Fourth Edition

Campaign Craft

The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management

Michael John Burton and Daniel M. Shea

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MICHAEL JOHN BURTON AND
DANIEL M. SHEA

Praeger Studies in Political Communication
Robert E. Denton, Series Editor

AN IMPRINT OF ABC-CLIO, LLC
Santa Barbara, California • Denver, Colorado • Oxford, England

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Burton, Michael John.
Campaign craft : the strategies, tactics, and art of political campaign management / Michael John Burton and Daniel M. Shea.—4th ed.
p. cm.—(Praeger series in political communication, ISSN 1062-5623)
Earlier eds. entered under: Shea, Daniel M.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-313-38343-4 (hardcopy : alk. paper)—ISBN 978-0-313-38344-1 (ebook)
1. Campaign management—United States. I. Shea, Daniel M. II. Title.
JK2281.S49 2010
324.70973—dc22 2010004225

ISBN: 978-0-313-38343-4
EISBN: 978-0-313-38344-1

14 13 12 11 10 1 2 3 4 5

This book is also available on the World Wide Web as an eBook.
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Praeger
An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC

ABC-CLIO, LLC
130 Cremona Drive, P.O. Box 1911
Santa Barbara, California 93116-1911

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Manufactured in the United States of America

For our mothers
Rosemary Bowers Shea
1937–2005
Grace M. Burton
1939–2005

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Acknowledgments

The authors owe a deep debt to all who helped make previous editions of this book possible. With the fourth edition, the list grows longer. We worked with a variety of talented people at ABC-CLIO and were very appreciative for the attentive copyediting by Jack Brostrom.

Michael John Burton would like to thank his hardworking and meticulous research assistants at Ohio University: Caitlyn Zachry, Saskia van Wees, and Louise Koons. Mike also received support from OU's Department of Political Science and smart suggestions for revision from Enrique Buron of Albimar Research and Jamie Emmons of Emmons & Company, along with encouragement from friends and family.

Daniel M. Shea would like to thank research assistants Ian Higham and Sam Rigotti, the staff at the Center for Political Participation, and his colleagues in the Department of Political Science at Allegheny College. As always, he is ever grateful for the love and support of Christine, Abigail, Danny, and Brian.

We greatly appreciate the help we received from all quarters, but the mistakes we will keep for ourselves.

Introduction

Consultant-Centered Campaigns

The presidential election of 1896 was an epic battle. It set Democrat William Jennings Bryan, a fiery ex-congressman from Nebraska, against Republican William McKinley, the even-tempered governor of Ohio. Bryan was a gifted orator in the classical tradition. Economic hardship was dividing the nation, Bryan argued, and a monetary policy like the one McKinley offered, which would link the national currency to gold bullion, was a vital threat to the working class. In an impassioned speech to the Democratic Convention, Bryan declared, "You shall not press upon the brow of labor this crown of thorns, you shall not crucify mankind upon a cross of gold" (Bryan 1913, 249). Taking his "Silver Democrat" message to 26 states, speaking to an estimated five million people, distancing himself from the failures of the incumbent administration, Bryan cast himself as a champion of the "common man" (Dinkin 1989, 114).

Sensing trouble, McKinley harnessed the ingenuity of his longtime friend and political godfather Marcus A. Hanna, arguably the first modern campaign consultant. Hanna fashioned the McKinley campaign along "business principles" (Troy 1996, 105). He systematically approached captains of industry for campaign cash, gathering about $3.5 million, more than anyone had ever raised in a presidential race before that time (Glad 1964, 169; Jones 1964, 283). The record would stand for a quarter-century. Moreover, Hanna organized separate bureaus for Germans, African Americans, wheelmen, merchants, and even women, a group that did not yet enjoy universal suffrage. Hundreds of speakers were deployed and countless pamphlets were distributed, some of them written in the home languages of newly arrived immigrants.

The customs of the 1800s held that presidential candidates would not plead their own case on the campaign trail. Wandering the countryside in search of votes would suggest weakness and, perhaps more importantly, would give Bryan a chance to outperform McKinley. Hanna therefore orchestrated a series of finely tuned "pilgrimages." The candidate would not go to the people; the people would come to the candidate.

Railroad moguls offered excursion passes for those wishing a journey to McKinley's front porch in Canton, Ohio (Jamieson 1996, 18). In Canton, every step was choreographed, introductory speeches were carefully scrutinized, and the press was given prime seating. The whole affair became a national phenomenon. It was said that "the desire to come to Canton has reached the point of mania" (Troy 1996, 105). From midsummer through the November election, McKinley gave more than three hundred speeches and saw perhaps a million callers at his door. People snatched twigs, grass, stones, and even pieces of the famous front porch as souvenirs.

Election Day brought massive voter turnout. McKinley won the presidency with 51 percent of the vote to Bryan's 47 percent—a respectable victory—thanks, in large measure, to the front-porch campaign and the innovative tactics of Mark Hanna.

McKinley's triumph came in the early days of electronic communication. Telephones were a novelty and wireless radio was still in development, but the stage was set for astonishing technological change. Television would be introduced following World War II, and within a decade, two-thirds of the nation's households would own at least one TV set. In the 1960s, satellite communication became standard fare on television newscasts. In the 1980s, CNN made television news a 24-hour commodity, and in the 1990s, the Internet gave instant access to information from around the globe. The culture became wired. Several years into the 21st century, nearly every American home has a television, around 90 percent have cable or satellite reception, and Internet usage approaches two-thirds of American adults. College students carry smart phones that can access the Internet, take photos, play music, locate restaurants, and send instant text messages to friends around the globe. All this technology is changing education, transportation, and personal communication, as well as the way people think about electoral politics.

In the political sphere, voters are tracked by ever-growing databases and are reached through ever more sophisticated microtargeting programs. Howard Dean's first campaign manager in the 2004 presidential primary season was persuaded by his experience that elections were

passing through a fundamental transformation: "The Internet is like an eight-year-old child, growing in leaps and bounds, giddy with possibilities" (Trippi 2004, 201). In 2008, the transformation would continue apace. Barack Obama's team amassed nearly three million cell phone numbers just by announcing that voters could receive breaking news of the vice presidential pick via SMS text (Pérez-Peña 2008). And further innovations await. While the strategic goal of professional campaigning remains the same as it ever was—finding enough votes to win an election—the tools of the trade have undergone, and continue to undergo, a permanent technological revolution.

Historically, campaigns were run by armies of volunteers made up of family, friends, and party activists who used such time-honored tactics as neighborhood canvassing and street-corner pamphleteering. Local ward heelers cajoled friends and posted yard signs. In the 1950s, this sort of "retail" politics was the way of the world. Massachusetts pol Tip O'Neill, who would make his mark as Speaker of the House of Representatives, could view politics as a sociable affair: Hands were shaken, deals were made, and people did not give up their votes until they were asked (O'Neill and Novak 1987). As a retired legislator, O'Neill lamented, "If I were running today, I probably would have to use all the modern techniques of political campaigning: hiring a political consultant, polling extensively and making ads targeted to TV audiences" (O'Neill and Hymel 1994, xi–xii).

O'Neill lived in the twilight of retail electioneering. The shift toward professionalism that began with Mark Hanna's work in 1896 was hastened by Dwight D. Eisenhower's 1952 campaign for president. Using market-tested gimmicks such as name repetition, Eisenhower's campaign produced a catchy jingle that went, "Ike for president, Ike for president; you like Ike, I like Ike, everybody likes Ike for president." By the mid-1960s, mass-marketing strategies that had been honed in the private sector were making deep inroads into American politics. The art of campaigning was becoming scientific. Carefully constructed random-sample surveys seemed more effective than simply walking around and conferring with other party leaders, and television could reach a huge audience with comparative ease.

Joe McGinniss, who detailed Richard Nixon's 1968 advertising strategy, saw in this brave new world a certain loss of political innocence: "With the coming of television, and the knowledge of how it could be used to seduce voters, the old political values disappeared" (1969, 28).

Today, handshake-and-pamphlet electioneering would seem oddly quaint for all but the humblest local race. A contemporary political professional might dismiss the techniques as "old style." Even the mass-marketing

approach that was novel in the 1970s has begun to show its age. In the 1990s, broad-based polling was augmented by narrowly targeted focus groups, and broadcast television was bypassed with direct distribution of videotapes. The Internet, which found its political footing in the 21st century, has wrought fundamental change. Every position paper, every advertisement, every news release, can now be personalized to voters across the World Wide Web. In the new millennium, the local knowledge once monopolized by loyal political workers who knew constituents by name or at least by reputation is being supplanted by computer-generated voter lists that serve much the same function.

Campaign technology allows well-financed candidates to sidestep established party screening mechanisms, purchasing voter lists for pennies a name and ordering television airtime over the phone. But the political parties have not remained idle. They have responded to the rise of high-tech, market-driven electioneering, which draws outside consultants into the mix, by morphing into "service-oriented" organizations that allocate money and expertise (White and Shea 2004, 101–26). Candidates run their own organizations, but parties can operate a separate campaign on the candidate's behalf in a sort of parallel political universe. These days, a congressional candidate can find herself pleasantly surprised by supportive television advertisements from party committees—ads that her campaign had no hand in producing.

Through all these changes, the ways in which campaign information is conveyed to voters have also been transformed. The mainstay of political rhetoric in the time of Bryan and McKinley was the full-blown campaign speech; today's viewers see thirty-second television spots, six-second sound bites, and five-word SMS texts. While it is certainly true that more information is available to contemporary voters than ever before—with candidate Web sites, bloggers, and instant access to news archives (the potential of an intensely informed electorate has never been greater)—some will argue, as McGinniss (1969, 30) did in the 1960s, that, with the rise of electronic electioneering, "style becomes substance."

THE STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY ELECTIONS

This book is not a how-to manual for managing a campaign; it is an attempt at a rational reconstruction of the logic of electioneering, a topic that begs the question: *Do campaigns matter?* Several early election studies found little evidence that they did (see Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1944; Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954). Voters

seemed to be casting their ballots according to socioeconomic position or party affiliation rather than the campaign messages offered during the election cycle. Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee argued that the principal effect of campaigning is to help move people toward a given predisposition: "As time goes on . . . we find that people abandon deviant opinions on specific issues to agree with the position taken by their party" (285). Only when a dramatic, crosscutting issue divides the electorate would voters be swayed by candidate appeals. Scholars had little reason to study campaign strategy, because there was not much to suggest that campaign activities had a strong effect on electoral outcomes.

Some voters *do* break from their social, economic, and partisan predispositions, but even this anomaly can be explained without reference to campaign strategy. In 1966, V. O. Key suggested that voters use recent history as their guide: "As voters mark their ballots they may have in their minds impressions of the last TV political spectacular of the campaign, but, more important, they have in their minds recollections of their experiences of the past four years" (1966, 9). Morris Fiorina (1981) argued that a "running tally of retrospective evaluations" influences a voter's partisan orientation, which in turn shapes a voter's decision about the candidates. Alternatively, David Mayhew (1974a; 1974b) suggested that the desire to be reelected leads members of Congress to spend lots of time working toward that goal. Members have to deliver for the district, or else the district will not deliver for them. Satisfying the constituency in effect meant winning over the electorate, and so the power of legislative incumbency seemed to overwhelm the noise and fanfare of political campaigns.

If electoral outcomes can be predicted by reference to incumbency, personal experience, party attachment, or socioeconomics, it would seem that energetically pressed campaign strategies and tactics play little role in the final results. Scholarly estimates of popular vote totals in presidential elections have been highly accurate, even though academic models largely ignore what is happening in the campaigns.

But recent years have witnessed a growing academic interest in campaign operations. Thomas Holbrook (1996, 156) has argued that "election outcomes and voting behavior are easily explained with just a few variables, none of which are related to the campaign," and yet, according to Holbrook, "campaigns do matter." The reason: "Prevailing attitudes about the economy and the incumbent administration" create an "equilibrium"—the outcome that would be expected without campaign effects (157). Support for a candidate is often *out* of equilibrium at the outset of a campaign. A front-runner who has somehow fallen behind

expectations has a critical mission: to "move public opinion toward the expected outcome" (157).

Holbrook's perspective represents an emerging view in the scholarly world: Campaign effects might be minimal, but they are real, and they matter. James Campbell (2008), for example, argues that precampaign "fundamentals" such as incumbency and the election-year economy tend to frame the general structure of presidential campaigns. Campbell has estimated "unsystematic campaign developments" at "less than two percentage points of the vote. The estimated impact of unsystematic factors exceeded three percentage points in two election years but was never as great as five percentage points in any of . . . fifteen [recent] elections" (78). But, of course, a few percentage points can change the course of history in a presidential election.

The literature on party realignment, which generally holds that parties exploit cracks in their opponents' electoral coalition, at least implicitly supposes that someone is acting on strategic opportunity. As one party coalition starts to fray, a wise strategist on the other side would do well to find a wedge issue to hurry the unraveling. At the level of individual candidates, D. Sunshine Hillygus and Todd G. Shields, who ran a comprehensive analysis of possible campaign effects, argue that not only do campaigns "have more than 'minimal effects' on the public, but these effects reflect the activation of issues at the expense of partisan loyalties, especially among those most exposed to campaign dialogue" (2008, 83). While it is hard to disentangle episodic campaign maneuvering from the more durable conditions in which they are embedded, there is room to believe that the final tally on Election Day is a function of luck, circumstance, and hard work.

CAMPAIGN MANAGEMENT LITERATURE

A strong literature has developed on campaign management and allied fields. Several books emerged in the 1970s, most notably those of Robert Agranoff (1972), Joseph Napolitan (1972), and James Brown and Philip M. Seib (1976). In the 1980s, Larry Sabato (1981), Marjorie R. Hershey (1984), Ann Beaudry and Bob Schaeffer (1986), and Barbara L. and Stephen A. Salmore (1989) shed much-needed light on the inner workings of political campaigns. Later, Edwin Diamond and Stephen Bates (1992) and Karen S. Johnson-Cartee and Gary A. Copeland (1991) examined campaign advertising, Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1992) explored the rise of "dirty politics," and Gary W. Selnow (1994) took account of computer technology in modern elections. More

recently, David A. Dulio and John S. Klemanski (2006) looked at the "mechanics of state legislative campaigns." Richard J. Semiatin (2005, 2008) has followed the campaign process from start to finish, and Cherie Strachan (2003) has explored the growing professionalization of campaigns, as has Dulio (2004). Dennis Johnson's *No Place for Amateurs* (2007) is a staple in the field.

Case studies have been an important part of the literature. Richard Fenno (1978, 1996) is the undisputed leader in this area of research. A series of case-level analyses from the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy has followed outside money in congressional campaigns for more than a decade (see Magleby 2000, Magleby and Patterson 2008). A few years ago, the authors of the present text wrote *Campaign Mode: Strategic Vision in Congressional Elections* (Burton and Shea 2003), a set of case studies that loosely followed, as have other such books (see Bailey et al. 2000; Adkins and Dulio 2010), in the tradition of Fenno's "soak and poke" investigations of ground-level campaigning.

Specialized work covers a variety of topics. Bruce Newman's *The Handbook of Political Marketing* (1999) offers a wealth of practical guidance along with keen scholarly insight. James A. Thurber and Candice Nelson have edited several volumes (1995, 2000, 2004, 2010), all of which provide a mix of theoretical and applied material. Robert V. Friedenberg (1997) has outlined an important segment of the campaign industry—communications consulting—and Nelson, Dulio, and Medvic have edited a provocative volume on campaign ethics (2002), while Ronald Keith Gaddie (2004) asks why anyone would want to run for office in the first place. Nelson, Dulio, and Thurber (2000) have offered a timely look at television advertising. Additionally, L. Sandy Maisel and Darrell West (2004) have edited a volume on the types of information voters hear during campaigns. One of the most difficult obstacles that candidates confront is knocking off an incumbent; Edward Sidlow (2004) has explored this issue in detail. Jeffrey M. Stonecash (2008) demystifies the campaign polling process, and Michael J. Malbin (2006) continues to produce some of the most important books on campaign finance, writing standard works that sit alongside seminal research into congressional elections by Paul S. Herrnson (2008) and Gary Jacobson (2009).

Beyond the scholarship, a variety of campaign manuals give practical advice. Judge Lawrence Grey's *How to Win a Local Election* tells campaign operatives, "A coat of clear varnish can extend the life of a sign, and one good tip is to take the stack of signs as they come from the printer and use a roller with varnish to seal all the edges" (2007, 203).

Catherine Shaw's *The Campaign Manager* (2010), S. J. Guzzetta's *The Campaign Manual* (2006), and Christine Pelosi's *Campaign Boot Camp* (2007) are excellent primers for nuts-and-bolts understanding. Hal Malchow's *Political Targeting* (2008) is more advanced than most instructional materials and is perhaps most useful to experienced professionals.

While campaign guidebooks explore tactical matters in detail, it is not their mission to locate new-style politics in a broader historic or analytic context. Scholarly work, for understandable reasons, frequently misses the practical side of campaigning; the trees get lost in the forest. With *Campaign Craft*, we hope to bridge that gap. This volume combines theoretical knowledge with practical information about the nature and function of real-world electioneering. Each chapter looks at a slice of new-style campaigns, reviewing its logic and importance as well as relevant tactics and technologies. More than anything else, the goal of this book is to clear away some of the mystery surrounding this enigmatic aspect of American politics.

NEW-STYLE CAMPAIGNING

Old-style electioneering relied on one-to-one relationships between the party and the people. It was characterized by retail politics, as practiced by political operatives and party bosses. "New-style" campaigning, a notion outlined by Robert Agranoff (1972), was a break with that past. The new style can be drawn along four dimensions:

1. New players
2. New incentives
3. New tactics
4. New resources

In the "golden age of parties," candidates did not *run* campaigns—they *stood* for election. Office seekers were expected to contribute to their own electoral efforts, of course, perhaps with a donation to the party coffers, but day-to-day campaign operations were often left to the party. Political machines across the country drew much of their power from the ability to hand out government jobs and other tangible benefits, often relying on immigrants who found opportunity in the political party system. Reformers countered the party machines by pushing for civil service rules (which reduced patronage), the secret ballot (which rendered vote promises unenforceable), and direct primary elections

(which removed the selection of nominees from the hands of party leaders). In some states, good-government groups called for nonpartisan municipal elections. Decreased immigration, increased mobility, and broad-based public education all worked to loosen the grip of old-style political parties.

As the years passed, a growing number of candidates began running for office without much party help. They could buy the kinds of political expertise once offered by, and monopolized by, the parties. Consultants could be hired to measure voter preferences and then aim campaign messages toward specific groups. As the campaign industry began taking off in the early 1970s, there were, by Agranoff's count, 30 branches of the campaign profession (1972, 17). A 2009 directory of political consultants lists 59 categories of consultancy, from "Advance and Event Planning" to "Voter Registration" (*Politics* 2009a). One estimate holds that there are some seven thousand consultants making all or part of their living running campaigns (Johnson 2007, xvii).

In the old days, party organizations controlled government patronage and government contracts. Some volunteers would assist a candidate because they believed in the person or the party, while others were family friends showing personal loyalty, but it was also common to find campaign workers expecting a job after the election. More recently, the independent professionals who have become the core of the campaign team expect direct payment for their labors. Consultants make their living by piecework, by the hour, or by a share of expenditures. Some work for a "victory bonus." Party affiliation is important to the consulting industry as a matter of trust, if nothing else, but campaign consulting is unmistakably profit driven (see Grossmann 2009).

Consultants have made themselves indispensable in large part by mastering campaign technology. Television and radio can reach more people in a few seconds than party foot soldiers could talk to in a month. Twenty-first-century computers crunch through voter lists and help campaign consultants produce mail, raise money, target voters, and generate news releases. New technologies allow a candidate to "meet" with large numbers of people via Internet conferences. The World Wide Web grants access to policy papers, family photographs, and television ads. In recent years, campaign videos have been produced for Web-exclusive distribution. Computer-generated "robo calls" are moving onto a turf once occupied by dedicated volunteers.

These new-style campaigns survive on money. Nearly all the tactics of this emerging profession hinge on financial resources. Some candidates have figured out how to win elections despite lagging funds, but examples seem increasingly rare. Few new-style consultants would

trade away cash to gain a few more volunteers. The reason is simple: If a campaign is short on volunteers for a phone bank, it can buy the services of a telemarketing firm; if, however, the campaign is short on money for television airtime, it cannot pay for the necessary ad slots with surplus volunteers.

The rising cost of electioneering is astounding. In South Dakota, where incumbent Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle confronted Republican John Thune in 2004, more than $36 million was spent, a whopping $71 per vote. The Federal Election Commission (2009) reported that the "financial activity of 2008 presidential candidates and national party convention committees increased 80% in receipts . . . totaling more than $1.8 billion." Immediately after the 2008 election, the Center for Responsive Politics (2008) declared that "93 percent of House of Representatives races and 94 percent of Senate races that had been decided by mid-day Nov. 5, the candidate who spent the most money ended up winning." Further, according to the center, "The national party committees reported spending more than $865 million" by mid-October and "issue advocacy groups . . . spent nearly $200 million" (ibid.). The most expensive race in the 2008 cycle (aside from the presidential campaign) was the U.S. Senate contest between Minnesotans Norm Coleman and Al Franken, which reached $35.4 million in candidate spending *before* the eight-month-long recount battle started (ibid.). The next year, Mayor Michael Bloomberg would top $100 million running his New York City reelection campaign.

CONSULTANT-CENTERED CAMPAIGNS

Agranoff's view of new-style campaigning goes a long way toward describing the state of affairs that existed at the beginning of the new millennium, but it is not a perfect fit for contemporary electioneering: Party organizations have made a comeback, and at the same time, candidate-centered campaigns have become more consultant centered.

The Resurgence of Party Organizations

Many journalists in the 1960s and 1970s believed the parties were receding. David Broder declared, "The party's over" (1972). Voter partisanship was at a lull, presidential candidates ran on their own hook—frequently blasting the official party apparatus—and legislators were inclined to stray from party leaders on important votes. And yet, through it all, the national party organizations and thousands of state and local party units continued working with candidates and voters. A

study of changes in the political parties from 1960 through 1980 found that, contrary to popular wisdom, most party organizations remained vibrant (Gibson et al. 1983; Cotter et al. 1984). Although party finance activities were threatened by interest groups, including political action committees (PACs), which could make direct donations to candidates, political parties were by far the largest single source of assistance to candidates. Office seekers relied on party organizations to carry petitions, organize volunteers, give money, make telephone calls, and canvass door to door. Apparently, "the party goes on" after all (Kayden and Mahe 1985; see also Crowder-Meyer 2009).

The contradiction might seem puzzling. Fewer voters were claiming a partisan label, and legislators saw fit to abandon the party almost at will; yet at the same time, the party organizations seemed to be expanding. A plausible solution was offered by Joseph Schlesinger (1985, 1991): Pushed into a corner, the parties were forced to respond energetically. It is precisely because partisanship mattered less among the voters that party organizations had to adapt to the new situation, offering more and more services to their candidates. And candidates, for their own part, understand that their fortunes are joined together under the party label, so they have an incentive to use party organizations as a form of collective security.

Over time, the parties found new ways to finance their efforts. The same 1970s-era campaign finance reform measures that limited direct party payments to candidates also opened up the so-called soft-money loophole. Direct donations to federal candidates were tightly regulated, but money given to the parties was not. As a result, political parties could make big-money media buys. Even after passage of the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, which was intended to limit soft-money contributions, parties did quite well for themselves.

The money going into party organizations seems to be getting put to good use. "Campaign committees," such as the National Republican Campaign Committee (for Republican members of Congress) or the Democratic Legislative Campaign Committee (for Democratic state legislatures), serve as leading-edge consultancy operations. Governors have followed suit. In 2004, for example, the Missouri Democratic Party took in $3 million from the Democratic Governors Association (DGA) to help with these races, and the Republican state committee received some $1.8 million from their own governors' association. In all, the DGA raised $24 million in 2004, and the Republican Governors Association raised some $34 million (Bogardus 2005).

The services and resources provided to candidates by national and state committees are vast. They pump money into the election, and they

provide expertise. Paul Herrnson has noted that House and Senate campaign committees offer "assistance in specialized campaign activities such as management, gauging public opinion, issue and opposition research, and communications." Moreover, Herrnson writes, party committees can serve as "brokers," linking "candidates and interest groups, the individual contributors, the political consultants, and the powerful incumbents who possess some of the money, political contacts, and campaign experience that candidates need" (2008, 106). At the state level, committee operatives might join candidates in the field, helping the candidate's campaign organization (but also looking over its shoulder).

Legislative campaign committees are cold-blooded. They have a long tradition of targeting their efforts at only the most competitive races (see Shea 1999). If a candidate's chances are good, significant help might be forthcoming, but a long-shot candidate will get little support beyond basic guidance and perhaps a few referrals. As a would-be congressional candidate described his first encounter with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, "All they did . . . was show me a list of [PACs] and then tell me that the PACs wouldn't talk to me until I was the designated candidate. They promised me nothing. I could count on no help from them at all" (Fowler and McClure 1989, 37). For some candidates, the money game has become one of the most frustrating aspects of new-style campaigning—how does one become competitive without first getting assistance, and how does one get assistance without first becoming competitive?

The Rise of Consultants

During the 1950s, Eisenhower showed that Democratic voters could be unhitched from their partisan moorings by sheer force of personality, and most presidential candidates since Ike have followed that lead. Today's voters might sometimes have difficulty reading a candidate's party affiliation from his or her campaign advertisements. Character is frequently the main emphasis, and consultants often advise clients to distance themselves from party leaders. "The candidate, rather than the party," wrote Agranoff, "tends to be the chief focus of today's campaign communication" (1972, 4).

The shift from party to personality was made possible, in part, by political "image makers." Only after persistent appeals from new-style advisers did Richard Nixon give full consideration to television imagery. According to McGinniss, Nixon "would need men of dignity.

Who believed in him and shared his vision. But more importantly, men who knew television as a weapon: from broadest concept to most technical detail" (1969, 34). Expertise would give rise to the "selling of the president." Years later, Bob Squier, who was among Washington's premier media consultants, would say in passing, "You'll find people in my business tend to use this word 'viewer' and 'voter' almost interchangeably" (1998).

While McGinniss viewed campaign advertising with a mix of awe and contempt, few serious contenders for major office would try to run a 21st-century campaign without the services of professional consultants. Professionals measure public opinion, shape candidate appeals, raise money, and implement targeted voter contact programs. If contemporary campaigns are not quite party centered, neither are they strictly candidate centered. Perhaps they are, in many ways, consultant centered.

The founding scholar of campaign communications, Dan Nimmo, argued that campaigns were becoming titanic battles between warring campaign professionals (1970). Candidates hire their consultants, have their good name on the line, and make the key decisions, but the organizational structure immediately beneath the candidate is populated by political consultants (see Doherty 2006). The old-style party boss pledging government jobs is long gone. Campaigns are now run by people who know the strategies, tactics, and art of political campaign management—that is, by professionals. Everything from fund-raising to direct mail to television advertising to grassroots work can be coordinated by members of the new campaign intelligencia.

The rise of campaign intellectuals would have flabbergasted practitioners of old-style politics. Experience, not schoolwork, was the driving force of New York's legendary Tammany Hall politics, as Tammany leader George Washington Plunkitt made clear:

> We ain't all bookworms and college professors. If we were, Tammany might win an election once in four thousand years. Most of the leaders are plain American citizens, of the people and near the people, and they have all the education they need to whip the dudes who part their name in the middle and to run City Government. We got bookworms, too, in the organization. But we don't make them district leaders. We keep them for ornaments on parade days. (Riordon 1995, 45)

In recent years, however, the ranks of consultancy firms have been fed with alumni from graduate schools, such as the Bliss Institute of Applied Politics at the University of Akron or the Graduate School of

Political Management at George Washington University, that grant master's degrees in practical politicking. The University of Oklahoma, American University, New York University, the University of Florida, the University of Virginia, Suffolk University, Regent University, and Yale University, among other schools of higher learning, also provide graduate training.

Consultants even have their own professional organization. The American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) charges yearly dues, holds well-attended conferences, maintains a code of ethics, and bestows industry honors—the "Pollie" awards. While Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* might poke good fun at a Pollie for Best Yard Sign, professionals assembled at the annual conference of the AAPC can learn about the latest campaign techniques while they build their list of professional contacts. Vendors showcase their latest wares and consultants chat among one another. Between meetings, attendees can be seen skimming magazines such as *Politics* (formerly *Campaigns and Elections*) or *Winning Campaigns*, both of which cover the industry for professionals looking to build or run a business.

