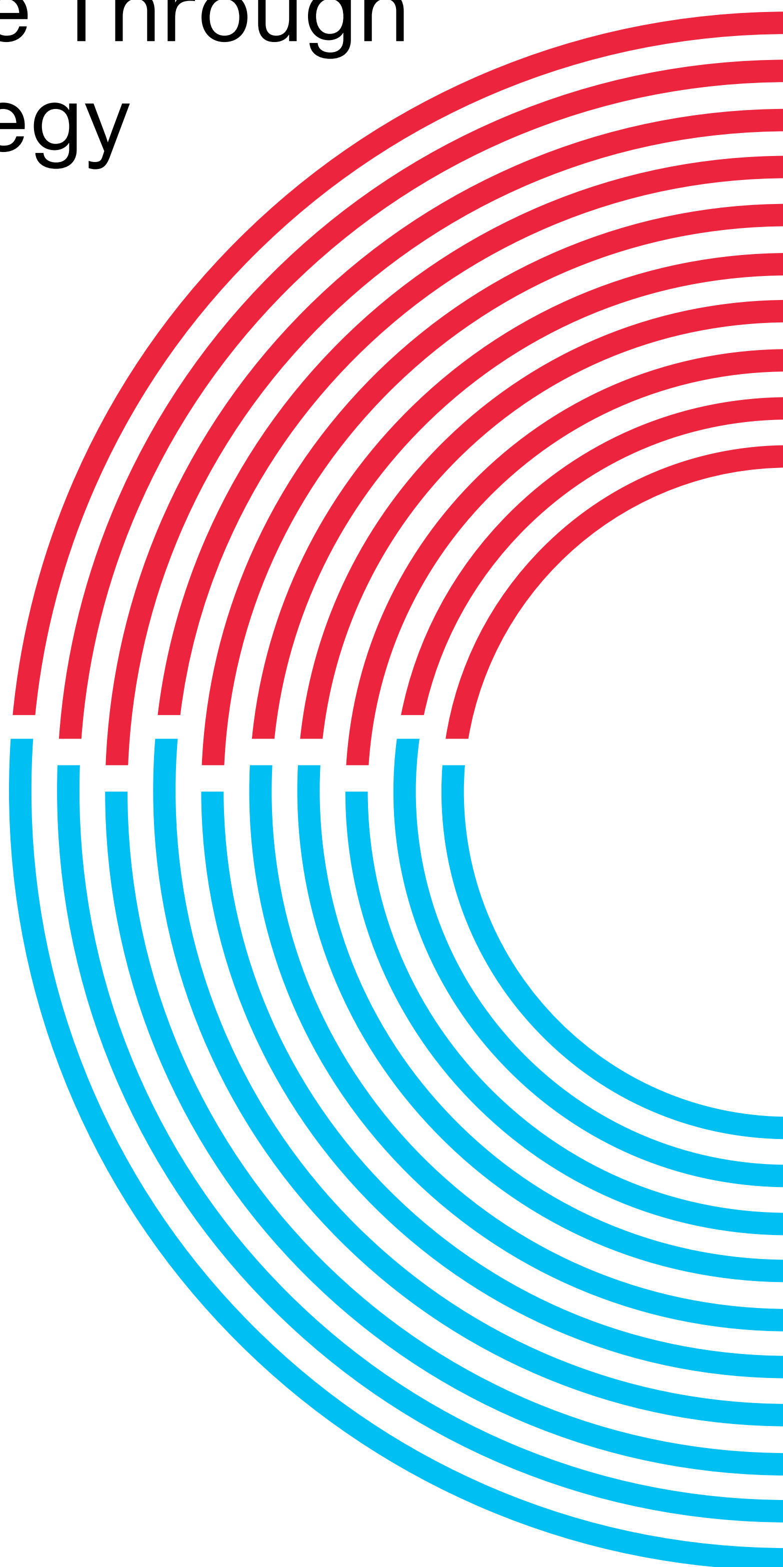
By Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D. April 2023

Electoral Advocacy: Social Change Through Political Strategy



Advocacy Labs_

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Electoral Advocacy: Social Change Through Political Strategy

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A collaboration between

About the Author

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About AdvocacyLabs

AdvocacyLabs is an initiative of 50CAN and FutureEd that provides insight into how change happens in education policy, using reports, briefs, interviews and events grounded in academic research and exclusive data from education advocacy organizations to illuminate what works and why in policy advocacy. Follow us on Twitter at @AdvocacyLabs.

