

<b>Institution:</b> Brunel University London		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 19 Politics and International Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Shaping Parties' Campaign Strategies and Influencing the Regulation of Election and Referendum Campaigning		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2005-2020		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>  Justin Fisher	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>  Professor of Political Science	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>  09/2000 - present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2014-present		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		

### 1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

Electoral campaigns and their regulation are a critical aspect of all democracies. Fisher's research has shaped the campaigning strategies of political parties, delivered important findings for and influenced the approach of the Electoral Commission, overseas commissions and informed the media on the conduct, administration and regulation of elections. It has demonstrated how constituency campaigns can deliver electoral payoffs, resulting in parties adapting their strategies, such as targeting and management of constituency-level campaigns. It has informed and influenced regulators on how effectively election and referendum regulations and administration function for users, and where existing regulation and administration is problematic.

### 2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The electoral system used for British parliamentary elections results in a significant level of campaigning taking place at constituency level in addition to campaigns run at national level. As parties' campaigns and their strategies have become more sophisticated, the national campaign has taken on a supporting role for the constituency-level campaigns. This presents an important series of questions of direct relevance to parties and regulators: **Q1**. Do the campaigns deliver electoral payoffs? **Q2**. Are some parties' campaigns more effective than others and if so, why? **Q3**. How well does electoral administration at the constituency level function? **Q4**. Do perceptions of the quality of electoral administration vary and if so, why? **Q5**. Are there areas of election administration and regulation that could be improved upon?

Fisher's research is based on a series of surveys of election agents carried out in the immediate aftermath of general elections – he has been the Principal Investigator of these studies at each election since 2005. The surveys are designed to investigate the electoral effects of constituency campaigning in changing electoral contexts both in terms of party vote shares and turnout **Q1**, **Q2**; to analyse and monitor the changing styles and techniques employed in constituency campaigning **Q1**, **Q2**; and to assess the agents' experience of the administration and conduct of the election in their constituency **Q3**, **Q4**, **Q5**. The studies most relevant to the review period (2010, 2015, 2017 and 2019) were funded by the ESRC, with the Electoral Commission commissioning additional questions to assist in its post-election reporting. Agents from the 3 main GB parties (Conservatives, Labour and Liberal Democrats) plus the 2 national parties (Plaid Cymru and the Scottish National Party) were surveyed in each election. Agents from UKIP were surveyed in 2015 and 2017 and the Brexit Party in 2019. In addition, Fisher was commissioned by the Electoral Commission to undertake research into the experiences of permitted participants at the 2016 EU Referendum **Q3**, **Q5**.

## Key Findings

- F 1.** There is a positive relationship overall between the intensity of constituency-level campaigning and the electoral performance of candidates
- F 2.** The relative performance of candidates from different parties is strongly influenced by the targeting strategies of national parties and their ability to maximize resources in the seats upon which they wish to focus
- F 3.** The relative performance of candidates from different parties is mediated by the level of party popularity at both national and constituency levels
- F 4.** Campaigning which incurs no financial cost (including face-to face campaigning) can offset any financial advantage of better funded campaigns
- F 5.** The attitudes of electoral agents towards electoral integrity are conditioned by the geography of their seats, their party, and whether their candidates won or lost the election
- F 6.** Electoral and referendum regulation, which is poorly understood or affects participants asymmetrically can cause significant difficulty