The recruitment of top consultants has become a campaign message in itself (see Dulio 2004, 138–39). Journalists pay attention to the formation of a consulting team. If a candidate has a strong corps of campaign operatives, wealthy donors and small-scale givers may start pulling out their credit cards. A professional media consultant knows how to leverage this attention, and a professional fund-raiser knows how to get money for the campaign. For a political operation on the move, hiring a strong team becomes something of a self-fulfilling prophecy, owing to the skills afforded by, and the reputations created by, these new "wizards of American politics" (Luntz 1988).

MASS CUSTOMIZATION: THE *NEW* NEW STYLE

The shift from old-style to new-style campaigning was a passage from retail to wholesale politics. Lost in the shuffle was a personal touch, as might be expected in the electronic age. But the same technological forces that, in some ways, pulled campaigning away from individuals is now reweaving one-to-one ties with the voters.

Television is the archetype of early new-style campaigning. The congressional class of 1974 had a whole new look—young, energetic political outsiders with blow-dried hair. Tammany-style politics were gone. To win, candidates had to go on TV, a costly medium requiring specialized expertise. Television demanded professionals who could "edit on

the action." Few operatives knew how to backlight a candidate without creating a halo effect. The language of ad production—with its "Nagras," "Chroma Keys," and "crystal syncs"—was utterly foreign to old-style campaign managers. Political campaigns had to outsource the production of television ads to those who already knew the business.

Simple economics enabled consultants with specialized expertise to build their industry. Direct mail illustrates the point: Learning postal regulations for a mass mailing takes time, so turning to a professional can significantly shorten the production schedule. But figuring out how to size, sort, and seal a mailing is only the beginning. Direct mail depends on clean data, efficient stuffing machines, and proficiency in building lists that yield high-dollar contributions. Database professionals must learn how to "merge and purge," "de-dupe," "household," and practice "good data hygiene." Once a campaign operative has mastered the legal, technical, creative, and organizational demands of the mail business, there is no point in restricting this kind of expertise to a single candidate. Working on a number of campaigns at once helps distribute overhead expenses over a larger group of clients, reducing per-unit costs and increasing profits. The whole organizational structure of campaigning is set to be transformed.

In the 1970s, a competitive campaign organization wishing to send out a mass mailing might rely on a volunteer coordinator who would assemble a squad of supporters and spend an evening folding letters and stuffing envelopes. In the new millennium, the job might be outsourced to a professional mail house. Consulting firms manage the entire process. Professionals target recipients, develop artwork, write copy, arrange for printing, and then ship the mailing. And if a "lettershop is cheaper than pizza and beer for your volunteers" (Malchow 1990), the value of a volunteer coordinator—a position once filled by college students, retirees, and battle-hardened party members—declines in importance against fund-raising consultants.

As professionals hone their skills, they become more efficient, learning how to target voters more precisely. A "mass" mailing is becoming less mass-oriented in the 21st century, as voter lists gain fine detail on the habits and hobbies of individuals. By modeling the data properly, a good political targeter can figure out with a fairly high degree of certainty whom to reach, and with what message. The mail house can reasonably hope to send the right flyer to the right individual. And the rise of cable television, with its hundreds of channels, many catering to small, well-defined audiences, frequently aimed at tiny geographic units, means that opportunities for electoral efficiency continue to increase—if, that is, a consultant has invested the time and trouble to

learn the proper ways to use each medium (and each channel, and each show).

One way to understand the *new* new-style of campaigning is to look at developments in the private sector, where "mass customization" is an avowed goal. This seeming oxymoron was popularized by B. Joseph Pine II, who identified a convergence of mass-production efficiency with the individualized attention of hand-tailored artisanry. "Through the application of technology and new management methods," Pine wrote, manufacturers are "creating variety and customization through flexibility and quick responsiveness" (1993, 44, emphasis omitted; see also Tseng and Jiao 2001). In 1964, the only mass-market computer was the IBM System/360 (Pine 1993, 36); in the new millennium, customers routinely design their own systems online. Shoppers looking to buy their very own custom computer (a concept unthinkable in the 1960s) go to a Web site, choose a base model that suits their needs, and then configure the system according to personal requirements. Network devices, hard drives, external storage, and screen sizes are selected one at a time—all according to the customer's personal specifications. Thousands of combinations are possible.

There is a clear parallel with modern politicking. Campaign consultants formulate a basic strategy and then mix and match preexisting slogans, color schemes, policy stands, and media strategies to suit a range of clients. Campaigns, in this sense, are neither handcrafted, as in the days of retail campaigning, nor mass-produced, as they were becoming with the rise of wholesale politics in the 1960s and 1970s. Contemporary campaigns are built by adapting pretested components to the particular needs of different localities, candidacies, and constituencies.

"Modularity" is the key. Many firms use off-the-shelf parts that are interchangeable not just within a product line but across product lines as well. Standardized components are fitted to a variety of products, meaning that costs can be contained by producing a multiplicity of modules that are combined into a wide-ranging diversity of salable goods. Wrote Pine:

> Economies of scale are gained through components rather than the products; economies of scope are gained by using the modular components over and over in different products; and customization is gained by the myriad of products that can be configured. (1993, 196)

In the journalistic world, CNN creates short news segments that can be used on its many outlets, including CNN International, CNN-HLN, CNN en Español, CNN Airport Network, and CNN's affiliated

Web sites. Modular construction has increased the scope and flexibility of journalism. Political consultants do much the same thing.

Campaign scholars Judith Trent and Robert Friedenberg write that "candidates adapt" to varied political audiences with "speech modules." Each module is "a single unit of speech," they explain, and "typically, candidates will have a speech unit, or module, on each of the ten to twenty issues on which they most frequently speak" (2008, 201). "Talking points," as they are called in the industry, are recycled from one event to the next, with only minor variations in phrasing. They can be used in letters, brochures, op-eds, debates, or any other text-based form of communication.

Modularization can be seen throughout the campaign process. Electoral data come in standardized formats, and campaign commercials have consistent regularity. A presidential advance staffer can rapidly assemble an immense campaign rally—with satellite trucks, lights, and a handsome backdrop—because each piece of the puzzle has already been used several times. Once a staffer learns how to coordinate sound and video at small events, this expertise can be adapted to larger settings. A smart advance person soon figures out by repetition which pieces of the technology—electronic equipment, wiring, and so forth—are unique to local vendors and which are standardized nationwide. Once the transferable elements of sound and video production are understood, the technique has been, in effect, modularized, and the swift production of large events becomes possible.

Modularization requires political wisdom. A mass-production approach would demand that successful campaign events be repeated step-by-step for each venue. An artisan's approach would reinvent the process over and over again so that each production would be tailored to the exact needs of each campaign stop. Mass-customization, on the other hand, merges the efficiency of repetition with the impact of individualization. Political professionals distinguish the elements of success that could work only in a particular time and place from those that can be transferred to other contexts. This task demands a broad knowledge of campaigns or, at the very least, close attention to industry trends.

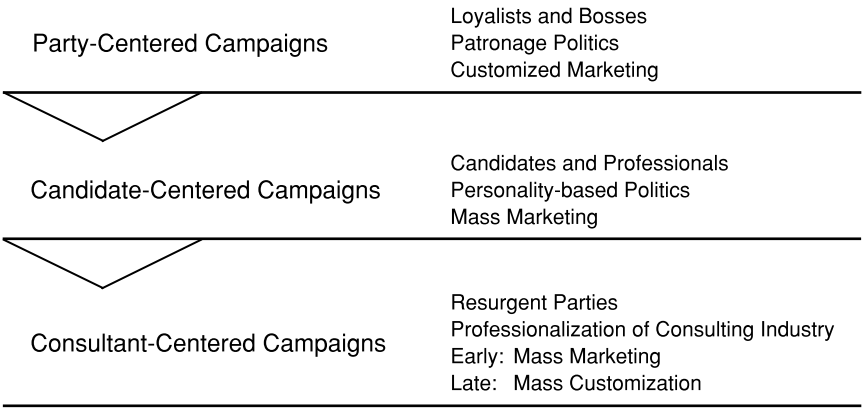
The professionalization of political campaigns stems partly from the efficiency of well-executed modularization. A whole industry of consultants has arisen—an industry that profits when it efficiently recycles techniques from one campaign to the next. Political professionals develop models to guide electoral targeting and get-out-the-vote operations. They specialize in particular types of campaign messages or field tactics. One consultant who has written "around 150 speeches" notes that he "regard[s] all of those speeches as variations on one single speech." Each speech had six component parts: "Four parts were set in advance, and the

remaining two were prepared especially for each event." Hence, the candidate would say something about the locale of the speech—"I am happy to be here today in your hometown"—and proceed to "say something like, 'I remember how once upon a time the situation was such and such. . . . (filler N. 2)'" (Maor 2001, 35; ellipses in the original).

As James Carville has said, "In campaign politics an idea is like a fruitcake at Christmas—there's not but one, and everybody keeps passing it around" (Matalin and Carville 1995, 35). There is a danger to predictability—the general who fights the next war like the previous one risks ignominious defeat—but if the modularized components of campaign management are continually remixed and rematched, with new techniques replacing those that have become outmoded, a consultant's methods of operation can remain strategically viable. To win—and profitability is maximized by repeated victory—campaign operatives must keep their techniques current. They should probably broaden their knowledge by working on a variety of campaigns, meeting with other consultants, and keeping up with innovations in their chosen field. In other words, consultants must become "professionals" in the sense that their careers revolve not around individual candidates or the fine distinctions of democratic governance but around campaigns and elections per se.

If old-style retail campaigning involved a one-to-one relationship with voters, and early new-style campaigns used a mass-marketing approach that involved one-to-many contacts, the strategy and tactics of mass customization, where consultants narrowly target their message, hoping to optimize their efforts at the level of the individual voter, is a one-to-many approach that functions on a one-to-one basis (see Figure I.1).

Figure I.1
Party-, Candidate-, and Consultant-Centered Campaigns



ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

Each of the following chapters is designed to help students of American politics understand the history and logic of political campaigns in this new age of high-tech, consultant-centered campaigning. In other words, our intent is to explain *what* a political campaign might be doing and *why* the campaign might be doing it that way—the logical calculus that drives competitive campaigns.

The focus will be on elections below the presidential level: state, congressional, and local elections. Few consultants are lucky enough or skilled enough to plan media buys, organize direct mail, or raise funds in the higher echelons of a presidential campaign. Therefore, while this book will feature presidential campaigns—in many ways, these elections epitomize campaign strategy, and students of politics already know the plots and players—for the most part the book will address strategies, tactics, and technologies appropriate to midlevel and lower-level elections: Congress and state legislatures, along with county and city offices.

Part 1 investigates campaign preliminaries, beginning with chapter 1, which provides a glimpse into campaign planning. Chapter 2 looks at the contextual factors that define a particular race. Chapter 3 examines opposition research—collecting derogatory information that might be useful in the campaign, either on defense or offense.

Part 2 looks at strategic thinking. It begins with an overview of segment analysis in chapter 4, moving on to survey research in chapter 5 and voter targeting in chapter 6.

Part 3 examines campaign contact, beginning with fund-raising in chapter 7, moving forward to communications in chapters 8 (overall media strategy) and 9 (news coverage) and then to direct voter contact in chapter 10.

Finally, in the conclusion, the new style of campaign organization is explored in light of technological innovation.

It is important to note that this is *not* a book about how campaigns are run. No volume could accomplish this august feat, because every campaign presents its strategists with a unique set of challenges. If nothing else, financial limitations prevent a campaign from undertaking a first-rate targeting operation *and* the deepest possible opposition research *and* the best voter targeting, survey techniques, media strategy, and grassroots operation. Part of strategic thinking involves making tough choices and arriving at the right decisions on resource allocation, knowing that the best mix of tactical resources might become obvious to the campaign team only in distressing hindsight.

Ironically, the speed and dynamism of electioneering heightens the importance of historical understanding. This book draws heavily on the recent past and not just the latest, greatest campaign technologies. Important lessons can be drawn from the successes (and failures) of past practices. Moreover, electioneering, for all its cutting-edge bluster, is inherently unadventurous. In the commercial world, strategists can roll out a new marketing technique with full knowledge that poor returns will mean a temporary, but recoverable, dip in sales. In the campaign world, a new technique that loses just a few percent of the vote can spell disaster according to the all-or-nothing rules of American elections. For this reason, a campaign consultant might rationally resist change and might look to the successes and failures of others, learning about strategy and tactics vicariously through the retelling of war stories.

And yet, a critical transformation of American elections is under way. New-style campaigning has taken hold from the presidential level down to city council contests. Political scientists have begun to understand the larger processes, but the details have been elusive. Gerald Pomper noted in the 1970s that, although Americans choose more than half a million public officials through the ballot, "elections are a mystery" (1974, 1). In this book, we hope to explain the basic operation of campaigns and to underscore both the art and the science of professional electioneering.

Part I

CAMPAIGN PRELIMINARIES

Chapter 1

The Campaign Plan

Campaign manuals offer worksheets, strategies, and election calendars. One popular guidebook holds that a "flowchart (plan or calendar) is an essential tool in any successful campaign. Flowcharts keep the campaign organized and provide you and the rest of your team with a visual plan of the whole campaign" (Shaw 2010, 374). Another manual cautions its readers, "Do not ever go into a campaign without some sort of plan" (Bike 1998, 176). Yet another warns about the shock of insight that accompanies forward thinking: "As you read this Manual you will notice the relatively high costs and enormous amount of work involved. The immediate reaction generally is, 'Is all this really necessary to win?' The answer is an emphatic YES" (Guzzetta 2006, 133, emphasis omitted).

John F. Kennedy and his advisers spent three years planning their 1960 presidential campaign. A daylong strategy session in October 1959, more than a year before the voting got under way, focused on the campaign's "final assault plans" (White 1961, 53). In the morning, JFK ticked off the strategy for each region and each state, even getting into the details of local political factions. After lunch, with brother Bobby taking the lead, the agenda would shift to more practical matters, when "assignments were to be distributed and the nation quartered up by the Kennedy staff as if a political general staff were giving each of its combat commanders a specific front of operations" (56).

Detailed campaign planning has marched into the new millennium. The winning presidential campaigns of George W. Bush profited from the expertise of a political scientist at the University of Texas, Daron R. Shaw, who applied his academic accumen to a supremely practical

problem: winning a majority of electoral votes. "Multivariate analysis of the 1988 through 1996 data," Shaw found, "demonstrate that the relative importance of a state is affected not only by its competitiveness and population but also by the cost of advertising in its media markets and the amount of recent effort expended there by the opposition" (2006, 46). States were ranked according to electoral value, and campaign resources were allocated to a set of target states and media markets laid down in the original plan. Shaw speculates that Al Gore's planning revolved around many of the same principles and that the opponent's electoral map probably looked a lot like the one Shaw helped sketch for Team Bush (ibid., 62–63).

While the two campaigns differed markedly on public policy, both were trying to be rational and strategic—values that are revealed in a good campaign plan (Shaw 2006, 62–69). Plans are not static. A Kentucky political consultant notes: "In most cases my campaign plan is a working document. Rarely does everything remain constant from day one through election day, especially budgeting" (J. Emmons, pers. comm., 2009). But good planning means that ongoing changes merely shim up a strong foundation and that strategists will not find themselves writing up a new design from scratch or jerry-rigging the campaign operation to salvage sunk costs.

This chapter discusses the rationale for careful campaign planning, the contents of a typical campaign plan, and some of the challenges inherent in the planning process.

THE NEED FOR CAMPAIGN PLANS

Prominent political consultant Joseph Napolitan (1986) noted several years ago that campaign strategies must be well suited to the candidates who use them. When a candidate is uncomfortable with the plan, blunders easily follow. Candidates who are confused about strategy or tactics can become hostile, second-guessing staff decisions even after consensus has been reached. A good campaign plan, it might be said, prevents an exasperated candidate from asking, "Why am I doing this?"

The ideal plan will be so well understood, so meticulously documented, so deeply ingrained in all campaign activities, that the reasons behind every event will be obvious. Its core principles should be visible in the candidate's schedule, briefing book, and advertising buys. The alternative is disorganization. In Napolitan's mind, "one of the worst things that can happen is to have a campaign go off in several different directions simultaneously" (1986, 27). Consultants who believe they

can just deal with problems while the campaign is in motion might find themselves wishing they had done more planning ahead of time. Open assignments can become failed expectations; undefined schedules can become wasted time. Campaign operations involve details and deadlines, not to mention all sorts of turmoil. A campaign plan is meant to "bring order out of that chaos we call the democratic process" (Grey 2007, 90).

A campaign plan describes *what* is to be done, *when* it should be done, *who* should be doing it, and *how* the work will be completed (see Baudry and Scheaffer 1986, 44). Good plans divide responsibility, integrate work, and present a step-by-step blueprint of the electoral cycle. With agendas and timetables in hand, everyone has a job to do. A plan must be flexible; it might change and may well require fundamental revision at some point—and yet the campaign plan remains an important tool for coordinating a diverse, concurrent, mutually dependent assortment of tasks.

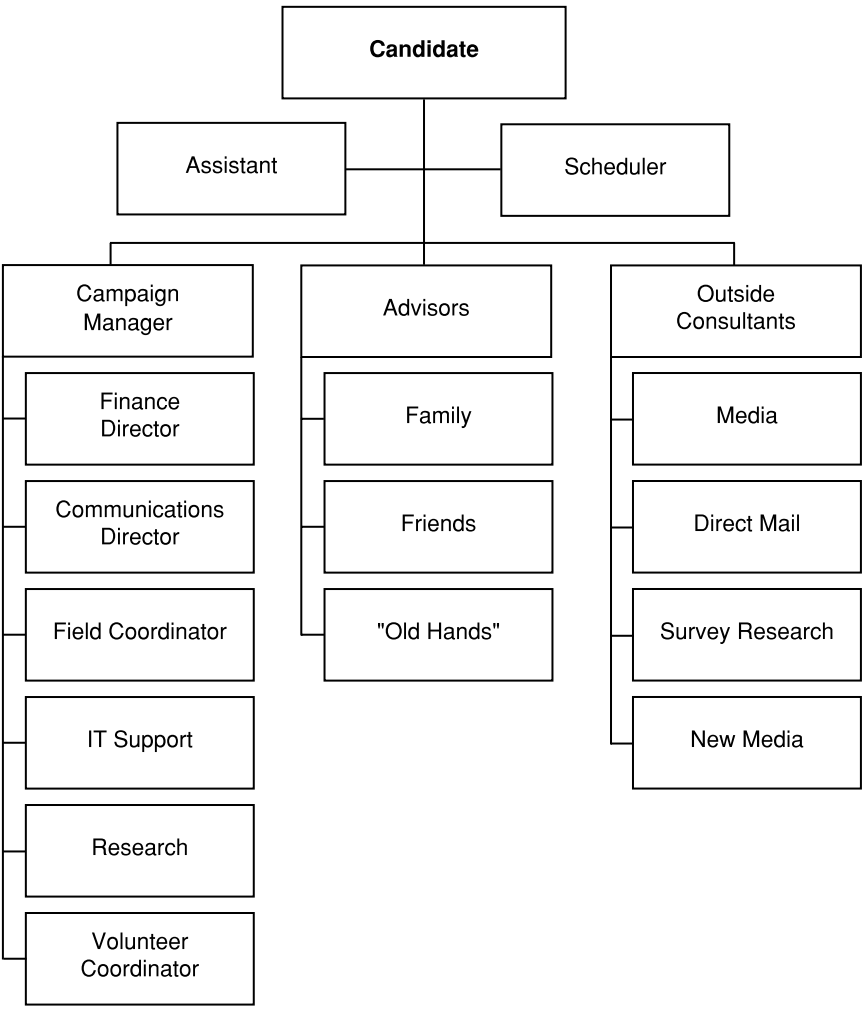
"On a single page of paper," one consultant has advised, "you must be able to succinctly match dollars, strategy, timeline, and cash flow" (Allen 1996, 51). Voter contact might demand two-thirds of the budget, but campaign organizations would also want to think about costs such as office space and supplies, computers and gasoline, voter lists and consultants who know how to turn those lists into votes, not to mention the price of pizza and T-shirts, and nail files imprinted with the candidate's name. Raising the money to pay for goods and services will itself incur costs. A "prospecting letter" that hopes to identify likely donors by asking for small sums of money requires a healthy investment in postage and stationery. Like other investments, the returns are uncertain.

By establishing command authority and delegating staff responsibilities—there might be a campaign manager, a finance director, a volunteer coordinator, a communications director, and deputies for some or all of these roles (see Figure 1.1)—a campaign plan can help save precious time and money.

Canvassing the same neighborhood two different times with the same exact flyer is an expensive waste of resources. Moreover, each campaign function requires some level of harmonization with all the others. More than one staffer talking to reporters threatens to send conflicting messages, leaving the campaign in the embarrassing position of explaining what it was really trying to say. Image tends to become reality and a discordant campaign risks appearing irresolute, too weak to govern.

Planning helps avert mixed messages. A "message of the week" tactic might hammer home a single aspect of an overall theme each and every day from Monday through Sunday—the expectation being that repetition helps the message break through. A plan might consider ways

Figure 1.1
Notional Campaign Organization



to ensure that policy pronouncements do not overlap. If, for instance, the campaign wants to follow an environmental track during a given week, all communication during this period should reinforce that one theme, and nothing should be said regarding consumer protection until "Consumer Week." Later, when radio spots are aimed at consumer-protection issues, the direct-mail consultant should be sending consumer-oriented letters just as the communications director is trying to get these same issues into the daily paper.

Finally, since a planning document, by its very nature, represents a strategic exercise, campaigns will want to figure out what the *opposition* might be contemplating. According to one professional, "There's nothing more pleasing, from the point of view of a strategist, than to work against an incumbent who runs the same campaign again and again" (Shea and Brooks 1995, 24). Furthermore, if the candidate's own record is vulnerable (no one is perfect), then strong responses to impending attacks should be drafted ahead of time. As consultant Mark Weaver has suggested, the job of a campaign is "to predict the counter-attack and be ready—because it will come" (ibid., 29). Like chess, electioneering is a game of anticipating and defeating opposition tactics before they come into play.

Plans can help guide internal campaign operations and inspire confidence among potential supporters and members of the news media. A well-organized candidate looks like a winner—an invaluable impression for a campaign to make, especially if the candidate is a newcomer. Skepticism is one of the most difficult obstacles for a challenger to overcome. "Sure losers" can be written off by reporters and receive little help from donors. A strong campaign plan might show influential people that the campaign is serious, that it is likely to conduct itself in an orderly, efficient, professional manner, and that it will not waste resources or miss opportunities. Such a campaign might be worth watching.

ELEMENTS OF A CAMPAIGN PLAN

The contours of a campaign plan will vary from candidate to candidate, campaign to campaign, and consultant to consultant. There is no single, universal set of guidelines, but the logic of electioneering suggests certain fundamentals, including the following, which are discussed in more detail in later chapters.

- *District Profile.* A good profile would include a district's physical geography, industries, housing patterns, demographics, community organizations, and other durable aspects of the political terrain (see chapter 2).
- *Candidate and Opposition Research.* A candidate's background, policy preferences, experience, committee posts, bill sponsorships, political appointments, and so forth can all have an impact on the campaign. The same holds true for the opposition (see chapter 3).
- *Segment Analysis.* A ward that has voted Republican in the past will likely vote Republican in the future. In the digital age, campaigns can move their analyses beyond geography, but an understanding of precinct analysis can

help campaign strategists learn how to infer voter behavior from all sorts of political groupings (see chapter 4).

- *Polling*. If a campaign expects to hire a pollster, some attention should be given to basic questions: What types of information will be sought? What sorts of questions should be asked? And how will the data be used? (See chapter 5.)
- *Voter Targeting*. Strategy often dictates that campaigns should court a narrow, persuadable slice of the electorate or a small group of supporters who might need some nudging into the voting booth. Finding these voters requires that a campaign figure out who might vote for the candidate, and why (see chapter 6).
- *Fund-raising*. Just as a campaign must look for voters, it must seek the financial resources necessary to reach those voters, and reaching people in today's media environment is expensive. Campaigns need to raise money (see chapter 7).
- *Communications*. A strategic plan for campaign communications can be parceled into subsections—one for paid media, another for earned ("free") media—each subplan including electronic communication, print, and Internet strategies (see chapters 8 and 9).
- *Direct Contact*. Even as an increasing share of campaign spending is devoted to electronic outreach and the Internet (sometimes called "Netroots"), campaign organizations continue their traditional grassroots efforts, such as knocking on doors and putting up signs (see chapter 10).

THE CHALLENGES OF PLANNING

Integrating tactical elements into a unified schedule can be difficult, and budgets have to coordinate income with outflow. Usually, the term *budgeting* refers to financial plans, but the concept provides a good structure for assessing many aspects of the campaign process. With scarce resources—money, volunteer hours, candidate time, and so forth—income must equal or exceed outflow. Somehow, the whole operation needs to work together as a single unit, and optimizing the sequence of events can be tricky. Media attention is difficult to gain without a solid war chest, but a war chest is difficult to fill without media attention.

At the tactical level, campaigns are urged to map their plans on a flowchart. Starting with "about ten feet of paper," planners might attach colored sticky notes representing important events and functions (Shaw 2010, 374). Paper and sticky notes are giving way to campaign management software, but the rationale goes unchanged. Tasks must be broken down into their separate components, arrayed one after the next, and organized so that everything will be completed by the time the election is held. There is no "dog ate my homework" in electoral politics.

Campaigns should plan forward from the resources they have, or that they can reasonably expect to receive—there is little value in designing a million-dollar campaign unless the money is forthcoming—but a political strategist might also want to ponder not just how to move forward but also how to move backward, thinking in reverse, starting with Election Day and moving back to Day One (see Burton and Shea 2003, 6). For instance, strategist Catherine Shaw has suggested, "you know you will need to repair lawn signs the day after Halloween, so place a green Post-it reading 'Repair Lawn Signs' above November 1. Lawn signs usually go up one month before the election, so put that up next" (2010, 375). Backward mapping can prevent a campaign from running out of time. Putting it all together—assessing available resources and plausible outcomes, figuring out how to link means and ends—will likely turn into an ongoing design cycle that runs until the final moments of the campaign.

One team of scholars has described a three-stage evolution in voter attitudes:

1. Cognition: awareness of the candidate
2. Affect: development of opinions about the candidate
3. Evaluation: the decision itself (Salmore and Salmore 1989, 13–14)

A political professional might think in terms of *name identification*, that is, getting people to recognize the candidate by name; *persuasion*, or bringing people to believe in the candidate; and *GOTV*—"getting out the vote." Strong, active partisans might know instantly whom they will support, and they may well show up at the polls without prompting. For others, the decision-making process may require time and effort, as the candidates come to awareness, as impressions are formed, and as a final determination is made—perhaps in the voting booth.

Billboards, bumper stickers, and yard signs serve almost no function other than establishing name recognition and perhaps affixing the party label to the candidate. There is room to question whether it is better to get these materials out as early as possible—slowly building momentum as time goes by—or if a last-minute explosion might have a greater impact (see Shaw 2010, 147). In some jurisdictions, the choice might be dictated by a local ordinance regulating signage, such as one limiting the number of days prior to an election that yard signs may be displayed. Elsewhere, the fact that yard signs are vulnerable to late-campaign vandalism might force a decision to abandon their use altogether.

Should the candidate be presented as a moderate, a liberal, or a conservative? Political professionals want to control perceptions as they help voters through the persuasion stage. Campaign veteran Mary Matalin calls it "cardinal rule 101 of politics: *Never let the other side define you*" (Matalin and Carville 1995, 72). Sometimes the opposition is completely unknown and highly vulnerable. If the sponge is to be filled, everyone wants to fill it. In fact, the corollary to cardinal rule 101 might well be *Always define the opponent early*.

Defining candidates and opponents requires money and media. *Early* money allows a campaign to attract *more* money, and just as important, it helps the campaign get a jump on the opposition when it goes looking for media advertising. Operatives who fail to buy early might see the best ad times sold out from under them. Local affiliates can deplete their stock of pre–Election Day ad slots if the opposition gets there first. Or a campaign might simply run out of resources. Political professionals were dumbfounded when Democrat Kathleen Brown's 1994 gubernatorial campaign failed to keep cash on hand for the end-of-cycle campaign blitz, allowing Brown's opponent, Republican Pete Wilson, to give a half million dollars to *other* GOP campaigns (Wallace 1994).

Brown's defeat highlights the inherent challenge of campaign planning: Uncertainty can often be reduced, but it can never be eliminated. Just as a business plan cannot take full account of future economic conditions, a campaign plan relies on delicate guesswork about the political landscape that may or may not hold true on Election Day. Certainly, a campaign working its way through the final week of an election would not want to realize, after the fact, that most of the ballots had already been cast by mail. Forgivable mistakes, such as errors of miscalculation, are also possible. Sometimes the money does not come in; sometimes the volunteers do not show up; sometimes the stock market crashes in the closing weeks of a campaign cycle, as it did in September 2008, when operatives were sent scrambling to figure out how to communicate with an electorate that was watching its life savings evaporate as Election Day approached.

