



A Voter's Guide: Data-Driven Political Influence Workshop Plan



Workshop aim:

Participants will gain an understanding of how political parties use personal data to influence voters' behaviours and decisions during election campaigns. The workshop provides tools to assist voters in developing their political agency and personal opinions within an election environment of pervasive digital campaigns and limited online privacy.

Workshop time:

Three hours

Experience level:

This workshop is designed for people who are new to the topic of digital election campaigns.

Number of participants:

5 - 25 participants with one facilitator

Workshop facilities (online):

Collaborative online space that allows participants to add text and pictures; participants should also have access to pen and paper, or a digital drawing tool.

Workshop facilities (offline):

Aluminium foil; Pens and paper.

Workshop format:

The workshop can be run online or offline. Half-way through the workshop is a break for participants to stretch and rest. Throughout the agenda sections you can find:

- Objectives
- Discussion points
- 1 - 2 activities
- Slides
- Sources

Agenda

Section 1:

Introduction to Data-Driven Politics (45 minutes)

Section 2:

Political Communications and Influence (30 minutes)

Section 3:

The Influence Industry and Data-Driven Political Campaigns (15 minutes)

Break (15 minutes)

Section 4:

Behind Influence: Data as a Political Asset and as Political Intelligence (60 minutes)

Section 5:

Why Does Data-driven Influence Matter to Us? (25 minutes)

Section 6:

What Can We Do? (20 minutes)

Introduction to Data-Driven Politics 45 minutes

Objectives

- Introduce the topic, organisers and purpose of the workshop
 - Establish a safe, brave, and playful space for the participants to share and learn
 - Encourage participants to consider what they want to get out of the workshop
 - Create a foundation for some of the key concepts of data and political influence
 - Discuss the importance of different types of political engagement within the participants' contexts
- There will be examples from specific parties in specific countries, but the research has shown these tools and practices are used across the political spectrum and around the world.
 - We will be examining practices and methods of a for-profit industry connected to politics, as well as our values towards industry's involvement in politics, but not the political alliances of the individuals in the room with us.
- Ask the participants about the meaning of political engagement:
 - What does political engagement mean to you?
 - What are other types of political engagement besides voting?

Discussion Points (10 minutes)

- Introduce yourself and if relevant [Tactical Tech](#) and the [Influence Industry Project](#).
- Introduce the workshop agenda
- Ground Rules: Suggest ground rules and/or co-develop them with the group
- Make the following notes about the political nature of the content:

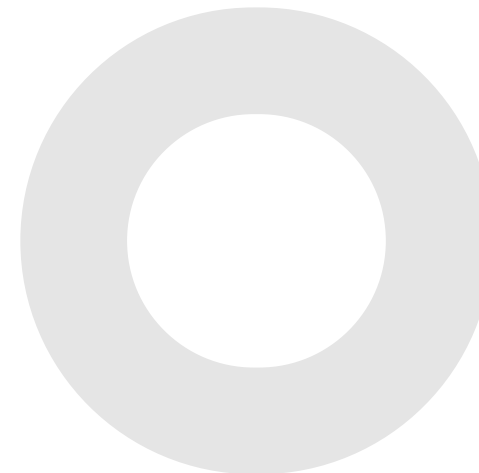
✓ Activity (20 minutes)

Portraits and Data Doubles: Introduce the topic of profiling including how others can create representations of us, and how this applies to the collection of personal data. The activity is designed to reveal how representations of us through data are incomplete and inaccurate.

