

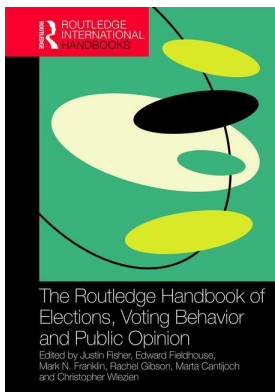
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PERSUASION AND MOBILIZATION EFFORTS BY PARTIES AND CANDIDATES

Justin Fisher

Introduction

At the heart of any discussion about persuasion and mobilization efforts by parties and candidates is the extent to which campaigns have any significant electoral impact at all. A perusal of the literature on voting behavior and turnout in this volume, for example, could lead one to the conclusion that campaigns are, in fact, little more than a ritual with negligible impact on the outcome of an election. This might seem a bizarre claim – after all, parties and candidates expend a great deal of time, energy and money on campaigning. If they had so little effect, why would they bother? Yet, in any examination of campaign effects, we must first ask two questions: *why might campaigns (not) matter?* And, *will campaigns always be equally (in)effective?*

Holbrook (1996) neatly summarizes key points that are pertinent to the first question. He outlines a series of scenarios where efforts in persuasion and mobilization may or may not be seen as being electorally significant. First, drawing on work going back to Campbell et al.'s *The American Voter*, long-term influences on voting behavior such as partisan identification and socio-demographic effects suggest that campaigning may be less significant. While there may be short-term effects, many voters are likely to behave in accordance with existing predispositions (Holbrook 1996: 6–7). Second, from a different perspective and drawing on V. O. Key's (1966) important work, party performance may be said to be the deciding factor. Here, voters' interpretations of incumbent performance and challenger potential are the deciding factors rather than the self-promotion in campaigns (Holbrook 1996: 8). Third, economic interpretations (which may be related to party performance) may be said to drive electoral popularity. Moreover, as Fiorina (1981) argues, it may be such judgments over time which contribute to the formation of a partisan identification – a form of brand loyalty derived from satisfactory product performance rather than emotional attachment. Finally, there is the principal argument often cited against campaign effects and inspired originally by Lazerfeld, Berelson and Gaudet's seminal study (1944: 102–104) – namely that few voters change their minds as a result of campaigns. Rather, that reinforcement is the most likely outcome. Consequently, it is argued that this suggests the relative unimportance of campaigns. Of course, none of these arguments say that campaigns have no effect, rather that their impact will frequently be negligible in terms of electoral impact.

On the other side of the coin, there is a series of arguments that suggest campaigning may be (potentially) effective. First and foremost, we need to challenge the assumption that a lack of

change in voting behavior is evidence of the ineffectiveness of campaigns. There is no good reason why a voter's change of mind should be conceived as being any more significant than the reinforcement of both committed and wavering supporters. The down-playing of reinforcement makes no logical sense. To be sure, voter switch may be easier to measure, but the cementing of voter choice is just as significant and, indeed, is more likely to occur. Fundamentally, reinforcement is just as significant as change. Second, while long-term factors such as partisan identification and socio-demographic effects may well limit some of the potential for campaign effects, there is clear evidence in many countries that the intensity of voters' partisan attachments has declined significantly (see, for example, Crewe and Denver 1985; Dalton 2002a). Equally, the impact of socio-demographic factors is weaker, leading in many cases to greater electoral volatility (Pederson 1979; Crewe and Denver 1985; Dalton 2002b; Dalton, Wattenburg and McAllister 2002). Under such conditions, the potential for campaign effects is much greater.

Third, and relatedly, there is some evidence that voter indecision has increased (Holbrook 1996: 12–13; McAllister 2002: 23–27). In Britain, for example, while some may have reservations about the survey question capturing when voters decided how to vote, there has been a clear and consistent increase over time in voters deciding their vote closer to polling day (see Figure 23.1). This also presents greater potential for campaign effects. Fourth, while voters may indeed make electoral judgments on the basis of performance which are ostensibly exogenous to campaigning, there is an argument to be made that long-term party campaigning will act to some degree as a preference shaper of voter judgments. In other words, voters' assessments of party and candidate performance may be endogenous where campaigning occurs over the long term, rather than only in the period immediately before elections.

