

Campbell's Law

Donald Campbell, an American social psychologist and researcher pioneered a methodology of program evaluation called Campbell's Law. The Law posits that, "Measuring progress (using both quantitative and qualitative indicators) is essential; when using quantitative data for evaluation, the indicators can become distorted or manipulated; and there are concrete steps we can—and must—take to minimize data manipulation and distortion." (Porter-Magee, 2013)

Hargreaves, Boyle and Harris (2014) states Campbell's Law holds to the following:

"Once accountability strategies concentrate on only one or two aspects of performance and use blunt tools to assess it, the whole system is distorted to deliver those results, even at the cost of its core purposes." (Hargreaves, et al, 2014, p. 122)

The premise of Campbell's Law holds to the protection "against the "harmful" impact of using data to drive decisions." (Porter-Magee, 2013) Campbell's focus aimed to:

1. Identify ways to uncover "the distortion, corruption, and/or misuse of data and institutionalizing them."
2. Use multiple measures (both quantitative and qualitative) so "numerical data doesn't become the only way to judge a program's effectiveness or impact."

Koretz, as noted in Porter-Magee, argues that "a primary cause of Campbell's Law is incomplete measurement of desired outcomes." (Porter-Magee, 2013)

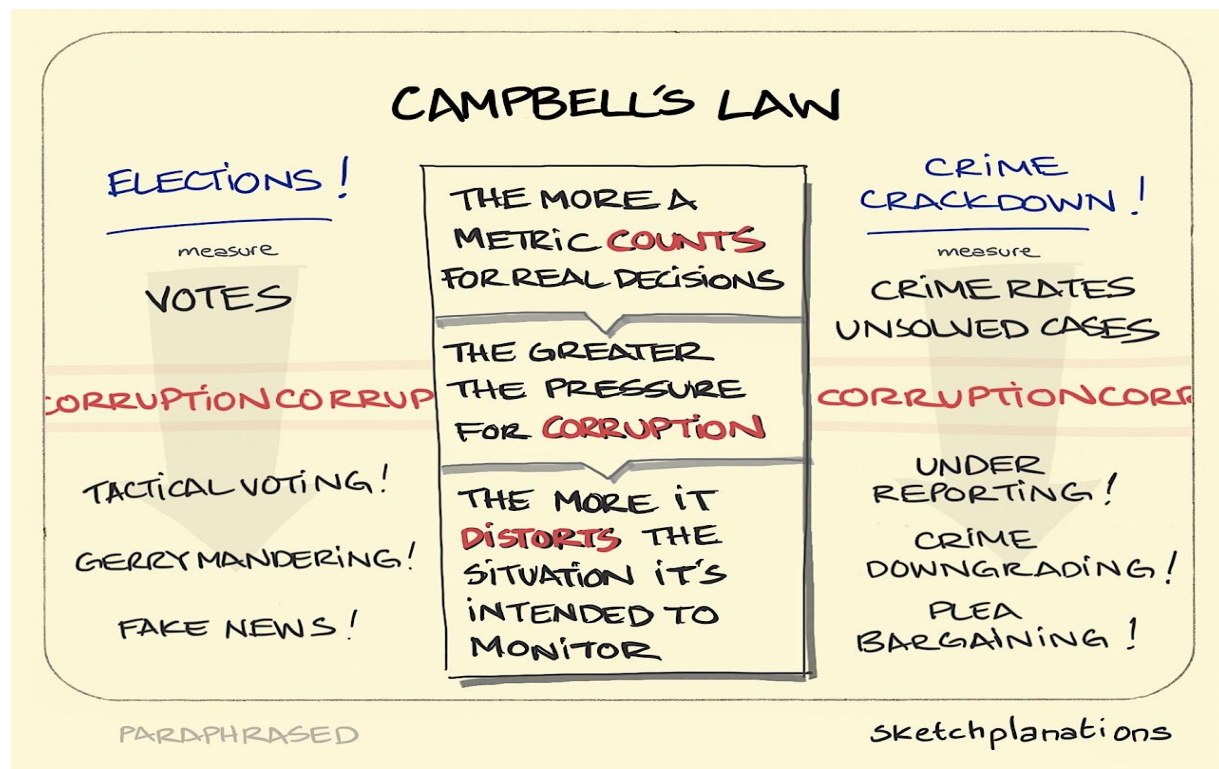


Figure 1

Illustrated from <https://sketchplanations.com/campbells-law>

Looking at Campbell's law, we face an important caution for looking at metrics. Quantitative indicators used for social decision-making, reduces subjectivity. The more subjective, the greater chance for it to succumb to corrupt pressures. This distorts and warps the social processes intended for monitoring. The warning in Campbell's Law recommends not abandoning standardized assessments and accountability, but rather doing a better job of protecting ourselves against manipulation and distortion. Holding to the important things is essential to fulfilling valid goals and marking best practices in fulfilling those goals.

Campbell stated it this way:

The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor. (Campbell, 1976, p.49)

For further reading on Campbell's Law

Campbell, D. (December 1976). Assessing the impact of planned social change. The Public Affairs Center, Dartmouth College.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.170.6988&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Hargreaves, A., Boyle, A., and Harris, A. (2014). *Uplifting Leadership: How organizations, teams, and communities raise performance*. John Wiley and Sons.

Porter-Magee, K. (February 26, 2013). Trust but verify: The real lessons of Campbell's Law. The Thomas B. Fordham Institute. <https://fordhaminstitute.org/ohio/commentary/trust-verify-real-lessons-campbells-law>