About 50CAN

50CAN: The 50-State Campaign for Achievement Now is a locally led, nationally supported nonprofit education advocacy organization committed to a high-quality education for all kids, regardless of their address. Follow us on Twitter at @FiftyCAN.

About FutureEd

FutureEd is an independent, solution-oriented think tank at Georgetown University's McCourt School of Public Policy, committed to bringing fresh energy to the causes of excellence, equity, and efficiency in K–12 and higher education. Follow us on Twitter at @FutureEdGU.

Foreword

Since first launching AdvocacyLabs as a joint initiative between FutureEd and 50CAN in 2019, we have marshaled insights from the best academic research on effective advocacy to answer the real-world questions advocacy leaders are asking themselves every day. Over the past four years we have highlighted more than one hundred research studies that make use of everything from qualitative analysis to experimental designs to social simulations with the goal of elevating insights that can give education advocates an edge in their work on behalf of the nation's students.

In this latest report, we dive into the world of elections, drawing upon best-in-class research studies to answer many of the key questions advocates ask when considering how they can build more political clout to promote improvements in education.

This report asks and answers seven practical questions to help more education advocates become full participants in our democratic process.

Marc Porter Magee, Ph.D.
CEO and Founder, 50CAN

Thomas Toch
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Introduction

Elections are the beating heart of our democracy, but many education advocates get involved in them only reluctantly or not at all.

It can feel risky to choose sides in a messy partisan battle when the goal up to that point has been to stay above the fray. Politics can also seem like a different world than the one most of us are familiar with in our daily lives. How can advocates avoid wasting time or making big mistakes that undermine all the other advocacy work they do?

Advocates considering electoral work have a lot of questions. Research can help us bring the facts to bear on some of the most pressing.

The first step is to let go of simplistic stories about how elections work. The truth is that building political clout through electoral advocacy is difficult, incremental and unpredictable. But that doesn't mean it's not worth the effort.

At 50CAN and the 50CAN Action Fund, we have found that when we combine election work with traditional types of advocacy—like community organizing, storytelling and lobbying—we are more successful. In fact, the win rate for our policy campaigns jumps from 44 percent to 65 percent when electoral advocacy is included in an advocacy plan. Over the past decade, that 21-point edge has translated into more than 40 additional policy wins that wouldn't have happened if our local leaders had stayed on the electoral sidelines.

Knowing what the research says can help you make the jump to electoral work with your eyes wide open about how to best use elections to advance your cause.

Each chapter in this report focuses on a question that advocates often ask when considering whether and how to get involved in elections:

1 *Do campaigns matter?* Research suggests that electoral work can matter but often fails to have an effect because advocates don't engage in elections productively. The more personal the tactics, the better.

2 *Does campaign spending matter?* To make your money count, you need to use polling to decide which races can be tipped to your side and focus more on challengers than incumbents.

3 *What does electoral spending buy?* The most reliable thing campaign contributions secure is support for your champions and an opportunity to make your case.

4 *Do campaign policy promises matter?* Research suggest that campaign promises not only help bind candidates to your cause but also shift public opinion in your favor.

5 *Does fact-checking an election work?* Politicians are more accurate in their statements when they know someone is holding them accountable.

6 *Should advocates recruit candidates?* Yes, but you need to start the recruitment process well in advance of the campaign and make sure to encourage your candidate in addition to keeping them well-informed about the issues at stake.