Overall, therefore, it appears there are good reasons to suggest that campaigns have the potential to deliver electoral impact. The question then becomes an empirical one as to whether they do in fact make any difference to outcomes and, more specifically, under what circumstances these effects are most likely to occur? This latter question is one that has gained increasing attention from those analyzing the persuasion and mobilization efforts by parties and candidates (Cox and Thies 2000; Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse, 2011a; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002).



Figure 23.1 Percentage of voters who decided how to vote during the campaign in Britain, 1964–2015
Source: British Election Study

Which campaigns?

When thinking about electoral campaigns, a distinction is usually drawn between national and local (district or constituency) campaigns. Reference is frequently (and still) made to the “ground” and “air” wars: the latter being the national campaigns fought through television, the national press and, increasingly, the internet and social media (see Ward, Gibson and Cantijoch in this volume); the former being the work conducted by activists at the local (district or constituency) level. The distinction between the two levels has never been completely neat and has become increasingly open to challenge (Fisher and Denver 2008). Notwithstanding this blurring of boundaries, it is clear from only a cursory look at the literature that national campaigns have historically been the primary focus of academic attention, especially since the onset of the televisual age from the 1950s onwards. Butler and Rose (1960: 120), for example, in their study of the 1959 British general election concluded that “... if all constituency campaigning were abandoned, the national outcome would probably be little altered.” Writing ten years later, Dennis Kavanagh (1970: 79) similarly dismissed local efforts as inconsequential, asserting that the main value of the constituency campaign is that it “gives the members something to do. ... It is, for many, the only time they help apart from voting and paying dues.” As this chapter makes clear, however, these conclusions about the marginal impact and even death of district-level campaigning have proven to be highly exaggerated.

Demonstrating electoral effects of campaigns at the national level has always presented significant methodological challenges. For example, when is it accurate to say that a campaign has started? What counts as campaign spending and what is “routine”? How do you capture the effects of non-party or non-candidate campaigns – so called “third party” activity? One attempt to tackle some of these questions can be seen in the work of Fisher (1999). In particular, he sought to address the problem of defining a campaign starting point by studying the impact of annual party expenditure on poll ratings over a thirty-five year period. This meant that party popularity was measured on an annual basis rather than just at the time of elections. Furthermore, the use of a more continuous measure of party popularity reduced the bias caused by the omitted effects of “third party” activity, since such efforts would be occurring almost entirely in election years. The results were interesting in that they showed that national campaigns, as captured by annual party expenditure, delivered very little in terms of consistent or sizeable electoral payoffs.

Separate to the problems of accurately measuring the electoral impact of national campaigns, there has been a growing questioning of the assumption that campaign effects are confined to the national level. Indeed, Fisher (2015) has gone so far as to suggest that the national campaign may now be effectively subsumed into district-level activities. Consequently, attention has shifted to measuring the persuasion and mobilization attempts by parties and candidates, and their effects at lower levels of aggregation – districts or constituencies. This switch has also been accompanied by an increasing variation in the range and level of methodological sophistication among the analyses conducted.

Election spending

The most common approach taken to understanding the drivers and consequences of campaigning at the district level has involved the study of election spending by candidates and parties (in part, due to data availability). Gary Jacobson (1978, 1980, 1990) was a pioneer in this regard, using data from US congressional elections to examine whether money was a significant factor in determining the electoral fortunes of candidates. While he hypothesized that spending would

matter, his key insight was that it would be of greater significance for challengers than for incumbents. This was based on the logic that *ceteris paribus*, voters will choose to support those candidates about whom they have the most information. Since incumbents can use their office to publicize themselves, they require less publicity – and therefore less funding – during an election campaign. Moreover, incumbents will be likely to spend less if they feel that their re-election is reasonably assured. Conversely a challenger, who has not enjoyed the benefits of incumbent publicity, will have greater need for campaign finance (Jacobson 1980: 36–37). As a result, money spent by challengers should have a greater electoral impact than that spent by incumbents.

