POLITICAL CAMPAIGN STRATEGY BASICS:
YOUR WIN NUMBER

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INTRODUCTION

==Every campaign starts with a win number.== Your win number is your guiding star, your compass, your map to victory. Quite simply, your win number is the number of votes you need to get elected.

There are many ways to calculate this number - it all depends on the resources you have at your disposal. Sure, you can get caught up with pretty projections and clever calculations - but unless you've got the backing, by the time you've got a perfect model it'll be November 8 and you'll be too late! (pardon the rhyming.)

If you're running your campaign on a tight budget, then this guide is for you. This is a simple, sure-fire way to get a solid, useful win number that you can use to plan your campaign, and win your race.

STEP 1:
CALCULATE THE EXPECTED VOTE

How many people will come out to vote, and how many ballots will they cast?

The best way to get a solid, workable turnout prediction is to use the last three similar elections to help predict the next one. Rather than use turnout, the most reliable technique is to average actual ballots received in the last three similar elections.

Remember, a similar election isn't necessarily the last election - a general election will have higher turnout than a midterm, for example.

Once you've calculated turnout, you might need to adjust it by a few percentage points to account for unique conditions - for example, is your turnout expected to be higher because of a hotly contested election further up (or down) the ballot?

THE MATH

1   **EXPECTED BALLOTS:**
(Ballots Cast Election 1 + Ballots Cast Election 2 + Ballots Cast Election 3) / 3 = Expected Ballots

2   **EXPECTED VOTES CAST:**
(Expected Ballots / Registered Voters) + Adjustment %) x Registered Voters = Expected Votes Cast

STEP 2: CALCULATE VOTE GOAL

This is the number of votes you need to win. In a general election, this is a simple majority - 50% + 1%.

Of course, a margin of only one percent isn't exactly safe - if turnout were to change by a fraction, you might lose. Generally, a 3% margin is a good baseline - but you can increase this if you're worried about unpredictable factors that might change things on the day.

THE MATH

1   **BASIC WIN NUMBER:**
Expected Votes Cast x 52% = Basic Win Number

2   **VOTE GOAL:**
Basic Win Number x (100% + Extra Safety Margin %) = Vote Goal

WHAT IF THERE ARE MORE THAN TWO CANDIDATES RUNNING?

In a race with more than two candidates, things become much more complicated.

In a race with three candidates, for example, simply getting more than a third of the vote might not be enough to win. If one candidate collects just 5% of the vote, you and the other candidate are left to fight over the remaining 95%.

To calculate your win number with multiple candidates, it becomes a matter of how many viable candidates there are in the race at any given moment. You then have to use this - plus some guesswork and polling data - to calculate the number you need to win. These numbers are constantly changing in real time, and are complicated to track and calculate without experience.

In order to develop a sound strategy, you'll need more data, better software to process it, and experienced assistance.

CONCLUSION:

Now that you've calculated your vote goal, you've built the basis of your campaign. All ads, lawn signs, door knocking, and other tactics are simply in aid of getting you to that vote goal, and getting elected.

If you want to get even deeper into the nitty-gritty, you can use this same math on a granular basis. For instance, you could do the same math on a precinct levelto give you local vote goals.

Ready for the next step? Check out the **The Campaign Workshop's post** on calculating your vote deficit - the gap between the votes you have, and the votes you need.

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