7 *Can you persuade the public to vote on your cause?* Research shows that the most effective tool for getting voters to change their preexisting beliefs is storytelling.

1 Do campaigns matter?

While not a question most people think to ask, before engaging in electoral advocacy it's worth exploring when and where campaigns actually matter. Research suggests that electoral work can matter but often falls short of its potential. The more personal the tactics, the better.

What the advocates say

"It is easy to spread yourself thin across a large number of elections and have a limited impact on the outcome of those races. If you really want your electoral advocacy to matter, you need to be thoughtful about where to focus your efforts. For the 50CAN Action Fund, that means local races, with a particular focus on primaries that polling suggests are close enough for our grassroots advocates and tactics to make the difference."

Jonathan Nikkila, Executive Vice President, 50CAN Action Fund

What the research says

Before exploring how campaign work might positively affect the outcome of a race, it is worth taking a look at why researchers began to suspect it might not.

"The suspicion that campaigns might actually not matter arose primarily from findings reported in research on presidential elections," writes Gary C. Jacobson in his comprehensive 2015 review of the field, "How Do Campaigns Matter?" published in the *Annual Review of Political Science*.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Columbia University sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld and colleagues conducted some of the first empirical studies of U.S. presidential campaigns. By tracking the differences between campaigns and their results, they "concluded that presidential campaigns had little effect on voting decisions, which were determined by real experiences between elections and by enduring loyalties to parties and other social groups." Building on this line of study, later researchers "showed that presidential election outcomes could be predicted with considerable accuracy by so-called fundamentals such as the state of the economy, distribution of partisans in the

electorate, and ideological locations of the candidates before the campaigns had even taken place."

Campaign strategy sessions, stump speeches, debate prep, door knocking and advertisements were mostly irrelevant to the outcome, they argued. In the words of Jacobson: "If only the fundamentals matter, campaigns do not."

It's a striking conclusion, but is it true? Subsequent research has complicated the picture. For example, a study of the 2004 U.S. presidential election by Richard Johnston and colleagues found that the strategic decision of the Bush campaign to concentrate advertising spending in battleground states during the final weeks of the campaign allowed him to overperform in those areas. Similarly, "by examining voters living in non-battleground states but in media markets shared with battleground states," Gregory A. Huber and Kevin Arceneaux found that the Bush campaign's advertising efforts had "substantial persuasive effects."

More recently, Minali Aggarwal and colleagues partnered with the liberal advocacy group Acronym to measure the effect of an eight-month, $8.9 million social media advertising campaign on the 2020 presidential election. They found that there were small but significant shifts in voting among the targeted voters. The advertising campaign increased voting among Biden leaners by 0.4 percentage points and decreased voting by Trump leaners by 0.3 percentage points. "Our results indicate that differential mobilization effects of even large digital advertising campaigns in presidential elections are likely to be modest," they conclude.

In their 2017 review of the research in *American Political Science Review*, Joshua L. Kalla and David E. Broockman conclude that general election campaigns are likely to matter in two circumstances: "First, when candidates take unusually unpopular positions and campaigns invest unusually heavily in identifying persuadable voters. Second, when campaigns contact voters long before election day," though this early persuasion tends to "decay," they write.

In "How Do Campaigns Matter?" Gary C. Jacobson writes, "The most effective tactics are personal: Door-to-door canvassing increases turnout by an average of about 2.5 percentage points; volunteer phone calls raise it by about 1.9 points, compared to 1.0 points for calls from commercial phone banks; automated phone messages are ineffective." "A review of the evidence," he says, "leaves no doubt election campaigns do matter in a variety of important ways … The question is not whether campaigns matter, but where, when, for what, and for whom they matter."

The lessons

1 There are some elections where campaigns, no matter how well run, will not make the difference. This is particularly true when fundamentals—like the economy—point strongly in one direction. Obviously it is not worth advocates' time and effort to try to influence these elections.