While empirical analysis has largely supported his arguments, Jacobson's work has been subject to some criticism. Green and Krasno (1988), for example, contended that incumbent spending was more significant than Jacobson claimed and that challenger spending less so, and subject to diminishing returns. Gerber (1998: 402) also suggested that, while incumbents are likely to be better known and have an information advantage, challengers may also spend money to address new issues that are not on the established political agenda. As a consequence, challengers have the advantage, in theory, of coming to be seen as the champions of a particular cause. On more methodological grounds, Cox and Thies (2000: 41) have claimed that Jacobson's findings about the lower impact of incumbent spending may be due to omitted variable bias.

Notwithstanding these criticisms, Jacobson's main conclusion that candidates' efforts to persuade voters (indicated by their levels of campaign spending) has an electoral payoff has been borne out by further research in the US and other democratic contexts (Benoit and Marsh 2003; Carty and Eagles 1999; Forrest, Johnston and Pattie 1999; Johnston and Pattie 1995; Maddens et al. 2006; Palda and Palda 1998; Pattie, Johnston and Fieldhouse 1995). A key finding from this latter body of work has been that challenger spending has its most beneficial effect in elections that use single member districts rather than proportional representation systems (Sudulich, Wall and Farrell 2013: 771).

Overall, the use of election spending as a measure for campaign intensity has provided some highly compelling findings. However, despite the generally supportive findings, the use of campaign expenditure as a measure of campaign strength is nevertheless potentially problematic. First, as Fisher (1999) observes, the relationship between spending and electoral payoffs depends on an assumption that different candidates or parties will spend with equal degrees of skill. This, of course, can be subject to empirical testing, but suffice to say the assumption that X dollars will buy Y votes is not a robust one. Second, the focus on activity which incurs cost ignores that which does not. Fisher et al. (2014) show, for example, that free campaigning may deliver more in the way of electoral payoffs than candidate spending, and thus a less financially endowed candidate may be able to offset her disadvantage by engaging in more "free" campaigning. As a consequence, while a useful indicator of campaign strength, it is clear that a sole focus on spending is likely to fail to capture a significant amount of non-monetary but highly influential campaign activity.

Measuring district-level campaign effects

Notwithstanding the concerns about the use of campaign spending, a significant comparative literature has developed since the early work of Jacobson, suggesting that campaigning efforts by political parties and candidates impact positively, in terms of both mobilization and turnout (Gerber and Green 2000; Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2007; Hillygus 2005; Marsh 2004, Carty and Eagles 1999). The UK case has been particularly prominent (Clarke et al. 2004, 2009;

Whiteley and Seyd 1994; Whiteley et al. 2013; Pattie, Johnston and Fieldhouse 1995; Denver and Hands 1997; Denver et al. 2003; Fieldhouse and Cutts 2009; Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011a; Johnston and Pattie 2014).

Overall, the approaches employed in the comparative literature can be broadly divided into two types: those that rely on individual-level survey data and those relying on aggregate-level indicators of campaign strength (such as campaign spending). In addition, there are also isolated examples that use experimental methods (see, for example, Gerber and Green 2000). Those studies employing individual-level data typically use national or cross-nation election study data and specifically measures of self-reported campaign contact by candidates and parties (see, for example, Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2007; Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Whiteley et al. 2013). They then examine the extent to which this contact has affected voter decision-making. These approaches have generally indicated that more contacts can deliver positive effects – especially amongst voters who are undecided closer to polling day (Clarke et al. 2004, 2009; Whiteley et al. 2013; Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011a).