There is another reason why campaign plans fail: The opposition is executing some plans of its own. Personal financial preparations can be hampered by unforeseen circumstances—losing a job, having a flat tire—these bumps in the road result from the vagaries of an indifferent world. In politics, as in business and warfare, the world is not simply indifferent—it is hostile. Opposition forces are hard at work trying to figure out the candidate's next move so that they can find the best place to lay a political trap. In other words, in a competitive enterprise like political campaigning, the unpredictability that bedevils forward planning

and backward mapping is often the result of opposition attacks, and this fact bodes ill for the majority of campaign plans. It is a truism of winner-take-all elections that only one campaign plan can survive a political duel.

CONCLUSION

Thoughtful campaign plans hope to minimize uncertainty and waste. A plan seeks strong donor prospects, helps keep the candidate focused on strategy, dampens the impact of opposition attacks, and tightens organizational focus on the endgame. If volunteers and staffers fixate on daily events, a team can wander "off message" and divert resources from mission-critical objectives. A solid plan can help keep everyone on task and on schedule, or at least it can help maintain big-picture perspective on routine electoral volatility.

But lacking omniscience, mistakes will be made. "The best laid schemes o' Mice an' Men," Robert Burns intoned, "Gang aft agley"—that is, go awry—"An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain / For promis'd joy!" If a campaign plan is not based on an accurate reading of past, present, and future events, of the candidate and the opponent, of the strengths and weaknesses of both campaign organizations, and of the voting public, then even the most thoughtful preparations may disappoint.

In 1991, those who designed George H. W. Bush's reelection effort assumed—quite reasonably—that the economy would pick up, that there would be no real opponent in the GOP primaries, that the Bush White House and the Bush campaign would work cooperatively, and that the president would not need to hit the hustings in earnest until the Republican Convention. Life unfolded differently. The economy remained stagnant, conservative commentator Pat Buchanan ran well in New Hampshire, coordination between the White House and the campaign organization was problematic, and, because the president chose to spend time governing instead of campaigning, he found himself running so far behind Bill Clinton that recovery became all but impossible. It did not help that Ross Perot jumped into the race, then jumped out, then jumped back in again. The Bush campaign plan, thoughtful though it may have been, just did not work.

A wise strategist knows that any plan is only as good as its assumptions, and that assumptions can be wrong. On the one hand, the value of a campaign plan is that it might keep an organization tightly focused through troubled times; on the other hand, sticking to a flawed plan extends the agony. Campaign strategists must decide when to cut the rope and when to hang on.

Chapter 2

The Context of the Race

American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr cautioned against worldly naïveté. Emotional support groups of all description would later soften his message, but what is now called the "Serenity Prayer" was originally expressed by Niebuhr in Old Testament prose, and it was meant in just that spirit. His prayer read: "God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things that should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish between the two" (Sifton 1998). The prayer was intended not for easy comfort, but to focus the mind on the rigors of differentiating the tractable from the intractable.

Niebuhr's sentiment is an important part of political wisdom—the ability to look at a race, a district, or an opponent's popularity and then distinguish what can be changed from what cannot. In some districts, the number of registered voters cannot be modified, while in others a strong voter registration drive can bring a dramatic transformation. Political consultants talk about the "landscape," "environment," or "political terrain." What office is in play? What do the demographics look like? Who else will be on the ballot? New-style politics begins with an understanding of campaign context. A discussion of political strategy is largely meaningless until the context is understood—until the things that cannot be changed are distinguished from the things that should be.

This chapter lists some of the basic features of a political terrain: the office being sought, incumbency status, multiplayer scenarios, the election year, national trends, candidates for other offices, physical geography, demographics, and other contextual matters.

THE OFFICE BEING SOUGHT

Successful mayors can sometimes fail miserably when they run for Congress. Congressional representatives are now and then handed embarrassing defeats when they attempt a move to the Senate. The larger constituency may be quite different from the smaller districts inside it, and the difference might bring defeat. Additionally, the electorate of a city might look quite different from the residents of the larger congressional district in which the city is located. Another possibility is that voters have different expectations for mayors, members of Congress, and senators. A loud tie and bombastic personality may be loved in local politicians and loathed in higher officials. The formality of an executive might seem pompous in a legislator. Many candidates have learned the hard way that the nature of the office sought affects the fundamentals of a campaign.

Voter Expectations

In matters as basic as tone, body language, and personal style, distinctions make a difference. Voters might expect a Senate candidate to wear a dark suit but regard prospective county commissioners in business attire as haughty. A judicial candidate will usually want to sound nonpartisan. Candidates for mayor will be required to know the details of local zoning laws and sewer problems, while a candidate for the House of Representatives standing before the very same audience will be forgiven if he or she does not know the nuances of recent tax levies but will likely be expected to speak intelligently on issues of national importance—the federal deficit, for example.

To decide which issues can work, campaigns might look at the political history of the district, paying close attention to prior successful (and unsuccessful) candidates. They might look at issues that the current officeholder handles. Well-funded campaigns generally commission surveys. When people say "education is important," they might mean that the state and local government, not federal bureaucrats, should invest more money in schools; that the federal government should offer better education funding; or that there is enough money but parents need to get involved.

Voters seem to match candidates to offices and offices to candidates. Research in this area is not well developed, but, roughly speaking, candidates for executive posts are expected to have leadership skills and the ability to implement programs. On the other hand, legislative candidates might need to form a close connection with the average voter.

Congressional representatives have a variety of styles (see Fenno 1978), but legislative representation is generally expected to be constituent focused. Asked whether members of Congress should look after the needs of "their own district" or the "interest of the nation," a Harris Interactive survey found that respondents favored the district-centered representation 67 percent to 29 percent (Taylor 2004).

Another element of voter expectation relates to formality of tone. In some districts, voters expect executive and judicial candidates to run mild-mannered campaigns, but they might allow legislative candidates free rein to go on the attack. In other jurisdictions, all candidates, even prospective judges, can take the partisan offensive. Traditional wisdom holds that candidates for the U.S. Senate should remain stately, but during his successful 1992 bid for the Senate, Russ Feingold ran a television spot featuring Elvis Presley—or perhaps it was just an Elvis impersonator—who had come out of hiding to lend his endorsement. While most would say that gubernatorial candidates should have executive stature, in 1998 Minnesotans elected former professional wrestler Jesse "the Body" Ventura, whose television ads featured a seemingly naked Ventura posing as the model for Auguste Rodin's sculpture *The Thinker*.

Not long ago, it was believed that serious candidates should wear business attire in public. Jackets might be doffed at barbecues and ice-cream socials, but for the most part, candidates should arrive at political events wearing a suit. In some areas, this advice still holds, but in a time when the corporate world endorses "casual Fridays," formal business attire might connote self-importance. Campaign ads and brochures often show a candidate talking to citizens with a jacket casually draped over the shoulder. As more and more women have joined the ranks of the elected, bright colors have become acceptable, though in 2008, disparaging comments were sometimes directed at Hillary Clinton's wardrobe, and later Sarah Palin's, which became controversial with reports that Palin's clothes had been purchased with political funds. When a candidate—any candidate, local or national—is photographed with sleeves rolled up, the intended meaning is obvious: it's time to get to work.

Media Relations

The office being sought affects not just voter expectations but also media expectations. To gain positive press, a strategist should understand what reporters expect from candidates. For many voters, the lines separating local, state, and national issues are hazy, but to good reporters,

they are fairly clear: Federal candidates will be expected to have a grasp of national matters, state contestants should know about state issues, and local office seekers should understand community concerns.

Generally speaking, the higher the office, the greater the scrutiny. Candidates for top-tier offices might find themselves surprised by the grilling they receive from the local news media. Poorly prepared candidates seem incompetent or green. In 2002, Democratic gubernatorial nominee Bill McBride, challenging Gov. Jeb Bush in Florida, seemed for a time to be a serious contender. But during a crucial debate, McBride could not provide an answer to moderator Tim Russert's repeated inquiries about public school funding. Vague responses signaled inexperience in dealing with such topics—political issues, that, as governor, he would encounter regularly. Florida voters retained Bush (Semiatin 2005, 221).

A similar problem occurred in the fall of 2009, when a special election was held to fill a House seat in upstate New York. The race for the 23rd Congressional District drew wide media attention because local GOP leaders had endorsed State Assemblywoman Dede Scozzafava, while national conservatives like Rush Limbaugh and Sarah Palin endorsed political neophyte Doug Hoffman of the state's Conservative Party. As the race tightened, each candidate sought to bolster paid-media buys with news media attention. Hoffman's editorial board meeting at the *Watertown Daily Times*, the largest newspaper in the district, backfired. As the editors described it, Hoffman "showed no grasp of the bread-and-butter issues pertinent to district residents" (*Watertown Daily Times* 2009). Hoffman lost to the Democrat by a razor-thin margin.

Media scrutiny varies according to office, with the importance of an infraction varying with the power of an official. A reporter who finds a blemish on a state legislative candidate might never report the discovery, while congressional candidates are held to a higher standard. In 1996, the news media hammered Wes Cooley, an Oregon congressman, for seemingly inaccurate statements in a voter guide, where he claimed that he was a veteran of the Korean War. Cooley later explained, "I shouldn't even have said Korea. . . . I was in the Army. I was in the Special Forces. At that period of time, the Korean conflict was going on" (Egan 1996). Previously, when running for a seat in the state senate, Cooley had apparently "moved a trailer into the district so he could qualify as a resident," although "neighbors said he never lived in the district" (ibid.). Cooley got by with a minor press flap at one level of government—he was a state senator until his election to Congress—but once in Washington, his past became news on a variety of fronts and the congressman was forced to step down.

Since 1992, "ad watch" journalism, which emphasizes the disclosure of inaccuracies in campaign messages, has become a political force in American politics. Presidential, Senate, and in many instances House candidates can expect to see their commercials, speeches, and debate remarks reviewed for content, while many state and local candidates are held to a lower standard of accuracy. The application of lesser scrutiny may allow for a greater number of unfair charges. Whereas attacks on House and Senate candidates are often checked for accuracy, charges against state and local candidates are rarely investigated. Reporters are overworked and underpaid and have a great many demands on their time. They might suggest that their job is to report the news, not to referee political fights (see Dunn 1995, 117). Rather than track down every charge that any candidate makes against another, journalists concentrate on higher-level races. Nevertheless, the rise of voter participation on the Internet, with political blogs following down-ballot races, means that virtually every candidate risks the scrutiny of double-checking.

Finally, newspaper endorsements generally go to incumbents, and research suggests these endorsements may have an impact. Paul Herrnson notes that "roughly 85 percent of incumbents in races contested by both major parties benefit from [newspaper endorsements]. It improved their electoral performance by roughly five points over incumbents who did not enjoy such positive relations with the fourth estate" (2008, 250). Other research suggests that endorsements are less meaningful. A team of scholars who looked at the influence of endorsements from 1940 to 2002 found only a minor lift for the candidate who received an endorsement (Ansolabehere, Lessem, and Snyder 2006). Kathleen Hall Jamieson has found that endorsements have lesser impact in more highly visible races (2000). And the power of endorsements might be changing. In the past, voters relied on a limited range of sources for their political information and a local newspaper might have held sway, but now voters can graze the Internet for all sorts of campaign news, and endorsements from local papers might be less important than they once were.

Overall Interest in the Campaign

Political novices sometimes become frustrated that their campaigns do not make the news—and, in fact, that the campaign may be of little interest to voters. This is natural. Candidates, party activists, volunteers, and professional consultants can become immersed in their campaigns and may start believing that others should be as well. Yet most voters

prefer to think about their spouses, children, bills, vacations, hobbies, cars, jobs, and other aspects of their lives. Elections are of marginal concern.

Surveys from the American National Election Studies (ANES) have found that the number of truly concerned, interested citizens has been modest over the past decade—about 30 percent are interested in campaigns. Yet even this figure may be exaggerated, because "good citizens" are *engaged* citizens, and respondents may want to be seen in that light. The surveys also indicate that the share of voters who call themselves "very interested" has increased a bit in recent years. This is likely due to such large, national policy debates as those over health care, the economy, and military conflicts. Furthermore, the peaks and valleys in voter interest suggest significantly greater interest in presidential election years than during off-year elections.

Not all offices are ignored equally. There is a hierarchy of interest, starting at the top of the ballot with presidential races and dropping to Senate and House races—with the rest falling some distance below, right down to judicial posts and other "down-ballot" offices (e.g., county coroner) that hardly any voters care about. In the past few decades, the ANES data indicate that roughly 40 percent of those interviewed reported that they did not care who won their congressional race.

Judge Lawrence Grey, a former elected appellate judge, dismisses television as a means of communicating with voters for local candidates: "You can . . . forget about any broadcast coverage of your campaign as a news event. . . . News divisions are operated as entertainment enterprises, and serious news is often not entertaining" (2007, 174). Statewide and large-city mayoral races receive a good deal of coverage, but most congressional campaigns are given short shrift. Absent a controversy, colorful candidate, or cliff-hanger, the general rule is that city council, county legislative, state legislative, and judicial races will largely be ignored.

The problem of voter inattention for lower-level candidates can be seen in both the number of votes and the amount of money that goes to down-ballot races. Voters at the polls almost always select a candidate for president, governor, and congressional representative, but many leave the ballot blank when they get down to county commissioner. Lower-level offices can suffer drastic roll-off from the top of the ballot. The same is true in political fund-raising. Individuals and organizations give money to candidates partly because they are aware of the campaign, maybe even excited by it. Presidents can raise hundreds of millions of dollars; county commissioners might raise thousands. If only a few people are familiar with the race, then only a few will contribute.

INCUMBENCY STATUS

There are three basic types of election: *uncontested, contested incumbency*, and *open seat*. An uncontested race in which the incumbent has no challenger is obviously the most predictable of the three since there is literally no opposition and the winner is a foregone conclusion. Races in which the incumbent *is* contested usually go to the current officeholder; as much as people say they want to "throw the bums out," they tend to return their own representatives to office. Most uncertain is an open-seat election. Two well-qualified candidates running against one another can make for stirring political drama.

In 2002, Democratic incumbent congressman Tom Sawyer was faced with a difficult primary battle when his Akron-area district was merged with another district that included Youngstown, Ohio. While the two areas were similar in that both were industrial cities located in the Rust Belt, the political environment of each district differed greatly. Sawyer discovered that his main competition would be a state senator from the Youngstown area, Tim Ryan. Ryan built a large and effective grassroots network, and with his knowledge of local politics, he was able to connect with voters and unseat the incumbent (Beiler 2002). In rare instances, incumbents are even pitted against one another after their districts are merged, as when Ohio congressmen Bob McEwen and Clarence Miller were forced to run against each other in a GOP primary in 1992.

Despite occasional twists of fate, incumbency is a valuable resource. Officeholders typically enjoy higher early name recognition than challengers, deeper relations with the news media, more experienced staff, better finances, a broader base of volunteers, and stronger connections with parties and interest groups. Some incumbents cultivate their representational relationship with the electorate through publicly financed mailings, town hall meetings, and scores of receptions and dinners. Furthermore, incumbents generally have at least a modicum of appeal—they were already elected at least once. Even in the Republican sweep of 1994, renowned for the number of sitting members it pushed out of office, fully 90 percent of incumbents were retained. Since 1998, an average of 95 percent of House incumbents running for reelection have won (Center for Responsive Politics 2009a). These percentages are lower for executive posts, such as for governor or mayor, but there is no questioning the importance of incumbency in these races as well.

If an incumbent is scandal-free and makes no great mistake, the challenger's odds are slim. Most challengers have comparatively little name recognition. Political action committees and major donors are hesitant to back a challenger for fear of antagonizing the incumbent—the person

who is most likely to be making policy after the election. According to the Campaign Finance Institute (CFI), in 2008 there were 306 House races where the incumbents netted over 60 percent of the general election vote. These incumbents raised an average of $1.1 million, while their challengers raised an average of just over $227,000. According to the CFI, the gap is smaller in more competitive races, but even in the tightest House contests—where the incumbent netted less than 55 percent of the vote—the average challenger raised only about half the amount collected by the incumbent (Campaign Finance Institute 2010a).

Generally speaking, the higher the profile of the race, the weaker the incumbency advantage. Presidents, governors, and U.S. senators benefit from greater media coverage, especially in the early stages of a race, but these carefully watched campaigns offer significant media coverage to the challenger as well. When Republican John Thune challenged well-known Senate minority leader Tom Daschle in 2004, Thune was already a big name in South Dakota politics. A former three-term member of the House of Representatives, Thune had narrowly lost a bid for Senate in 2002 against Democrat Tim Johnson. The 2004 race was closely followed by state and national media, and partly due to Thune's political career, the news coverage proved roughly equal for each. Thune narrowly defeated Daschle, stunning the political establishments in South Dakota and Washington, D.C.

Primary elections are increasingly interesting. Recent polarization within the major parties has highlighted the importance of effective primary campaigns. For some candidates, the primary is more difficult than the general election. Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania jumped to the Democratic Party in the spring of 2009 when it seemed likely that he would lose the GOP primary race against a prominent conservative. Many of the contextual matters of a general election are different in primary contests—not the least of which is the level of voter turnout. Turnout in most of these contests is less than half of what is found in a general election contest. Moreover, the type of voter who goes to the polls in a primary might be different than the typical voter who casts a ballot in the general election. Primary voters are considerably more active, aware, and ideological.

Many incumbents run the same campaign time after time—a warning sign, according to consultant Neil Newhouse, of "incumbentitis," whereby incumbents look on a past successful campaign as the model for future campaigns (Shea and Brooks 1995, 24). When *Campaign Craft* coauthor Daniel M. Shea and fellow scholar Stephen Medvic took a close look at the 2008 defeat of 14-year Republican incumbent Phil English of Pennsylvania, they found a sitting congressman caught up in

an anti-incumbent mood running against challenger Kathy Dahlkemper, a strong, energetic candidate. English's "tried and true" approach was largely ineffective against Dahlkemper, and he seemed unable, or unwilling, to try a different course of action (Shea and Medvic 2009).

An incumbent has a record to defend, while a novice might have a clean slate—which is sometimes an enviable possession. By one account, "the most difficult opponent is somebody who's never run for anything" (Persinos 1994, 22). Likewise, although it has traditionally been perceived as undignified for an elected official to go hard on the offensive, challengers rarely have much to lose. This rule may be changing—incumbents are going on the attack much more often than they did in the 1980s—but early attacks can still be dicey. To disregard a challenger is to refuse recognition; to attack a challenger is to give credence to the opponent's candidacy. However, as noted by campaign commentator Ronald Faucheux, incumbents "may not have the luxury of being able to ignore the substance of the attacks if they appear to be resonating with voters" (2002, 26). Few political stories get more coverage than an underdog catching up to an incumbent who everyone had originally assumed would win. In fact, a challenger who persuades reporters of the campaign's viability is laying the basis for a media-ready Horatio Alger story.

MULTIPLAYER SCENARIOS

Elections are commonly imagined as head-to-head battles, but many races involve three or more major players. Generally speaking, there are two types of multicandidate fields: party primaries, and general elections containing third-party, independent, and write-in candidates. Both are difficult to strategize. In primaries, party members are running against one another, and infighting is common. Three, four, five, or more candidates might run in a primary, and calculating where the vote will swing often becomes a matter of speculation and argumentation.

Some primaries and general election contests have a two-step process: If a candidate garners more than 50 percent, the election is won; if no candidate crosses the 50 percent mark, then the two top vote-getters are forced into a runoff. For example, the 2009 race for mayor of Atlanta went to a runoff election, as City Councilwoman Mary Norwood, the front-runner, was unable to cross the 50 percent barrier in a multicandidate general election contest. Other elections have different arrangements, perhaps running all candidates in one election regardless of party. And in some jurisdictions, a handful of "at-large" seats go to

the top vote-getters: five candidates might vie for three seats, and the three candidates with the largest number of votes win. At-large races, like runoffs and other types of contested elections, require a good deal of planning and forethought.

Third-party candidates rarely win in general elections, but they often make a difference. They can erode a major-party candidate's base of support, undercut the intended message, and siphon off volunteers. One reason: Minor-party candidates often join the race because they are dissatisfied with the incumbent, a feeling that might be shared in the wider electorate. It is no accident that Jesse Ventura's win came at the expense of two well-known Minnesota officeholders. Challenging the system was exactly the point of his campaign.

An ongoing challenge to major-party campaigns in the first decade of the new millennium has been the introduction of outside interest groups into the electoral competition. When interest groups favor a candidate, the effort can be seen as a happy surprise. Outside help, though, is not always helpful. The battle over Utah's Second Congressional District in 1998 saw heavy spending by a group interested in term limits. Incumbent Merrill Cook, an independent turned Republican, faced Democrat Lily Eskelsen, considered by many a strong contender for Cook's seat. Eskelsen wanted to make the election a referendum on Cook's record, touting education and other issues where Eskelsen seemed to have the advantage. Meanwhile, Americans for Limited Terms put $380,000 into a broad-based, anti-Cook ad campaign (Goodliffe 2000, 171). Apparently, "while the efforts of the parties largely neutralized each other, the term-limits campaign significantly increased the negativity of the campaign, which reflected poorly on Lily Eskelsen, whom [Americans for Limited Terms] were supporting" (ibid.).

THE ELECTION YEAR

Campaign professionals talk about three different kinds of campaign year: on, off, and odd. An *on-year* election occurs when there are presidential candidates on the ballot (e.g., 2008 and 2012). *Off-year* elections also occur every four years, in the even-numbered years between presidential contests (e.g., 2010 and 2014). Finally, *odd-year* elections occur in odd-numbered years (e.g., 2009, 2011, and 2013). There are neither presidential nor congressional elections in odd years except for occasional "special" elections held to fill a prematurely vacated House or Senate seat.

The type of election year is important to campaign planning because the number of people going to the polls varies significantly. Turnout is

almost always highest during on-years because of the attention given to presidential campaigns. In addition, the entire House of Representatives, one third of the Senate, most state legislators, and many governors are elected during on-years. Generally speaking, off-years will have the next highest turnout. Although the president is not on the ballot, House, Senate, and statewide races generate excitement and send people to the polls. Almost all jurisdictions reserve odd-years for municipal offices.

The case of young voters in the 2008 and 2009 elections is revealing. In 2008, young voters flocked to the polls. For those under 30, turnout in 2008 grew by 15 percent compared to 2000. In the next year's elections, however, this age-group nearly evaporated. This decline likely had a significant impact on the odd-year statewide races for governor in New Jersey and Virginia. According to the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement (CIRCLE), an authority on youth voting statistics, 53 percent of voters under 30 turned out in the presidential election in 2008, but only 19 percent voted in the New Jersey gubernatorial election in 2009 (Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning and Engagement 2009).

Special elections also suffer diminished turnout. They are often held on short notice when an office suddenly becomes vacant, perhaps because of a resignation or death. In March 2005, Doris Matsui, a California Democrat, succeeded her late husband in Congress by winning the seat herself. Often, as in Matsui's case, there is less interest in politics for special elections, and turnout is generally low. Propelled to the winner's circle by name recognition and her husband's long-standing political connections, Matsui won 69 percent of the vote in this low-turnout election. In New York's 23rd Congressional District special election in 2009, just 34 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, whereas 63 percent had voted in the 2008 election and 43 percent in 2006. Without the national attention this race received—it was one of the few races worth watching that November—the turnout might have dipped even lower.

Political scientists have noted a cyclical phenomenon they call "surge and decline." In most midterm congressional elections in the past hundred years, the president's party has lost seats. The election of 1990, which took place just two years after George H.W. Bush's impressive victory in the 1988 presidential election, provides a clear illustration. The months leading up to the 1990 midterm had public opinion surveys indicating that voters were fed up with "business as usual" in Washington. Because Democrats controlled both houses of Congress, one might have expected Republicans to do well. As it happened, Democrats gained 17 seats in the House and 1 in the Senate. On average, the

president's party will lose about 20 seats in the first midterm election of the president's tenure. But there are many exceptions, often closely linked to presidential job approval ratings. In 1994, two years after the election of President Bill Clinton, Democrats lost 54 seats in the House and 8 in the Senate, surrendering legislative control to the Republicans.

Scholars have struggled to find the causes of surge-and-decline. One possibility is that on-year and off-year elections attract different voters. Many citizens who vote in presidential elections do not cast ballots in the off-year. These people, generally less partisan and less ideological, might be responsible for a president's electoral success as well as an influx of congressional officeholders of the president's party. During off-year elections, the pool of voters shrinks as casual voters drop out. Another possibility is that voters lose excitement for the president. As time goes by, voters become increasingly disillusioned, and they might even support congressional candidates of the other party. A third conjecture is that the type of candidate running for office changes between the two elections. In off-years, aggressive candidates, angry with the president, run with steadfast determination, buoyed by money from interests opposed to the administration's policies.

A complete understanding of this phenomenon is elusive, and aberrations make prediction difficult. In 1998, for example, Democrats faced a perilous situation. Historically, the second midterm after a president is elected is especially risky for members of the president's party. In 1986, six years after President Ronald Reagan's election, the GOP lost eight Senate seats and ceded control of the Senate to insurgent Democrats. In 1974, in the months approaching what would have been President Richard Nixon's sixth year (had he remained in office), the Republican Party lost 43 seats in the House. Prior to the 1998 elections, the president's party could expect to lose roughly 38 House seats. Six years after Clinton won the presidency, in the middle of his impeachment battle, one might have thought the Democrats would suffer major losses. Yet the outcome was quite different: House Democrats actually *gained* five seats.

Another anomaly came in 2002, when the Republicans picked up several seats. Many speculate that the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, disrupted the surge-and-decline process. That is, the party in power was not likely to lose seats in this difficult time, as voters find stability comforting: "The pro-Republican atmosphere in 2002 helped the GOP buck the trend in which the president's party loses seats in midterm elections" (Herrnson 2004, 245). In any event, "in 2006 the unpopularity of the war in Iraq, growing numbers of American fatalities in the Middle East, and perceptions of widespread

corruption and mismanagement in the Republican-controlled Congress and executive branch hung like an albatross around the necks of GOP candidates" (Herrnson 2008, 251). The Democrats picked up 31 House seats and 6 Senate seats in 2006.

NATIONAL TRENDS

All politics may be local, as Tip O'Neill said, yet even local politics cannot escape national trends, moods, and obsessions. Each year, the news media highlight some concerns and downplay others, as popular perceptions of the "crime issue" show. One legal historian has noted:

> Throughout the country, newspapers, movies, and TV spread the word about crime and violence—a misleading word, perhaps, but a powerful one. Even people who live in quiet suburban enclaves, or rural backwaters, are aware of what they consider the crime problem. (Friedman 1993, 452)

From a crass, strategic point of view, many candidates find that the difference between perception and reality has little meaning.

Like perceptions of crime, economic trends and presidential popularity are powerful political forces. In the 1970s, election scholar Edward Tufte (1975) built a strong predictive model of congressional midterm elections using only a small number of variables. Although scholars have since changed and refined congressional elections models, Tufte's point is well taken: voters reward or punish candidates for events that are largely beyond their control. In 2008, given the weak state of the economy, along with a historic low number of Americans who believed the nation was on the "right track" (an oft-used measure of the mood of the public), it was a very tough year for Republicans; as a result of the November election, the Democrats picked up 21 House and 8 Senate seats, along with control of the White House.

Some national trends are set in motion by tragic events, crises, and wars. Strength, foreign policy experience, and military prowess were key candidate qualifications following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Arguably, the GOP gains in 2002, which ran counter to surge-and-decline theory, were owed partly to the rise of national and domestic security concerns prompted by 9/11.

But events are subject to interpretation. A Republican may believe that an economic recovery is a product of tax-cut policies, and a Democrat may conclude that crime is on the decline and therefore should not be featured so prominently on the national agenda. Campaign professionals

understand that public perceptions can be nudged—for better or worse—but only if prior beliefs are taken into account. Whatever might be responsible for national tragedies, the economy, or criminal behavior, these are the sorts of issues that voters can feel in their bones. A campaign that wants to bring people closer to the truth must begin with what voters believe, not what they ought to believe.

CANDIDATES FOR OTHER OFFICES

Popular presidents and governors seem to help elect friends down the ballot. A faith in "coattails" is deeply ingrained in American electoral politics. The esteem granted to one candidate, it is assumed, will trickle down to others. In 2008, for example, a large group of Democrats was swept into office with Barack Obama.