2 Research shows that campaign tactics can shift votes, whether they are carried out by a candidate's own campaign or by an outside advocacy group. In close elections the side that uses these tactics more effectively can make the difference between winning and losing.

3 The more personal the tactics, the better. Where possible, focus on organizing volunteers to connect with voters through door-to-door canvassing and personal phone calls.

2 Does campaign spending matter?

One of the most popular ways to try to help a candidate win an election is to donate money. But more campaign spending doesn't always increase the odds of winning, particularly for incumbents. To make your money count, you need to use polling to decide which races can be tipped to your side and focus more on challengers than incumbents.

What the advocates say

"Donating to a candidate or spending money in support of a candidate through an independent expenditure campaign can be one of the best ways to help advance public support for your cause. But there are plenty of ways to spend money on elections that don't get results. We have learned to not only focus on competitive races in often-overlooked districts, but to also use polling data and candidate recruitment to inform our spending strategy."

Victor Evans, Executive Director, TennesseeCAN Action Fund

What the research says

It might seem obvious that candidates with more money would win more often. After all, why would candidates spend so much time raising money if it didn't matter? Yet, when researchers started taking a closer look at the data in the 1970s, a consistent pattern emerged: the amount of money an incumbent spent on their campaign had no connection to whether they won reelection.

Does money really not matter in elections? To find out, Yale political scientist Alan Gerber convinced five local campaigns—a Connecticut mayoral election, an election for the New Jersey state assembly, an election to the Connecticut state legislature, a congressional primary election, and a congressional general election—to participate in a field experiment. Gerber randomized the use of direct mail on the behalf of each campaign at either the neighborhood or ward level and then observed the results.

"These campaigns were broadly typical of those that rely on direct mail," Gerber writes in the 2004 research article. "None of the state and local candidates had the resources to conduct expensive

television campaigns ... and the effect of the mailings on voter preferences was measured through a postelection survey."

What did Gerber learn? In general, direct mailings for incumbents didn't secure additional votes. In only one of the five races did the extra spending result in more votes and the cost was high ($200 per additional vote). By contrast, additional spending on behalf of challengers worked. For example, the direct mailings in the mayoral race secured additional votes, and at a more sustainable cost of $30 per vote. Gerber concludes: "The experiments suggest that incumbent spending has only a negligible effect on incumbent vote margins. In contrast, the challenger's spending appeared highly effective." Those findings "speak directly to the extensive literature on incumbent and challenger spending effects in general elections."

As to why incumbents tend not to benefit from higher spending, Gerber suggests that their higher name recognition at the start of a campaign may lead to diminishing returns. Further, he argues that the winner-take-all dynamics of an election may lead incumbents to play it safe and focus on tactics that shore up the votes they need to win rather than seek a broad expansion of support.

The lessons

1. Having more money is no guarantee of an electoral victory. In fact, the size of an incumbent's campaign budget tends to have no relationship to their odds of winning.

2. The story is different for challengers: the extra money they spend tends to result in more votes.

3. In close races where the challenger can raise a lot of money, campaign spending can produce upsets. Using polling to decide which races to support can make a big difference for advocates.

3 What does electoral spending buy?

While it is easy to envision a one-to-one relationship between electoral contributions and policy outcomes for your causes, the truth is more complicated. The most reliable thing campaign contributions secure is support for your elected champions and the opportunity to make your case with them.

What the advocates say

"Participating in elections isn't some magical solution that makes the hard work of advocacy go away. Done right, it is a patient numbers game where year after year you support the people who support your cause, rather than a quick fix that turns opponents into allies."

Michael O'Sullivan, Executive Director, GeorgiaCAN Action Fund

What the research says

It's not surprising that people tend to think that securing results for a cause is as simple as spending a lot of money on elections. After all, when the 2010 *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission* case was decided by the Supreme Court in a way that lifted restrictions on donations, *The New York Times* wrote in an editorial that the decision had "paved the way for corporations to use their vast treasuries to overwhelm elections and intimidate elected officials into doing their bidding."