**3. References to the research** (indicative maximum of six references)

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- Ref 1** Fisher, J., Cutts, D. C & Fieldhouse, E. (2011) 'The Electoral Effectiveness of Constituency Campaigning in the 2010 British General Election: The 'Triumph' of Labour?', *Electoral Studies*. **30** (4): 816-28 [10.1016/j.electstud.2011.08.002](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2011.08.002)
  - Ref 2** Fisher, J., Johnston, R., Cutts, D., Pattie, C. & Fieldhouse, E. (2014) 'You get what you (don't) pay for: The impact of volunteer labour and candidate spending at the 2010 British General Election', *Parliamentary Affairs*. **67** (4): 804-824 [10.1093/pa/gst006](https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gst006)
  - Ref 3** Fisher, J. (2015) 'Party Finance: The Death of the National Campaign?' *Parliamentary Affairs*, **68** (Suppl. 1): 133-153 [10.1093/pa/gsv032](https://doi.org/10.1093/pa/gsv032)
  - Ref 4** Fisher, J., Cutts, D., Fieldhouse, E. & Rottweiler, B. (2018), 'The Impact of Electoral Context on the Electoral Effectiveness of District Level Campaigning: Popularity Equilibrium and the Case of the 2015 British General Election', *Political Studies* **67** (2): 271-290 [10.1177/0032321718764800](https://doi.org/10.1177/0032321718764800)
  - Ref 5** Fisher, J. (2018) 'Party Election Expenditure Election Effects: National vs. District Level and the Regulatory Challenges' in J. Mendilow & E. Phelippeau (eds) *Handbook of Political Party Funding*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar. pp. 55-77
  - Ref 6** Fisher, J. & Sällberg, Y. (2020) 'Electoral Integrity – The Winner Takes it All? Evidence from Three British General Elections' *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* **22** (3): 404-420 [10.1177/1369148120912668](https://doi.org/10.1177/1369148120912668)
  - Grant 1** Justin Fisher (PI) Economic and Social Research Council (ES/T015187/) November 2019-March 2020, *Constituency Campaigning in the 2019 General Election*, GBP87,850
  - Grant 2** Justin Fisher (PI) Electoral Commission Contract, May 2017-September 2017, *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the General Election*, GBP11,981
  - Grant 3** Justin Fisher (PI) Economic and Social Research Council (ES/R005052/1) May 2017-May 2018, *Constituency Campaigning in the 2017 General Election*, GBP62,825
  - Grant 4** Justin Fisher (PI) Electoral Commission Contract, May 2016-September 2016, *Attitudes of Permitted Participants on the Administration of the EU Referendum*, GBP12,000

## Impact case study (REF3)

- Grant 5** Justin Fisher (PI) Electoral Commission Contract, March 2015-September 2015, *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the General Election*, GBP9,987
- Grant 6** Justin Fisher (PI) Economic and Social Research Council (ES/M007251/1) February 2015-September 2016, *Constituency Campaigning in the 2015 General Election*, GBP257,305
- Grant 7** Justin Fisher (PI) Electoral Commission Contract, April 2010-September 2010, *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the General Election*, GBP9,990
- Grant 8** Justin Fisher (PI) Economic and Social Research Council (RES-000-22-2762), February 2010-February 2011, *Constituency Campaigning in the 2010 General Election*, GBP98,056

**4. Details of the impact** (indicative maximum 750 words)**Shaping Policy Recommendations - Impact on the Political Parties**

The Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and Plaid Cymru all attest both to the high value of the research and the importance of active interaction with party staff [S5.1, S5.2, S5.13; S5.15, S5.19]. The 4 parties have used Fisher's research to inform their campaign evaluations and strategies, and it has had a direct impact on their election planning [S5.1, S5.13, S5.15, S5.19]. Findings 1, 2, 3 and 4 directly shaped the electoral strategy of Labour. The party adapted its field operations in the 2015 election campaign in response to Fisher's research [Ref 1, Ref 2] – both in the allocation of resources and campaign priorities, and in recognizing the need to engage in more face-to-face campaigning '...alongside a stronger focus than ever before on volunteer mobilization and effective volunteer management' [S5.1]. The testimonial from Labour's General Secretary makes clear that Fisher's research '...has played a major part in informing and shaping Labour's approach to general election campaigning as a Party' and resulted in the party adopting the goal of undertaking 'four million conversations' in the 2015 campaign [S5.1].

The strategies informed by Fisher's research had proved to be electorally advantageous, increasing Labour's share of the electorate by approximately 1.4%, without which Labour would have won at least 12 fewer seats [Ref 4]. Labour notes that Fisher's research '...continues to have a major impact on our thinking and our work' [S5.1]. The Conservatives' strategy was directly influenced by Findings 1, 2 and 4. The party's Director of Voter Communications notes that findings from the 2017 election presented at CCHQ were '...a key reason why the Conservative Party placed renewed emphasis on building up constituency-based campaign organisations, including the employment of a new generation of local campaign organisers.' It also led 'to a renewed focus on support for incumbent MPs to help them with the local constituency communications' [S5.19]. The Liberal Democrats actively use the research in planning their campaigns [F1, F2, F3, F4] – the Party's President noting that it is '...one of the key sources of research that helps inform internal debates in the Liberal Democrats over how to organise a political party and how to win elections...' providing '...an invaluable and practical source of evidence, neatly mixing the rigour of academic research with the accessibility required for use by non-experts.' [S5.15]