As logical as the coattails theory may appear, though, it is hard to find direct evidence for a strong effect. Leading election scholar Gary Jacobson suggests that "national issues such as the state of the economy or the performance of the president may influence some voters some of the time . . . but for many voters the congressional choice is determined by evaluations of candidates as individuals" (2009, 168). Jacobson's "strategic politician" theory holds that smart candidates pay close attention to early polling data, particularly as the information relates to fellow party members. When partisan colleagues are unpopular, strategic politicians decide to sit the race out. The nomination is left to lesser candidates, who, with poor qualifications, scant finances, and low name recognition, lose the election. Years later when the party is back in favor, strategic politicians enter the race. Because they are well qualified and adequately financed, they win.

The strategic-candidate process seemed to be at work in the fall of 2005. Because of lingering difficulties in Iraq, perceived incompetence in the response to Hurricane Katrina, sky-high gas prices, and legal troubles for a top White House aide, George W. Bush's popularity fell below 40 percent. Exceptionally qualified Democrats started gearing up for 2006.

To argue that coattails have little direct effect is not to say that they are completely inconsequential. The mere perception that coattails exist may bring strong down-ballot contenders into the race when more prominent candidates lead the way. Better candidates bring increased financial support and heightened media coverage. If others believe a candidate will get a significant boost from higher-ups on the ticket, they may be more likely to lend a hand. Thus, in some ways, the coattails

theory may be self-fulfilling: When people believe that a candidate will win, they jump on the bandwagon.

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

Campaign activities are molded by the physical characteristics of a district. Door-to-door projects are possible for the state senate seats encompassing San Francisco's east side, and they are likely more cost-effective than radio and television advertising. Yet, in some downtown areas, a campaign may find problems with this type of electioneering because high-rise apartment buildings often forbid entry. And a sparsely populated countryside that is home to many large dogs will not be attractive to volunteer canvassers.

Some regions are particularly difficult to work. While a candidate for the Senate in Rhode Island has more than a million citizens packed into a thousand-square-mile area, a candidate in North Dakota has about 640,000 people spread across nearly 70,000 square miles. In a 2000 Illinois congressional race, Mark Kirk was running for an open seat representing the 10th District, which encapsulates a chunk of suburban Chicago. Kirk's campaign knew that ads on broadcast television stations would be less effective than ads on cable and radio coordinated with direct mail. Kirk used the latter and kept the plan to advertise on broadcast television low on the priority list until late in the campaign so that spots would be purchased only with campaign funds that had not been earmarked for anything else (Blakely 2001).

The layout of a district might define travel patterns, which may, in turn, influence the range of viable campaign activities. Some districts allow a candidate to drive from one end to the other with ease, but other districts demand hours on the road or even frequent plane trips. High mountains, thick forests, and wide bodies of water can be logistical barriers. Some districts have urban density at their core, making the placement of campaign headquarters obvious; others are so spread out that careful calculations must be made about headquarters placement, or perhaps two or three headquarters are needed to cover the district.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In the golden age of parties, local bosses knew their constituents. George Washington Plunkitt could say, "I know every man, woman, and child in the Fifteenth District, except them that's been born this summer—and I know some of them, too" (Riordon 1995, 25). In a

world where new immigrants joined social clubs and political parties, at a time when travel was a luxury few could afford, neighborhood organizers could be on familiar terms with their voters and send political information up the chain of command. By the 1950s, urban flight and the decline of tightly knit communities made neighborhood-based assessments increasingly problematic. At the same time, primitive data handling was coming into its own, and demographic information, generally culled from census reports, could be punched into computer cards and run through sorting machines.

Every 10 years, the federal government undertakes a massive, constitutionally mandated effort to gauge the country's population. Unlike sample-based surveys, the Census Bureau attempts to enumerate every person living in the United States. For Census 2010, the short form asked people about the type of housing they lived in; about their age, sex, ethnicity, and race; and about their relationship to others in the home. Those who fail to submit a response could expect a visit from a census worker. Separately, the Census Bureau now runs its American Community Survey with long-form questionnaires that ask a series of questions relating to electric bills, education, employment, and a variety of other data points that can help build a socioeconomic profile that would assist political professionals who are strategizing an electoral contest.

Census data are not perfect. Some people are missed altogether, some forms are not accurately completed, and some people do not want to divulge personal information to the government. More important, researchers cannot study individual unit data, limiting the data's utility. But none of these shortcomings render census information useless. While local politicos in Plunkitt's day might have been able to say from their own knowledge which areas were predominantly Polish or Italian, or which neighborhoods were upper income and which were lower, new-style demographics can show how many people own their homes, how many are headed by a single parent, how many are blue-collar workers, how many are farmers, and how many are over the age of 65. A demographer can look at the entire nation or at a city block. Multivariate analyses on a large number of geographic units make census data far superior to casual estimates.

The Census Bureau continually refines its data collection techniques, adds and subtracts questions, and generally tries to improve its forecasting—but on the whole, the underlying structure of the data sets has remained fairly constant. Data delivery, however, has changed dramatically. In the 1980s, campaigns referenced hard-copy volumes. Research libraries held racks of census publications, while local public libraries

carried selected titles. Accessing this information required legwork and cross-referencing. Information from the 1990 census was available on computer tape reels, tape cartridges, and CD-ROMs. Not only were the data more accessible, but they were more manageable. Campaign strategists could carry an impressive quantity of searchable data fully loaded into a laptop computer.

For the new millennium, census information moved to the Web. A few clicks on the Census Bureau's home page could tell a researcher connected to the Internet that, within the city limits of Wilmington, North Carolina, there were 75,542 people living in 34,268 households. There were 53,058 Caucasian Americans and 19,487 African Americans. The median gross rent in the white population was $641. Among black residents, approximately 467 took public transportation to work, and roughly 38 took a bicycle. All these data can be downloaded into commercial database software. The quantity of information offered by the Census Bureau is mind-boggling, and the bureau collects and sells more than just the data collected in the decennial survey. It produces information on business, agriculture, building permits, federal fund transfers, and other sorts of demographic data.

OTHER CONTEXTUAL MATTERS

Many districts have strong institutional traditions, boasting a local union, a chamber of commerce, service Club chapters, and other such organizations. The more politically active of these groups might provide endorsements and contributions, but the importance of an organization should not be measured solely on its formal political affiliations or lack thereof. Nonpolitical groups can be central to word-of-mouth communication. In some areas, for example, volunteer fire departments loom large, both in size and stature, and while these organizations are officially nonpartisan, campaigns and elections might be a constant topic of conversation.

Local elected officials can help a campaign attract media attention, contributors, and volunteers, and they can make endorsements as well as introductions to other prominent members of the community. In some states, elected officials transfer campaign funds to other candidates. That said, rivalries often divide political communities, and a candidate who inadvertently lines up on the wrong side of a feud can cause irreparable damage to his or her campaign. Likewise, a political hero can be a powerful force, offering endorsements, organizational assistance, and perhaps a shaving of advice, though not all politicians are

viewed favorably. Some depart public life on a bad note, and endorsements and pictures associating a candidate with a political villain can prove harmful. Complicating matters, endorsers do not always share their checkered pasts willingly. Many campaigns are lured into believing that an endorsement will help, only to discover the full extent of the public's wrath.

Communities often have unique social and political customs. A city might accept the use of mild profanity on the stump while its neighboring suburbs do not. Are political discussions allowed in church? It depends on the community. Is it polite to call people by their first names? Perhaps, but it is best to find out ahead of time. The rules can get complicated. In some locales, there are Democratic taverns and Republican lounges—and out-of-town political guests are often expected to stay at hotels with a long-standing connection to a party.

Local parties vary in the degree of assistance that they give candidates. In some areas, aggressive party organizations are eager to help aspirants to public office, perhaps offering endorsements during the primary season, while in others they are no help at all. Where party organizations are strong, it is common to find a powerful leader at the helm. Perhaps it will be the chair, though sometimes an influential veteran is really in charge—and sometimes it is an operative from the neighboring county machine. In a sense, helpful parties and powerful leaders are inextricably linked. These party bosses are a mixed blessing. They can be pivotal players, leveraging money and volunteers as no one else can; unfortunately, party gatekeepers can be difficult to work with. In New Hampshire, it has been said, a Republican presidential candidate who wants to call on experienced volunteers must first "enlist a poobah, a warlord, a New Hampshire potentate," with accompanying political machinations reminiscent of "the old Kremlin and the Soviet politburo" (Ferguson 1996, 44). This sort of power structure can be found in varying degrees across the United States.

Local political machines are important, and so is a region's tourism and recreation. At one level, ski resorts and stadiums can be large employers, but just knowing what voters do in their spare time helps a candidate develop a connection with voters. A candidate in western Pennsylvania who knows little about waterfowl might want to go on a hunting trip. A consultant arriving in Houston who cannot name a few Clint Black songs should think about tuning into a country station. In campaigns, little things can make a big difference.

A community can be proud of its heritage. Understanding what a population has endured, recently or in the distant past, can yield valuable insight about an electorate. Natural disasters, social and political turmoil,

and even high school sporting events can be seen in hindsight as momentous occasions. Team songs, mascots, and great players of the past might be critical bits of knowledge. Again, for most people, politics is only a small part of life. A voting district encompasses a wide array of communities, and its traditions form a complex mosaic. In many ways, to know this heritage is to know the district.

CONCLUSION

A campaign is about strategy, and strategizing involves looking at the terrain on which the campaign will operate: a party boss who will not budge, a district so large that the candidate has trouble keeping to schedule, a national economic trend over which the campaign has no control but under which it must labor, poor candidates at the top of the ticket, third-party spoilers, an opponent who enjoys the benefits of incumbency, and so on. Strategists who do not accept "the things that cannot be changed" might find themselves at a profound disadvantage. In many ways, the difference between amateurs and professionals in the world of political campaigning is measured by the degree to which they can understand the realities of the districts in which they are working.

Chapter 3

Opposition Research

The history of electoral politics is replete with underdogs overcoming long odds by finding a silver bullet. Democrat William MaGee's 1990 campaign for New York's heavily Republican 111th State Assembly District is such a story. MaGee operatives knew their voters, and their adversary—MaGee had compiled stacks of information on Republican Jack McCann. Having served 25 years in public life, McCann had amassed a long public record, and MaGee's campaign team used that record to assemble a damaging profile of their opponent and had an effective strategy to deploy it.

MaGee took advantage of the upstate/downstate split in New York politics. New York is two states in one: The greater New York City area is "downstate," and everything north of Westchester County is "upstate." Downstate has traditionally been heavily Democratic, as are most members of the Assembly from that area. Conversely, most elected officials from upstate are Republican. Political and cultural animosity between the two regions is sharp, stretching back to early America. Among the worst insults one can hurl at upstate politicians is to call them pawns of downstate interests, and vice versa.

As of 1990, Democrats had held the majority in the Assembly for decades. They controlled the legislative calendar, budget appropriations, committee assignments, office space, and pork-barrel allocations. Republicans were left to nip at the edges and stall the process. Parliamentary games played out during each legislative term as the two sides postured, harassed, and embarrassed each other. While Democrats had nearly complete control over the budget process, Republicans stonewalled by offering amendments. For example, Republicans might

suggest adding money to the budget for law enforcement, forcing Democrats, who had already struck a budget agreement with the state senate and the governor, to vote against the amendment. Republicans would then claim that Democrats were "soft on crime."

One year, the Republicans pledged to vote as a team. A few of the Republicans were from downstate—Long Island, mostly—and these members, like the rest of the minority, offered amendments seeking funds for roads, bridges, rail stations, parking lots, ferry ports, and other projects helpful to downstate residents. McCann was a team player, so he voted with his GOP colleagues, even though his district sat 200 miles to the north. Here the MaGee campaign found its silver bullet: Why was McCann voting for downstate projects?

The campaign assembled a direct-mail piece with a large picture of then New York City mayor Ed Koch on the outside and a caption asking, "What Do Ed Koch and Jack McCann Have in Common?" Upon opening the mailer, the reader learned, "They Both Work for New York City!" Below the headline was a list of downstate projects McCann had supported, along with staggering price tags. At the bottom, the costs were summed up, and a final caption read, "At a time when our roads, bridges, and schools are falling apart, Jack McCann is pushing for more than $1 billion for New York City. Who is he working for, Ed Koch or us?" Newspapers picked up the story, as did many television and radio news programs. The notion that McCann was a "pawn of downstate interests" quickly spread. McCann, forced to defend his tactical votes, was distracted from touting his central accomplishments. This one mailing, sent early in the campaign, helped turn a long-shot venture into a neck-and-neck race in which MaGee eventually prevailed. In 2008, Magee won his ninth consecutive reelection to the Assembly.

This chapter is designed to acquaint the reader with opposition research—called "oppo" in the trade, or simply "OR." It discusses the role of research in American politics, ethical issues with OR, the function of oppo in campaigns, researching one's own candidate, the various types of profile data, and the work involved in locating and organizing this sort of information.

OPPOSITION RESEARCH IN AMERICAN POLITICS

Opposition research has become a mainstay of electoral politics, but it has deep historical roots. During the presidential election of 1800, Federalist operatives claimed that Thomas Jefferson might have had several slave mistresses and may have fathered a child with one of

them. (Scientific research performed in the 1990s suggested that the Federalists were probably right about the paternity issue.) Years later, in the election of 1884, Grover Cleveland was said to have fathered a child out of wedlock with a woman named Maria Halpin. Supporters of James G. Blaine chanted, "Ma, Ma, where's my Pa? Gone to the White House, ha, ha, ha." The Cleveland team retaliated by charging that Blaine had used his congressional office for financial gain, and supporters had their own version of the song: "Blaine, Blaine, Jay Gould Blaine! The Contentional Liar from the state of Maine." Cleveland won the election, and on Election Night, Cleveland's people shouted, "Hurrah for Maria, Hurrah for the Kid. I voted for Cleveland, and I'm damned glad I did!" (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991, 6–7).

Oppo has been conducted by college students, friends, colleagues, and family members; during much of the 20th century, paid professionals would have been considered an extravagance. Today, however, many consulting firms specialize in research, and the resources available to OR professionals have increased immeasurably. One consultant, writing at the dawn of the digital age, noted that, "Prior to the popularization of the Internet, [a campaign's] examination of the public record had to be done on-site, by hand." A public record spanning 25 years "took five people six months to complete. In addition to being slow and time-consuming, the cost to the client was staggering." But by the late 1990s, opposition research had come to mean "sitting in front of a computer examining everything from newspaper articles, to property records, to civil and criminal court records" (Bovee 1998, 48). Ironically, the rise of computer technology began to turn oppo back toward its roots. With Internet search engines, it seemed as though every vote, and every campaign donation, could be located in moments, even by one of the candidate's supporters with little experience in political research.

Quite possibly, the demand for OR stems from the time pressures afflicting journalists. Policy issues are complex, and politicians are able to spoon-feed reporters with the results of campaign research (Persinos 1994, 21). Watergate gave rise to investigative journalism, and the news media have become fixated on "character" issues (Sabato, Stencel, and Lichter 2000, 37–38)—feeding into the hands of campaign operatives who are ready, willing, and able to push stories that undermine the opposition. Even if shocking details sometimes cross the bounds of decency, the increasing use of OR might be a function of its effectiveness. As media consultant Bob Squier once noted, "I love to do negatives. It is one of those opportunities in a campaign where you can take the truth and use it like a knife to slice right through the opponent" (Luntz 1988, 72).

Michael Gehrke, a former research director for the Democratic National Committee, the Clinton White House, and John Kerry's presidential campaign, has pointed out a problem with the evolution: "It used to be the main thing you were up against was time. . . . Now it's simply managing all the information you have access to and being able to wrap your head around it" (*Campaigns and Elections* 2006b). Campaigns must figure out what to do with all the data, and even when the data are organized and understood, the intelligence must be deployed with discretion, even if reporters take the bait. "There appears to be a public suspicion that the press . . . has intruded into private territory," scholar Kathleen Hall Jamieson (1998) warned at the height of the Monica Lewinsky scandal: "What some in the press regard as investigative journalism seems to many to be simple voyeurism." While bloggers in the new millennium are constantly searching for the one-of-a-kind fact that will bring down an opposing candidate, many professional opposition researchers understand that the effective use of research is a complicated endeavor.

ETHICAL ISSUES IN OPPOSITION RESEARCH

One researcher has asserted that if candidates "are not willing to have their backgrounds checked out—particularly their financial backgrounds—they shouldn't be running for public office in the first place" (Robberson 1996). But there are ethical gray zones. Is it right to campaign on an incident that occurred 10, 20, or even 30 years ago? What about the private lives of candidates?

While the public can sometimes be squeamish about dealing in dirt, some professionals argue that opposition research is actually *good* for the democratic process. It moves campaigning away from style and imagery and toward substantive issues. It holds candidates accountable for their actions. Gary Maloney, who has worked on Republican presidential and senatorial campaigns, says the most rewarding part of OR is "finding the truth, and using it to elect honest men and women and to defeat liberals, evildoers and crooks" (*Campaigns and Elections* 2006a).

Truth has consequences. During the 2008 presidential primary, Hillary Clinton spoke about her foreign policy experience, citing a trip to Bosnia: "I remember landing under sniper fire. There was supposed to be some kind of a greeting ceremony at the airport, but instead we just ran with our heads down to get into the vehicles to get to our base" (Dobbs 2008a). When archival video showed her arriving without incident or

urgency, a spokesman for Barack Obama's campaign called Clinton's story "part of a growing list of instances in which Senator Clinton has exaggerated her role in foreign and domestic policymaking" (Duke, Brusk, and Roselli 2008). So long as the public demands honest politicians, candidates will point to lapses in candor.

It may still be argued that aggressive OR creates mean-spirited politics. While few decry the disclosure of factual information about an opponent's official duties, it is quite another thing to resurrect decades-old personal issues that have little relevance to the responsibilities of governance. By making everything fair game (sometimes even family problems) the tactics of modern campaigning can drive good people from service. Ethics charges, even if trumped up—even if proven wrong—can permanently damage a stellar reputation. Moreover, personal attacks and misrepresentations can alienate voters. Opponents of oppo can argue that the steady decline of voting is linked to the malicious nature of modern politics. And sometimes OR just fails. As Maloney notes, "Truly personal stuff rarely works in campaigns because it is so difficult to prove and blowback is severe. . . . You can never depend on public revulsion or on forgiveness" (*Campaigns and Elections* 2006a).

Beyond personal destruction, some people question whether a hostile campaign environment fosters bad government. In the fall of 2009, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman asked "whether we can seriously discuss serious issues any longer and make decisions on the basis of the national interest" (2009). A Republican congressman had shouted "You lie!" at President Obama during an address to Congress, another had just called the president the "enemy of humanity," and a Democratic congressman warned that Republicans wanted sick Americans to "die quickly." In the midst of this maelstrom, Darrell West of the Brookings Institution suggested American politics has entered an "arms race of incendiary rhetoric" that threatens to bring down everyone involved (Libit 2009). A reasonable person can ask if there might be a relationship between aggressive opposition research, negative campaigning, and a decline of political civility.

Questions about the ethics of OR have intensified as the Internet has allowed anyone with a computer and online access to join the conversation. In the 2008 campaign, Sarah Palin's family was drawn deep into the blogosphere, with questions not just about her public life, but about her family life as well. Barack Obama was adamant that his campaign would not use personal attacks on the Palin family: "Let me be clear as possible. I think people's families are off-limits, and people's children are especially off-limits. . . . We don't go after people's families; we don't get them involved in the politics. It's not appropriate, and it's not

relevant" (Marquardt 2008). Yet at least one observer has argued that oppo should be allowed when it is "honest, legal and relevant to the race" (Persinos 1994, 22).

Strategically, the question is how does OR affect the campaign's outcome. If the news media decline to run with negative information, the story has little or no value outside the blogosphere. If the campaign maneuvers around reporters and airs its charges through paid advertising, the campaign risks a backlash. Mere mentions are risky. The 1992 George H. W. Bush campaign deliberately avoided talking about allegations of Gov. Bil Clinton's marital infidelity out of fear that Bush would pay a price for raising the issue. As the reach of amateur journalism and social media widens to include ever larger segments of the electorate, however, the boundaries of propriety are crumbling. In other words, the rise of amateur reporting on the Internet threatens to undermine professional journalistic standards and to make almost everything, no matter how false or lurid, part of the game.

While standards set by the press and public can be cryptic, there are a few reasonably clear guidelines in political news that wise campaigns follow. Even as recreational reporting in the form of blogs and online rumor mills overflow the channels established by traditional journalism, trained reporters still hold considerable sway insofar as the online community cites conventional reporting as authority—and uncited work tends to be dismissed by those not already wedded to a blogger's point of view. Journalistic standards of truthfulness, relevance, and fairness are still important.

Truthfulness

Rumors are rampant in the political community and on the Web, but most gossip is not reported in the traditional media because the hearsay is unverifiable. Moreover, without verification, a gossip-based story violates a key tenet of the profession, so reporters are on the lookout for claims that stretch the bounds of credulity. During the 2008 Senate race in North Carolina, Elizabeth Dole's campaign aired television ads against her opponent, Kay Hagan, implying that Hagan's attendance at a fund-raiser held in the home of a man who advocated political secularism showed that Hagan herself was "godless." The ad included video footage of various activists giving interviews about their political agenda, and it ended with an image of Hagan, accompanied by a voice that sounded like it might be Hagan's, stating, "There is no God" (Brown 2008). The *Charlotte Observer* made clear that Hagan "teaches Sunday school and is an elder at her Presbyterian church in

Greensboro" (Zagaroli 2008b). One unintended consequence of the ad may have been a surge in money for Hagan, who took in a large number of donations from angry supporters (Zagaroli 2008a).

Two subsets of the truthfulness standard hold that the information must have been gained from a legitimate source—one that is both legal and appropriate—and that the information must be independently verifiable. Operatives should not hide in the bushes with a camera or present gossip as if it were fact, nor should they hire a private investigator to do the dirty work. Even if the campaign is dealing with legitimately gathered information, it must think about the standards held by the news media. As an illustration, Clinton's 1992 campaign, which was given a foreign news report that Bush campaign materials were being produced in Brazil, was unable to get the American media to air the story because no one could find independent verification that the Bush campaign actually knew its materials were manufactured abroad (*War Room* 1993). The story could not be authenticated, and therefore it could not be run. Nonetheless, if such a story were to emerge in more recent times, it surely would make the rounds on YouTube and wind up reported by journalists who feel pressured to report the water-cooler conversations that voters are sharing.

Relevance

A candidate's official actions are automatically considered relevant. Here negative is newsworthy. The difficulty comes in the sometimes vague distinction between official conduct and personal behavior. Larry J. Sabato, Mark Stencel, and S. Robert Lichter (2000) have offered a standard that draws a line between reportable and unreportable news according to the item's bearing on public affairs. A candidate's personal life should become news, they say, only when it affects public business. Thus, extramarital affairs per se might be out of bounds, but if the relationship involves a lobbyist, the story would be reportable because "there is a clear intersection between an official's public and private roles" (2000, 8). In general terms, the public has a right to know when its interests might be affected.

In the 2002 Senate campaign, an ad run by the Montana Democratic Party against candidate Mike Taylor included a clip of Taylor working as a hairdresser in the 1970s, applying beauty cream to a man's face. "Macho-ism," scholar Paul Herrnson explains, "is an important thing to project for a male candidate [in Montana], and when you have a picture of him actually touching another man, that's going to be potent" (Pescatore 2006). Taylor's employment as a hairdresser more than

20 years prior to the race had little or nothing to do with the candidate's potential legislative skill, but the tactic seems to have worked, even if the campaign message might not fit Sabato's standard.

Fairness

Fairness is closely related to truthfulness and relevance, but it sometimes has a unique quality that campaign operatives misunderstand to their detriment. Campaigns leveling a charge must be sure their own candidate is clean. In 1998, Sen. Alphonse D'Amato's campaign charged opponent Chuck Schumer with having missed critical votes while he was out campaigning. But D'Amato himself had missed a number of votes when he was running for Senate in 1980. Although D'Amato initially gained traction against Schumer, the missed-votes argument turned into an embarrassment for the D'Amato campaign. Not only did D'Amato lose whatever advantage he once had with the issue, but lethal questions of hypocrisy and incompetence were added to the mix.

In a larger sense, fairness goes to a sense of right and wrong. For example, few now defend the attacks leveled against Sen. Max Cleland of Georgia, a decorated veteran of the Vietnam War who lost three limbs in the field, who in 2002 was linked in campaign ads to Osama bin Laden. But no central authority polices the profession. An irresponsible consultant might suffer public scorn, but there are few ways to officially condemn a consultant's misuse of OR data. The American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) has a code of ethics whereby members pledge, among other things, to "document accurately and fully any criticism of an opponent or his or her record" (American Association of Political Consultants 2009b). Still, those who run campaigns need not belong to the AAPC, and there are no licensing requirements for campaign consultants.

THE FUNCTION OF OPPOSITION DATA

Students of the political arts sometimes speak of "prospective" and "retrospective" evaluation. *Prospective evaluations* are anticipatory. A voter looks at a candidate—qualifications, party labels, personalities, and campaign promises—and then guesses what kind of job the candidate will do. When Barack Obama promised to reform health care, he was asking voters to view his candidacy prospectively. *Retrospective evaluations* look in the opposite direction. Past actions are weighed in order to judge a candidate's future behavior. When Obama charged that John McCain consistently voted in line with George W. Bush, he was

inviting citizens to think about the problems of the outgoing administration, a call to retrospective voting. A scholarly consensus holds that retrospective evaluation is a powerful aspect of voter decision-making because, first, prospective evaluations require voters to study campaign plans, and second, all else being equal, the past seems to be a strong predictor of the future.

Opposition research taps into retrospection. The most celebrated example is Ronald Reagan's question to the American people in 1980, when the economy under Jimmy Carter was in deep trouble: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" It was an attempt to convey the perils of the opponent by pointing to past performance. In a sense, voters are confronted with a choice: Either look at each candidate's plans for the future (a speculative, time-consuming chore) or examine what has happened in the recent past (a quick, "factual" process). If backward-looking clues are unflattering, the evaluation of the candidate will be negative (see Fiorina 1981). The power of retrospection carries an obvious appeal, and as more and more candidates use negative advertising, voters might become well accustomed to it. Voters may come to depend on it even while they decry the spread of political negativity.

COUNTEROPPOSITION RESEARCH

It is a nearly universal principle—from philosophy to theology to military theory—that one must look at oneself before attacking others. To the extent that OR is a search for comparative advantage, the candidate as well as the opponent should be fully known. After all, opponents conduct opposition research, too. Perhaps the best way to prepare for negative attacks is to know what the opposition might find. Unexplained absences need to be taken into account, along with defaulted loans, off-color comments, and difficult votes. As D'Amato learned, campaigns should not throw stones unless they know what sins their own candidate has committed.

No recent campaign better exemplifies the importance of thorough research than the McCain-Palin presidential campaign. Shortly after Sen. John McCain announced Alaska governor Sarah Palin as his vice presidential running mate, a series of disclosures came to the public's attention, including questions about her daughter's unwed pregnancy and allegations that Palin had misused her gubernatorial power for personal revenge. These questions left many pundits asking whether the McCain campaign did sufficient research on Palin before adding her to the ticket (see Balz 2008; Bumiller 2008; Heilman and Halperin 2010, 360–64).

Just as any job seeker must assemble a résumé, prospective candidates might develop a scrupulous account of past work experience, political affiliations, memberships, outside activities, and the like. This sort of information can be distributed as a one-page biography, but files should probably be kept to back up any question—positive or negative—about the candidate's background. A documented fact can stop a rumor before it starts, but exculpatory information that cannot be authenticated is not always helpful.

A good campaign team might be unable to assume that its candidate has perfect memory or faultless candor. Simply listing biographical information can be tricky. Given the scrutiny that follows political candidates, it is important to record exact titles and job descriptions, but determining whether a candidate upholds the highest ethical standards can turn into an uncomfortable journey. Pasts can be blemished; memories can be selective. Strengths and weaknesses are perhaps best learned through research. The candidate's writings, tax records, school transcripts, court cases, tax forms, investment documents, vehicle registrations, medical histories, and so forth might be ready for retrieval at a moment's notice. Layers of pride, shame, and forgetfulness can make self-portraiture quite uncomfortable. Counteropposition researchers may begin to think that lying to oneself is more deeply ingrained than lying to others.

TYPES OF PROFILE DATA

The point of counteropposition research is to help candidates know themselves better than anyone else ever could, in order that the campaign can be in a position to deflect attacks. As electioneering becomes more and more aggressive, OR continues to be an integral part of new-style campaigns. The information involved in opposition research can be separated into four distinct categories:

1. Political
2. Campaign finance
3. Career
4. Personal

Political Information

Political information refers to the facts generated by a candidate while in public office or on the way to that office. Some political information is intended for public consumption, while other information is intended to

remain behind closed doors. No matter how thoughtful, careful, and attentive to the public needs an official might be, a candidate's record inevitably holds *something* damaging. The task of an opposition researcher is to find words, deeds, and works that will anger or disappoint the electorate. Some of the major categories of research are listed below.