Activity instructions [here](#)

Post-Activity Discussion Points (15 minutes)

- Personal data does not have one single definition
 - Personal data can represent many different aspects of a person, such as what you look like, your opinions and what news you read, your behaviours such as how often you go shopping, or your contact details.
 - Personal data can represent an individual or a group;
 - Personal data can be connected to a specific individual, a group profile, or be anonymised;
 - Personal data can represent what you did in the past as well as predictions about what you might do in the future.
 - **For this workshop, we define personal data as a representation of any aspect of a person or persons that can be hosted in a database.**
- There are three common ways data is created:
 - **Data you create** such as posts that you like on social media, when you fill in a form online to sign up for an event, or when you send an email. Data is collected from online interactions (click, website visited, video watched) and on internet-connected devices (apps downloaded and used, mobile location).
 - **Data that others create** about you such as photos that you are tagged in or inclusion in another person's 'contacts' or 'friends' list, or that another person record about you when you attend a course or event.
 - **Data that is inferred** about you is created through analysis of the trends and connections among data that you create or data created about you, and data of other people. Inferred data makes predictions such as who you are most likely to vote for based on where you live.
- Data is often collected without people's knowledge and it can be difficult to opt out of data collection.
- You can think of these types of data created, collected, and inferred about you as your 'data trail', 'data shadow' or 'data double.'
- Data represents a lot about us including our actions, location and general outline of our interests, but does your data shadow resemble you? What could be missing in your data shadow?
- Just about every sector uses data. Every major company that is conducting marketing or advertising campaigns is using personal data. For this workshop, we are talking exclusively about political parties, candidates and groups conducting election campaigns.
- **We are going to demystify some of the data-driven technologies and tools which political parties, and the surrounding influence industry, rely on to influence voters.**



Slides

Slides 1 – 12 cover the introduction, agenda, ground rules, and the introduction to data and the data market.

Sources

To learn more about this topic and our research, visit:

- [Data: From Personal to Political](#)

Political Communications and Influence 30 minutes

Objectives

- Define political influence
- Discuss real-life examples of political communications
- Relate participants' current context of political communication to wider trends in political influence
- Identify what types of content are influential and have an impact on public opinion

Discussion Points (20 minutes)

- Ask participants: which political ads or other election campaign content, such as SMSs, emails or TV interviews, have you seen that you remember or that made an impression on you?
 - What was memorable about the content?
- What is political influence?
 - Influence is the capacity to have an effect on the character, development, or behaviour of someone or something, or the effect itself.
 - 'Influencing' is different to 'informing', which aims to provide information without necessarily changing behaviour.
 - Influence is different from regulation, which aims to change behaviour through enforcement rather than choice.

- Influence aims to have an effect on the behaviour or actions of an individual or a group through nudging, persuasion, or even manipulation so that they choose to act in a certain way.
- For this workshop, we are looking at how political parties, candidates and campaigns attempt to influence voters during election campaigns.
- What does political influence during election campaigns look like?
 - Political influence has always relied on different communication channels and technologies over time including newspapers, radio, television, email, websites, and social media.
 - Politicians adapt their communications to different technologies - either developing press releases in the formats requested by journalists, changing their backdrops for TV interviews, or developing website images to represent their values online.
 - **Prepare:** Find examples relevant to the context of the participants, or facilitator, of different forms of political influence such as two of the following: TV advert, SMS from a political party, billboard or poster, Facebook or Instagram advert, YouTube video from a party.
 - Most of these technologies are used together, such as sharing a TV interview through TikTok, or reading newspaper headlines on social media. This is sometimes referred to as The Hybrid Media System.

✓ Activity (20 minutes)

Political appearances: Participants will identify visual tools used by politicians to demonstrate certain values and qualities that may be appealing to the public.

Activity instructions [here](#)

Post-activity discussion points (5 minutes)

- Political parties design their political communications to send an attractive and cohesive message about a candidate or party's values.
 - Political communications can aim to create a narrative in a story or series of stories to gain support from a specific voting group.
 - Political narratives can be stories politicians tell in a positive light for themselves or in a negative light against their opponents.

📄 Slides

Slides 13-22 cover what influence is and where political influence can be seen during an election campaign.