**Shaping Policy Recommendations - Impact on Regulators UK**

Studies at each election cover evaluations of campaign legislation and guidance offered by the Commission. These data supplement the Commission's statutory reporting on the elections and influence its policy and procedures [S5.4, S5.6, S5.8, S5.10, S5.11, S5.20]. The Commission notes that Fisher's work '...has directly informed how we seek to support agents directly, through our guidance, and also how we work with Returning Officers to ensure all elements of the administration of elections are fit for purpose' [S5.4]. Co-design is important, with the Commission noting that Fisher's '...expertise in research design alongside our focus on the detailed administration issues...' was important in developing '...a research approach that yields

## Impact case study (REF3)

real benefits for us' [S5.4]. Fisher has conducted further analysis using these data, which has led to better understanding at the Electoral Commission as to the most effective ways to target efforts at improving electoral administration and enabling them to assess '...how the attitudes of expert stakeholders in the electoral process...differs or compliments [sic] those of the general public.' [F5] [Ref 6] [S5.4].

These studies informed Fisher's commissioned research for the Electoral Commission on permitted participants in the EU Referendum, which showed that there are significant issues in respect of the effective operation of referendum campaign rules [F6] [S5.9, S5.12]. The report proved to be particularly important for the Commission in understanding how referendum rules worked in practice [S5.4]. The study resulted in an invitation as a witness before the Scottish Parliament Finance and Constitution Committee in its deliberations over the Referendums (Scotland) Bill in September 2019. In the Committee's final report, Fisher's evidence was cited 14 times, highlighting 3 areas (referendum spending limits, reforms in respect of the provision of electoral registers to participants, and the need for sufficient time in advance of the referendum to conduct necessary administration). The Committee urged the Scottish Government to consider Fisher's recommendations [F6] [S5.9] [S5.17]. Fisher also submitted evidence to 2 Parliamentary enquiries on the regulation of constituency and national level campaigning. His evidence was cited in both final reports [F6] [Ref 5] [S5.16, S5.18]. After submitting evidence to the Committee on Standards in Public Life's review of Electoral Regulation, he was an invited participant in a resulting roundtable in October 2020 [F4, F5, F6] [S5.21].

### Ukraine, Kosovo, Albania, and Ethiopia

Fisher has delivered advice to the Electoral Commissions and Electoral Boards and MPs of Ukraine, Kosovo, Albania, and Ethiopia on party and campaign finance legislation, enforcement and operation, drawing on his work on effective campaign regulation. [F1, F2, F4, F5, F6] [Ref 2, Ref 3, Ref 5]. The advice was influential, with all resulting in '...important insights into options and techniques for the effective regulation of both election campaigning and party finance' and lead to '...a clear improvement in participants' understanding of the issues involved in this complex area of public policy-making' [S5.6]. Fisher's research has been of considerable benefit in advice given to international electoral management bodies [S5.5, S5.6]. The organiser of visits from Albania and Ukraine notes that '...his knowledge and work was instrumental to the projects' success', adding that specific utility arose from his work in volunteer labour and campaign spending [Ref 2] [S5.5].

### ***Stimulating Debate, Improving Public Understanding and Challenging Conventional Wisdom***

Fisher's research has improved understanding of election campaigns, regulation and legislation. His work formed the basis of BBC Radio 4's *Political Thinking* programme on campaign and election regulation in May 2017 [F6] [S5.3, Ref 3, Ref 5]. He was an invited witness to the House of Lords Select Committee on Trade Union Political Funds and Political Party Funding in February 2016, relating to how the proposed legislation would affect the funding of Labour, and its ability to campaign effectively. His evidence was cited 5 times in the Committee's report [F6] [S5.7]. Fisher's work on campaigns has also influenced thinking on digital targeting. In March 2019, he delivered a 'very well received' invited presentation to the Cabinet Office's Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation [F1, F2, F3, F4] [S5.14].

