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Lurie wins election for S.F. mayor

Nonprofit founder's victory delivers stunning rebuke to Breed's tenure

By J.D. Morris

Daniel Lurie has been elected mayor of San Francisco, defeating London Breed another term after arguing that her flawed leadership caused the city to struggle since the pandemic devastated its downtown and exacerbated the drug crisis, homelessness and public concerns about crime.

The victory in Tuesday's

race capped a stunning and rapid political ascent for Lurie, an heir to the Levi Strauss fortune who founded a successful charity, Tippling Point Community, about two decades ago, but was not widely known when he began his mayoral bid last September.

Lurie will be the first San Francisco mayor in more than a century to have never served in government before his election. He saw



Mayor-elect Daniel Lurie had 56.2% support as of late Thursday afternoon.

that as a sign of strength as he campaigned on a promise to bring change to City Hall.

Under the ranked choice voting system, Lurie had 56.2% support to Breed's 43.0% as of late Thursday afternoon. San Francisco still has tens of thousands more votes to count.

Lurie won by pouring millions of dollars of his own money into his campaign — the main reason the race was the most expensive in modern San Francisco history — and consistently telling voters

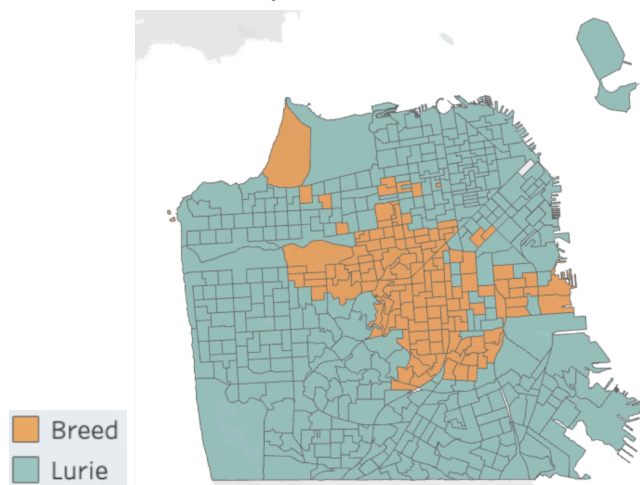
that the city had been let down by an ineffective group of "City Hall insiders" that included Breed and the other leading contenders in the race.

"After years of record-high budgets, worse outcomes, and more excuses, San Franciscans are ready for change," Lurie wrote in an open letter to supporters.

His message was amplified by a political action committee that spent heavily on his behalf, financed in part by Lurie's wealthy mother, Miss Haas, Talem Lurie continues on A13

Daniel Lurie was a different type of candidate so we ran a different type of campaign. The secret sauce to our success was Daniel himself: his willingness to be bold and fearlessly challenge the status quo. Daniel's leadership ran through every part of our organization, and our campaign is proof of his unique ability to build an accountable and disciplined team to deliver measurable results.

In the end, the race was not close. The *Chronicle* described Daniel's win as a "shock to the political system," while *Politico* characterized Daniel as a "change agent". The Mayor-Elect is currently winning by more than 10 points. Precinct level data gives an even clearer picture of his broad base of support. On first choice votes, Daniel won 240 precincts. Mayor Breed, Peskin and Farrell won 128, 134 and 26 precincts respectively. After ranked choice, Daniel carried 377 precincts to Breed's 132.



TAKING ON THE POLITICAL ESTABLISHMENT

Core Objectives

- Take the side of San Franciscans over insiders
- Make the critique on the system broader than just the current Mayor

Daniel Lurie overcame more than 100 years of history, becoming the first mayor of San Francisco from outside of the political establishment since 1911. Daniel's insurgent campaign took on the full weight of the City Hall machine and did so without the institutional support of the Democratic Party, the vast majority of Democratic clubs, nor organized labor and elected officials.

This memo is a detailed look at the campaign we ran and how that helped us to overcome the odds.

CHANGE CANDIDATE FOR THE CHANGE MOMENT

Core Objectives

- Make Daniel synonymous with change
- Launch campaign early to grab the mantle of change
- Turn attacks on Daniel into attacks on change itself
- Caste opponents as a product of a broken system

San Franciscans have been demanding change at City Hall after years of record-high budgets, worse outcomes and more excuses. From the day he launched his campaign, Daniel vigorously presented a unique, disciplined and powerful case for change. That was the strength behind his candidacy and the biggest reason that he won.