Economists Cailin R. Slattery, Alisa Tazhitdinova and Sarah Robinson saw the ruling as an opportunity to put that assertion to the test. They compared tax-policy legislation in the wake of the *Citizens United* ruling in 21 states that enacted contribution bans before 2000 and in a control group of the 27 states that did not enact bans before the ruling.

They found that independent expenditures by wealthy business groups in elections did increase substantially across the United States post *Citizens* United. But did the money buy results on tax policies that matter to business groups? No.

"Ten years after the ruling and for a wide range of outcomes, we are not able to identify economically or statistically significant effects of corporate independent expenditures on state tax policy, including tax rates, discretionary tax breaks, and tax revenues," they write. "Our results thus suggest that corporate political contributions are unlikely to drive tax policies outright."

That is, elected officials don't appear likely to change their minds on big policy issues just because an advocacy group spends a lot of money on elections. If campaign contributions don't translate into simple victories, what can they do for a cause?

To help answer this question, Joshua Kalla partnered with David Broockman on a field experiment testing the real-world scheduling decisions of senior policy-makers (or, perhaps more realistically, the assistants responsible for managing their appointments).

The researchers partnered with a grassroots advocacy organization seeking meetings with members of Congress. They emailed meeting requests to 191 congressional offices and randomly varied whether the message identified the people requesting the meeting as "local constituents" or "local campaign donors."

According to the study, when informed prospective attendees were political donors, meetings were scheduled with senior policymakers "three to four times more often" than with people who identified themselves as local constituents. In light of their large and statistically significant findings, published in American Journal of Political Science in 2016, Kalla and Broockman concluded: "Our results suggest that the vast majority of Americans who have not donated to campaigns are at a disadvantage when attempting to express their concerns to policymakers."

The lessons

1. Independent expenditures by advocacy groups by themselves don't secure big policy shifts for their cause.

2. Indeed, research suggests that spending by PACs alone makes little difference in what policies get passed.

3. Donations to candidates do help open doors, but whether that leads to policy change is dependent on all the other tactics a good advocacy campaign requires.

4 Do campaign policy promises matter?

In addition to helping elect candidates, advocates working on elections often strive to secure public commitments from candidates endorsing their policy positions. Research suggests that these public commitments not only help bind candidates to your cause but can also shift public opinion in your favor.

What the advocates say

"To be successful over the long term, advocates must push candidates to make public statements in support of their policy priorities. You can't be afraid to ask candidates to be out in front on your policy priorities. Advocates often make the mistake of taking a candidate's word for support because they gave the right answer on a candidate questionnaire or survey. Actions speak louder than words, so you need to insist that if they are with you privately they must be willing to be with you publicly."

Kelli Bottger, Executive Director,
Louisiana Kids Matter

What the research says

Politicians make a lot of promises and put out a seemingly endless stream of statements on the positions of the day. How hard should you work to get a public commitment from elected officials on your issue?

To find out, David Broockman and Daniel Butler secured the cooperation of eight state senators in a unique experiment involving constituent communication.

The state senators agreed to randomly vary their communications to three groups of constituents: a control group received no communications; a first treatment group received communications in which the legislator staked out strong positions on issues like decriminalizing marijuana and the treatment of undocumented immigrants, including lengthy justifications for each position; and a second treatment group received communications staking out the same strong positions with only minimal justifications.

To understand the potential shifts in the beliefs of the constituents, Brookman and Butler surveyed a sample of 1,047 constituents before and after they received the letters from their representatives.

Published in *American Journal of Political Science* in 2017, the study found "strong evidence that legislators can shape constituents' views on issues." The constituents who received letters stating their legislator's positions were "significantly more likely to subsequently share" those positions.

The researchers also found that "constituents who received lengthy arguments from legislators justifying their positions were no more likely to change their opinions than constituents to whom legislators provided little justification."