📄 Sources

To learn more about this topic and our research, visit:

- [Data as Political Influence](#)

The Influence Industry and Data-Driven Political Campaigns

15 minutes

Objectives

- Define data-driven campaigning
- Describe features of data-driven political influence
- Define the influence industry and the role of private firms in political campaigns

Discussion Points (15 minutes)

- What is data-driven campaigning?
 - Data-driven campaigning is the use of data to strategically place and tailor political messages often, but not only, through online channels
 - Political parties use personal data to make decisions about how to carry out a political campaign, including:
 - which messages to share with the public,
 - whom to advertise them to,
 - and how to personalise the message to individuals and groups.
- Political parties often hire services from private firms to carry out data-driven campaigning
- Private firms, therefore, have a lot of decision-making power over the content we receive in a political campaign.
- Ask the participants what they already know about Cambridge

Analytica, including:

- What do they remember from the news story?
- Where do they remember hearing or reading about the news story?
- Provide some details about the Cambridge Analytica scandal:
 - Cambridge Analytica was a data analytics company.
 - In 2018, a whistleblower exposed that Cambridge Analytica had been collecting personal data from millions of Facebook users without their consent.
 - Cambridge Analytica used data to work with political campaigns around the world, including the Brexit campaign in the UK, and Donald Trump's 2016 campaign for US President.
 - This news story was famous in many parts of the world because it revealed how personal data is used by private companies to help political parties create influence.
- **Prepare:** If there is an example that is better known in the participants' context, the facilitator can also highlight a relevant example.
- Describe the size and role of the political influence industry:
 - There are many private companies involved in collecting, analysing, and selling voter data to political parties – over 500 worldwide
 - Some of these firms are data brokers, who collect and sell data and analysis about voters or potential voters to political parties.
 - Other firms collect data to produce content, such as to design advertisements, social media posts, emails, and other communications on behalf of political parties.

- Some firms collect data to inform themselves to sell consulting services to advise political parties on how to carry out their election campaign, such as when to use traditional or digital media.
 - This collection of firms is what we refer to as the Influence Industry.
 - Some of these firms are explicitly political, but others are working on the principles of the technology industry and the private sector, aiming to make a profit before aligning to any partisan or non-partisan political principles.
- **Political influence can be seen in the political advertisements that you see on social media or on a website: it's the phrasing of the email that a political campaign sends you, it's how the political billboard looks and the public actions that a politician takes during a campaign.**
 - Ask the participants where do they see influence – on what channels do they receive political messages and in what places do they see images of political candidates?
 - In the next session, we will look at the uses of data behind influence as:
 - Data as a Political Asset: the collection and storage of data
 - Data as Political Intelligence: the analysis of data for information

Slides

Slides 23 - 31 discuss the mechanisms of data-driven campaigning and the influence industry.

Sources

To learn more about this topic and our research, visit:

- [The Explorer](#)
- [Investigating the Companies Behind Our Political Opinions](#)
- [The Dilemmas of Using Personal Data for Political Influence](#)



Break 15 Minutes

Behind Influence: Data as a Political Asset and as Political Intelligence

60 Minutes

Objectives

- Describe how data can be a political asset to politicians and political parties
- Describe how data can be turned into political intelligence
- Connect how data as an asset, and data as intelligence, act as a foundation for political influence

Discussion Points (15 minutes)

- Behind the adverts, emails, and other messages we receive from political candidates and parties is:
 - The Use of Data as a Political Asset
 - The Use of Data as Political Intelligence

Data as a Political Asset

- Valuable sets of data on any citizen can be amassed and sold, shared or otherwise exchanged between political candidates, campaigns, and data brokers. These data sets are assets to political campaigns and the potential influence they could have on voters.
- An asset can be understood as an item or good of value that belongs to an individual, company or government. An asset has the potential to benefit the entity that owns it.

- More data collected means both more which can be sold, and more which can be analysed producing presumed-better quality – and more valuable – insights. Anyone collecting data has an interest in protecting and growing their assets.
- Data about potential voters can be sourced from:
 - public data, such as public records including voter files which are made available from the government and include names and addresses of eligible voters and census data;
 - consumer data, which is the data trail we’ve described to be collected across devices like apps, social media, financial data and often bought from data brokers.