These individual-level analyses suffer, however, from three significant drawbacks. First, they rely on respondent recall. While respondents may well remember a personal encounter with a candidate or party worker, they are far less likely to accurately recall the number of leaflets they received or how often they were contacted through social media. Leaflets, it is often argued, are as likely (maybe more likely) to go the way of the unsolicited pizza advertisement as they are to be read by voters. Equally, social media sites contain a vast amount of peripheral information which is likely to reduce the accuracy of contact recalled by respondents online. The second problem that studies using individual survey data face is that, for the purposes of measurement, respondents will almost certainly be unable to ascertain the origin of the communication they receive. To be sure, they can tell which party is being promoted, but unless they are familiar with the intricacies of electoral law, will be unaware of whether communication came from the district campaign or the national one. This is, obviously, only a problem for political scientists – not the (potential) voter. However, it illustrates very neatly the ongoing methodological difficulties associated with isolating the effects of campaign activity within a district. The third problem use of these data present is a practical one. To capture the variety of different means of voter contact for all parties running in elections requires a considerable amount of survey space, which is not always available. The 2015 British Election Study, for example, featured more questions than ever before on campaign contacts. Yet, there was still insufficient space to capture some of the main ways voter contact can occur through online channels.

To address some of these problems, scholars have turned to forms of aggregate data that tap into the extent of local party effort and party members' levels of activism. This approach has been particularly prevalent in the UK, first in an important series of studies by Seyd and Whiteley (1992, 1994), making use of party membership survey data to examine the impact of local activism, during and outside of election periods, on parties' electoral fortunes. The authors found that for both Labour and Conservative parties, higher levels of activism had a positive impact on their party's share of the constituency vote. Their analysis thus complemented and enhanced the earlier work of Johnston and Pattie which had focused on expenditure by capturing the impact of pre-campaign and also campaign activity that incurred no cost. Like previous studies, however, it also faced a number of key limitations. First, like expenditure, party activism was a proxy rather than direct measure of actual campaign intensity. Second, given it was an off-shoot of a larger project on party members, the data did not cover all constituencies – particularly in the study of Conservative members (Denver and Hands 1997: 243–245). Finally, as later work revealed, a significant proportion of the labor undertaken in district-level campaigns is typically done by activists who are not themselves party members (Fisher, Fieldhouse and Cutts 2014).

It thus again missed a significant part of the campaign effort that was happening locally. Despite these shortcomings, the analyses using party member data were important in reinforcing the notion that campaigning mattered and could deliver electoral payoffs.

A second approach was pioneered by Denver and Hands (1997) in their study of the 1992 British general election. To capture a fuller picture of campaign intensity, the authors surveyed the individuals responsible for running campaigns at the district level. In the British context, this was the candidates' electoral agent. Denver and Hands devised a set of questions, which captured more than just members' campaign activities and those things that cost money. Rather, the survey captured a range of important factors which contribute to varying levels of campaign intensity: preparation, organization, manpower, use of computers, use of telephones, polling day activity, use of direct mail, level of doorstep canvassing and leafleting. These data had several advantages over the previous types used, the most important of these being that they provided a direct rather than proxy measure of campaign intensity. In addition, the survey captured campaign effort that incurred costs, and those that were delivered for free. Finally, it covered more districts than the study of members.

This approach is, of course, not entirely bias or error free. First, like the studies based on national election survey data, the analyses are based on self-reported responses to a questionnaire. This raises the strong possibility of inflated claims in respect of activity levels. This complaint, however, should be considered against the considerable variance in the levels of campaign intensity that is evident in basic frequency reports from the surveys. Thus, if respondents are inflating their effort by 10 percent, while this may affect the absolute values reported, it does not necessarily affect the relative differences observed between campaigns. Certainly, repeated comparisons between the distribution of campaign effort reported by agents and candidate spending indicate the data are robust. Second, and again similarly to all survey-based methods, there is a missing data problem due to non-response. This has made some analyses that rely on responses for all parties in a given district more challenging, though approaches such as those employed by Fieldhouse and Cutts (2009), which have combined survey and spending data, have helped to alleviate the problem of missing data to a degree.