The media and other campaigners have benefitted considerably from the research, enhancing understanding of campaigning. The BBC commissioned Fisher to write an article on campaigning before the 2017 election [F1, F2, F4] [Ref 1, Ref 2, Ref 3, Ref 4], which received approximately 250,000 hits in the first 48 hours following publication (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-39779158>). He appeared on BBC Radio 4 *The Westminster Hour* (approximately 700,000 listeners) in March 2016 to explain how campaigning techniques would be used in the EU Referendum [F1, F2, F4] [Ref 1, Ref 2]. With the PSA, Fisher organised a presentation for practitioners and journalists on research on campaigns at the Institute for Government in October 2017 (72 attendees) [F1, F2, F3, F4] [Ref 1, Ref 1, Ref 3, Ref 4, Grant 3].

## Impact case study (REF3)

Fisher has disseminated his work on parties, elections and electoral law extensively through the media [F1, F2, F3, F4, F5] [Ref 1, Ref 2, Ref 3, Ref 4, Ref 5]. During the review period, he has appeared on (viewer/listener figures in parenthesis where available): *Sky News* (26 times) (140,000-170,000); *BBC Newsnight* (344,000-600,000); *BBC Daily Politics* (11,000-27,000); *BBC The Week in Parliament* (c.10,000); *BBC London News* (twice) (750,000-1,100,000); *Channel 4 News* (twice) (700,000-800,000); *BBC Radio 4's The Westminster Hour* (twice) (700,000); *BBC Radio 4 Political Thinking* (900,000 – 1,000,000); *BBC Radio 4 PM* (twice) (2,500,000); *BBC Radio 4 More or Less* (2,000,000); *BBC Radio Five Live* (1,800,000); *Talk Radio* (400,000); *RTE Radio's Morning Ireland* (twice) (430,000); *BBC Radio Ulster* (82,000-134,000) and various local BBC Radio news programmes, commercial radio as well as Norwegian and Korean television. He was a results analyst for the ITV General Election programmes in 2015, 2017, and 2019. He has also been sought for comments by many journalists, which have been syndicated nationally and internationally.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

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- S5.1** Letter from the General Secretary of the Labour Party
- S5.2** Testimonial from former senior member of Field Operations at the Conservative Party
- S5.3** Recording of BBC Radio 4 *Political Thinking*, 6 May 2017  
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0524f1y>
- S5.4** Letter from the Head of Research and Evaluation at the UK Electoral Commission
- S5.5** Letter from Lisa Klein Associates
- S5.6** Letter from International Consultant on Election Practice and former Chief Executive of the UK Electoral Commission
- S5.7** House of Lords Select Committee, Report of Session 2015-16
- S5.8** Justin Fisher & Yohanna Sällberg (2017) *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the 2017 General Election*
- S5.9** Justin Fisher & Bettina Rottweiler (2016) *Research among permitted participants at the EU referendum*.
- S5.10** Justin Fisher, David Cutts, Edward Fieldhouse & Bettina Rottweiler (2015) *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the 2015 General Election*.
- S5.11** The Electoral Commission (2015) *The May 2015 UK Elections*
- S5.12** The Electoral Commission (2017) *The 2016 EU Referendum*
- S5.13** Testimonial from Deputy Chief Executive and Head of Campaigns at Plaid Cymru
- S5.14** Open Innovation Team Partner Update June 2019 (Cabinet Office)
- S5.15** Testimonial from President of the Liberal Democrats and former Head of Innovations at the Liberal Democrats, 2019
- S5.16** Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, *Electoral Law: The Urgent Need for Review* (HC 244) November 2019
- S5.17** Scottish Parliament, Finance and Constitution Committee, *Stage 1 report on the Referendums (Scotland) Bill* (SP Paper 607) October 2019
- S5.18** APPG on Electoral Campaigning Transparency, *Defending Our Democracy in the Digital Age* (Fair Vote), January 2020
- S5.19** Testimonial from Director of Voter Communications at the Conservative Party
- S5.20** Justin Fisher & Juhi Kumar (2020) *Attitudes of Electoral Agents on the Administration of the 2019 General Election*.
- S5.21** Committee on Standards in Public Life, Review of Electoral Regulation, *Roundtable for academics & civil society organisations* (October 2020)