Daniel's life's work is about doing things differently to achieve measurable results for those who need it most. Daniel founded and led one of the most innovative poverty fighting organizations in the country. He built housing faster and at a fraction of the cost as it takes City Hall – a project that garnered a unanimous vote from the Board of Supervisors. Mayor Ed Lee trusted Daniel to deliver Super Bowl 50, creating the most giving Super Bowl in history. **Voters want experience. But they want the right experience to create change.**

In other words, at a moment defined by a demand for change, Daniel had the right message and the right experience to meet the moment. And even more importantly, he had the right temperament. Daniel is the kind of person San Franciscans want to lead

the city into a new era. His integrity, sincerity and authenticity were always well received by voters and essential components of his promise of change.

INSIDERS BLINDED BY CONVENTIONAL WISDOM

Core Objectives

- Use our opponents' reliance on conventional wisdom as an asset
- Skip the gatekeepers and go straight to the voters
- Don't gossip, don't leak

The first polls on the race showed that Daniel was broadly popular and had the strongest change message in what was clearly shaping up as a change election. Nonetheless, San Francisco's political insiders dismissed Daniel's prospects. **His strength as a candidate was initially missed because what appeals to insiders and everyday voters can be very different.** For example, pundits saw Daniel's kindness and listen-first approach as signs of weakness whereas most people view those as strengths for a mayor.

The insiders' blindness to Daniel's strength became one of the biggest strategic advantages of the campaign, as our competitors were shaped by conventional wisdom. As we got closer to starting our paid media, we became increasingly confident that they weren't anticipating that we'd come out strong in the summer and shake up the race. One reason for this is that our campaign did not gossip or leak. On the flip side, it felt like we often knew what opposing campaigns had ordered for lunch. The information asymmetry consistently played to our advantage.

Once we launched the early stages of our paid media campaign in August and full-scale field operation months prior, we figured our competitors would wake up and focus their firepower on us. We were wrong. They not only continued to dismiss us — they actually increased their public mockery and dismissals. They saw our late summer spending as an act of desperation rather than the logical next step in a methodical campaign plan. They had the resources to respond but chose not to, ceding the airwaves, connected devices and mailboxes to our early definition campaign.

CAMPAIGNS ARE BATTLES OF DEFINITION

Core Objectives

- Define Daniel in paid media early
- Focus on "reform vs experience" modeled universe of key targets
- Use direct to camera style to form connection with voters

- Define Daniel's experience as the right experience for the change we need
- Define competitors' as parts of an ineffective, outdated and corrupt system
- Reassure voters in the final stretch

Reel of TV & Digital Spots

Campaigns are battles of definition. If you go too early, that definition fades as voters aren't ready to receive the information. Go too late, and you may already be defined by your opponents. We knew we couldn't reach saturation with all voters so we built a modeled universe on the voters most likely to support change/ reform over experience in City Hall. There's inherently an element of false choice built into modeling questions but we saw clearly that a large subset of voters were more hungry to shake up the status quo and we wanted to reach them early and consistently.

Our paid communications started with the "reform vs experience" modeled universe of voters on August 5th and built towards the start of our broadcast TV phase on August 20th. Daniel spoke directly to voters and set the frame for the election in his first [TV ad](#) "City Hall Insiders". Our next [ad](#) "I Know" featured a powerful validator in Dr. Nadine Burke Harris speaking to Daniel's effectiveness and commitment to combating poverty and supporting early childhood. Polling showed that voters started coalescing behind Daniel as they learned more about who he is and the change he'll bring as mayor.

Corruption

Early polling indicated that corruption was one of a handful of top issues on voters' minds. This was an underappreciated dynamic in the race that our campaign helped to propel to the fore. Our steady focus on the corrupt system enlarged the market for the issue and set the frame. We avoided moralizing and instead focused on why the corrupt system is holding City Hall back from tackling our most pressing issues of public safety, homelessness, drugs, small business and the affordability crisis (the City Hall Accountability Plan released in April became a guidepost for Daniel's pledge to stomp out corruption). Right as our competitors were dealing with a deluge of ethics and corruption scandals dominating the press coverage, we released the spot "[Plan](#)" to spotlight his bold accountability plan and reflect the momentum behind change.

Reassuring Voters in the Final Stretch

Throughout the campaign, we had been asking a question on our polls about whether someone prefers reform or experience in City Hall (this a shorthand representation of the longer question that we created our core persuasion universe off of). Reform was

consistently winning 2/3 of voters. As we approached the date that ballots were going out, the response was 50/50. Voters often become more cautious when it's time to actually vote. We used our final spot "[Change](#)" to both capitalize on the *Chronicle's* endorsement and also spotlight the support of leaders that validated Daniel's experience and temperament.