Data as Political Intelligence

- Data is analysed and interpreted by political campaigns to create ‘intelligence’ to inform campaign strategies and priorities.
- **Profiling political party’s own success:** political groups use this data to evaluate whether their communications are successful in portraying the values they hope to portray, and whether people are responding well to their messaging and online appearance.
 - Political parties can create a profile of their own success using metrics provided by platforms such as Google or Facebook, which show them how many people are liking their content, sharing it with others, opening their emails, and clicking links to their website.

- They can also test and constantly improve their content through A/B testing: A/B testing is the process to measure responses to two or more different images and messages, as well as the time they spend on the message or channel they use to send it on, to see what gets the most responses and what is less successful.
- **Profiling voters:** political parties, and private firms, can analyse and combine data points (often in large quantities) to create profiles about individual voters or groups of voters.
 - One way of doing this is by dividing voter information into “audiences” or specific segments of people with various data points in common. Many data companies sell “audiences” which are profile categories which are applied to specific individuals in the political parties’ databases.

Post-activity Discussion Points (10 minutes)

- Did you think your profile type was accurate or inaccurate?
- What did you think of this as a practice? Is it ethical?
- Types of profiling include:
 - **Psychometric profiling:** people’s personality type or psychological tendencies
 - Psychometric or personality profiles are created from popular science methods such as ‘OCEAN’.
 - **Demographic profiling:** people’s gender, religion, ethnicity, location of where they live, income, and number of family members.
 - Demographic profiles are often collected from CENSUS or forms you fill in.
 - **Opinion profiling:** representation of groups who share an opinion such as who support or oppose an upcoming legislation or who are for or against specific political movements.
 - Opinion profiles can be gathered through polls, focus groups and digital listening, which involves scraping social media platforms to gain an idea of how people feel about a subject.
 - **Behavioural profiling:** representations of people based on the trends of their behaviours, such as how often they shop, what content they usually read on a website, or what time of day they read their emails e.g. an “early-bird news reader” or a “late-night online shopper”.
 - Behavioural profiles can be created by tracking your behaviours online or purchasing data on your habits from data brokers.
- All of these types of profiles can be used by political groups to decide what content to target to a voter’s specific profile types.

✓ Activity (10 minutes)

The OCEAN Profile: A browser-based quiz in which participants gain an understanding of how adverts are targeted to them based on their “psychometric” profile, specifically the OCEAN method made infamous by the data analytics firm Cambridge Analytica.

Activity instructions [here](#)

✓ Activity (20 minutes)

In their shoes: This small-group activity places participants in the shoes of an advertiser to understand how political ads are designed according to different profiles of potential voters.

Activity instructions [here](#)

Post-activity Discussion (5 minutes)

- Did any of these types of profiling feel more or less accurate?
- Did any of these types of profiling feel more or less creepy?
- Many organisations can access demographic data, and some behavioural data such as what people are reading on their website, but it is much more expensive to run digital listening, polls, or psychometric profiling.

🔗 Slides

Slides 33-42 show data as a political asset and data as political intelligence, including how political parties and groups profile themselves and voters, different types of profiling are covered.

📄 Sources

To learn more about this topic and our research, visit:

- [The Political Data Technologies Framework](#)
- [Data as a Political Asset](#)
- [Data as Political Intelligence](#)

Why Do Data-Driven Campaigns and the Influence Industry Matter?

