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US Presidential Campaigns and Their Impact

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Introduction

U.S. presidential campaigns dominate national media attention during increasingly long periods before election day. Presidential campaigns deliver messages by way of television, radio, mail, and online media with a goal of persuading voters to support their candidate and mobilizing supporters to turnout on election day. Early studies of the persuasiveness of campaigns were characterized by findings of minimal effects. Most voters made their minds up before the general election campaigns and they did not often change their minds once decided. Campaigns exerted little influence when it came to changing the mind of voters about whom to vote for. Still, other studies find evidence that campaigns enable learning by voters. Despite limited evidence of persuasive effects, many studies find evidence of campaign effects with respect to mobilization and turnout. Through field experiments and the randomization of get out the vote (GOTV) messaging, decades of studies have documented the ability of campaigns to increase turnout. Recent studies, sometimes in conjunction with campaigns, have brought voter files—large databases of citizens voting history sometimes supplemented with additional information—to bear on questions of voter turnout. Through the use of field experiments and with advances in data and modeling techniques, studies have increasingly identified consistent evidence that through advertisement and other mobilization efforts campaigns

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