In step with the findings from previous studies by Johnston and Pattie and Seyd and Whiteley, Denver and Hands showed that more intense constituency campaigning did deliver electoral payoffs. However, they also showed that the effects were not uniform. What was critical was the effective targeting of campaigns. For campaigns to have electoral impact they needed to occur in districts where candidates and parties were either seeking to take a seat or defend it from a realistic challenge. More specifically, it was revealed that both Labour and Liberal Democrat campaigns yielded payoffs, while those run by Conservatives did not. This difference was due primarily to the fact that the latter's strongest campaigns took place in those seats that it held comfortably. The Denver and Hands methodology has been refined over the years to reflect new developments in campaigning (see Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011a). Its central finding remains, however. Campaigning at the district level can produce electoral payoffs, but those payoffs will be greater if efforts are properly targeted where they are needed most.

While the study of local level campaigning is most developed in the British case, it is nevertheless striking how the findings are replicated across other countries. Both single country and comparative studies, using a variety of approaches, have reported similar findings, despite variations in electoral systems (see, for example, André and Depauw 2016; Gschwend and Zittel 2015; Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2007; Marsh 2004; Sudulich, Wall and Farrell 2013). The broad universality of results across electoral systems is important, since we might expect targeting to occur mostly in majoritarian systems with single member districts (where the winner takes all in an individual district), rather than more proportional ones (where the relationship between

votes and seats may be less dependent on electoral geography). Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2007) and Viñuela, Jurado and Riera (2015), however, demonstrate this is not the case. In line with the expectations of Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2007: 92), parties “expend greater effort on mobilizing voters when the expected benefits of turning out voters are greatest, relative to cost.”

Thus far, we have shown that a variety of different methodological approaches applied across a range of different countries support the view that campaigning matters. In general, it seems that well-targeted, more intensive campaigning leads to a stronger electoral performance. In addition to affecting vote choice, there is also evidence to suggest that campaigning can boost turnout. Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2007), for example, in a large N comparative study using survey data find that campaigning does mobilize voters, while Fisher et al. (2016a) and Trumm and Sudulich (2016) show that the same holds in more detailed studies of the British general election of 2010. All three studies, however, also show that there is variation in terms of effects. Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2007) find that campaigning in candidate-based systems is more likely to mobilize voters than in party-based systems – a result they attribute to the fact that levels of party contact in safe seats in countries with single member districts are still higher than in those of countries using proportional representation. Thus, although there does appear to be greater scope for targeting seats in majoritarian systems, this does not necessarily mean that voters in non-target seats are neglected (Trumm and Sudulich 2016: 6). Fisher et al. (2016a) find that campaign effects on turnout vary by party in Britain, with campaigns of less popular parties having the least impact and, in some seats, actually appearing to diminish turnout.

The importance of context

The preceding review makes clear the importance of comparative studies in developing the literature on campaign effects, both across space and time. Essentially this work has provided very convincing evidence to show that any effects are variable and contingent on a range of exogenous factors. While this may seem to be an obvious point, in truth, most studies have failed to progress beyond answering the initial question of *whether campaigns have electoral effects*. Much less attention has been given to the second but equally important question of *whether campaigns are equally effective and under what circumstances*. This latter issue is now fast becoming one of the important new puzzles to occupy those analyzing campaign effects.

Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse (2011a), for example, have argued that the effectiveness of a campaign is dependent on four key elements that are exogenous to the campaign effort: the closeness of the election, the likelihood of the election producing significant change, the effectiveness of the targeting that occurs and the level of clarity on the objectives a party has in any election. The first of these elements – the closeness of the election – is likely to increase the impact of the campaign given that voters are more primed or cued to receive party messages. The effects of competitiveness are, however, also moderated by parties’ popularity – where parties are not unusually popular or unpopular at the national level – popularity equilibrium within the parties’ usual range of support (Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011a: 818). If parties are unusually unpopular, the impact of their campaigns is less likely to be decisive since voters will be less receptive to their messages. For more popular parties, the campaign has a more negligible impact since voters typically will already have decided to vote for them. Research using experimental methods has certainly supported the idea that campaign interventions are affected by the level of popularity of the party (Niven 2001; Hillygus 2005; Arceneaux and Nickerson 2009; Fieldhouse et al. 2014). Similarly, in terms of turnout, Karp, Banducci and Bowler (2007: 95–96) have shown that parties in a non-competitive position find it difficult to persuade

potential voters to go to the polls. The rationale being that mobilizing in support of such a party is perceived as making very little difference to the outcome.