OPPONENTS HAD SIGNIFICANT RESOURCES & SPENT MORE ON NEGATIVE ADS

Core Objectives

- Never underestimate the money behind the status quo
- Define their sources of funding as antithetical to change

We knew that winning required beating the entire political establishment and a flood of money from groups of relatively new and extremely well-funded organizations that were either supporting Farrell or Breed. **Our competitors' campaigns, their IE's, their candidate-controlled ballot committees and independent organizations that were either explicitly or implicitly supporting them outspent our side by millions. On TV alone, our campaign was outspent by more than \$1 million.**

More than \$4 million was spent attacking Daniel in the last 5 weeks of the campaign, with the vast majority of this total (\$3.3 million) coming from Farrell's IE. The remainder of the onslaught came from Breed's IE and money funneled from TogetherSF and Neighbors to the Committee to Fix SF Government, Yes on D. **The total spent on attacks against Daniel in the final 5 weeks was more than we spent highlighting our opponents' records during the entire campaign.**

DISCIPLINED GROUND GAME

Core Objectives

- Relentless focus on quality
- Sophisticated targeting and data informed our strategy
- Unmatched scale and scope
- Tried and true tactics married with innovation

"From the first training, I felt that the management team focused on ensuring I truly wanted Daniel to win. They took the time to connect my lived experience with Daniel's platform and policy ideas, which gave me the confidence to fight for each vote at the door." - Danielle B.

"I never expected to feel as valued as I do on this campaign. When I encountered tough questions, our canvass manager would elevate our observations to campaign leadership and equip me with the information I needed to continue having long and tough conversations at the doors. As a local Mission resident, seeing that type of responsive dialogue was inspiring." - Kai S.

The landscape of a presidential turnout environment is far different than a low-turnout off year election. As a result, we approached field differently than is typical in San Francisco. A key component of what made our program different is how early we began investing. The campaign's investment in field was born out of Daniel's commitment to meeting voters where they are, engaging in an authentic and meaningful way, and empowering supporters to take ownership of the campaign.

The field operation consisted of multiple programs aimed at informing and persuading voters as well as recruiting and activating volunteers. This included:

- Meet and Greets: Over 260 meet and greets with over 10,000 attendees were hosted in the homes of voters across the City. Daniel attended each and every one.
- Volunteer Activations: Over 2,800 volunteer shifts were filled by 410 individual volunteers who participated in a myriad of activities including neighborhood walks, phone banks, and special events.
- Special Events: The campaign organized dozens of unique events designed to reach voters in non-traditional ways - Karaoke nights, festivals, happy hours, coffee meet ups, run and swim clubs.
- Knocking, not lit dropping: We took the time to have conversations at the door as opposed to "lit dropping". Our opponents were flooding the streets with door hangers but they were rarely canvassing households. We know because we spoke to their canvassers throughout the campaign and hired some who left out of frustration over disorganization.

Our campaign featured a professional voter contact operation of over 50 community organizers at any given time who collectively knocked on the doors of over 120,000 households and made 400,000 phone calls.

CHINESE VOTE STRATEGY - ENGLISH & MONOLINGUAL

Core Objectives

- Build an early base of support
- Redefine the playbook on a citywide AAPI voter contact
- Focus on high quality persuasion over visibility (smoke & mirrors)

- Hire AAPI staff unbiased by conventional wisdom

“Almost every heavily Asian precinct marked Daniel as their first-choice — from single-family homes in the Sunset and the Richmond to multigenerational families in the Excelsior, Portola and Visitacion Valley to the SROs in Chinatown.” - Mission Local

Our campaign won the vast majority of AAPI-heavy precincts because of the different approach that we took to reaching and persuading this critical group of voters. Instead of copying the playbook of visibility and rallies with the same group of voters, we were data driven and focused on maximizing our vote in pockets across the city.

We launched a door-knocking, field, and phone banking effort targeted at Chinese American voters long before any other campaign, showing our dedication to connecting early and often. Additionally, we secured top-tier endorsements — with a focus on public safety — from respected Chinese American leaders to build further trust and engagement. Through direct connections with local leaders, merchant associations, and neighborhood advocates, we focused on issues central to this community, including public safety, small business support, corruption and housing affordability.

Without the support of institutional AAPI political groups that traditionally do ground work, we had to build our own field game, staying disciplined and focused on effective direct voter contact rather than lower efficiency visibility.

