

## DATA-DRIVEN CAMPAIGN

Fabio Lupato García (University Complutense Madrid)

Valeria Tarditi (University of Calabria)

### Definition

Data-driven campaign (DDC) refers to the design of political parties' electoral campaigns in which digital technologies and the use of data are central to all campaign activities. Every phase and objectives of the electoral campaign — including strategic decision-making, the development of proposals and campaign messages, the implementation of voter mobilization strategies, the generation and allocation of resources, and overall campaign organization — is guided by the collection, use, and analysis of data. This encompasses the application of advanced data analysis techniques, profiling, and other voter modelling strategies, as well as continuous testing throughout the campaign and the promotion of effective communication through micro- and even nano-targeting. Data-driven campaign fosters the growth of data analysis expertise and the provision of technological support. In its ideal form, DDC marginalizes the role of professional politicians and traditional campaign practices, replacing them with the centrality of data in the making, implementation, and evaluation of every aspect of the electoral campaign.

### Context

The concept characterises the so-called fourth phase of communication, or post-modern communication, in which digital tools and the web acquire centrality (Norris 2004; Gibson 2020). This phase of communication is characterised by the parties' development of political marketing strategies built around the voters and their needs. Within these electoral strategies, data collection and analysis play a predominant role (Munroe and Munroe 2018; Gibson 2020; Dommett et al. 2024). This also affects the type of professionalisation of party actors, with the acquisition of a fundamental role for those specialised in communication, data analysis and information gathering. Some authors (Kefford et al. 2023) point out that the spread of DDC can have perturbative effects on democracy as it fragments political discourse, weakens traditional accountability systems,

contributes to the personalisation of organisations, affects the fairness of elections by strengthening parties with larger resources, and increases the possibility of manipulating voters. At the same time, however, with the exception of the United States, most of the parties in other European and Western democracies do not have the economic and professional capacity and resources to implement DDC. Also, they might not admit they use it, especially in highly-regulated data contexts such as the EU, where targeting can be risky politically. That is why measuring DDC is a challenge. In some cases, it seems that newcomers as well as "digital parties" might be more active in adopting it than major parliamentary parties (Bon et al. 2025).

### **Related Concept:**

Data-driven Microtargeting; Digital Activism; Digital Engagement; E-Democracy; Digital Party; Participation; Platform politics

### **References**

- Bimber, Bruce (2014). Digital Media in the Obama Campaigns of 2008 and 2012: Adaptation to the Personalized Political Communication Environment, *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 11(2): 130-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2014.895691>
- Bon, Esmeralda, Gibson, Rachel, Greffet, Fabienne, Römmele, Andrea (2025). What drives data-driven campaigning (DDC)? A comparative analysis of the institutional and organisational factors shaping the adoption of DDC in the French and German party systems, *Swiss Political Science Review*, 31(1): 79-101. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12652>
- Dommett, Katherine, Kefford, Glenn, & Power, Sam (2021). The digital ecosystem: The new politics of party organization in parliamentary democracies. *Party Politics*, 27(5): 847-857. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068820907667>
- Dommett, Katherine; Barclay, Andrew & Gibson, Rachel (2024). Just what is data-driven campaigning? A systematic review, *Information, Communication & Society*, 27(1): 1-22, DOI: 10.1080/1369118X.2023.2166794
- Gibson, Rachel (2020). *When the Nerds go marching in. How digital technologies moved from the margin to the mainstream of political campaigns*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jungherr, Andreas., Rivero, Gonzalo, & Gayo-Avello, Daniel. (2020). *Retooling politics: How digital media are shaping democracy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jungherr, Andreas (2023). Artificial Intelligence and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework. *Social Media + Society*, 9(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/20563051231186353>

- Kefford, Glenn, Dommett, Katherine, Baldwin-Philippi, Jessica, Bannerman, Sara, Dobber, Tom, Kruschinski, Simon, Kruikemeier, Sanne, & Rzepecki, Erica (2023). Data-driven campaigning and democratic disruption: Evidence from six advanced democracies. *Party Politics*, 29(3): 448-462. <https://doi.org/10.1177/13540688221084039>
- Lupato, Fabio G., Jerez, Ariel, & Meloni, Marco (2023). Digital innovation in electoral campaigns: the case of microcredit in Podemos. *Policy Studies*, 45(5): 773–791. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01442872.2023.2203479>
- Munroe, Kaija. B., & Munroe, H. D. (2018). Constituency campaigning in the age of data. *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 51(1): 135–154. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423917001135>
- Nickerson, David W. & Rogers, Todd (2014). Political Campaigns and Big Data. *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 28(2): 51–74.

Suggested citation: Lupato García, Fabio & Tarditi, Valeria (2026), “Data-driven campaign”, Dictionary on Digitalization and Democracy, RELINK<sup>2</sup> Cost Action 23114. <https://relink2.eu/>