

U.S. Congress

Congressional Campaigns

Nathan Barron

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Contents

1 Do (Congressional) campaigns matter?	1
1.1 Spending	1
1.2 Persuasion	1
1.3 Information and knowledge	2
1.4 Agendas, framing & priming	2
1.5 Voter turnout	2

1 Do (Congressional) campaigns matter?

1.1 Spending

Three historical views:

- Challenger spending matters and incumbent spending does not¹
- Marginal returns are greater for challengers than for incumbents, but not as stark as previously assumed²
- Spending by both incumbents and challengers has about the same effect or that incumbent spending is actually more potent³

Spending can be particularly effect in changing who votes, particularly among low-information voters, partisans, and those who are economically dissatisfied.⁴

1.2 Persuasion

Broockman and Kalla⁵ find that campaigns are not effective in persuading potential voters. Recent literature suggests that there might be a small ability to persuade voters in cases where campaigns calibrate advertisements with experiments.⁶

¹Jacobson 1985, 1990, 2013; Abramowitz 1988; Ansolabehere & Gerber 1994

²Bartels 1991, Goidel & Gross 1994, Kenney & McBurnett 1994

³Green & Krasno 1988, 1990; Erikson & Palfrey 1998; Goldstein & Freedman 2000

⁴Schuster, Steven Sprick. 2020. “Does Campaign Spending Affect Election Outcomes? New Evidence from Transaction-Level Disbursement Data.” *The Journal of Politics*. 82(4): 1502-1515.

⁵Kalla, Joshua L., and David E. Broockman. “The Minimal Persuasive Effects of Campaign Contact in General Elections: Evidence from 49 Field Experiments.” *American Political Science Review* 112, no. 1 (2018): 148–66. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055417000363>.

⁶Hewitt, Luke, David Broockman, Alexander Coppock, Ben M. Tappin, James Slezak, Valeria Coffman, Nathaniel Lubin, and Mohammad Hamidian. “How Experiments Help Campaigns Persuade Voters: Evidence from a Large Archive of Campaigns’ Own Experiments.” *American Political Science Review*, 2024, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001387>.

1.3 Information and knowledge

- Campaigns are especially helpful for challengers and early-career incumbents; improving name-recognition
- Particularly relevant to spending (see table below)

	Total spending during election	2 months prior to Election day	Election day Election day
DV = Recall			
Incumbents	>\$400k	35	50
Incumbents	<\$400k	25	40
Challengers	>\$400k	20	40
Challengers	<\$400k	5	15
DV = Recognize			
Incumbents	>\$400k	80	90
Incumbents	<\$400k	80	90
Challengers	>\$400k	50	80
Challengers	<\$400k	25	45

Table 1: Percentage (%) of Survey Respondents who could Recall or Recognize Congressional Candidates by Spending, Incumbency Status. (Source: Jacobson 2006)

1.4 Agendas, framing & priming

- Agendas are the topics that candidates and parties discuss.
- Framing is *how* to think about certain policies, events, etc. Importantly, framing isn't *what* to think about those policies. For example, the Republican and Democratic parties differ in how to frame immigration issues: national security or humanitarianism. Framing is about how to process information.
- Priming is bringing certain topics to the forefront by increasing those topics' perceived relevance.

1.5 Voter turnout

GOTV Strategy	Increased turnout
Canvassing	+ 2.5
Volunteer phone bank	+ 1.9
Commercial phone bank	+ 1.0
Robocalling	+ 0.0
Direct mail	+ 0.2
Text messaging	+ 4.1

Table 2: Percentage Point Increase in Voter Turnout by GOTV Strategy (Source: Jacobson 2015)