Voting Records. Candidates running for the House and Senate in 2008 made good use of opponents' voting records. With George W. Bush's popularity fading, many Americans were eager for new representation. Democrats were quick to point out how frequently their Republican opponents had voted with the Bush administration, and Democratic challengers freely posted pro-Bush voting habits online. Barack Obama was campaigning as an agent of political change, noting the frequency of John McCain's support for Bush, while McCain was highlighting Obama's "liberal" voting record.

Congress, as well as most city councils, county boards, and state legislatures, will confront numerous measures every session, and representatives will cast more votes than they can be expected to remember. Many bills are technical in nature and may be of little importance to the voters, but others are hotly debated. Research teams might look into a wide range of votes, no matter how insignificant they might seem, spanning an official's entire public career—including both floor votes and committee votes. Which votes matter? Campaigns sometimes consult lobbyists and staffers who are familiar with the legislation and who might know the best way to frame a "bad vote" in plain language; surveys and focus groups can also help.

Absenteeism. Missed votes suggest dereliction of duty. Absences due to family matters and health concerns will likely be excused, but one way to intimate that an official is not working for the people is to point out chronic absenteeism. In the 1984 Kentucky U.S. Senate race, Republican challenger Mitch McConnell was able to unseat incumbent Democrat Dee Huddleston by highlighting the senator's missed votes. In a legendary television spot, bloodhounds frantically sought Huddleston—in his Washington office and back home in Kentucky—but Huddleston was nowhere to be found. Huddleston was "missing big votes on Social Security, the budget, defense, and even agriculture," according to the McConnell camp, instead collecting money for speeches in California and Puerto Rico (Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 1991, 89). Sometimes, a single missed vote can make the difference. Democrat Harley O. Staggers was defeated in 1992 in part because he missed a key vote funding a new FBI center in his West Virginia district.

Bill Sponsorships. Some bills have only a single sponsor, others have two or three, and a few popular measures see dozens of legislators

"sign on." Members are not always careful in screening their colleagues' proposals, and there are ways to use this information on offense. First, if a legislator fails to sponsor bills important to the voters, she can be charged with neglect. Second, if a legislator sponsored a bill that never became law, then she can be charged with ineffectiveness. Third, if a member cosponsors many bills, it might be fruitful to ask whether their combined weight would bust the budget. Finally, campaigns might examine the relationship between bill sponsorship and voting records. If legislators vote against measures similar to the ones they are sponsoring, the act can be portrayed as a legislative flip-flop.

Committee and Leadership Assignments. Legislative committees have jurisdiction over limited sets of issues, and committee assignments tend to reflect policy priorities. Some committees are more prestigious than others, some tackle problems relevant to the candidate's district, and some are neither prestigious nor helpful to the people back home. Leadership responsibilities also speak to an official's status and effectiveness. Failure to move up the ladder might indicate a host of problems, ineptness and apathy among them.

Pork. A mainstay of incumbency is the procurement of "pork barrel" projects. Each year, city, county, state, and federal budgets are carved into military contracts, environmental remediation funds, new highways, and the like. These projects let public officials take credit for actions performed in the Capitol, the courthouse, or city hall. Officials report their success in the media and the mail, leading voters to believe that they are represented by effective legislators. Sometimes a legislator will be punished for failing to take care of the district with its share of federal largess, but the quest for high-grade pork can also be interpreted as a propensity toward profligate spending, a possible problem for a candidate running as a fiscal conservative.

Official Mailings. Many public officials are allowed to use official mailings to keep the voters informed. The upside for incumbents is that they can stay in touch with the district. The downside is that a publicly funded mail program can lead to charges of abuse. In the 1990 Indiana U.S. Senate race, Democrat Barron Hill gained ground against incumbent Republican Dan Coats by highlighting Coats's ambitious mailing program. In a television spot, a home owner stood in front of his roadside mailbox watching a gusher of letters spray out. The flow continued as the announcer said, "Dan Coats has dumped 13.1 million pieces of junk mail on Indiana." The message: Coats was misusing taxpayer money. In the current political environment, as watchdog groups scan the horizon for waste, fraud, and abuse, even a mass mailing that complies with all relevant regulations can be subject to critique.

Official Expenses. Perhaps the only thing that voters despise more than a public official squandering money on unnecessary projects is a public official wasting taxpayer money on him- or herself. Allegations against former Illinois governor Rod Blagojevich, who seemed to be selling his executive power to appoint Barack Obama's successor in the U.S. Senate, put graft back in the headlines, but his story is not the only scandal in recent memory. A 2008 Pennsylvania scandal known as "Bonusgate" centered on allegations that public funds were diverted to employees who worked on political campaigns—allegations that inevitably became part of the electoral debate. At the beginning of the 1990s, many members of Congress were confronted by angry voters over personal checks that were "bounced" in the House Bank scandal, which snared politicians who had apparently overdrawn their accounts. Although little, if any, taxpayer money was involved, the public seemed to view the episode as an example of public officials using their offices for personal gain.

Wise campaigns pay attention to travel records. Elected officials often conduct business on the road, but official trips, often derided as "junkets," can be a rich source of public embarrassment. For example, members may have traveled with their spouses to conferences, seminars, study sessions, and the like—perhaps in exotic locales. But sunny beaches are not a necessary premise. Chuck Schumer reportedly spent more than $140,000 in taxpayer-funded travel in just half of a single fiscal year (Phillip 2009). Acting on a campaign promise to visit every county in New York State each year, Schumer chartered flights aboard small aircraft. In response to accusations that the senator could just as easily have used commercial flights, a spokesperson defended Schumer's actions by saying that he "takes outreach to his 19 million-plus constituents seriously, and his busy travel pace makes him one of the most accessible members of Congress" (ibid.). The story was played up on the official Web site of at least one Republican colleague in the Senate.

Gaffes. Everyone makes mistakes, but candidates live in a world where opponents are eager to find them. Republican presidential nominee John McCain said in September 2008 that the "fundamentals of our economy are strong" (Dann 2008)—while the stock market was entering a historic free fall. The Obama campaign used Senator McCain's words against him throughout the rest of the campaign. But the Democrats were not unblemished. Sen. Joe Biden, who would later become the Democratic Party's vice presidential nominee, remarked in 2006 that "you cannot go into a 7-11 or a Dunkin' Donuts unless you have a slight Indian accent. Oh, I'm not joking." Whatever Biden's intended

meaning, the quote was quickly run by the right-of-center magazine NewsMax (2006) and then was rerun by the mainstream media several months later when Biden used ill-chosen words about Obama (calling him "articulate and bright and clean and a nice-looking guy") during Biden's own presidential campaign kickoff in 2007 (Thai and Barrett 2007).

Arguably, a gaffe made the difference in the 2010 special election to fill the seat Ted Kennedy had held in the Senate, which saw state attorney general Martha Coakley running against state senator Scott Brown. Coakley briefly asserted that legendary pitcher Curt Schilling, who had retired from Boston's beloved Red Sox and who had himself been rumored to want the Senate seat, was actually a Yankees fan:

> Interviewer: "[N]ow Scott Brown has Curt Schilling, OK?"
> Coakley: "And another Yankees fan."
> Interviewer: "Schilling?"
> Coakley: "Yes."
> Interviewer: "Curt Schilling a Yankee fan?"
> Coakley: "No, all right, I'm wrong on my, I'm wrong."

A blog on MassLive.com opined, "This gaffe, of course, reveals nothing about whether Coakley has the integrity, judgment and leadership to be a U.S. senator. But it does show that she's removed on a very basic level from Joe Sixpack, who lives and dies with the Red Sox and couldn't possibly fathom someone not being clear on what Curtis Montague [Schilling's] standing is in team history."

Some campaigns actively look for gaffes. In 2006, Sen. George Allen was followed by a volunteer "tracker" carrying a video camera. At one rally, Allen referred to the tracker, an Indian American, as "macaca," a slur few Americans even knew before Allen made it infamous. The clip was posted on YouTube and sparked national commentary. Allen's opponent, James Webb, closed the gap and ultimately defeated Allen in a victory that some attributed to the "macaca moment." Republicans would later send their own trackers into the field hoping to record Democratic blunders (Lightman 2009). According to a White House correspondent, "Today's era of instant communications geometrically increases the desire to control the message, while simultaneously making it nearly impossible to do so" (Cannon 2007).

Flip-flops. Candidates and elected officials sometimes contradict past positions taken in speeches, votes, or bill sponsorships. Holders of low-level posts often pledge to serve out their full term, only to find new opportunities for higher office. Others are dogged by term-limits pledges made in earlier years. Opposition researchers can (and do)

exploit such facts during a campaign, especially if the issue is a controversial one, such as abortion. Mitt Romney, while governor of Massachusetts, vowed to protect a woman's right to choose; with the 2008 presidential campaign in the offing, however, he professed his opposition to abortion (Romney 2005). Some abortion opponents were skeptical of Romney's newfound "conviction" (Goldfarb 2007). On the Democratic side, Senator Obama charged that Senator Clinton had changed her position on a large number of issues, ranging from the war in Iraq to her status as a New York baseball fan. At a campaign rally in New York, Obama chided Clinton: "There are folks who will shift positions and policies on all kinds of things depending on which way the wind is blowing" (Baer and Nussbaum 2007).

Campaign Finance Information

A second type of oppo looks at campaign finance. Senate and congressional candidates submit detailed reports to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) listing individual contributors and political action committees that have given to the campaign, and states have similar disclosure requirements. Opposition researchers scour these records for financial irregularities. For example, if four people with the same last name and address give the maximum allowable contribution and two of the contributors list their occupation as "student," a researcher might wonder if the head of household was funneling disallowed contributions through family members. Extremist groups or unpopular individuals sometimes can be found to have backed opponents. During the 2008 presidential race, for instance, the Clinton campaign highlighted Obama's acceptance of contributions from Tony Rezko, a Chicago businessman who had become the subject of many scandal stories (Morain and Hamburger 2008). The Obama campaign subsequently returned the contributions.

Moreover, well-funded campaigns and wealthy candidates can be accused of "buying" elections. In 2009, New York mayor Michael Bloomberg financed a $100 million bid for reelection from his own pocket in pursuit of a victory that rarely seemed in doubt. The *New York Times* reported:

> With more than 100 employees, his campaign now has a staff larger than 97 percent of all businesses in New York City. And his political operation has become a one-man economic stimulus program, buying $8,892 worth of pizza from Goodfellas Brick Oven Pizza on Staten Island and in the Bronx. (Barbaro and Chen 2009)

Many who supported Bloomberg were uneasy with the mayor's spending. The *Times* endorsed Bloomberg but opined that his avoidance of campaign spending limits "does everyone a disservice" (*New York Times* 2009).

Career Information

Public service is not the only way to amass a record. Prior business activities, higher education, and other career information is another source of potential problems. This information can be grouped into two broad areas: résumé inflation and questionable business practices.

Résumé Inflation. Many people stretch the truth when they write their résumés, but puffery is seldom tolerated in candidates for public office. In 2008, Darcy Burner, a Democratic candidate for the state of Washington's Eighth Congressional District, declared: "I loved economics so much that I got a degree in it from Harvard. Now everywhere I go in this district, the only thing people want to talk about is the economy." The problem was that Burner had actually earned, as she later said, "a degree in computer science with a special emphasis in economics" (Heffter 2008). The campaign soon became preoccupied with the issue, and a spokesperson for her opponent, incumbent Republican Dave Reichert, blasted Burner's "outrageous" claims: "It calls into question everything that she has said to this point. It demonstrates an arrogance that she thinks she can say what she wants and that no one is going to learn the truth" (ibid.). Burner lost.

Questionable Business Practices. Declared bankruptcies have become campaign fodder in recent years, as have lawsuits against a candidate's business. Beyond routine business questions, most candidates would hope that their precampaign record matches their campaign promises. But if past business practices seem to conflict with stated goals, an aspiring officeholder could land in the same position that a congressional candidate from Wisconsin, Steve Kagen, found himself confronting: "The NRCC [National Republican Congressional Committee] ran several advertisements aiming to discredit Kagen, a former doctor [who was] . . . proposing No Patient Left Behind legislation" by charging that "Kagen has 'left behind' and sued 80 former patients, many for unpaid medical costs" (Pescatore and Zusman 2007). Kagen won the seat, but with a slim margin.

Personal Information

The current, hostile news environment can be traced back to a 1974 episode of drunk driving by Rep. Wilbur Mills of Arkansas, who

chaired the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means. In the 1960s, the private lives of politicians were largely considered out of bounds. Reporters would ignore personal indiscretions so long as there was no gross interference with a candidate's public duties. But with the onset of journalistic distrust that accompanied Vietnam and Watergate, a more skeptical approach came into vogue. Mills was pulled over for speeding at night without headlights, at which point a stripper jumped out of his car and into Washington's Tidal Basin. The race to investigate public officials and their private lives had begun.

Thirty-five years later, South Carolina governor Mark Sanford came under public scrutiny during an unexplained absence from his office. He had led his staff to believe that he was simply hiking along the Appalachian Trail, but it was ultimately revealed that Sanford had gone to Argentina to meet his mistress (Barr 2009). While the old style of journalism might have overlooked Sanford's indiscretion, the new style thrives on it. The previous year, Rep. Vito Fossella, a Republican congressman from New York City, was arrested and charged with drunk driving, his blood alcohol level at twice the legal limit. Fossella admitted that he was on his way to visit a woman with whom he had been having an affair and confessed that they were parents of a three-year-old daughter. After two weeks of "damaging and scandal-filled headlines," Fossella ended his bid for reelection (Hicks 2008).

While a candidate's extramarital affair may become a campaign issue, a simple divorce raises few eyebrows—but slow alimony payments or child support might well draw attention. Court filings in family matters, if made public, can lead to embarrassing disclosures that would raise the possibility that the candidate does not uphold the image that members of the voting public expect of their public officials. Those who cannot handle the basic responsibilities of family life might seem to lack the "character" necessary for public office.

Generally speaking, any legal or ethical tangle is subject to review.

While guilt by association is considered unsporting in many arenas, it remains fair game in politics. Sometimes the matter is a blend of personal and political association, as in Hagan's case, and sometimes the issue goes straight to ideology. In 2008, detractors referred to John McCain by the epithet "McSame," implying that he would merely be a continuation of Bush-era policies. Efforts to tie Barack Obama to Bill Ayers, a former member of a leftist group from the 1960s and 1970s that was implicated in domestic bombings, ran throughout the election year. The tenuous connection between Obama and Ayers made its way into the

campaign by way of a *London Daily Mail* article written by a UK-based conservative who had apparently done his homework (Dobbs 2008a). In recent years, membership in clubs that exclude people on the basis of gender, race, creed, color, or religion has been seen to violate public ethics.

LOCATING AND ORGANIZING PROFILE DATA

"If there is something you are looking for—Social Security numbers, DMV [Department of Motor Vehicles] records, credit reports—chances are there is some database company that sells it," writes consultant John Bovee (1998, 50). Almost every government agency, branch, and office provides public information about its leaders and employees. Government "blue books" and "red books" provide a wide range of data, from government structure and process to office telephone numbers to official biographies. Commercial "yellow books" offer much the same information, often in a more useful format.

These materials are frequently available at research libraries. And with the rise of the Internet and the growing power of Web search engines, manual searches are yielding to keystrokes. In his 2009 campaign for California's 32nd District House seat, Emanuel Pleitez promoted his Facebook page as a way for prospective voters to learn about him and his candidacy. Unfortunately, photos on the site showed Pleitez drinking and partying. His opposition used these photos in an attack mailer depicting Pleitez as unfit for public office (Kapochunas 2009). Social networking sites such as Facebook can host unflattering—or even, in this case, politically damning—photos of a candidate.

Sometimes the photos are less hidden. State senator Scott Brown, who ran against Martha Coakley for the U.S. Senate contest in Massachusetts, was a respected GOP legislator, but shortly after he announced his candidacy voters were reminded on scores of Web sites that Brown had posed nude for *Cosmopolitan* in 1982. Brown was just twenty-two and had won that magazine's "America's Sexiest Man" contest when the photographs were taken. It is hard to say if Brown benefited from the coverage or lost support, but in any event Brown went on to win a dramatic victory, becoming the first Republican elected from Massachusetts to the U.S. Senate in decades.

With the advent of online indexing and the plethora of information available on the Internet, less research need be done on-site than in past years. Privately operated data services monitor legislative and executive actions. Many states have put vote data online, though many online

resources might not go as far back in time as an opposition researcher would hope. Contribution and expenditure information on federal candidates is provided online by the FEC, and "good government" groups like the Center for Responsive Politics maintain online databases. Detailed information can sometimes be obtained by searching an incumbent's official Web site.

Thorough research, however, demands legwork. Generally speaking, newer information from national and regional sources can be retrieved in digital form; older, more local sources of information might be stored on paper. Libraries may keep past campaign literature. It is unlikely that local stations will have saved radio and television campaign ads and more doubtful that broadcasters would provide tapes or transcripts, but local political parties might collect them. Other resources for campaign ads could include a friendly political science professor, an eager volunteer, or a bitter rival of the opponent. Historical societies maintain clip files. With narrowing profit margins, newspapers have become far less accommodating to requests for old articles, but the stories may still be around. Operatives in the digital age continue to leaf through yellowed clippings, partly because the research brings them in contact with librarians, lobbyists, and party chairs who know whereof they speak.

Online search engines can miss important information that is already posted on the Web, as they vary widely in their coverage. Google has begun indexing hard-copy stories published before the advent of Web-based news—a potentially powerful tool in the hands of opposition researchers, since deep indexing of old stories eases the discovery of obscure reports about a candidate's past. Independent Web sites provide free, nonpartisan (or at least bipartisan) research on a wide range of national-level candidates. Sources like politifact.com and factcheck.org help keep public commentary honest, and their data can work for or against those making factual claims.

Even where information is fully available and located, it must be organized for rapid response. In the 1970s, a campaign's filing cabinet might have bulged with news clippings and campaign finance reports. In 1984, the Republican National Committee spent $1.1 million to create its Opposition Research Group. The group's first task was to collect detailed information about each of the eight Democratic presidential candidates. The team pulled together a mountain of facts, using more than 2,000 sources and 400,000 documents. Readers sifted through the material looking for direct quotes, statements attributed to the candidates, and comments about the candidates. The information was coded and entered into a database. The system grew to contain about 75,000 items

and 45,000 quotes (Bayer and Rodota 1989). When Democrats nominated Walter Mondale, Republicans pounced. "Vice President Malaise" was a two-hundred-page analysis of the Mondale record sent to party officials across the country, and when Mondale spoke, Republicans highlighted the candidate's weaknesses. Ronald Reagan later used the research to prepare for their debates. The project was viewed as the "secret weapon" of the race (ibid., 25).

The GOP's 1980s-era innovation can now be replicated on laptop computers. But even with new-millennium digitalization, one of the most important resources that a campaign might tap is the knowledge of experienced operatives. Candidates defeated in previous cycles often have files in their basements, and past party chairs might recall the details of ancient races. Aspiring candidates might call on local politicos who have been through the process before. Experience helps with strategy, and it helps with candidate profiling as well. Those who have seen challengers come and go remember old scandals and how they played out. A new-style campaign listens to war stories to get information about the foibles of past candidates and to learn the sensibilities of the district. In some areas, a certain amount of scandal is written off as a cost of doing political business, while in others, absolute adherence to moral and ethical codes is paramount—and even it might be considered unscrupulous.

CONCLUSION

Opposition research has come a long way since Grover Cleveland was accused of fathering a child out of wedlock, and during William MaGee's 1990 run, serious opposition research was a political novelty. Few campaign professionals knew how to compile and organize this information, and even fewer knew how to use it well. But today, OR plays a role in nearly every major campaign.

During the 2008 presidential contest, Democratic researchers churned through Sarah Palin's political history. Their aim was to bombard the media with as much negative information as possible in the hope that news stories would focus on Palin's failings, hurting McCain's chances of winning the presidency (Smith and Bresnahan 2008). On the Republican side, Palin charged that Barack Obama's association with Bill Ayers showed that the Democrat had been "palling around with terrorists." Such aggressive OR seemed new, but really it was the same as it ever was. Opposition research is a way to find an opponent's strengths and weaknesses. If properly deployed, it can change the course of a

race, and with the increasing depth of online data, there is little reason to expect that oppo will fade away. Whether fast-paced OR helps increase political accountability or tends to decrease campaign civility, new-style consultants pay close attention to it—and it will continue to grow in importance.

Part II

STRATEGIC THINKING

Chapter 4

Segment Analysis

Ed Baum, a Republican challenger for city council in Athens, Ohio, faced a daunting challenge. Baum's small town was heavily Democratic, he had never held elective office, and he would be running in a multicandidate, multiwinner, citywide election. Six candidates were going after three at-large seats on the council. The top three vote-getters would take office; the rest would get nothing.

Baum was a college professor, and Athens is a college town. The campus precincts are heavily Democratic, as are many of the suburbs. To win, Baum reasoned he would need to not only hold his Republicans but also to pick up some non-Republican voters. He also wanted to make sure his supporters knew exactly *how* to vote. Of the six candidates, there were only two Republicans, but city residents were allowed to vote for three different candidates. If GOP supporters voted for their top three choices, at least one Democratic candidate would end up with a vote—possibly giving one of the Democrats just enough votes to knock Baum from the third-place slot he was shooting for. Baum needed to prevent Democratic competitors from picking up those extra votes, so his supporters needed to be persuaded to cast their ballots for only *two* candidates, not three—one each for the two Republicans on the ballot.

To find Republican supporters, Baum looked at the voting behavior of the city's precincts over recent presidential elections. He ranked each precinct as Democratic, Republican, or mixed. There was little reason to push hard in solidly Democratic precincts or in the areas that already showed a strong Republican affiliation. Few persuadable voters could be found therein. But the mixed areas, which might go either way—this was where Baum felt he could spend his time effectively,

where a knock on the door to say hello and drop off some literature might offer the greatest payoff. The approach seemed to work. Although Baum lost a couple of his targeted neighborhoods, victory on Election Day spoke to the value of careful electioneering.

Baum's arithmetic can be reproduced on the back of an envelope. Elaborate polling and computer-aided segmentation might offer more precise estimates—survey research and voter targeting will be covered in the next two chapters—but each approach begins with the general theory of inference.

THE LOGIC OF SEGMENTATION

Baum's calculation represents a cost-benefit analysis. Groups of voters were identified and ranked according to their prospective yields. Informally at least, a rate of return was computed for each unit of effort invested in the campaign against each vote expected on Election Day. Baum divided his city according to geography, but the technique he used is fundamental to any segmentation process. A campaign might carve up its electorate by gender and income, or by race and ideology. Segments can be identified within populations, and subgroups can be patched together as segments of the larger population. Whether segmentation is based on electoral history, as in Baum's case, or on public opinion polls, informed guesswork, or the myriad data points in a comprehensive voter list, the task begins with basic principles of aggregation.

Scholars and political professionals have long struggled with the question of why an individual votes for a particular candidate. Party politics are important, but there are other forces: ideology, personal finance, imagery, a sense of identity, and so forth. Some voters might base their decision on a witty campaign commercial, while others throw their support behind one candidate or another on the advice of friends, and still others reject a certain candidate because they simply assume that short people cannot possibly lead a nation. Political analysts will always be frustrated by the eccentricities of individual-level decisions. But intelligible patterns of behavior can be found in the big picture.

At the aggregate level, myriad individual actions combine into voting districts, states, and the nation as a whole. Personal idiosyncrasies blend into a larger mix. Some districts go Republican by roughly the same percentage year after year. Some states are more favorable than others to third-party candidacies. While Americans are constantly moving from home to home—one in five people moves to a new address each year—the political predisposition of a given neighborhood tends to remain constant. The individuals change, but the community remains much the same.

Importantly, while populations can demonstrate a fair amount of uniformity, the constancy is unlikely to be perfect. Lines can still be drawn. The logic of segmentation can be stated with three mutually reinforcing points.

First, *populations are heterogeneous*. Districts that appear uniform might contain a wide variety of concerns. A young, white, middle-class neighborhood with look-alike houses gives the impression of Milquetoast consistency. Residents probably share many interests, goals, and beliefs. But under the surface might dwell a fair amount of ideological diversity. Some people will be pro-life and others pro-choice. Some will be pro-gun and others pro–gun control. While American housing patterns tend to cluster on race, ethnicity, income, and lifestyle, most communities, no matter how similar in appearance, are made up of dissimilar elements.

Second, *heterogeneity can be used to segment voters into distinct analytic groups*. The Census Bureau asks people to record their gender, race, age, marital status, and educational attainment, among other things. Because individuals can be categorized by these variables, populations can be segmented along the same lines. Ambiguities abound, many categories are not politically significant, and frequently the power of a variable will change over time, sometimes decreasing and sometimes increasing, but distinctions among subgroups can be informative. And they may be important to electioneering. Before 1980, gender was not a strong factor in presidential elections, but in subsequent years it would become a powerful predictor of partisan preference. Women are now much more likely than men to vote Democratic. One trick to electoral research is figuring out which demographic and political categories will be significant in the upcoming election.

Third, *membership in a segment suggests shared concerns with others in that same segment*. Many Americans think of themselves as individuals who act from their own interests and not those of a larger group, but a good analyst can make powerful predictions about *individual*-level behavior on the basis of *aggregate*-level research. In a white, middle-class neighborhood, there might live a 32-year-old married white male of English descent employed as a well-paid accountant who goes to church every Sunday. Chances are very good that this person would be a dependable Republican. Not every member of his demographic group would have identical interests, nor would everyone agree on any one item—segment analysis is a business of probabilities, not certainties—but there is often a correlation between party preference and such factors as wealth, gender, geography, marital status, race, and occupation.

Baum used this same logic when he examined his city.

- *Point 1*: The city is diverse, containing students, professors, administrators, white-collar professionals, and hourly employees.
- *Point 2*: Neighborhoods vary in their partisanship, with student precincts leaning heavily Democratic.
- *Point 3*: A voter in a mixed precinct might be more likely to be persuadable than a voter in a more reliably partisan precinct.

Large aggregations can therefore be *dis*aggregated into smaller segments, and the character of the segment as a whole can say something about its members. There is a danger in this logic, as will be noted below, but a researcher who lacks individual-level data might be forced to make informed guesses from aggregate-level characteristics.

It is important to remember that aggregate figures describe groups, not individuals. For example, the number of *base voters* in a district—that is, party loyalists who always vote a straight ticket—is probably smaller than the size of a district's *base vote share* (i.e., the portion of the electorate that the party can always count on). Even some diehard Republicans occasionally vote Democratic, and vice versa, so a precinct that never dips below a 25 percent share might boast only 15 percent die-hard supporters. Indeed, a district could be populated entirely by swing voters—everyone switching his or her vote back and forth between the two major parties, maintaining no loyalty from year to year—and still have no swing *vote share* whatsoever (every election splitting 50-50).

Herein lies the danger of imputation: Individuals are not necessarily microcosms of the larger groups to which they belong. Baum had lived in his town long enough to know that its precincts were demographically cohesive and that the segment totals were meaningful at the level of individual analysis. But this knowledge came from experience, not raw precinct data. Another Republican candidate in another college town might have run similar calculations and developed comparable findings even though several of the mixed neighborhoods in that district were filled not with moderate voters in the middle of the electorate, but instead with a prickly jumble of liberal students and conservative administrators. In the latter case, a mixed neighborhood might contain equal numbers of staunch liberals and staunch conservatives, with few persuadable voters in between.

Statisticians call this difficulty the *ecological inference problem*. One good example: George W. Bush received strong support from low-income *states* in 2004, but John Kerry received support from low-income *people* (Gelman et al. 2008). Concluding from state-level data that poor people generally voted for Bush would be a serious mistake.

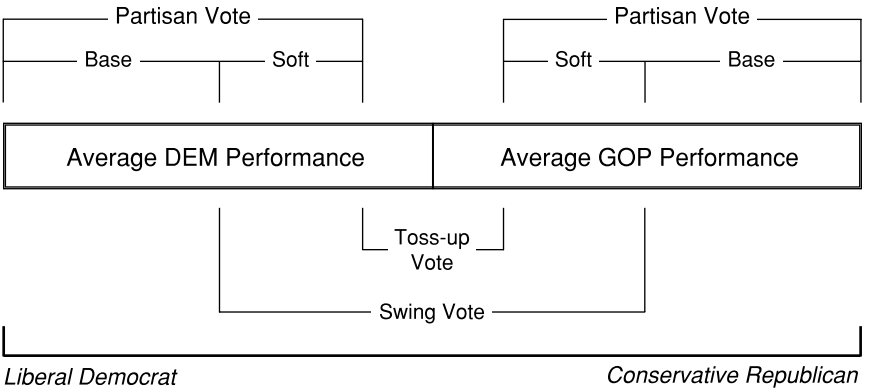
Sophisticated techniques have been developed to manage the ecological inference problem (see King 1997); still, it is important to keep in mind that groups and individuals are not identical, that individuals do not necessarily reflect the groups to which they belong, and that imputation is always risky. Moreover, the fact that a group may consistently vote for Democrats and Republicans on a 50-50 basis does not necessarily imply entrenched conflict—it might simply mean that half of the electorate is slightly to the left and the other half is slightly to the right (see Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2006).