The second key element linked by Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse (2011a) to an effective campaign is the likelihood that the election will lead to a change in the current political status quo. Anticipation of a change of government provides added momentum to the campaign, and particularly for that of the challenger, building a so-called bandwagon effect (Bartels 1988). The logic is that the momentum of challengers where electoral change is likely makes voters more receptive to their message. The third factor they see as increasing the impact of campaigns relates to the extent and type of targeting that takes place. While in general more targeting might be expected to yield stronger electoral benefits, given that resources are finite, logic would suggest that parties targeting a large number of seats would enjoy smaller electoral returns since resources would be diluted, thereby lowering the intensity of individual campaigns. Conversely, targeting fewer seats should produce greater electoral payoffs as the intensity will be better concentrated in those seats that matter most. As with the first factor, however, party popularity – or again unpopularity – is likely to moderate these expectations. Where there is a party that is particularly unpopular, parties that are more popular are likely to see greater dividends in targeting larger numbers of seats. Despite their resources being more diluted and producing a less intense individual campaign, voters will be less receptive to the unpopular parties’ campaigning.

The final condition these authors see as boosting campaign effectiveness, independent of level of the effort being made follows on from, and links to, the previous factor. Where the campaign has a strong central management that can efficiently coordinate and direct district efforts then it is better able to set and deliver on its targeting objectives and thus run a more successful campaign. If parties have clear objectives (such as winning a small majority or denying another party a majority, rather than just trying to win as many seats as possible), the electoral benefits are likely to be greater. These second two points are important, because the negative effects of national-level party unpopularity can be countered to a degree if campaigns have clear goals and are appropriately targeted. These four elements are summarized in Table 23.1.

What types of campaigning matter?

As well as understanding the external circumstances under which a campaign is most likely to be effective, it is also important to consider the type of campaign activity that is being undertaken. As we have seen, those studies that focus on a particular activity or set of behaviors, using surrogate measures such as spending or local party member activism, are unlikely to capture the full range of techniques that parties and candidates employ to persuade and mobilize voters. This type of differentiation requires starting with a broader and more abstract classificatory schema.

Drawing upon the developmental narratives and frameworks set out by Norris (2002) and Farrell and Webb (2002), we can identify three broad types of campaigning strategies: traditional,

Table 23.1 Exogenous factors influencing likely effectiveness of constituency campaigns

	<i>More effective campaigns</i>	<i>Less effective campaigns</i>
Closeness of election	Popularity equilibrium	Unpopular party(ies)
Significant change likely	Challenger(s)	Incumbent
High numbers of targeted seats	Unpopular party(ies)	Popularity equilibrium
Central management	Clear objectives	Unclear objectives

Source: Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse (2011a).

modern and e-campaigning.¹ Traditional campaigns are seen as being characteristic of the early years of competitive elections. They are labor intensive and typically include activities such as leafleting, doorstep canvassing and “last minute” polling day activity to ensure voters make it to the polls. By way of contrast, “modern campaigning” reflects the incorporation of technology into campaigns through the use of computers, specialist campaign software, direct mail and the use of telephones to both canvass voters and remind them to vote. A third and more recent development refers to the integration of email, internet and social media into campaign communication and the associated increasing specificity and personalized quality of that contact (see Ward, Gibson and Cantijoch in this volume).

Differentiating campaigns in this way is important for two principal reasons. First, it helps us understand how campaigning styles have developed over time, and reminds us that they will continue to do so. This particularly applies in respect of the adoption of technology, where developments are often rapidly superseded by newer or alternative technologies. As a consequence, it makes little sense to assume that what is used in past campaigns will automatically be used in subsequent ones. Second, we can extend the analysis to look at voters’ responses to each campaigning mode and how far they are likely to have an effect on their decision to turn out and also on whom to support.