The finding that legislators can shape constituent opinion simply by staking out a position reinforces the importance of securing visible support from elected officials on policy issues and can help advocates "focus their ask" on what really matters.

What, then, is the best way to convince elected officials to publicly support your cause? Daniel Butler, Craig Volden, Adam Dynes, and Boris Shor Butler developed an experiment to better understand what kind of "asks" actually work. To do so, they developed a survey experiment involving 575 municipal officials who were given a short description of a policy adopted in another community and asked if they would be interested in learning more. They varied the details of whether the officials who had passed the policy were Democrats or Republicans.

Published in *American Journal of Political Science* in 2017, the study found that a big driver of interest in learning more about a policy was the political party of the officials who had adopted that policy in another community. "For conservatives," the researchers found, "the interest-in-learning gap between the other-party treatment and the same-party treatment rises to about 40 percentage points." They found a similar but less significant pattern among liberals, who were about 20 percentage points more likely to want to hear more about a proposal they believed had been adopted by Democrats instead of Republicans.

Researchers have also tested elected officials' receptivity to other sources of information. Carey Doberstein recruited 1,108 government staff members to participate in a survey experiment. Participants were asked to read and comment on the credibility of research summaries from different sources on minimum wage and income-tax policies. Half the respondents received a summary with accurate affiliation and authorship information and half received a summary where those details were randomly assigned.

Published in *Policy Studies Journal* in 2017, the study found that "academic research is perceived to be substantially more credible than think tank or advocacy organization research, regardless of its content." For example, when academic research was attributed to an ideologically left-wing think tank, the odds of it being identified as a higher credibility source decreased by 68 percent. Likewise, when a document produced by an ideologically right-wing think tank was attributed to a university, the odds of it being identified as a higher credibility source increased by 292 percent.

Doberstein concludes that "academic research has a privileged position of credibility among policy analysts, followed by think tanks and then advocacy organizations." He goes on to observe: "Think tanks and advocacy groups with less ideological orientation demonstrate higher credibility … whereas strongly ideologically oriented sources receive much lower credibility scores."

The lessons

1. Securing campaign promises can be a key tactic because constituents are influenced by the positions their elected representatives take.

2. We probably overstate how strongly politicians need to justify their support of a policy to move opinions. Taking a side matters more that the reasons why.

3. Research suggests there are two ways to recruit a politician to a cause: show how politicians from the same party have led on the issue and cite research from a trusted academic source.

5 Does fact-checking an election work?

When the facts are on your side, you want the debate to be about the facts. But how can you ensure that actually happens in elections? Researchers have found that politicians are more accurate in their statements when they know someone is holding them to account.

What the advocates say

"It can take a lot of work to track what people are saying, research the truth and get the word out when politicians are misleading their constituents. And it doesn't always make you the most popular person in town. But it works."

Nicholas Martinez, Executive Director,
TEN Collective Impact

What the research says

Nothing is more frustrating than seeing candidates on the campaign trail misrepresenting the facts on your issue. A common tactic by advocacy groups is to serve as a "watchdog" in the electoral process, using the power of transparency and public oversight in an effort to keep candidates honest in their statements. But does it work?

To put this tactic to the test, Dartmouth College's Brendan Nyhan and University of Exeter's Jason Reifler selected 1,169 state legislators across nine states and randomly assigned them to a control, a placebo or a treatment group during an election cycle.

The control group received no communication regarding their public statements and speeches. The placebo group received a simple letter informing them that their reelection campaign was being monitored for accuracy. The treatment group received a longer letter warning them about risks to their reputation and reelection chances if they were caught making false statements. Nyhan and Reifler then tracked the accuracy of the legislators' statements through ratings by the watchdog organization PolitiFact and

via media stories.

Published in the *American Journal of Political Science* in 2015, the study found that legislators who were sent treatment letters “were substantially less likely to receive a negative PolitiFact rating or to have their accuracy questioned publicly in the study period.” Specifically, the percentage of elected officials in the treatment group who received either a negative rating from PolitiFact or had the accuracy of their claims questioned in the media during the campaign was just 1.3 percent, less than half the 2.8 percent among the control and placebo groups.

