• Vox - Ezra Klein: [http://www.vox.com](http://www.vox.com)
Movies about Campaigns

- **Weiner**: Documents Anthony Weiner’s unsuccessful 2013 run for Mayor of New York City. Must see study of a flawed candidate and a campaign in full on crisis mode.

- **Mitt**: Behind the scenes documentary of Mitt Romney’s 2012 Presidential campaign.

- **Game Change**: Excellent movie about McCain’s 2008 Presidential campaign told from the perspective of campaign advisor Steve Schmidt.


Fall Term: Timetable

1 Context

Week 1 – 20/09/2016 –Introduction

The primaries, state of the race, polling and forecasting.

**Compulsory Reading:**

- The Party Decides, chapters 2 and 6.

- Azari, Julia: What if the party decided not to decide?


**Supplementary Reading:**


- The Upshot: Who will be President?
Week 2 – 27/09/2016 – Anxious Politics and the Rise of Trump

- Fear and anxiety in politics, the immigration issue, misinformation and conspiracy theories, identity politics, the white working class and the rise of the radical right.

- We will view parts of the first presidential debate

Compulsory Reading:

- Anxious Politics, chapters 1 and 3.

- Revolt on the Right, introduction, chapter 4.


Supplementary Reading:


2 Methodological Perspectives

Week 3 – Thursday 04/10/2016 – Studying Campaign Effects

- Panel data, experimental methods, qualitative methods.

Compulsory Reading:

- Capturing Campaign Effects, “Three Virtues of Panel Data for the Analysis of Campaign Effects”.


- Ground Wars, Prologue, chapter 1.

Supplementary Reading:


- Capturing Campaign Effects, ‘The Rolling Cross-Section and Causal-Attribution’.
3 Theoretical Perspectives

Week 4 – 11/10/2016 – Do campaigns matter?

- *Minimal* effects hypothesis vs. *balanced* campaign hypothesis, the timeline of elections

Compulsory Reading:

- Do Campaigns Matter?, chapter 1.
- The Gamble, chapters 1 and 6.
- The Timeline of Presidential Elections, chapter 8.

Week 5 – 18/10/2016 – How do campaigns matter?

- Persuasion vs base mobilization; changing the composition of the electorate, do candidates matter?

Compulsory Reading:


Supplementary Reading:


4 Elements of a Modern Campaign

Week 6 – 25/10/2016 – Big Data and Clinton’s Geek Advantage

- The use of big data in campaigns; targeting; why are Democrats “better” at using data?
Guest speaker via videolink: Kevin Collins (Director of Research, Analyst Institute, Washington DC)

Meeting with Rowenna Davis (former Labour Parliamentary Candidate) on 26/10/2016

Compulsory Reading:


- Hacking the Electorate, introduction, chapters 1 and 6.

- Prototyp Politics, chapters 1 and 7

Supplementary Reading:


**Week 7 – 01/11/2016 – Capacity Building and Ground Game**

Compulsory Reading:

- Get Out the Vote, chapters 1, 2, 3 and 12.


- Free and earned media; traditional vs social media; priming and framing, do TV ads work?

Compulsory Reading:

- The Gamble, chapter 5.

Supplementary Reading:


Election Night Party:

• We’ll watch *Game Change* and *Mitt* followed by Election Returns on big screen live on CNN.

• Pizza and drinks will be provided.

Week 9 – 15/11/2016 – Election Post Mortem & Data Workshop

• Working with Campaign Data.

Compulsory Reading: Current blogs

Week 10 – 22/11/2016 – Money and Politics

• Campaign spending; does spending matter?; money and influence.

Compulsory Reading:


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Week 11 – 29/11/2016 – Campaigns in the UK

- The UK General Election Campaign 2015, the EU Referendum Campaign, Why did the polls get both outcomes wrong?

Compulsory Reading:


Supplementary Reading:


Week 12 – 06/12/2016 – Campaigns in Switzerland

- 2015 federal elections, referenda and initiatives, Operation Libero

- Guest Speaker: Marco Kistler (Swiss Social Democratic Party, Head of Movement Politics)

Compulsory Reading:


Week 13 – 13/12/2016 – Campaigns Across Western Europe and North America

• Campaign experiments in other European and North American countries, generalizability

• Please submit the draft of your research proposal at the latest on Friday, 9 December. Meetings take place during Week 13.

Compulsory Reading:


Supplementary Reading:


Week 14 – 20/12/2016 – Wrap Up Session

• Did the US Presidential campaign matter? If yes, how?