25 Minutes

Objectives

- Review why this is an important topic for voters, public discourse, and political practices
- Describe several common issues raised by data-driven campaigns

Discussion Points (10 minutes)

- The practice of using data isn't necessarily new. Enterprises and political groups have long paid attention to consumer habits, polling and which demographics are likely to vote for them.
- What is new is the volume, detail and scale of these practices. Digital technologies have super-charged the practices, and new AI-driven technologies will supercharge them even more.
- Ask participants if they think these data-driven influence techniques are used for better or worse in relation to improving their political knowledge and participation.
 - Explain some of the common issues:
 - Accuracy: if the data is not always accurately representing us, should it be used as a basis for the political information we are targeted with?
 - Hidden: Many people do not know that their data is being

- collected, and almost no one has the option to see all the data that has been collected about them.
- Bias: prejudices in the real world affect the types of data collected and how it is used to profile groups.
- Polarisation: private companies focused on profit will be more interested in controversial content producing the most clicks and shares, rather than political participation that helps voters.
 - Do the participants have other criticisms or concerns?
 - Do the participants think they these tools can be beneficial to them or their community?

✓ Activity (10 minutes)

What gives an image meaning? This reflective exercise prompts participants to question how political content makes them feel and to consider the intentions of the content-creator.

Activity instructions [here](#)

Post-activity Discussion Points (5 minutes)

- Ask participants what they think about political ads and images now that they understand how they work.
- Ask the participants whether today's session so far brought up any emotions for them and why.
- Political advertisements in particular can bring up strong emotions for people and can be very memorable.
- Some follow-up questions could be:
 - Can you notice the ways that political ads are designed to make you feel?
 - Do you want to know more about who makes the ads?
 - Do you think there are fair political campaign techniques; what makes a political campaign technique fair?
- Knowledge as action
 - Knowing about the influence industry and data-driven campaigning in elections is already powerful for voters.
 - When viewing a political ad, knowledge allows you to take a step back, think about the industry that brought the advertisement to you whether on your device or on your work commute and consider the data, techniques and influence behind the message.

Slides

Slides 43 - 48 cover the discussion questions for this section.

What Can We Do? 15 Minutes

Objectives:

- Discuss as a group what the next steps might be for participants.
- Reflect on types of activism or action within their own needs and interests.

Discussion Points (2 minutes)

- Data-driven campaigning is an international topic and policy-makers are developing regulations to regulate social media platforms and political parties. However, these regulations are not the only solutions, and may not be effective.
- There are steps that individuals, communities and groups can take to feel and be more in control of how they interact with political influence.

✓ Activity (5 minutes)

Reflection as political action: Political opinions can be a complex, personal and overwhelming topic. Choose from three different activities to create a private and reflective space for participants to examine their feelings and experiences in an intentional manner.

Activity instructions [here](#)

Discussion (10 minutes)

- Describe to participants that sometimes taking the time for yourself to understand your opinions and investigate a topic further is action.
- Share other actions the participants can take, such as:
 - Change the settings on your phone or personal devices to be more strict about tracking or add an ad blocker to your devices.
 - For a useful resource and some tips about technical actions to take, you can visit [A Voter's Guide](#), by the Influence Industry Project and Data Detox Kit
 - Prepare: Look for some context appropriate resources to share with the participants (see suggestions in the sources section).

- Interrogate information and learn how to identify verifiable news sources
- Advocate for transparency around political advertisements and for politicians to take data privacy seriously.
- None of these actions have to be public; you can remain as private as you want, reflect on your own, or have a conversation with a trusted friend.
- Next time you see an advertisement, pause and think about why you have been shown this advertisement. Notice the feelings that it evokes and if there are any claims that stick out to you.

Closing (3 minutes)

- Thank participants for their time, energy and interest

Slides

Slides 55- 61 give suggestions for further actions and wrap-up the session.

Sources

To learn more about this topic and our research, visit:

- Data Detox Kit: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/home>
- Who Targets Me: <https://whotargets.me/en>
- Ad blockers like Privacy Badger: <https://www.eff.org/pages/privacy-badger>
- Voter's Guide: <https://datadetoxkit.org/en/privacy/voting>
- Digital Enquirer Kit: <https://digitalenquirer.org>

To learn more about all topics mentioned in this workshop, check out <https://influenceindustry.org>