DISTINGUISHING SEGMENTS

A classic scenario for a competitive election is illustrated in Figure 4.1, which represents a district that generally splits its vote equally between Democrats and Republicans (the "Average Party Performance"). About 16 percent of the vote (the "Toss-up Vote") is at the center, and another 17 percent on each side (the "Soft-Partisan Vote") can usually, but not always, be depended upon by each party. Finally, some 25 percent of the electorate (the "Base Vote") supports even the least appealing candidates of one party, and another 25 percent supports the worst candidates of the other party.

This model illustrates an important truth: Competitive elections can be decided by small groups of people. If 25 percent of the electorate always votes Democratic and another 25 percent always votes Republican, the remaining 50 percent will decide the winner. Only half the electorate would be persuadable. If another 17 percent votes for barely acceptable

Figure 4.1
Diagramming the Electorate



Democratic candidates and yet another 17 percent votes for barely acceptable Republicans, then 84 percent of the electorate (the "Partisan Vote") may be deemed unmovable even before the competition starts, leaving only 16 percent at the center who are genuinely persuadable. Winning requires gaining a bare majority of these voters in the middle, just over 8 percent of the electorate. And because the effective turnout for down-ballot races is commonly less than 50 percent of those qualified, the key to victory might lie with moving little more than 4 percent of eligible voters. One of the most difficult problems facing a campaign professional is finding the (sometimes elusive) middle ground.

Party Performance and Vote Segmentation

Finding the right voters might begin with an analysis of voting segments. The process can be demonstrated with a precinct analysis similar to Baum's research, using a measure of average party performance to find the midpoint of the electorate, along with base, swing, soft-partisan, partisan, and toss-up scores to section out the electorate.

Average party performance is the typical vote share a party receives when two strong, evenly matched, quality candidates meet head-to-head. It can be calculated by selecting a set of competitive races and then taking the average vote share earned by candidates of the two parties:

$$\text{Average Party Performance} = \frac{\text{Sum of Competitive Vote Shares}}{\text{Number of Elections Analyzed}}.$$

This average locates, for better or worse, a district's center of balance (see Figure 4.2).

While the arithmetic is simple, the judgments required are not. Presidential races may be used, but high-ballot contests might not parallel down-ballot races, either because the nature of the two offices are different or because presidential candidates operate with a distinct set of opportunities and resources. Barack Obama had a lot of money, enthusiastic support, and a massive get-out-the-vote (GOTV) operation in 2008;

Figure 4.2
Average Party Performance

with none of those advantages, a candidate for county sheriff may want to avoid using Obama's victory as the basis for performance calculations. In some regions, presidential candidates are less popular than state candidates of the same party. Even if presidential races are avoided, reasoned debate can erupt over which candidates are "quality" candidates, which campaign operations were "strong," and which set of competitors was "evenly matched." Calculating good estimates demands familiarity with local trends; otherwise, it is difficult to say what is meant by "typical."

In politics, a "yellow dog Democrat" is someone who would vote Democratic even if the party's candidate were a yellow dog. Similarly, some Republicans are "true blue" or "rock-ribbed." Although many voters reject party labels, some ostensible nonpartisans consistently vote for candidates of the same party in one election after the next. The same can be said for voting districts.

The *base vote* corresponds to the worst performance that a party has shown over the past several elections:

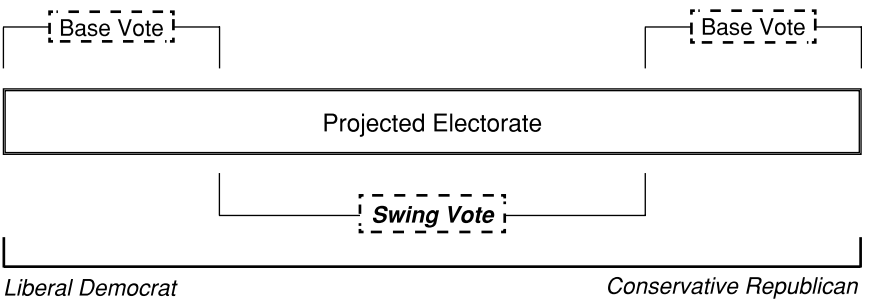
$$\text{Base Vote} = \text{Absolute Minimum Vote Share}.$$

The base vote is easier to figure than average party performance—just find the worst-performing candidate in recent history (see Figure 4.3)—though a researcher must still be careful. An uncontested election, or a merely nominal battle, might prove misleading.

Setting aside the portion of the electorate that will vote for any of its party's candidates no matter how bad focuses attention on the more persuadable segments of the electorate. The *swing vote* is the complement of the base votes for both the Democrats and Republicans:

$$\text{Swing Vote} = \text{Total Vote} - (\text{Base}_{\text{Dem}} + \text{Base}_{\text{GOP}}).$$

Figure 4.3
The Base Vote and Swing Vote



Two variations are also worth considering. A *swing factor* measures the extent to which voters move from one party to the other between two election years. A *split-ticket factor* is similar to the swing factor, except that it looks for volatility within a single election: the extent to which people divide their votes between the parties on a ballot form.

The swing vote category might still be too broad for prudent analysis, though, because it encompasses the whole of the electorate except for the portion that the parties hold through thick and thin. This margin between the party bases might be 50 or 60 percent. Gradations can, and probably should, be parsed within the swing vote. A good political analyst refines the swing vote in ways that ensure strategic utility.

Any effort to slice up the electorate is bound to be somewhat arbitrary, but reasonable distinctions can be made. Recall that the base vote was defined according to a party's *absolute worst* performance; the *soft-partisan vote*, on the other hand, can be defined in accordance with *typically poor* performance. The soft-partisan vote might be characterized by an average worst performance over five election cycles, the performance of a few strong but losing campaigns, or some other measure of voter tendency that squares with political judgment. The idea is to subdivide the swing vote in a way that identifies the portion of the electorate that goes for both attractive and less desirable candidates, but tends to shy away from the very worst of the bunch. This can be calculated for each party as follows:

$$\text{Soft-Partisan Vote} = \text{Typical Minimum Vote Share} - \text{Base Vote}.$$

The *partisan vote*, then, can be calculated as the sum of the base vote (the portion of the electorate that will vote for a party's absolute worst candidate) and the soft-partisan vote:

$$\text{Partisan Vote} = \text{Base Vote} + \text{Soft-Partisan Vote}.$$

The *toss-up vote* would be the remaining portion of the voting electorate—that is, the share that does not reside in either partisan vote:

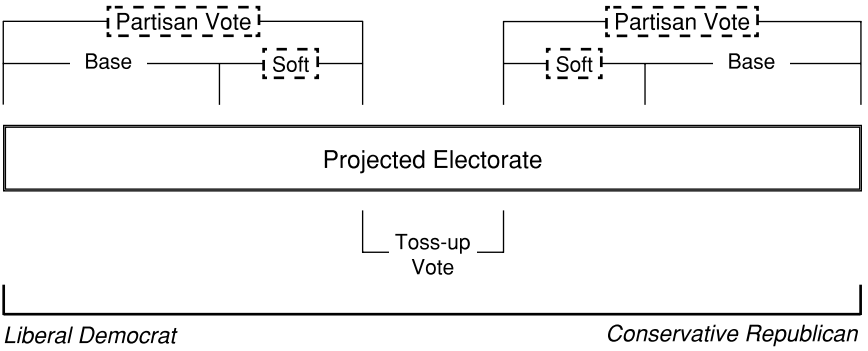
$$\text{Toss-up Vote} = \text{Total Vote} - (\text{Partisan}_{\text{Dem}} + \text{Partisan}_{\text{GOP}}).$$

This last section of the political terrain might well represent the site of the upcoming battle (see Figure 4.4).

Turnout, Roll-Off, and Resilience

Not all elections are won at the center. While persuasion tries to bring swing voters onto the candidate's side, mobilization recognizes that

Figure 4.4
The Partisan Vote and Soft Partisan Vote



many fairly reliable supporters need to be motivated to actually cast a vote. Winning by focusing on supporter turnout is often called a *base mobilization strategy*, or simply a *base strategy*, even when the effort does not concentrate exclusively on the most intransigent followers of the party line. Turnout is the key.

The overall population of a district is easy usually to find, but a campaign professional is not interested in the size of the whole population so much as the size of the voting electorate. This figure might range between 30 and 70 percent of the eligible population, depending on the district, election year, and offices listed on the ballot. A county that holds 100,000 voting-age people might have 80,000 registered voters, of whom only 50,000 typically cast ballots in a presidential year. Additionally, while almost everyone who enters the voting booth will select a candidate for president, "voter fatigue" sets in as people work down the ballot toward judges and county officials. Many constituents opt not to vote for down-ballot offices. This effect is called *roll-off or fall-off*. The opposite of voter fatigue might be called "voter resilience."

Simply averaging the number of votes cast in recent elections can be problematic. Say, for example, several recent contests are analyzed for a competitive two-way, open-seat race for the state assembly. An average over time might include years in which a president was elected and years without a presidential election, years when a U.S. senator was elected and years that did not include a Senate election. Turnout might go up and down in waves. Two methods of dampening variations are finding surrogate contests and computing a *set* of averages.

Finding surrogates is conceptually straightforward. The basic idea is to assume that several factors will influence the number of votes cast in the

election and then to find one or more elections that roughly match those factors. Who else is on the ballot? Are voters going to be excited about the race? Does the contest fall on a presidential election year? Would the opponent be an incumbent? If past is prologue, and if other elections have involved similar factors, it stands to reason that prior contests would offer a rough gauge of future events. Past elections might therefore be averaged into a simple model of the upcoming campaign. So, if one surrogate election saw 50,000 votes and another brought in 46,000 votes, it might reasonably be expected that 48,000 votes would be cast in the race.

Although the math is easy, problems can arise in deciding which elections are truly analogous. Finding surrogates demands an accurate forecast as to which factors will matter in the impending election, and as Yogi Berra famously declared, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future." Furthermore, assessing the reasons for variation in past elections is not always easy. A spike in turnout might be attributable to aggressive GOTV operations, unique personalities, or some combination of demographic and social change. Again, smart people can disagree about the meaning of political history. Especially when a prediction rests on a small sample of contests, researchers need to identify exactly the right surrogates.

The second approach is to calculate probabilities based on registration, turnout, and voter resilience. While regression procedures and other forms of analysis might provide better estimates by using a broader range of variables, a thumbnail sketch of turnout can be estimated from the size of the eligible electorate, overall turnout, year type, and the office being sought.

Assume that, in the two or three most recent on-year elections, a full 80 percent of voters were registered and that 75 percent of registered voters showed up at the polls. Assume further that, in a typical election in that same period (both on- and off-years), only 70 percent of voters who walked into the polling booth or sent their ballots in the mail actually marked a choice for offices at the level of state assembly. A rough estimate of the *effective turnout* would be the size of the electorate multiplied by the percentage of the electorate that is registered to vote, by the percentage of registered voters expected to vote, and by the percentage of the voting electorate that is resilient enough to vote for offices down the ballot. That is,

$$\text{Effective Turnout} = \text{Total Electorate} \times \% \text{ Registered} \times \% \text{ Turnout} \times \% \text{ Resilient.}$$

If the district consists of 100,000 eligible voters, 80 percent registration would reduce the number of possible voters to 80,000, and 75 percent

turnout would reduce the voting electorate to 60,000—of which, at 30 percent average roll-off (i.e., 70 percent resiliency), only 42,000 might cast a ballot in the race for state representative.

Critically, where there are strong differences in roll-off between on-year and off-year elections, which is likely, the analyst might decide to stick with on-year elections only. It would be the same sort of political judgment that is involved at this and every other step of the analysis. Is it better to work with surrogate elections or averages? How might the size of the electorate change over time? A district with low voter registration and a lot of people moving in and out might require that the analyst take preelection registration drives into consideration by examining past registration trends, looking at the typical increase (or decrease) of registrants between the beginning of the year and Election Day.

If 42,000 voters are expected to cast ballots for the assembly seat, the next question is, How much does that figure vary? Using surrogate races or averages in much the same way that the swing and toss-up votes were calculated, a researcher can find high and low watermarks of voter turnout at the district level and voter resilience for particular offices. Finding volatility in turnout would assist a mobilization campaign for the same reasons that knowing partisan variability can help a strategist set up a persuasion campaign: It helps show how much the voters are willing to move.

Note that the midpoint and volatility estimates described above involve two-way contests held on a regular Election Day. Multicandidate contests, special elections, and ballot initiatives tend to be more complicated, and less certain, than traditional two-way races because firm precedent on which to ground the calculations might be lacking. Special elections held for a single purpose at a unique moment in time might have no local precedent whatsoever, and ballot initiatives or referenda, particularly on issues that do not cut the electorate along party lines, require a range of difficult assumptions. Creativity is obligatory, especially if precinct boundaries have been recently changed. The only consolation might be the fact that one's opposition is facing the same sorts of analytic problems.

In any event, the number of votes necessary to win a two-way contest would be half the expected vote, plus one. If 42,000 votes will be cast for state representative, 21,001 are needed to win. In practice, the breakpoint seldom cuts right at 50 percent. Some people vote for third-party candidates and a few might write in their own names just to see if they will show up in the newspaper. Races can usually be won just under the halfway point. But it would be tough to defend a campaign plan that aims at a 49 percent plurality or a one-vote margin, since

the turnout and roll-off estimates stand on difficult ground. Wisdom dictates erring on the side of caution by working at the high end of the scale, and then perhaps adding a few votes to *that* figure. "Close" will not count on Election Day.

YIELD ANALYSIS

Assuming that valid individual-level assumptions can be drawn from aggregate-level behavior, the next question is which segments to target. Ed Baum rated individual precincts according to party performance, and then segmented the full set of precincts into targeted and nontargeted precincts according to that performance. Precincts that appeared to be saturated with Republicans or Democrats were given less regard than those that were deemed mixed. In other races, the targeting effort might focus on turning out voters who are already committed to the candidate. The first approach is a persuasion campaign; the second is a mobilization campaign.

Most electoral strategies rely on persuasion as well as mobilization, and both sorts of campaign efforts ideally work to get the lowest cost per vote gained (CPVG), which can be defined as:

$$\text{Cost per Vote Gained} = \frac{\text{Cost of Effort}}{\text{Number of Votes Gained}}.$$

So, for example, if a $10,000 direct-mail effort adds a hundred votes to a candidate's column, the CPVG would be $100; if only 50 votes came in for the same effort, the CPVG would increase to $200. (Of course, bringing in a new voter, someone who had not planned on voting, is worth half as much as converting a voter who would have voted for the opponent.) Truthfully, the number of votes to be gained is difficult to assess, so a campaign would be forgiven if it simply measured the cost per targeted voter (CPTV), the number of targeted voters reached per unit cost:

$$\text{Cost per Targeted Voter} = \frac{\text{Cost of Effort}}{\text{Number of TargetedVoters Reached}}.$$

Credit for developing this sort of calculation has been attributed to Bill Clinton's 1992 presidential campaign (Kurtz 1992a), and the notion has been fleshed out in the academic literature (see Green and Gerber 2008), but the logic of the cost-per-vote-gained estimate is implicit in virtually all thoughtful electioneering.

If campaign resources were infinite, a CPVG or CPTV computation would serve a mere accounting function: What was the final price of

victory? But since resources are limited, CPVG and CPTV serve a planning function when combined with two additional measures: efficiency, the minimization of waste, and coverage, the maximization of opportunity.

Efficiency is a function of success over effort. If a candidate meets with ten people, but only one of them was persuadable, the endeavor would not look terribly efficient. If, on the other hand, the candidate met with eight persuadable people out of ten, then the couple of hours spent chatting with those voters would seem a far more efficient use of the candidate's time. In this sense:

$$\text{Efficiency} = \frac{\text{Targeted Voters Reached}}{\text{Contacts Made}}.$$

A candidate seeking high efficiency might look for precincts with a large swing vote, because the probability that any particular voter within those precincts would be undecided might be greater than in the precincts holding a small swing vote.

Veteran strategist Hal Malchow makes an important distinction between efficiency and coverage: "While efficiency measures what a campaign is getting for its money, coverage measures what it is leaving out" (2008, 9). Sending mail to a solitary, absolutely persuadable voter would be a highly efficient use of campaign money, but leaving the district's other 9,999 persuadable voters out of the loop would be a serious tactical error. A sharp campaign thinks about coverage, a function of success over opportunity:

$$\text{Coverage} = \frac{\text{Targeted Voters Reached}}{\text{Targeted Voters Available}}.$$

Although a "*no target left behind*" strategy would be costly, perhaps *too* costly, increasing coverage at the expense of efficiency might be the only way to gather enough votes to win the election.

In the best possible world, a campaign would have 100 percent coverage and 100 percent efficiency, but perfection is all but impossible. Decisions must be made in every aspect of strategic planning. While there is no universal, ideal ratio between efficiency and coverage, the distinction itself suggests one way to think about the problem. A two-way matrix can display false positives (calling a base voter persuadable) against false negatives (grouping a persuadable voter into the base). Campaigns with money to spare might pay attention to coverage, while those that are short on funds might decide to go with efficiency. Of course, a campaign that lacks money and needs to cover a lot of ground has serious work to do.

Ranking Segments

The value of segment analysis is revealed as subgroups are rank-ordered. Ranking begins by estimating the size of the effective electorate and concludes with a set of targets that add up to victory. Strategists might want to rank precincts, counties, or towns according to their expected CPVG.

Table 4.1 illustrates a notional district that contains ten thousand voters and assumes that an ultra-intensive phone, mail, and door-to-door effort would cost $7.50 per voter. If the average party performance is 47 percent (4,700 votes can be expected), a candidate needs to pick up 301 more votes to win. Contacting everyone would run fully $75,000, a wasteful sum that suggests the need to target the right voters. For simplicity, assume that the calculated base vote of each precinct approximates the people who are listed as Republican or Democrat on the campaign's voter list; these, say, 6,984 base voters should probably not

Table 4.1
Ranking Precincts

							Accumulation	
Precinct	*Voters*	*Swing*	*Persuadable*	*Cull*	*Precinct Cost*	*CPVG*	*Yield*	*Cost*
7	848	255	200	80	$1,913	$23.91	80	$1,913
11	679	205	160	64	$1,538	$24.03	144	$3,451
14	765	231	175	70	$1,733	$24.76	214	$5,184
1	699	211	153	61	$1,583	$25.95	275	$6,767
2	663	200	140	56	$1,500	$26.79	331	$8,267
13	581	176	120	48	$1,320	$27.50	379	$9,587
4	628	189	125	50	$1,418	$28.36	429	$11,005
8	633	191	123	49	$1,433	$29.24	478	$12,438
10	816	246	158	63	$1,845	$29.29	541	$14,283
3	643	194	120	48	$1,455	$30.31	589	$15,738
6	654	197	120	48	$1,478	$30.79	637	$17,216
5	621	187	115	46	$1,403	$30.50	683	$18,619
12	544	164	98	39	$1,230	$31.54	722	$19,849
15	737	222	130	52	$1,665	$32.02	774	$21,514
9	489	148	75	30	$1,110	$37.00	804	$22,624
Total	*10,000*	*3,016*	*2,012*	*804*	*$22,624*			

Assumptions:
- Expected Party Performance: 4,700
- Cull Share of Persuadable Voter: 40%
- Cost per Contacted Voter: $7.50

Totals may not sum properly due to rounding.

be contacted. Contacting all the others, the 3,016 swing voters, would cost less than $23,000, a savings of more than two-thirds over contacting each and every voter in the district, but still a great deal of money.

Next, assume that the candidate's soft partisans will definitely vote for the candidate, but the toss-ups and the opposition's soft partisans remain open to persuasion (so they get counted as "Persuadable") and that contacting these open-minded citizens will cull newly supportive votes from 40 percent of these persuadables. If all this holds true for Precinct 7, then reaching all 255 unaffiliated swing voters would hit 200 persuadables and cull 80 votes at a cost of $1,913, or $23.91 for each vote gained; by contrast, in Precinct 9 the cost per vote gained would be $37.00. Sorting the precincts according to CPVG lets analysts see an accumulation of vote yields and costs as they move down the two right-most columns. A cutoff can be established after Precinct 4. Contacting the unaffiliated voters in the seven highest-ranking precincts would, if all these assumptions are accurate, yield 429 votes—meaning victory with a thick cushion—at a cost of $11,005, about 15 percent of the price of the district-wide, scattershot contact plan. Working through such a calculation would force a campaign to examine many of the assumptions that go into its spending targeting.

If the campaign had many tens of thousands of dollars to throw around, the preferred, and less risky, strategy, would be to ignore the analysis and hit all the voters—and this is sometimes done—but if the campaign is working with limited resources, its need to prioritize is imposed by necessity, and yield analysis is one tool it can use to make the cut.

A few lessons can be learned from this exercise. First, campaigns are intensely fought because the battleground is often confined to a small portion of the electorate. Second, a persuasion campaign might benefit from a high-energy voter mobilization effort, involving both registration and GOTV activities, in order reducing the number of middle-ground votes needed to win and thereby to reducing the cost of reaching targeted precincts. Finally, precinct analysis alone may not suffice to narrow the targeting operation, and other techniques such as polling, microtargeting, and good political judgment can help reduce the wastefulness of mailing, phoning, and canvassing large number of voters.

CONCLUSION

The payoff from segmentation and yield analysis might be a clean and simple set of numbers. But a researcher must bear in mind that the quality of the outcome is no better than the quality of the input: Garbage in—garbage out. Weighting can be factored in to adjust for the

geographic size of districts, or to favor contiguous precincts, or to insert hard-earned political wisdom into the equation. Findings can be adjusted in light of demographic facts, polling, volunteer lists, and other sources of politically meaningful information. Because politics goes beyond simple arithmetic—researchers need to know the social, economic, and political cultures of the district they are mapping—political wisdom is required, not just under the hot lights of a news conference but also in the cold calculation of electoral data, as Bill MaGee's New York Assembly campaign (see chapter 3) amply shows.

MaGee's district was, by all accounts, Republican. Nearly every local elected official in the district was Republican, and voter enrollment was roughly two-to-one Republican. Nonetheless, MaGee, a Democrat, won the seat, defeating a 10-year Republican incumbent. The campaign team was facing a variety of difficulties, not the least of which was modest funding. MaGee's operation needed to be run with extreme efficiency. A finely tuned targeting plan had to be devised, combining prior electoral history with polling data.

Of the 105 election districts, roughly 25 were deemed solidly Republican. The Republican Party performance in these areas was more than 60 percent; few Democrats had ever won them. Despite criticism from both the news media and local politicos for not covering these neighborhoods, the campaign directed no energy to these heavily Republican sectors. The strategy team also sought out the few solidly Democratic areas available, finding about 20 of them, and because resources were tight, little effort was made there, either. If MaGee could not count on solid Democrats, he was sunk anyway. Instead of cultivating base precincts, the campaign team was forced to assume that Democratic voters in these districts were already in the bag and needed only to be reminded to vote.

Still under consideration were 60 election districts that might, by some optimistic measure, be labeled "Swing." Yet the campaign did not have enough resources to work the voters in all these remaining electoral districts. A concerted effort had to be made to find districts with a high propensity toward persuadable voting and to rank-order these areas using a votes-needed-to-win estimate. Considering his base of support along with that of his opponent, how many swing districts were needed in a target group if MaGee was able to win them all with 52 percent? With 55 percent? 57 percent? 60 percent? In the end, roughly 40 election districts formed the core target group. If MaGee could win more than half of these precincts by at least 55 percent and break even in others, he stood a chance.

The campaign worked hard to court voters in the targeted precincts, sticking to survey-tested issues and themes. The most appropriate way to reach

these voters, given their dispersion across the district, was by fine-tuned direct mail, carefully planned literature drops, and neighborhood canvassing operations, augmented by ambitious telemarketing. In the end, MaGee won the election by fewer than 500 votes. His base came through, and he captured more than 55 percent in most of his targeted election districts. MaGee's campaign had successfully tackled a serious shortage of financial resources and voter support and had done so with strong vote segmentation and yield analysis.

Chapter 5

Campaign Polling

Richard Nixon wanted to re-create the Republican Party in his own image. Following the turmoil of the civil rights movement and student unrest, Nixon reasoned, middle-class Democrats, especially Southerners, might want to join the GOP. The president saw opportunity in this disaffection, and seized upon it. Planning began during the first year of Nixon's presidency. Seeking a new coalition and a new partisan divide, "White House polls tracked 'significant differences' based on party identification and ideology in trial heats, approval ratings, and concerning policy issues and other areas" (Jacobs 2005, 197). The idea was to locate disaffected voters within the Democratic ranks. With a focus on ticket-splitters, a raft of survey analyses showed what might sway these unsteady voters, and strategies pulled from the data helped Nixon win reelection in 1972 (ibid., 197–99).

Some candidates might wonder if this sort of polling is really necessary. Spending a lifetime in a district helps a person figure out what residents are thinking, and an expensive poll might seem redundant. A "feel for the district" was essential to old-style political activism. Precinct captains would listen to voters and transmit their feelings up the pecking order. Knowledge was gained from newspaper reporters and civic leaders. Sometimes political assessments were based on campaign rallies and constituent letters. The quest for public opinion began long before scientific survey research was developed. New-style campaign operatives, however, believe they cannot rely exclusively on informal measures—if only because the old party hierarchies have broken down. While candidates and elected officials frequently say they

ignore the polls, few political professionals would want to run a campaign without survey research.

By 2008, political polls had become an integral part of presidential campaigning, as strategists, reporters, and armchair analysts obsessed over the numbers, watching Barack Obama and John McCain go up and down, speculating about the effect of Sarah Palin, for good or ill. Pundits fixated on the horse race, and pollsters explained in detail why their favored techniques were truly on the cutting edge. Even after the election came to a close, analysts compared one survey to another and wondered about the future of political polling, an aspect of campaign management that has become technologically sophisticated and conceptually intricate.

This chapter discusses modern survey research in political campaigns: the need for polling, basic concepts, different types of polls, quality control, survey design, and data analysis.

POLLING BASICS

Polls are expensive. If a campaign has its own list and is willing to use cookie-cutter questions and forgo deep analysis, a survey runs several thousand dollars. A comprehensive "benchmark poll" for a mid-level race, on the other hand, might cost $15,000 to $20,000, or more. A statewide survey can hit $40,000 (Armstrong 2004, 88). Survey costs are a function of questionnaire design, interview length, the number of respondents, and the depth of analysis offered by the researcher. Writing a complex questionnaire requires expertise and experience. Individual interviews consume time, and larger samples add to the cost.

The results of a benchmark poll are sometimes unwelcome. A community leader planning a run for office might learn that popularity among peers does not necessarily translate into public fame. Low name recognition can be humbling. Even political leaders with long records of public service might experience low name identification. In 1994, only 49 percent of voters in Georgia's 10th Congressional District could identify their own five-term incumbent—this immediately after a hard-fought election season (Shea 1996, 402). Some candidates will also be disheartened to read survey results showing broad segments of the public expressing a cheerful preference for the opposition.

A core function of polling is to find the current level of name recognition and candidate support. Another major use of polling is to identify issue preferences among voters. At the beginning of any campaign season, candidates might be thinking about a catalog of pressing issues,

but the list must be pared down. Recalling the way he helped plan a 1991 Senate victory in Pennsylvania, James Carville wrote:

> Harris Wofford believes in a lot of things, but our researchers came up with three key issues that the people of Pennsylvania cared about deeply: a middle-class tax cut, more affordable education, and health care. Wofford did too. That's what we ran on. (Matalin and Carville 1995, 74)

A generalized respect for human life, an essential belief in individual responsibility, and a firm sense that the public sector must care for the poor—these are deeply held voter attitudes. Campaigns need to understand voter convictions if they are going to frame policy issues appropriately. A pro-choice position might be framed in terms of individual freedom; a flat-tax proposal might go to fundamental fairness.