- We had dedicated canvassing teams for each Sup. district that had high density Chinese neighborhoods. So we had dedicated canvassers in D11 (Vis Valley), D9 (Portola), West side in D1 & D4, D3 (Chinatown/Nob Hill) & D10. Specific canvassers were assigned so they were either already familiar or became very familiar with their turfs and neighborhoods.
- At peak, we had 23 canvassers, with a mix of seasoned and new canvassers.
- Canvassers were partnered on turfs so each pair included a bilingual canvasser in the event they encountered Mandarin or Cantonese speaking voters.
- 20,099 doors knocked; 23,282 total monolingual households.
- Because we were reaching voters before other campaigns, we sent a follow up postcard to every Chinese voter we spoke to at the door that supported us to provide a second touch before other campaigns reached them.
- We opened a Chinatown office in the heart of Chinatown, the only campaign to do so.
- We prioritized getting Daniel to events and locations across the city to meet voters where they were. This included visits to Chinatown at least three times a week, events like the Sunset night market, and non-traditional stops like H-Mart.

"Our Chinese field program was one of the most well-led & highly effective programs I've been a part of. Going out early and staying disciplined to an efficient, conversion-focused approach that reached voters where they were helped to secure voter support early, and successfully convert supporters of our competitors." - Yan, experienced Chinese language field organizer

AUTHENTIC & FREQUENT ORGANIC SOCIAL STORYTELLING

Core Objectives

- Tell Daniel's story on our terms
- Capture authentic, unscripted moments
- Spotlight diverse voices so Daniel's isn't the only voice
- Channel for Daniel to speak directly to voters

We approached our digital presence as a media outlet for the campaign, creating compelling, audience-focused content to cut through the noise of friends, celebrities, brands, and political opponents, all competing for their attention. By empathizing with the viewer, we provided real value—whether through informative news updates or behind-the-scenes looks at their city—all framed within Daniel's authentic voice.

We trusted our Gen-Z teammates, elevating their creative ideas, and leaned into a strategic mix of content: planned narratives tied to campaign goals, agile responses to real-time events, and a balance of "features" and "breaking news" formats. Core themes included framing Daniel as the best choice for change by demonstrating momentum, validating his leadership, and clearly differentiating him from opponents on policy and experience. We also showed his temperament and authentic passion and love for the City.

Our content felt native to each platform, leveraging direct-to-camera videos, real-time Instagram stories, TikTok-style reels, and journalistic long-form Twitter threads. Importantly, we focused on winning the election—not on chasing virality or getting bogged down in feuds (Twitter isn't real life!). This discipline, paired with weekly data analysis, allowed us to refine our strategy, amplify resonant themes, and maintain a digital program that drove results without distractions.

ALL IN ON YOUNG VOTERS

Core Objectives

- Reach young voters earlier & more often

- Produce digitally native content
- Increase chances of winning in high-turnout environment

Young voters consume media differently so we approached them differently. We recognized early on that young voters were a key undecided voting bloc and that they would make up a much larger portion of the electorate in a high-turnout presidential cycle. Younger voters spend much of their time viewing vertical videos on social media platforms. Given this dynamic, we had a distinct team focused solely on this audience, developing creative based on the media consumption habits of younger voters. We felt we could push an advantage here.

We leaned into digital memes such as the “watch my boss” trend to capture voters' attention (example [here](#)). Given that this was the type of content that these voters were already viewing on social media, we were able to grab their attention and persuade them more effectively. We also developed unique creative approaches to get out the message that Daniel's past experience and accomplishments would make him an effective mayor, such as [this ad](#) where we highlighted the affordable housing he was able to get built in San Francisco. The visual approach helped draw attention to Daniel's accomplishments in a skippable, short attention span environment.

ENDORSEMENT STRATEGY REFLECTING INSURGENT CAMPAIGN

Out of necessity, we approached our political strategy differently than typical campaigns. The traditional way of approaching endorsements was not going to work as an insurgent candidate running against insiders with a collective 70 years in City Hall, so we got creative and focused on what would move the needle with voters. Our endorsement strategy built a broad, inclusive coalition that reflected San Francisco's diversity. We prioritized grassroots support from merchant associations and small business and restaurant owners, whose perspectives shape the city's neighborhoods.

We built strong partnerships with key ethnic and affinity groups, including the Chinese, Filipino, and LGBTQ+ communities. Over time, Daniel secured endorsements from respected former officials in housing, public safety, and emergency services, underscoring Daniel's credibility and readiness to address San Francisco's pressing challenges. While we didn't have the most endorsements, each one we secured had more impact because we were the insurgent campaign. We successfully leveraged these across digital, TV and mail.

CONCLUSION

No amount of strategy and tactics can replace the importance of an incredible candidate with a vision that matches the moment. Mayor-Elect Daniel Lurie was the secret sauce in this campaign and is why he won with such a large margin.

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