To date, the findings about the electoral effects of the broad categories of traditional, modern and e-campaigning have shown some differences across types. Of course, in the “real world” no candidate or party campaign is exclusively traditional, modern or electronic, just as no campaign is either based solely on spending or free work. Furthermore, if a candidate or a party engages in intense traditional campaigning, it is likely that they will also engage in intense modern campaigning, too. It is thus almost impossible to completely isolate the effects of any particular approach. Nonetheless, some convincing attempts to try to measure the relative effects of engaging in more or less traditional, modern or electronic campaigning has been undertaken. The results show that voters do respond to all three types of *stimuli*, with positive responses becoming more common as an approach becomes entrenched. The findings with regard to e-campaigning are mixed, with some studies reporting a significant boost to candidate support if they engage in such activity (D’Alessio 1997; Gibson and McAllister 2011; Sudulich and Wall 2010), whereas others have struggled to find much in the way of positive electoral effects (Fisher, Cutts and Fieldhouse 2011b; Fisher et al. 2016b; Hansen and Kosiara-Pederson 2014). By way of contrast, the findings for the effectiveness of traditional campaigning methods in securing votes are subject to no such debate (Sudulich and Wall 2011; Fisher et al. 2014; Fisher et al. 2016b). Voters may respond to many cues, but respond best to human contact.

Finally, it is worth saying something about diversification of methods used and campaign effectiveness. While few, if any, campaigns rely exclusively on one type of activity, the range of methods that are used varies considerably. Sudulich and Wall (2011) examined the extent to which a greater diversification of methods paid off electorally for candidates in the Irish general election of 2007. Analyzing candidate spending returns they found a positive electoral impact of diversification when it was accompanied by a significant monetary investment. Candidates with lower budgets were found to be more successful if they diversified less and focused instead on doing a few things well rather than several things poorly (Sudulich and Wall 2011: 98). This matters, because it shows that there is no “one size fits all” in respect to campaign effects. Campaigns are more or less electorally effective depending on context, just as diverse campaigns are more or less successful depending upon the level of available resources.

Conclusions

The decline in the intensity of group and voter attachment to parties has created significant potential for campaign effects. In this chapter, we have shown how a range of studies, conducted in different electoral settings and using different types of data, have supported the idea that campaigns are now filling the gap that those more fixed forces once occupied. At the district level in particular, it has been shown that campaigning can increase turnout and deliver electoral payoffs for particular parties. Given this well-established finding, attention is now switching to looking at differential campaign effects and identifying the circumstances under which campaigns are more or less effective.

At the party or candidate level this seems to come down – in part – to one’s status as a challenger or incumbent. Overall or general popularity, however, also matters. It is much more difficult for a party to campaign effectively if that party is already unpopular since voters will be less receptive to any messages they send. Equally, highly popular parties or candidates will also have less effective campaigns, since voters are already likely to plan on voting for them. At the macro level then, the wider political and institutional context matters. Campaigns do not take place in a vacuum. The electoral environment and the degree to which campaigns are properly coordinated and planned are key variables in determining the likelihood of delivering payoffs. Campaign efforts matter; but they don’t matter equally all of the time.

Finally, we have made the point that campaigns are multi-faceted and operate across different levels and in different modes. A contemporary campaign will use cutting-edge technology alongside old-fashioned personal contact – indeed increasingly they may try to integrate the two together, blurring the boundaries and creating new hybrid forms of voter mobilization. However, it remains worth stressing that the mere existence of a new approach does not guarantee it will be electorally successful. Voters take time to become accustomed to new forms of contact and not all are successful in the longer term. Certainly one method that has stood the test of time is that of human contact. Indeed, such is the continuing importance of human contact that it makes less sense to speak of campaigns following an inevitable linear path of evolution, and more sense to say that, whatever happens, human contact forms the most important part of campaigns. Rather, it is the supporting cast of technology that evolves.

Note

- 1 The frameworks set out by Norris (2002) and Farrell and Webb (2002) were originally developed to capture developments in national-level campaigning. Fisher and Denver (2008) develop these frameworks to better reflect developments in district-level campaigning.

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