Ideology, strength of social commitment, and partisan preference are all clues to the behavior of an electorate, and each can be tapped, in principle at least, by opinion surveys. At their best, political polls allow campaign managers to gauge the potential value of strategies and tactics. With an accurate analysis of the electorate's attitudes, a campaign organization can make informed decisions about message resonance, voter targeting, and the allocation of resources. As donors place their bets on favored candidates and journalists decide which office seekers deserve coverage, new-style campaigns gain credibility by showing—*scientifically*—that they have a shot at winning.

TYPES OF SURVEYS

Surveys commissioned by media outlets and interest groups are usually intended to sell a story—not to strategize a campaign. Online aggregators such as pollster.com, fivethirtyeight.com, and realclearpolitics.com help pundits follow the horse race, but the findings are general in nature, and at any rate campaign operatives do not have access to the raw data that lends strategic meaning to an opinion survey. And even if the raw data were made public, the questions asked by outside pollsters might not square with the questions that would have been asked by strategists. When the candidate's future and the consultant's fortunes are on the line, polls conducted by a survey research firm that understands politics are often deemed a necessity.

Political polls can be separated into six major categories: *feasibility tests, comprehensive benchmark polls, follow-up polls, tracking polls, focus group surveys*, and pseudo-surveys called "push polls."

Feasibility Tests

Some candidates might want to dip their toes into the waters before they start serious campaigning or pay the high price of a comprehensive survey. If the candidate is a prospective challenger, a plain and simple survey might determine if there is any chance of victory; if the candidate is an incumbent, the idea might be to find the likelihood of defeat. As such, the questions could be few, zeroing in on "name recognition for a candidate and the opponent, job approval for an incumbent, support for reelection of an incumbent, and an early matchup" (Stonecash 2008, 21).

Comprehensive Benchmark Polls

A comprehensive benchmark is a major survey designed for long-range planning. Several hundred respondents might be asked dozens of questions that assess name recognition, issue preferences, underlying attitudes, and prevailing levels of knowledge about campaign issues. Measures of partisanship, ideology, and religiosity might be gathered alongside standard demographic data. The poll might also be used to test the relative value of campaign messages, including those that could expose vulnerabilities in the candidate's own record, with questions like: "If you knew that Mr. Smith had failed to vote in quite a few recent elections, would this fact make you more likely or less likely to vote for him, or would it make no difference?" Information gathered from the comprehensive benchmark can be used to design a basic campaign strategy and perhaps to recommend questions that will be asked in a follow-up or tracking poll, and in line with contemporary campaign strategy, the results can be used in a microtargeting analysis.

Follow-Up and Tracking Polls

A follow-up poll is conducted after the benchmark is taken and after the campaign season gets under way. The idea is to uncover strategic mistakes and correct them while there is still time. Follow-ups are typically shorter than comprehensive benchmarks, and tracking polls are shorter still. Tracking polls follow a limited number of issues on a regular basis—weekly, or even daily—in order to keep an eye on voter trends. Key items might involve name recognition, candidate preference, issue support, and perhaps the effectiveness of campaign events and commercials.

A run of tracking polls allows a campaign to watch changes in the electorate. The samples might be drawn anew for each survey, or a single "panel" can be drawn once and reinterviewed throughout the campaign. The latter approach would be informative, but expensive, and care

would have to be taken to ensure continued participation and to reduce the possibility that the repeated interviews themselves wind up changing respondent attitudes. A less burdensome approach is the quick-response poll using a new sample to identify the immediate effect of a campaign event. If the opponent launches a series of attack ads, for example, a quick-response poll might determine their impact.

Focus Group Surveys

Focus group surveys emerged in the early 1990s. In a focus group, a small pool of respondents chat about their opinions, beliefs, and attitudes for an extended period of time. A moderator "pulls" comments from the participants while a survey team records the conversation. Although the sample size is tiny, the depth of opinion offered in focus groups can capture subtleties that would be missed in a standardized poll. But although focus groups can appear informal, they must be carefully supervised in order to draw out useful information. Moderators must encourage shy members to speak up and prevent outspoken participants from dominating the conversation, and they have to ensure that the discussion does not become an exercise in mutually reinforcing "group think" or needlessly divisive argumentation.

Close cousins of the focus group are "dial groups" and "mall intercepts." In a mall intercept, a researcher approaches a shopper, asks a few screening questions, and then escorts the respondent into a storefront office to ask a set of substantive questions. Intercepts are sometimes used to examine direct-mail pieces, perhaps watching to see how people unfold the envelope and skim the enclosures. For television spots, a campaign might use a dial group, in which participants turn a control knob back and forth to indicate their changing level of satisfaction as they view the ads. Second-by-second analysis can pinpoint strengths and weaknesses in a campaign message, even capturing problems with wording and sentence structure.

A new alternative to the traditional focus-group testing is Web-based testing. Unlike a typical focus group, in which a small number of respondents get together in a room to chat, online focus groups engage in wide-ranging discussions over the Internet. Ads can be tested in a group or on an individual basis. The disadvantage of this form of research is that some of the nuance of face-to-face interaction is lost through the narrow electronic connection, but what is gained in the large sample and the ability to run controlled experiments is a potential for increased confidence in the generalizability of results.

While Internet-based testing might seem a less intimate way to gauge voter decision-making, ethnographic research goes to voters where they live—literally. By finding a representative voter and having that person

invite friends into his or her home, a political ethnographer can watch how real political conversations unfold, with the added benefit of feedback, not just from the respondent, but of friends who know what the respondent *really* thinks. The researcher might also ask permission to look around the home to see how the family lives and how it gets the news (in the same way that a commercial ethnographer might follow a shopper around the grocery store). Pollster Andrew Myers says, "Wherever possible, I've moved to the ethnographic approach since it tends to better simulate the real world and the flow of information within a respondent's personal network." The reason: "More and more in this cluttered media environment people rely on those within their personal network for information, and more often than not, these personal networks are important to how opinion is shaped and how people form opinions" (Myers, pers. comm.).

Push Polls

Feasibility tests, comprehensive benchmark polls, follow-up polls, tracking polls, and focus group surveys seek unbiased information about the electorate; push polls have an entirely different function. Often conducted during the final days of a campaign, push polls disguise voter persuasion as survey research. In fact, the term *poll* is inappropriate because the calls are not intended to collect data but rather to move support. "Would you still be inclined to vote for Mr. Davis if you knew he was once arrested for drunk driving?" is characteristic of this technique (see Stonecash 2008, 44–50). Push polls came to public awareness during the 2000 presidential campaign when mysterious calls to South Carolina voters, operating under the guise of survey research, used a racially charged message against John McCain (Banks 2008). The practice has not seemed to abate in recent election cycles, even in the wake of widespread denunciation and state legislative efforts to curtail them.

Many legitimate surveys offer carefully phrased messages with an edge of negativity to gauge voter response: "Does this statement make it more likely or less likely that you would vote for Mr. Davis?" The intention is to find the right message. With a push poll, there is no intention to find anything, a distinction recognized by the American Association of Political Consultants (AAPC) when it condemned "advocacy calling" that:

1. Masquerades as survey research
2. Fails to clearly and accurately identify the sponsor of the call
3. Presents false or misleading information to the voter (American Association of Political Consultants, 1996)

"To our knowledge," the AAPC wrote, "there is no overlap whatsoever between legitimate polling firms and firms that conduct so-called 'push polls'" (ibid.).

Unfortunately, push polls in an advocacy effort and "push questions" in legitimate survey research can be hard for nonexperts to distinguish, especially in an electorate that has become sensitized to the problem of push polling. The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) notes some distinguishing features of political advocacy: "One or only a few questions are asked, all about a single candidate or a single issue," for example, or "the questions are uniformly strongly negative (or sometimes uniformly positive) descriptions of the candidate or issue" (American Association for Public Opinion Research 2007). But a person receiving a call from a legitimate survey researcher might not know the difference between push questions in a real poll and push questions in a push poll. The respondent can hear the negative information contained in a push question and mistakenly believe the legitimate poll is intended for persuasion. In an era of intense media focus on negative campaigning and ubiquitous commentary on political blogs and social networking Web sites, a legitimate questionnaire that is confused with a push poll can instantly create a public relations setback that the campaign might want to avoid (see Smith 2007).

QUALITY CONTROL

A "good" poll has minimal error. If 55 percent of the population would vote for a candidate on Election Day, then the poll should accurately represent that fact. But inference from a survey always carries risk. Four sources of error are particularly salient: *instrument error, measurement error, sampling error*, and *nonobservation error. Total survey error* is a function of all these problems combined (see Weisberg 2005).

Instrument Error

Wording and sequence are important. A classic study in opinion research demonstrated that public attitudes toward freedom of the press changed as the order of questions was altered (Schuman and Presser 1981, 28–29). The problem is that early survey questions tend to "prime" respondents for later queries. The options provided to the respondent can also have an impact. If, for example, respondents are asked which of two candidates they prefer without offering the respondent a "no preference" option, the views of respondents who prefer neither might be lost; on the other hand, a pollster

may *want* to force an answer, since the ballot that voters will confront in the polling booth might contain only those two choices. Finally, the wording of questions has an impact on the content of answers. If a pollster tilts an important question to get a desired answer, money spent on the survey might well have been wasted. "Ask a bad question and you get useless answers" (Weisberg, Krosnick, and Bowen 1996, 101).

Measurement Error

Measurement error is caused by improper recording of answers. Even if the question has been appropriately phrased and duly answered, it is possible for an interviewer to register the response incorrectly. With pencil-and-paper administration, the information can be tarnished by data-entry personnel. Computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), whereby interviewers read questions from a screen and record answers on a keyboard would seem to reduce the fault rate, but interviewers can still blunder. Even if the respondent is filling out a questionnaire personally, on paper or on the Web, mistakes can happen.

Sampling Error

Any survey that polls a sample of individuals instead of the entire population is subject to sampling error, no matter how randomly the sample is drawn. One way to think about the problem: If a population consists of only four people, two supporters and two opponents, a series of randomly drawn two-person tests will sometimes overcount and sometimes undercount the number of supporters. Increasing the size of the sample will reduce the range of probable error, but will not eliminate it. In one real-world sample of voters, there might be a few more wealthy individuals than expected; in another, there might be too many young males; and in yet another, environmentalists might be grossly underrepresented compared to advocates of property rights. The only way to eliminate sampling error is to survey every last member of the population—rarely a practical solution.

Nonobservation Error

Unbiased samples are difficult to gather. One issue is survey *coverage*, the share of the target population that is reachable by the survey's intended method; another is *response*, meaning the share of sample members contacted who actually respond. Combined, nonresponse error and coverage error are called "nonobservation error" because the cases

were not "observed" by the researcher. Sometimes, the interviewer gets a respondent on the line but winds up skipping a question; this form of nonobservation error is called "item nonresponse."

Not everyone has a telephone, and not all those who have a telephone will publicly list their number—some because they value their privacy and some because they rely on a cell phone instead of a landline. Among those who have a phone, the phone number is often shared with others in the household. If family members differ in the rates at which they answer the phone—say, if women answer the phone more often than men—the sample might become skewed. Internet polling poses new challenges, since many people do not have a computer with Internet access, and those who *do* have Internet access are not representative of the larger population.

Cell phones are prompting a host of novel questions for survey researchers. The AAPOR formed a task force to deal with this important new fact of life (see AAPOR Standards Committee 2008). Because phone numbers have become portable—users are allowed to carry their numbers with them when they move from coast to coast—phone numbers are becoming detached from their original voting districts. Likewise, cell numbers are shorter lived, as people abandon their mobile numbers at a higher rate than with landlines (ibid., 22). Further, response rates among cell-only users are "consistently below 30 percent and overall about 10 percentage points less than in current landline surveys" (ibid., 18).

Calling a cell phone invokes a different set of legal restrictions than calling landlines. These laws reflect not only the possible financial costs of answering a cell phone but also the sense of privacy that people attach to a device they carry on their person. And since people tend to answer cell phones in public places, the precise locale might affect a respondent's answers. According to the AAPOR Standards Committee: "Questionnaires for cell phone surveys should be carefully evaluated so that even if the question wording is sensitive the response categories maybe able to be designed to protect the privacy of the information from someone who might overhear them" (2008, 25). Put another way, delicate answers to survey questions should not echo through a public restroom.

Representativeness is critical to survey research. If the coverage varies by some politically meaningful factor, new problems arise. Samples picked out of a phone book are biased against people without telephones (who may be poorer than average), people with unlisted phone numbers (who may value privacy more than others), and people who rely on cell phones (who may be younger than most). In fact, there is

some evidence that cell-phone-only adults are more liberal than their landline-only counterparts (Keeter et al. 2007).

Among those who have any sort of phone, landline or cell, a growing percentage refuse to divulge their personal opinions. "The key to polling's accuracy is the principle of 'equal probability of selection,'" columnist Arianna Huffington has written, "but if larger and larger numbers among those randomly selected refuse to participate, this principle no longer applies" (Huffington 1998)—though it should be added that low response rates do not necessarily affect the final results if there is no systematic difference between respondents and nonrespondents. After years of survey calls and telemarketing pitches, many people have simply stopped answering questions, and "drops in response rates of approximately 2–3 percent per year [since the mid-1990s have] created concerns about the representativeness of the data collected" through traditional landline methods (AAPOR Section on Survey Research Methods 2008, 1).

One way to manage nonobservation error is to weigh individual cases according to demographic characteristics of the electorate. A study of the 2004 presidential election showed that while cell-phone-only voters were more likely to vote for Kerry than Bush, the effect was largely a function of age—a characteristic that demographic weighting can handle (Keeter 2006). A study of the 2008 election reached much the same conclusion (Keeter et al. 2009). With the continuing rise of cell phone usage, however, systematic differences between cell-phone-only individuals and their landline counterparts threaten to escalate. Data weighting is currently awkward because information on the use of cell phones is sketchy, especially for populations smaller than a national data set (AAPOR Section on Survey Research Methods 2008, 3; AAPOR Standards Committee 2008). And even if the results are properly weighted, the question remains: Is there some politically meaningful difference between those who respond to questions and those who do not?

SURVEY DESIGN

Face-to-face interviewing is an aging stereotype of political survey research; the process is rarely used in the new millennium because it is expensive, time consuming, sometimes physically dangerous to interviewers, and less than practical if voters live in gated communities, rural locales, or other places with limited access. Mail surveys, on the other hand, might reach out to broader sections of the electorate, but

response rates to questionnaires can be exceedingly low and the polls take a long while to complete, though some media outlets and political professionals continue to use them in throwback to earlier days. Internet-based polling can reduce costs, but many suspect that a Web survey suffers from the same self-selection biases as mail polls. For these reasons, telephone contact continues to dominate political campaign polling. In any event, good survey research depends on proper sampling, thoughtful questions, and competent administration.

Sampling

One of the thorniest problems in survey research is determining how to develop a proper sample. A dire cautionary tale is the *Literary Digest* poll of 1936. For years, the *Digest* had accurately predicted the winner of presidential elections by sending letters to potential respondents drawn from subscriber lists and telephone books. On the basis of millions of mailings, the *Digest* predicted Alf Landon's victory in the 1936 election (*Literary Digest* 1936a; see also Bryson 1976). The results of the poll may have comforted Governor Landon, but the results of the actual election—in which Landon garnered less than 37 percent of the popular vote—were probably more satisfying to President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. After the election, the *Literary Digest* issued a plea, asking, "If any of the hundreds who have so kindly offered their suggestions can tell us how we could get voters to respond proportionally, and still keep the poll secret . . . then we wish these critics would step up and do so" (*Literary Digest* 1936b, 8).

To overcome the problem of nonrandom selection, pollsters began using random digit dialing (RDD). RDD generates telephone numbers based on area codes and local exchanges, not phone listings, so those with unlisted numbers might still be reached, helping to ensure a more random selection. More recently, political pollsters began returning to list-based approaches, but this time working with samples drawn from voter lists. Yale professors Donald Green and Alan Gerber (2006) have made a strong case that registration-based sampling (RBS) is the superior technique because the sample starts with an information-rich data set—a conclusion reinforced by state-level empirical research on the 2004 presidential election showing that RBS had higher completion rates (Mitofsky et al. 2005).

Good sampling does not guarantee high-quality results, though. Generally speaking, inference from a sample involves two types of error: bias and sampling error. *Bias* is the difference between the underlying reality of the population and the reported result from the sample. If,

factually speaking, the incumbent has 50 percent support in the electorate, but a poll shows only 49 percent support in its sample, the poll is slightly biased against the incumbent. The problem is that pollsters do not have access to the absolute facts of the entire population, only to the results from survey samples. Researchers are left to estimate the plausible sampling error with a confidence interval.

Among statistical theorists, the exact meaning of a *confidence interval* is subject to dispute, but one way to understand the concept is to say that it marks the range within which a researcher might expect to find the true level of support or opposition in a randomly drawn sample. If support for a candidate in a thousand-person sample is 50 percent and the level of confidence is 95 percent, then the confidence interval would be roughly ±3 percent; a researcher would understand that there is a 5 percent chance that a sample drawn from that population would fall outside the specified bounds, that is, would show a support level of more than 53 percent or less than 47 percent. If the difference between the incumbent's measured support (say, 51 percent) and the challenger's (49 percent) is less than the three point margin of error, journalists might call the race a "statistical dead heat."

When deciding on sample size, a consultant must determine how much error can be tolerated. The reason: Random sampling, by its very nature, is a game of chance, and sometimes randomly selected groups will be unrepresentative. Minimizing the odds of a "fluky" poll demands a large sample. A 5 percent margin of error at 95 percent confidence requires perhaps 384 respondents; a 3 percent margin at 99 percent confidence might require 1,843 respondents (see Table 5.1). Splitting the sample into subgroups might require "oversampling" certain subgroups to maintain a high level of confidence in the population of interest. Tighter boundaries and higher levels of confidence entail larger sample sizes, so campaign

Table 5.1
Margins of Error and Measures of Confidence

Margin of Error (%)	*95% Confidence*	*99% Confidence*
±7	196	339
±6	267	461
±5	384	663
±4	600	1,037
±3	1,067	1,843
±2	2,401	4,147
±1	9,604	16,587

operatives are forced to choose between saving money and achieving accuracy.

If sampling procedures do not generate a list of potential respondents that accurately reflects the general population, even large samples can fail, and sometimes the practicalities of survey administration create imbalances within a sample. For example, 600 interviews might be run, many of them in the afternoon. At that time of day, the sample might contain an overabundance of older respondents and female respondents if these groups have a greater tendency to be at home and a greater willingness to field questions.

If 250 males are interviewed, but demographic research shows that 312 males were needed to build a representative sample, one solution is to give more weight to each male's response. Alternatively, the pollster might set a demographic quota before the interviewing begins and keep calling males until the correct number is reached. But even these corrections might be flawed. The males at home during the day might have different party or candidate preferences from those of the men who are at work. They might labor at night jobs, be employed part-time, or simply be unemployed. The same goes for female respondents. Thus, the set of individuals whom a pollster can interview in the middle of a workday is not necessarily representative of all the individuals in the district, and even demographic weighting can mislead—all the more reason for a pollster to make several attempts at reaching a voter who does not answer the phone. And even if the pollster could reach everyone on the sample list, the fact that some people will decline the chance to be interviewed will produce a degree of nonresponse error.

Question Construction

Pollsters talk about "good" and "bad" questions. A good question is one that will be understood by just about every respondent. Clear language and bilingual interviewers can aid the process. The average citizen has little policy expertise, so questions about environmental issues might require discussion about the "loss of trees" rather than "deforestation." For the same reason, a question's wording should not steer respondents toward any particular response: "Do you believe in the constitutional right to keep and bear arms?" predisposes a respondent to answer yes.

Professional pollsters spend a lot of time figuring out how to word questionnaires in just the right way. Colloquial phrases might skew results. Slang means different things to different people, and its interpretation might vary by age, class, and ethnicity. Indefinite terms can also become problematic. What does "frequently" mean? How many is

"several"? Even the word "voter" can be vague. If the interviewer asks, "Are you a voter?" and the reply is yes, is the respondent indicating a vote in every election, every general election, or every presidential election—or a one-time vote for a compelling candidate a decade ago? Also to be avoided are complex questions that ask about two things at once, as well as simple questions that assume facts not in evidence.

Further distinctions can be made among various types of questions (Backstrom and Hursh-Cesar 1981). An information question asks about facts relating directly to the respondent, such as standard demographic items (e.g., age, sex, race, income). A knowledge question goes to the wider domain of verifiable facts (e.g., the identity of the respondent's congressional representative). An opinion question asks for a judgment (e.g., the respondent's attitudes toward an issue or candidate). A self-perception question relates directly to the respondent (e.g., whether the respondent considers him- or herself a Democrat).

Any of these four types of questions can be asked in an open-response or a closed-response format. In an open-response question, the person answers in his or her own words. Open-response formats might require interviewers to know a great deal about the topic at hand. Asking "What do you believe is the most important problem facing America?" might bring a wide array of responses, and an ill-informed interviewer may well transcribe or interpret a complicated answer incorrectly. In the closed-response format, the respondent is asked to choose from a predetermined set of answers. Closed-response items are easier to record, but they may force respondents into judgments they would not offer on their own.

One important use of closed-format questions is for screening. Filter questions ensure the relevance of subsequent questions. A filter question might ask whether respondents intend to vote in the upcoming election. If the answer is no, the survey might terminate. Why spend money gathering information from a nonvoter? Then again, a campaign might want to know what sorts of issues would prompt a decision to vote, which would be helpful to a get-out-the-vote effort.

After a respondent passes through the filter and is asked a few substantive questions, the polling agent might ask a sleeper or probe question. A probe seeks detail about a previous response. For example, if the questioner had asked, "In politics, do you normally think of yourself as a Democrat, an independent, a Republican, or something else?" and the respondent replied Democrat, a probe might go on to inquire, "Do you consider yourself a strong or weak Democrat?" Individuals who call themselves independents might be pressed on the angle of their lean. Sleeper questions check the veracity of a respondent's answers to other questions. At some point in a questionnaire, the respondent might

be asked whether he or she voted in the most recent election; later on, a sleeper question might ask about the location of the polling place.

Administration

With a sample set and a questionnaire in hand, the next step is to make contact with voters. Modern polling firms train callers to be professional. Written guidelines from Jeffrey M. Stonecash, a scholar who has worked for political campaigns, instruct callers to "follow the script at all times; deviations and attempts to elaborate/interpret questions ruin the validity of responses" (2008, 78). Dispassion is intended to remove the caller's ideosyncracies from the polling equation. "Interviewer effects" crop up when something about the person asking questions winds up influencing the answers coming from the respondents. Beyond tone of voice or unconscious prompting, vocal characteristics associated with gender and race can alter the results (ibid., 76).

One way to manage interviewer effects while lowering the cost of survey research is to have a computer do the asking. Interactive voice response (IVR) systems work like the CATI software employed by live interviewers, except that the questions are asked by a computer and responses are written directly to the database (which means that it is not always possible to know who is answering the phone). In the same way that a bank's customer service line might guide a client through a variety of options, an IVR system asks questions and branches respondents to new queries based on the answers received. The value of this technology was debated throughout the 2008 electoral cycle (see Omero 2008), but if, as Stonecash notes, race and gender influence responses, the anonymity of an IVR system might reduce interviewer effects (though respondent anonymity might also produce disconcerting answers to these sorts of questions).

Yet another alternative is Internet polling. This form of administration carries built-in benefits, not the least of which is the instant delivery of media content. A respondent could watch a proposed commercial and comment on it without marching down to a research firm. Moreover, "the cost of transmission of information is very low; the speed of transmission is very high; and the data are immediately available to the analyst" (O'Muircheartaigh 2008, 306). While some advocates of Internet polling believe they can approximate demographic balance with quotas or weighting, detractors are not yet convinced. The people who go online are disproportionately young, educated, and affluent—and those willing to participate in online surveys are probably more engaged in political discussion than the average voter. The controversy over the value of opt-in Internet survey results is ongoing (see Foster 2006, 34).

One experiment has found, albeit tentatively, that Internet surveys might generate useful information (Hill et al. 2007), while another has found serious problems with some Internet survey designs (Yeager et al. 2009).

DATA ANALYSIS

Assuming that a poll was well constructed and well administered, its results will speak to the beliefs and opinions of a district's voters. Candidates may express interest about procedural matters, but they might well be more interested in seeing the results. Tables 5.2 through 5.6 display the findings of a poll regarding a notional Senate race between Democrat Bob Smith, Republican Mark Wilson, and independent Joan Jones.

Table 5.2 shows that 452 individuals said they were "very interested" in the election, representing 43.1 percent of nonmissing cases. This form of tabulation is called a frequency distribution. At the bottom of the grid is the number of respondents who answered "Don't know." These respondents were unable or unwilling to answer the question. The 13 individuals in this category constitute 1.2 percent of the sample. A large number of "Don't know" responses can suggest either an ambivalent electorate or a bad question.

The poll shows a clear lead for Wilson. Table 5.3 reports candidate preference. The results indicate that Wilson is ahead with about 43 percent of the voters who expressed a preference, as compared to roughly 33 percent for Smith and nearly 4 percent for Jones. In Table 5.4 are results from a probe that was asked of all respondents who stated a preference. The CATI screen would have prompted interviewers to ask, "How certain are you to vote for [candidate's name]?" Roughly a third of the respondents said they were "somewhat" sure they would vote for their candidate on Election Day.

Table 5.2
Interest Level Question
In the election for the U.S. Senate, the Democrat Bob Smith is running against Republican Mark Wilson, and the independent Joan Jones. Would you say that you are very, somewhat, just a little, or not at all interested in this race?
(1) Very (2) Somewhat (3) Little (4) Not at all (9) Don't know

	Observed Frequency	*Percent of Total*	*Percent of Nonmissing Cases*
Very	452	42.60	43.13
Somewhat	360	33.93	34.35
Little	115	10.84	10.97
Not at all	121	11.40	11.55
Don't know	13	1.23	—

Perhaps the most important category is the "undecided" voter. Table 5.5 shows preferences for those individuals who indicated they had not yet made up their minds or intended to skip the race. Each was asked which way he or she leaned, and the uncommitted were apportioned to their respective candidates. More than 80 percent of respondents had already expressed a preference in the initial vote-choice question and therefore were not asked this question. Of those who were, more were leaning toward Smith than the others, but most appeared to be truly undecided.

A cross-tabulation displays the frequency of responses to one item within the categories established by another. This sort of breakdown helps a campaign visualize the intersection of two variables. Table 5.6 shows candidate preference cross-tabulated by interest among voters who intended to vote in person. The column headed "Very" shows the number of individuals who said they were "very interested" in the race. In that column, the cells for the individual candidates show Wilson leading Smith by about 54 to 35 points. In the second column are individuals who reported that they were "somewhat interested" in the race. Here, the relevant cells show Smith closing the gap to about 6 points. Among those individuals who said they are only "a little interested," Smith appears to lead by a 4.5-point margin. A majority of those who said that they were "not at all interested" in the race said they did not intend to vote.

CONCLUSION

Campaign polls are usually run by professional polling firms, not in-house volunteer operations, where enthusiasm and inexperience might

Table 5.3
Candidate Preference Question
If the election were held today, would you vote for Mr. Smith, Mr. Wilson, or Ms. Jones, or would you skip the race? (1) Smith (2) Wilson (3) Jones (4) skip (5) Undecided-IF VOLUNTEERED (9) Don't know

	Observed Frequency	*Percent of Total*	*Percent of Nonmissing Cases*
Smith	343	32.33	33.17
Wilson	447	42.13	43.23
Jones	39	3.68	3.77
Skip	109	10.27	10.54
Undecided	96	9.05	9.28
Don't know	27	2.54	—

Table 5.4
Preference Probe
How certain are you that you will vote for [candidate's name]? Very certain, somewhat certain, not at all certain, or don't know? (1) Very certain (2) Somewhat (3) Not at all (9) Don't know

	Observed Frequency	*Percent of Total*	*Percent of Nonmissing Cases*
Missing	232	21.87	—
Very certain	521	49.10	63.30
Somewhat	273	25.73	33.17
Not at all	29	2.73	3.52
Don't know	6	0.57	—

introduce unwanted variables. But outsourcing carries its own set of risks. Polling firms, which might themselves contract out survey administration, may be using callers who differ in training and tenure. While almost anyone can be taught how to read a questionnaire out loud, few people are superb conversationalists. Even the method of payment can affect data quality. An hourly wage might reduce the incentive to submit bogus call reports, but it provides less motivation to complete the calls in a timely manner. Piecework payments might reward persistent employees but they might also credit sham call reports. Supervisors sometimes hook into interviews, call respondents back for confirmation, or even allow clients to listen in on the process, but regrettably, there is no way to guarantee perfect survey administration.

