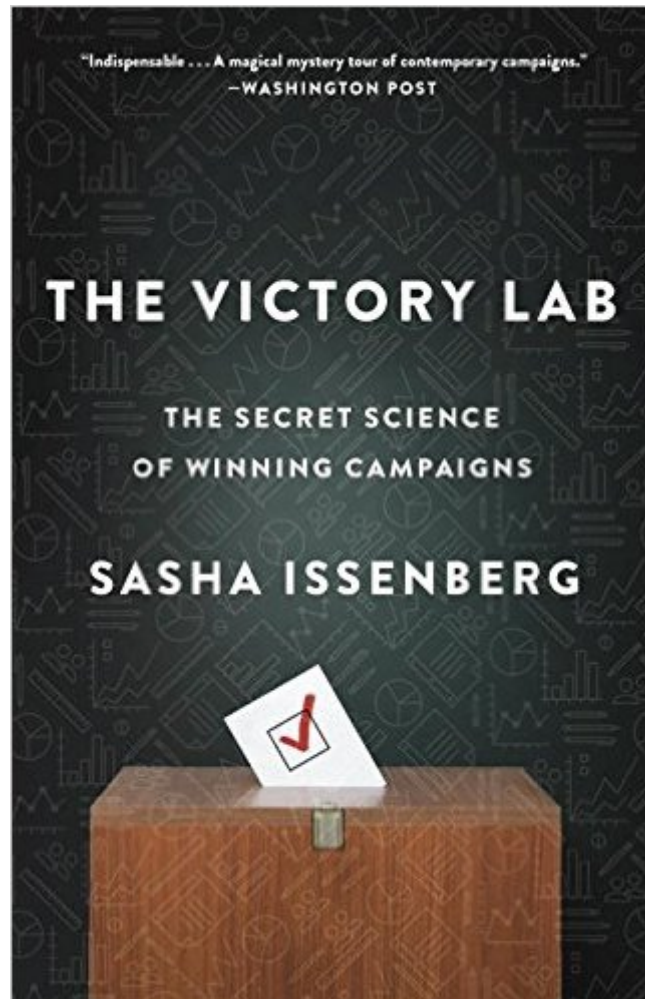# The Victory Lab: The Secret Science Of Winning Campaigns

Synopsis

UPDATED FOR THE 2016 ELECTIONThe bookÂ PoliticoÂ calls â œMoneyballÂ for politicsâ • shows how cutting-edge social science and analytics are reshaping the modern political campaign.Renegade thinkers are crashing the gates of a venerable American institution, shoving aside its so-called wise men and replacing them with a radical new data-driven order. Weâ ™ve seen it in sports, and now inÂ The Victory Lab,Â journalist Sasha Issenberg tells the hidden story of the analytical revolution upending the way political campaigns are run in the 21st century.Â Â Â Â The Victory LabÂ follows the academics and maverick operatives rocking the war room and re-engineering a high-stakes industry previously run on little more than gut instinct and outdated assumptions. Armed with research from behavioural psychology and randomized experiments that treat voters as unwitting guinea pigs, the smartest campaigns now believe they know who you will vote for even before you do.Â Issenberg tracks these fascinating techniquesâ ”which include cutting edge persuasion experiments, innovative ways to mobilize voters, heavily researched electioneering methodsâ ”and shows how our most important figures, such as Barack Obama and Mitt Romney, are putting them to use with surprising skill and alacrity.Â Â Â Â Provocative, clear-eyed and energetically reported,Â The Victory LabÂ offers iconoclastic insights into political marketing, human decision-making, and the increasing power of analytics.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I basically agree with previous reviewers Paul Tognetti and Dan Bobinski that this book presents

some interesting research but is too long and repetitious. However my main complaint is different. This book does not reveal, as the subtitle claims, "The secret science of winning campaigns." The author appears to have had a preconceived storyline, the Moneyball of politics, which doesn't fit the facts. Unfortunately, this framing causes the author to miss a much more interesting and important story contained in this material.The Victory Lab traces a nearly century-long academic quest that began with a simple question: Why do some people not vote? Extensive laboratory and field research has thrown some fascinating light on this question, which goes to the heart of what democracy means. Which people vote affects more than the result of an election, it affects group identities and how people feel about the result and how the elected officials act, which in turn set the political environment for the next election, and thereby is an essential determinant of the nature of civil society. The most interesting thinkers profiled in the book deal with these issues in their full complexity.Some of the theory and experimental data developed in this quest might be useful for influencing close elections. This is the main focus of the book, which leads the author to spend too much time on shallow thinkers with narrow partisan (or in some cases merely financial) goals. Yes, it's impressive how much you can influence people's decision whether to vote through simple micro-targeted threats, bribes and even mere contacts.

My, how times have changed! In years gone by political campaigns hoped to drum up support utilizing the traditional methods of radio and television ads, direct mail and polling. This was the approach favored by those whom author Sasha Issenberg dubs "the gurus". According to Issenberg "the gurus were the celebrated political wise men whose practices had become the political default, thanks to their success serving up a cocktail of lore and myth, anecdote and inertia that could so thoroughly intoxicate the candidates who paid their bills." But in the view of a growing number of political scientists these methods were rapidly becoming outdated due to the advent of an array of exciting new technologies. All of a sudden it was possible to identify "undecided" voters who might be sympathetic to your candidate and to "nudge" non-voters as well. These innovative new get-out-the vote (GOTV)strategies being championed by the so-called "geeks" who worked quietly behind the scenes would pose a direct threat to the entrenched and high-profile political consultants. This ongoing battle between the "geeks" and the "gurus" is the story Sasha Issenberg tells in "The Victory Lab: The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns". I had very high hopes for this book when I plucked it off the Vine. But for reasons that I will discuss shortly I came away a bit disappointed.Perhaps the most important lesson that campaigns have learned from the political scientists is that finding small, refined batches of voters really matters. This is a strategy that is very

cost effective and runs counter to the traditional radio and television buys and newspaper ads favored by the consultants.

Sasha Issenberg's book The Victory Lab is well written and, for the most part, quite interesting. It is, however, a good deal longer than need be to tell its story. This is due to the author's interest in not only explaining recent developments in mounting effective political campaigns, but also giving a good deal of attention to the history of such efforts, including background on the principal participants over the last forty years. I had not expected the historical material in a book subtitled "The Secret Science of Winning Campaigns," and it sometimes gets in the way of a streamlined presentation of technical issues. The book presupposes little or no knowledge of research design, statistics, or measurement theory. That's all to the good, but if the text included less chatty historical coverage and more discussion of the fundamentals of pertinent quantitative techniques, The Victory Lab would be a more satisfying read.The two basic themes that undergird Issenberg's account are micro-targeting of prospective voters and random assignment of treatment and control status to permit interpretable comparisons. Micro-targeting means gaining access to individuals and small, homogeneous groups rather than using data aggregated to the precinct, county, or other geographical level. Micro-targeting enables political analysts and operatives to identify conveniently small groups that do not correspond to pre-drawn geographical or administrative boundaries and to use their peculiar characteristics to focus get-out-the-vote campaigns and messages tailored to enhance the appeal of a specific candidate. The shopworn,conventional, broad-brush alternative is to use existing data sets that aggregate measures to a higher level, such as the county.

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