



Hacking the Electorate: How Campaigns Perceive Voters

By Eitan D. Hersh

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Hacking the Electorate is the most comprehensive study to date about the consequences of campaigns using microtargeting databases to mobilize voters in elections. Eitan Hersh follows the trail from data to strategy to outcomes. Hersh argues that most of what campaigns know about voters comes from a core set of public records. States vary in the kinds of records they collect from voters - and these variations in data across the country mean that campaigns perceive voters differently in different areas. Consequently, the strategies of campaigns and the coalitions of voters who are mobilized fluctuate across the country because of the different ways campaigns perceive the electorate. Data policies influence campaigns, voters, and increasingly, public officials.

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Editorial Review

Review

"With solid empirics, Eitan Hersh's *Hacking the Electorate* deftly deflates myths about the magic of microtargeting, while demonstrating how campaigners' perceptions of voters vary in consequential ways with the particulars of the publicly available data they draw on for the enterprise. The book offers an original and thoughtful perspective on an increasingly prominent campaign tool."

Gary Jacobson, Distinguished Professor of Political Science, University of California, San Diego

"Think political campaigns know you better than you know yourself? Think again. It's not what magazines you read or which beer you drink that drives campaign strategies, it's the information on public records gathered by local governments. In *Hacking the Electorate*, Eitan Hersh delivers a much-needed corrective to the myths of modern campaigning - microtargeting may be effective, but the algorithms are far simpler than candidates and strategists would have you believe."

Lynn Vavreck, University of California, Los Angeles

"You may have heard that campaigns have encyclopedic data about you and can use your choice of car, beer, or magazine to target a message specifically to you. You've heard wrong. Eitan Hersh shows what campaigns really know about voters, and how it matters. This is the first political science account of what 'big data' can and cannot do for campaigns. It is a must-read for academics and campaign practitioners alike."

John Sides, George Washington University, Washington DC

"Hersh offers a compelling account of the link between campaign strategy and candidate access to the personal information citizens provide to the government to register to vote. The book should be required reading for scholars of campaigns and elections, but it holds broader appeal to anyone interested in understanding the dynamics of campaign communication and the politics of public records."

Sunshine Hillygus, Duke University, North Carolina

"In *Hacking the Electorate*, Eitan Hersh has not only drawn attention to a critical feature of modern campaigns but he has also opened up an entirely new field of study in American politics. Commentators speak about the importance of 'big data' to contemporary campaigns and governance, but Hersh shows us the link between the available data and many well-known, if poorly understood, pathologies of our politics. Anyone interested in the trajectory of American campaigns and the important role of data and technology in them should read this book and heed its lessons."

Nathaniel Persily, James B. McClatchy Professor of Law, Stanford University, California

About the Author

Eitan Hersh is an Assistant Professor of Political Science at Yale University. His research has been published in journals such as the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* and the *Journal of Politics*, as well as featured in news outlets such as *PBS NewsHour*, the *Associated Press*, and the *Washington Post*. Hersh has served as an expert consultant in several election-related court cases.

Users Review

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Paul Anderson:

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