“We found no evidence that these results were driven by legislators speaking less frequently or receiving less coverage, suggesting instead that they were less likely to make inaccurate statements rather than being silenced more generally,” Nyhan and Reifler concluded. “Given the very small numbers of legislators whose accuracy is currently being questioned by fact-checkers or other sources, one could argue that fact-checking should be expanded in the US,” they argued, “so that it can provide more extensive and consistent monitoring of politicians at all levels of government.”

The lessons

1. Fact-checking of candidates can be effective, especially if advocates alert candidates that that they will be monitored.

2. By announcing your intentions ahead of time, you can head off misstatements on your issue before they occur.

3. Done right, this tactic can reduce inaccurate statements by 50 percent or more during a campaign.

6 How should advocates recruit candidates?

Advocates often assume they should limit their efforts to seasoned politicians with experience launching campaigns. But one of the most effective ways to influence elections is to get involved in candidate recruitment. Research points to a number of ways to recruit effectively, including starting early and encouraging your candidate in addition to keeping them well-informed about the issues at stake.

What the advocates say

"It can feel like a lot of work, but there is nothing more powerful than finding people who share a common vision and helping them master the electoral process. That is truly democracy in action."

Amanda Aragon, Executive Director, NewMexicoKidsCAN Action Fund

What the research says

"In models of electoral accountability where voters are able to perfectly control those they elect, the identity of politicians should not matter for the outcomes we observe," writes Saad Gulzar in a 2021 article for the *Annual Review of Political Science*. "But, of course, voters exert only imperfect control over who is elected to office, so the identity of those who enter politics should impact the outcomes of democracies."

Indeed, if advocates only work within the constraints of who has already decided to run for office, they may find no candidates are strong champions of their cause.

Where should advocates focus their candidate-recruitment efforts? Surprisingly, research suggests that the simple act of encouraging people to consider running for office can make a difference.

"When researchers ask political candidates and officeholders why or when they decided to run for office, a majority consistently report that encouragement to do so from others played the most important role," writes David E. Broockman in his 2014 article on recruitment in the *Journal of Experimental*

Political Science.

To put this idea to the test, Broockman partnered with CREDO Action, an American liberal advocacy group, to send email appeals to 99,935 of its most active members encouraging them to run for office. The study used four different messages:

- Two messages focused on political support:
  - "There's help for people like you who want to run for elected office."
  - "All over America, people like you are running for office—and winning."
- Two messages focused on personal encouragement:
  - "You would be a great elected official."
  - "We want you to run for elected office."

Broockman found that the personal encouragement messages were more effective than the offers of political support. Indeed, the message, "We want you to run for elected office" resulted in more than twice the number of people actually running for office as the message, "There's help for people like you who want to run for elected office" (0.48 percent of recipients versus 0.23 percent of recipients).

Research suggests it is never too early to start this kind of personal encouragement. In a study of political engagement in high school published in 2016, Martin Lundin and colleagues explored the effect of holding a student council position on the likelihood that students would run for public office as adults. By tracking students over time and comparing the behavior of those who won their council races to those who lost by slim margins, they found this early success increased the odds of running for public office later in life by 34 percent.

The lessons

1. You can have more influence in elections if you get involved in shaping who runs in the first place.

2. One of the simplest steps you can take is to encourage people who care about your issue to run for office and share why you would be enthusiastic about them as a candidate.

3. It is smart to pursue a "small wins" strategy by encouraging them to run for something local and build on that early success in future races.

7 Can you persuade the public to vote on your cause?

Elected officials are sensitive to changes in the beliefs of their constituents. This has led advocates to try and influence voters as a way to advance their causes through election campaigns. Research shows that the most effective tool for getting voters to change their preexisting beliefs is storytelling.

What the advocates say

"Stories matter. Emotional, relatable stories are a way for our brains to humanize, contextualize and connect with complicated issues that data and statistics just can't match. As an advocate, stories will help you cut through the debate and help people connect with your passion for a cause, the people you are trying to help and the way they can be a part of that cause. That's why I lead my advocacy work in education by talking about my son or a student I've gotten to know through our programs."

David Miyashiro, Executive Director, HawaiiKidsCAN Action Fund

What the research says

One of the most common arguments advocates make when meeting with candidates is that they have public opinion on their side. But can you actually shift public opinion in the direction of your issue?

To better understand what it takes to build public support for a cause, psychologist Matthew L. Stanley and colleagues carried out a study involving more than 3,000 participants engaged with five hot button issues: fracking, animal testing, drone strikes, the gold standard and standardized testing.

They gave participants three types of information: information that affirmed their existing positions; information that made the case against their existing positions; and information on both sides of their issue.

They found that it is hard but not impossible to change people's minds, and that some strategies for doing so work better than others.

Participants were "more likely to stick with their initial decisions than to change them no matter which reasons are considered," they reported. As an example, when participants were asked whether they supported standardized testing in schools, 47.6

percent said yes. When presented with arguments both for and against standardized testing, 46.7 percent still supported standardized tests, a shift of just 0.9 percentage points.

But while the researchers found that only a small group of people are likely to change their minds on an issue under any circumstances, they also found that participants who were given only the opposing side of an issue to their own were significantly more likely to change their minds than participants who evaluated reasons for both sides. When presented only with the reasons not to support standardized testing, support dropped by 4.6 percentage points. This suggests that advocates would be most effective spending their time making arguments against the other side on their issue.

If arguing the facts doesn't result in the big opinion shifts advocates need to win, what else can they do? Joshua L. Kalla and David E. Broockman used both field experiments and a survey to explore how different advocacy tactics might succeed in shifting opinions on contentious debates where more reasoned arguments have failed.

In their article, the researchers reported that one tactic in particular, known as "perspective getting," was particularly effective in shifting opinions. This narrative is presented by someone from the listener's community (an ingroup member) who is not a part of the group affected (the outgroup). An example of this approach is a neighbor telling you a story about the challenges of an undocumented immigrant family in your community.

For their study, Kalla and Broockman made use of randomized door-to-door canvassing experiments conducted in California, Michigan, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and Tennessee to explore the effectiveness of four tactics:

- Traditional Perspective-Taking (self-generated, imagined): "Imagining what it would be like to experience a story if one were the outgroup member in that story."
- Analogic Perspective-Taking (self-generated, recalled): "Thinking about a time when one was discriminated against to help understand what it is like for outgroup members when they face discrimination."
- Vicarious Perspective-Giving (self-generated, recalled): "Describing the experiences of a friend or family member in the outgroup."
- Perspective-Getting (received from another person): "Listening to an ingroup friend tell a story about the experiences of their friend in the outgroup."

The researchers found "consistent evidence in favor of the efficacy of narratives that promote perspective-getting, or hearing about the experiences of an outgroup member" as the most effective way to shift public opinion in one-on-one settings.

This simple act of relaying a story about a vulnerable group—the experiment focused on undocumented immigrants and transgender people—took half the time as the self-generated tactics and produced significant shifts in public opinion. For example, in follow-up surveys they found that people who received the perspective-getting treatment experienced a 12.7 percentage point increase in support for making undocumented immigrants eligible for college scholarships at state colleges. They also found that this tactic worked for canvassers "regardless of whether they were themselves members of the outgroup."

The lessons

1. Simply presenting the facts to voters is unlikely to make much difference because people are naturally inclined to defend their beliefs.

2. Rather than try to persuade people with logic, use narratives to encourage people to see an issue from a different perspective.

3. This approach can be particularly effective when you are connecting with people in-person, such as during door-to-door canvassing or at an event.

Selected Articles

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