Not every used-car buyer is a mechanic, but an informed shopper can look under the hood for oil leaks and broken hoses. The same holds true

Table 5.5
Undecided Probe
Are you LEANING toward Mr. Smith, Mr. Wilson, or Ms. Jones? (1) Smith (2) Wilson (3) Jones (5) Undecided (9) Don't know

	Observed Frequency	*Percent of Total*	*Percent of Nonmissing Cases*
Missing	856	80.68	—
Smith	34	3.20	20.36
Wilson	27	2.54	16.17
Jones	4	.38	2.40
Undecided	102	9.61	61.08
Don't know	38	3.58	—

Table 5.6
Cross-Tabulation of Interest Level by Vote Intention

	Level of Interest in Campaign				
	Very	*Somewhat*	*Little*	*Not at all*	*Total*
Smith	158	124	43	17	342
	(35.4%)	(35.0%)	(38.7%)	(14.9%)	(33.3%)
Wilson	242	244	38	21	445
	(54.1%)	(40.7%)	(34.2%)	(18.4%)	(43.4%)
Jones	18	15	3	3	39
	(4.0%)	(4.2%)	(2.7%)	(2.6%)	(3.8%)
Won't Vote	3	35	11	59	108
	(0.7%)	(9.9%)	(9.9%)	(51.8%)	(10.5%)
Undecided	26	36	16	14	92
	(5.8%)	(10.2%)	(14.4%)	(12.3%)	(9.0%)
Total	447	354	111	114	1,026
	(43.6%)	(34.5%)	(10.8%)	(11.1%)	(100.0%)

for polling services. Knowing basic survey techniques and a range of analytic tools reduces the risk of a costly mistake. Consultants must therefore be good consumers of survey data, aware of the many pitfalls of polling. There are, to be sure, scores of analytic techniques that pollsters can use to coax hidden findings from the data. Some firms build regression models or use more sophisticated procedures, and survey data can be laid over demographic and electoral information. Advanced methods are employed to find the right place to position candidates in the electoral environment and to target voters on a one-to-one basis.

NOTE

A significant portion of this chapter is adapted from Jesse Marquette, "How to Become a Wise Consumer of Campaign Polling," in Daniel M. Shea (ed.), *Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996).

Chapter 6

Voter Targeting

In 1994, voters took power from the Democrats in the House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate and handed both legislative chambers to the Republicans. "Safe" Democratic candidates went down to defeat. Speaker of the House Tom Foley lost his congressional district to an attorney who had never held elective office. It was a political bloodbath widely interpreted as a rejection of the Democratic Party in general and the Democratic president in particular. Many thought Bill Clinton could do little more than bide his time until his eventual downfall in 1996. Some thought a challenger would rise from within the Democratic ranks and beat the incumbent president in the primaries.

After the rout, two schools of strategic thought emerged among the president's supporters. The first was liberal. Many of the losing Democrats were moderate or conservative, and the Democrats who remained standing after 1994 were more partisan than their predecessors. The liberal view held that the president should concentrate on his Democratic base. The idea made sense: Why should the president cast himself as a Republican in Democratic clothing? After all, it was said, given the choice between a Republican and a Republican, the people will choose the Republican every time. The other school argued for centrism. The votes lost in 1994 fell from the center, not the left. To win in 1996, the middle ground had to be recaptured.

Consultant Dick Morris, who had advised both Democrats and Republicans during his career, gave the centrist approach his own sly twist: Press simultaneously against the Democratic left and the Republican right, find the center, and rise above partisan conflict. Morris called his strategy "triangulation." In his words, "The president needed to take

a position that not only blended the best of each party's views but also transcended them to constitute a third force in the debate." By following this path, Morris wrote, "either [Clinton] will be repudiated by the voters and slink back into the orthodox positions or he will attract support and, eventually, bring his party with him" (1999, 80–81). While the policies engendered by triangulation would later be called too moderate, too small, or too cynical, many have concluded that the strategy was politically sound.

Thoughtful candidate positioning was accomplished in the old retail politics, but it gained importance with the rise of new-style campaigns. As mass-marketing becomes more customized, the focus is turning toward highly specific forms of communication, helping candidates and their consultants reach individual voters with personally tailored messages. Broad-based understanding of entire districts is being refined into narrowly focused analytics that traffic in neighborhoods and individuals. In many ways, a discussion of voter targeting is the culmination of campaign planning, candidate and opposition profiling, voter segmentation, and campaign polling. Without a target, a campaign has no direction; without a theme, it has no rationale.

This chapter discusses three aspects of voter targeting: strategic positioning, microtargeting, and the development of effective campaign themes.

STRATEGIC POSITIONING

The size and character of electorates can vary from one community to the next. A sparsely populated area might supply a rich lode of swing votes while an urban center might offer a relative handful. In some precincts, Democrats never stand a chance, while in others, the Republican always suffers, and in still other areas, the outcome is usually in doubt. The approach a campaign takes to a given electorate—whom it will target and how it will gain the target votes—stems largely from the composition of the electorate it must persuade. A precinct or district with a strong party tradition demands one strategy; an area with a large toss-up vote calls for another. For campaign professionals, there are no immutable rules, only reasoned guidelines.

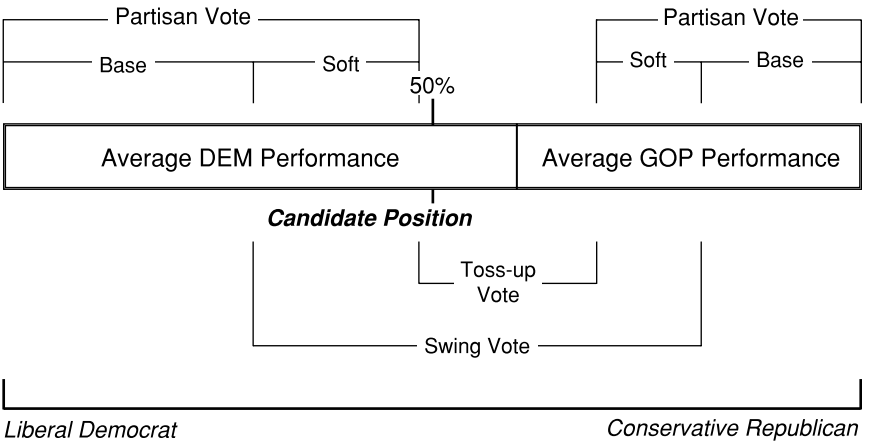
Targeting can begin with three distinct goals: *reinforcement, persuasion*, and *conversion*. Reinforcement is the task of making sure partisan voters stick with the candidate; persuasion brings toss-up voters on board; and conversion is the act of cajoling opposition voters to switch sides. In general terms, a campaign reinforces its own partisans, persuades the toss-ups, and converts the partisans of the opposition.

It is easier to reinforce or persuade voters than to convert them. When the candidate is a member of a heavily favored party, the campaign might focus exclusively on reinforcement. The object would be to get the partisan voters to show up at the polls or to mail in their ballots. In politically volatile areas, where neither candidate has an edge, persuasion might be the central strategy. If most voters are committed to the opponent's party or if a challenger faces a popular incumbent, conversion might be paramount. Early research and campaign polling can say a lot about a district, and registration lists offer basic facts about individual voters, often including party affiliation. (Party identification remains a highly reliable predictor of voting habits.) Combining this information into a larger portrait of the electorate can suggest the loyalty of a district.

Figure 6.1 reflects a district that puts the Democrat in good stead. Democratic partisans comprise just under 50 percent of the vote, while Republican partisans are only about 30 percent. Further, the Democratic base is about 50 percent larger than the Republican base. As such, a Democrat's goal might be to reinforce partisan supporters while persuading a small number of toss-up voters. Winning requires no converts, as many of the swing voters would be predisposed to vote Democratic anyway. A Democrat's best strategic position might lie among the soft Democratic partisans.

There was little question as to which section of the electorate Democrat Jesse Jackson Jr. needed to target in his 1995 special election to fill Illinois's Second Congressional District seat. African Americans made up more than two-thirds of the Second District, which extended from Chicago's

Figure 6.1
Strategizing a Partisan District: The Democratic Favorite



South Side into the nearby suburbs (Benenson 1995). Party enrollment roughly paralleled the demographics, with the inner-city areas overwhelmingly Democratic and the suburbs solidly Republican. The Jackson campaign targeted the city. On Election Day, Jackson won 98 percent in the inner-city precincts and even got 51 percent of the suburban vote. This was enough to give Jackson a three-to-one majority overall (Johnson 1995).

Some candidates enjoy the benefits of partisanship; others suffer. Looking at the district in Figure 6.2 from the Republican side, one finds a bleak landscape. A Republican campaign has little choice but to try to convert some Democratic partisans. Because the race is a long shot, it may be necessary to take Republican voters for granted, hoping they will stick with the GOP candidate. Reinforcement might take the form of a get-out-the-vote drive. Assuming that some Republican partisans will be lost and a fair number of middle-ground voters will go Democratic, a number of Democratic soft-partisans must be converted. To do so, a Republican candidate might take a position at the center of the electorate, well to the left of the GOP base.

Low turnout and high creativity can help. Republican Bill Redmond found a way to prevail in the heavily Democratic Third District of New Mexico. In 1996, Democrat Bill Richardson beat Redmond with two-thirds of the vote. When Richardson was tapped to become ambassador to the United Nations in 1997, the seat opened up for a special election. Like Jackson, Redmond would benefit from low voter turnout, which makes a motivated base all the more significant, but Redmond had to do more. In addition to energizing the base, the Redmond campaign moved to break up Democratic partisanship by praising a Green Party candidate who was

Figure 6.2
Strategizing a Partisan District: The Republican Underdog

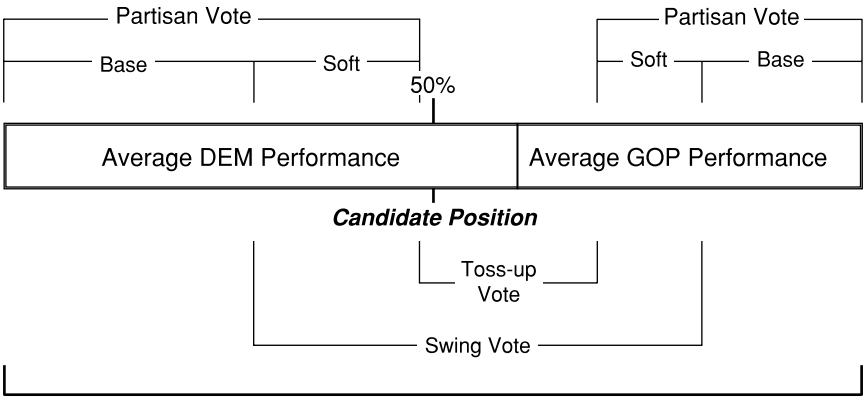
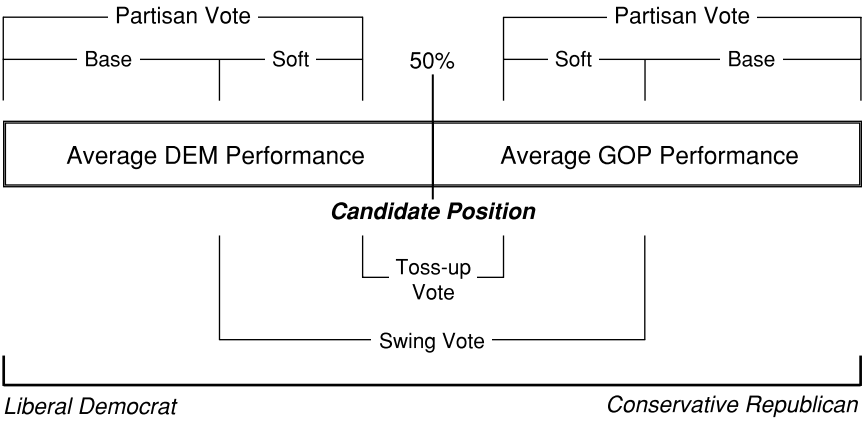


Figure 6.3
Strategizing a Toss-up District



peeling off left-liberal voters. According to Redmond's campaign team, the strategy was basic: "By identifying Redmond as a warm, caring person, we were able to blunt . . . textbook Democratic attacks of extremism that hurt so many candidates in 1996" (Wilson and Burita 2000, 98). Having positioned himself as a moderate—playing down his conservative credentials—Redmond won the election with a 43-percent plurality, beating the Democrat by just three percentage points.

Toss-up districts present a different set of problems. Figure 6.3 suggests a district with no clear bias. In one sense, the strategy is the same as it would be for an underdog: the candidate should find a position near the center. A basic strategy is to reinforce the partisans and persuade the toss-up voters.

Few races have been more evenly matched than the 1998 Senate fight between Democrat Scotty Baesler and Republican Jim Bunning. The first was known in Kentucky from his college basketball days, the second from a career in professional baseball. Each was a sitting congressman in a state that split its votes between Democrats and Republicans. Both candidates were in the conservative wing of their respective parties. Bunning, however, positioned himself as a moderate and then began running attack ads. According to political scientists who studied the race, Bunning "lay claim to the traditional Democratic issue of protecting Social Security" (Gross and Miller 2000, 189) and used this position as a strong foundation from which to commence a harsh advertising barrage against the Democrat.

Narrow targeting works. Bunning, Redmond, and Jackson ran hard, but they also ran smart. The folly of reaching broadly is twofold. First, political campaigns live on scarce resources. Time and money should be spent

where they will do the most good, so campaigns have to be efficient. Second, covering areas where there is little chance of success can do harm. If people who are predisposed to vote against a candidate start receiving literature and phone calls that denigrate their party and challenge their convictions, opposition interest can be piqued, and some otherwise lazy partisans might be activated to cast a vote (the wrong way).

Many campaigns adopt an approach that squares with "median voter theory." This scholarly conjecture states, in essence, that an electorate bulging with ideological centrists will entice candidates from both ends of the spectrum to run toward the center. In the middle lies the ideal point where some "pivotal voter" resides, and capturing *this* voter decides the election. This middle-of-the-road pivotal voter is the same person for both major party candidates. The logic of the model, which was detailed by Anthony Downs (1957), explains why both sides of the partisan divide so often chase voters at the center of the electorate. It should not be surprising that, in recent presidential elections, "battleground residents were *not* more likely to be contacted by only one party . . . instead, they were much more likely to be contacted by *both* parties" (Panagopoulos and Wielhouwer 2008).

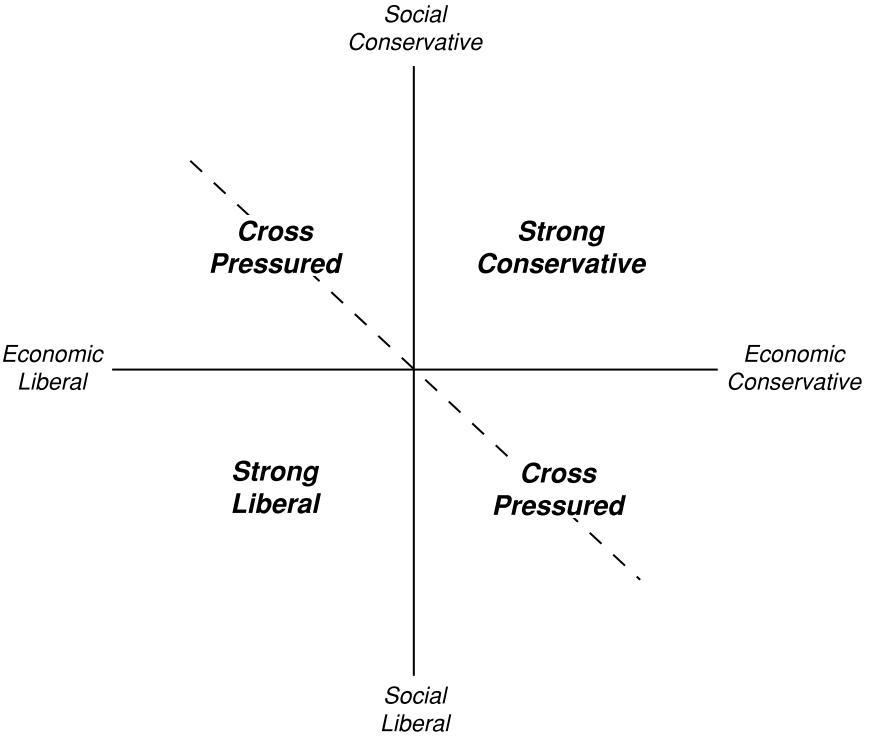
There are important exceptions to this rule. In 2004, the Bush campaign eked out a win by concentrating on its highly motivated base. A base strategy often relies on voter polarization. If half the electorate is Democratic and half is Republican and few people are persuadable, the key to victory might lie with getting one's own voters to show up in larger numbers. Karl Rove, who is often credited with developing the approach, has admitted that it is a "risky strategy," but the method has a strong rationale. An insider described the strategy this way: "Karl does not believe there's a true 'middle,'" because "everyone is a 'leaner,' and the leaners are affected by the actions of the base" (Kornblut 2004). By this line of thought, energizing the base increases the number of votes among natural supporters while at the same time gathering up a quantity of centrists who feel the effects of base enthusiasm.

Base energy is important, and sometimes a centrist approach fails. In 1998, in Ohio's Sixth Congressional District, Lt. Gov. Nancy Hollister, a Republican, tried to draw moderate voters from incumbent Democrat Ted Strickland. The district had thrashed back and forth between the major parties since 1992, with 2 percent margins each time. Hollister was a quality candidate, but after a bruising primary with conservative GOP rivals, she was caught on the horns of a dilemma: Winning the district seemed to entail holding the center, but holding the center meant risking the base. When Hollister's moderate campaign began, the right wing of the GOP might have had trouble understanding where the

candidate stood on issues like abortion. A centrist message seemed to disenchant the conservative base (Burton and Shea 2003). In the end, Hollister lost the socially conservative district by 14 points.

One difficulty with a simplistic interpretation of median voter theory is that it fails to recognize the power of base voters. Another is that it squeezes the electorate into a single ideological dimension. Life is more complicated than that. If a line is drawn between the extremes of left-wing liberalism and right-wing conservatism, where should a strategist place, say, a pro-growth opponent of capital gains taxes who believes women should have the right to choose an abortion? Or a blue-collar union member who believes in government-paid health care but wants to protect gun rights? These voters are pushed in different directions; they are "cross-pressured"—that is, two important factors run in different directions at once. A more realistic approach is to draw political space along two or more axes, perhaps beginning with social and economic values, as illustrated in Figure 6.4 (see also Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope 2006, 170–82). The main concept is the same as a one-dimensional analysis—

Figure 6.4
Ideological and Cross-Pressured Voters



find the center of balance between opposing forces—but the multidimensional model is more subtle, which is to say, more informative.

Some issues do not fit an ideological continuum at all. Donald Stokes, an early critic of Downs, contrasted "position issues," which can be placed along a linear axis, with "valence issues," which cannot. A valence issue is one that has broad consensus, like opposition to crime or corruption. Voters dislike a corrupt politician, no matter which party the politician represents. In the 1950s, questions about corruption were raised along with questions about the economy and the Cold War:

> As the Republicans looked over the prospective issues for 1952, their problem was not whether to come out for or against Communistic subversion or prosperity or corruption in Washington. It was rather to put together a collection of issues of real or potential public concern whose positive and negative valences would aid the Republicans and embarrass the Democrats. (Stokes 1966, 173)

Base partisans find ways to validate or vilify candidates on the basis of ideology, but persuadable voters are more amenable to the power of valence issues (or they might not be considered so persuadable).

To a large degree, the choice of candidate position will depend on a strategist's assumptions about the decision-making processes of voters. Scholarly efforts to devise a general theory of voting behavior once focused on socioeconomics. In *The People's Choice* (1944), Paul Lazarsfeld, Bernard Berelson, and Hazel Gaudet surveyed a group of voters over the course of the 1940 campaign season and found that only a handful changed allegiance from one candidate to the other. Candidate selection seemed to be a function of the voter's social and economic class. So if, as was true at the time, downscale Catholics voted for Democrats, an individual voter's "choice" could be predicted from religion and income. Persuasion mainly entered into the equation where voters were cross-pressured. *Upscale* Catholics were pulled in two directions simultaneously and had to make decisions.

When voters had to make such a decision, they did so not by listening to the radio or campaign operatives, but by talking to people within their social circles. This point was made a few years later by Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee in *Voting* (1954): Like "music, literature, recreational activities, dress, ethics, speech, [and] social behavior," they wrote, political decisions "have their origin in ethnic, sectional, class, and family traditions" and "exhibit stability and resistance to change. . . . While both are responsive to changed conditions and unusual stimuli, they are relatively invulnerable to direct argumentation and vulnerable to indirect

social influences" (310–11). Campaign persuasion, it seemed, had minimal effects.

The work of Lazarsfeld and his colleagues was followed by research that placed less emphasis on social and economic position and more on voter attitudes and party identification. In *The American Voter* (1960), Angus Campbell, Phillip Converse, Warren Miller, and Donald Stokes argued that voting behavior worked its way through a "funnel of causality" that began with a voter's demographic position but proceeded through the development of party identification (largely inherited from parents) and later to candidate perceptions. Party identification is generally gained early in life and tends to screen out messages from the opposition, so short-term influences such as candidate imagery have meager impact on ballot-booth decisions. From this point of view, a campaign that believes it can persuade a mass of voters to defect from the opposition by talking about the issues will run up against decades of political socialization (see also Miller and Shanks 1996; Lewis-Beck et al. 2008).

Some observers believed that a focus on demographics and party identification was too pessimistic. "Voters are not fools," declared V. O. Key (1966, 7), who argued that people look at recent history and decide whether the current officeholders are worth keeping or if the voters should throw the bums out. Voters can make a rational decision to "stand pat" or to "switch." For campaign strategists, this might mean highlighting what's right or wrong (depending on whether the candidate is an incumbent or a challenger) with the current state of affairs.

Key was arguing that voters are thinking about policy choices even if they lack comprehensive knowledge of public policy. Likewise, Morris Fiorina (1981) has argued that voters keep tabs on how the governing party seems to be doing, and Samuel Popkin (1991) has argued that uninformed voters are not necessarily irrational, just under-resourced in political knowledge. If people vote rationally in the sense that they are making decisions to advance their own interests, it stands to reason that voters who know a lot about the candidates and their positions would not need new information—and would not be persuaded by its acquisition—whereas those who know little about politics would be more open to persuasion.

From the campaign operative's point of view, the problem with classic formulations might lie in the dearth of persuadable voters they seem to offer. With either the socioeconomic or partisan attachment model, the voter's choice is largely predetermined; the models that assume voter rationality tend to imply that the few voters who are open to persuasion are disaffected or disinterested and therefore not predisposed to vote. It is difficult to say why candidates bother campaigning at all.

Sunshine Hillygus and Todd Shields (2008) combine the classic models into a new approach that seems to be a better fit with what campaigns actually do in the heat of battle. Voters have party attachments *and* policy preferences, and they can become cross-pressured; but for Hillygus and Shields, political cross-pressuring exists where there is an incongruence of policy preferences and party attachment. "The most persuadable voters in the electorate are those individuals with a foot in each candidate's camp," Hillygus and Shields write.

> This group of persuadable voters includes some political Independents who are closer to the Republican candidate on some issues and the Democratic candidate on other issues, but it is primarily composed of partisans who disagree with their party on a personally important policy issue. These are the "but otherwise" Democrats and Republicans, as in the voter who is "pro-life, but otherwise Democratic" or "opposed to the Iraq War, but otherwise Republican." These cross-pressured voters have a more difficult time deciding between the candidates, so they turn to campaign information to help decide between the competing considerations. (5)

Following this logic, a campaign would want to take advantage of the fact that many persuadable voters are highly interested in the election—but are stalling on their final answer because they are ambivalent, because some important policy preference is not squaring with their party's candidate. Hillygus and Shields find that wide swaths of the electorate are in some sense persuadable, a conclusion that squares with the understanding held by some professionals (see Winston 2010).

The argument Hillygus and Shields put forward in *The Persuadable Voter* has profound implications for strategic targeting. The best issues, it seems, might be "wedge issues," which force members of the opponent's constituency to decide between loyalty and policy. Importantly, *wedge issues*, as the term is used here, refers not merely to divisive issues, but to issues that test the opposition's coalition. That is, wedge issues can be "aimed at pulling away voters from the other camp" (Hillygus and Shields 2008, 2). Because a two-party system inherently contains divergent policy preferences—voters do not constrain themselves simply to option "R" or option "D"—the reservoir of wedge issues is deep and the opportunity for voter persuasion is wide (ibid., 4).

Using a mixed method analysis of the 2004 election, Hillygus and Shields estimated that much of the electorate was up for grabs.

MICROTARGETING

Issues—whether positional, valence, or wedge—are bundled up in the minds of individual voters, and campaign operatives long to discover

which issues will work politically and which will not. Polling, demographic research, electoral history, and a strong understanding of local politics all provide a good sense of a district. Strategists who want to broadcast a message far and wide could find inferences drawn from generalized sources of information perfectly appropriate to their needs. But sweeping analysis was better suited to the days of mass media campaigning than new-millennium customization. With the rise of information technology, political campaigns have more opportunity to reach voters directly, and they are gaining the data and analytic tools they need to target those voters individually.

The rise of microtargeting can be traced to low-tech direct mail. Richard Viguerie collected the names of people who donated to Barry Goldwater's 1964 presidential campaign and built a small empire on that foundation. Over time, targeting became much more ambitious and far more computer intensive, merging preexisting data from outside the campaigns and voter identification generated by the parties and candidates themselves. More than just collecting names, microtargeting can be said to operate by

> taking whatever individual-level information is available . . . and combining it with demographic and geographic marketing data about those individuals to build statistical models that predict the attitudes and behaviors of voters for whom that individual level behavior is not known. (Strasma n.d.)

One early use of computationally intensive targeting arrived in the early 1970s when the Claritas Corporation broke new ground with "geodemographic clusters." The underlying assumption was that people gather into "areas where the resources—physical, economic, and social—are compatible with their needs" (Robbin 1989, 109). In other words, people choose their neighborhoods according to their lifestyles. These neighborhoods, in turn, have identifiable characteristics that can be used to draw inferences about the people living there. By examining 535 variables for the entire U.S. population, Claritas established dozens of distinct groupings that, it said, accounted for much of American diversity. Each cluster was given a nickname. One was called "Share Croppers" because it contained low-income, rural, poorly educated Southern whites. Other groups were labeled "God's Country," "Archie Bunker's Neighbors," and "Bohemian Mix." Each cluster was purported to comprise approximately like-minded individuals. Geodemographics thereby transformed a casual perception of neighborhood life into a sophisticated understanding of shared thinking.

One analysis found fault with the new approach. Researcher Mark Atlas argued that geodemographic clusters did not live up to their

billing. First, before-and-after evidence provided by the company, when reexamined, seemed to offer little evidence that the system changed electoral outcomes. Second, at a more conceptual level, Atlas wrote, "the forty Clusters derived from the entire nation's Census data may be very different from clusters that would be generated if each state's data had been clustered individually" (1989, 134). "The allocation of campaign resources," argued Atlas, "is too crucial a task to be undertaken when there is substantial uncertainty about the targeting procedure's validity both in theory and in practice" (135).

Voter constellations gained new importance a decade later. In 2000, Karl Rove, who came to presidential politics by way of the direct mail industry, believed the microtargeting techniques that had increased profits in the private sector could increase vote shares in politics (Wayne 2008). In the years leading up to the 2004 election, the GOP put roughly $20 million into a database it called the "Voter Vault" (Baldwin 2006). The Vault was packed with individual-level data and augmented by shoe-leather efforts to speak with voters one-on-one and by appeals to submit "church membership rolls, hunting-club registries, college-fraternity directories and P.T.A. membership rosters" (Gertner 2004). Ed Gillespie, who chaired the Republican Party, said the effort could be used for early persuasion, yet added that "it's very, very important to us for people in the last 72 hours to e-mail their friends and knock on their doors and get Republicans to the polls" (Gertner 2004).

Parties and candidates have long maintained "house lists" of voters, contributors, and volunteers. Data might also be compiled from newspaper clippings, letters sent to the candidate, attendance at candidate forums and fund-raising events, and rosters of prior campaign staff (Selnow 1994, 75). House lists might also be assembled from political parties, interest groups, and other campaigns. Some elected officials might keep a list of voters who have expressed an interest in one topic or another, though many jurisdictions forbid the political use of information acquired during official hours or in the conduct of official business. Furthermore, election laws and privacy statutes regulate the collection, storage, and use of some lists. As with all other aspects of a campaign, compliance with legal and ethical codes must be the top priority.

Using voter files as a starting point, a new-style campaign might look for ways to enhance voter records. For at least two decades, campaigns have been able to add data from state motor vehicle departments, fish and game commissions, and county assessors (see Beiler 1990, 33). A list of people with hunting licenses can show concentrations of hunters, and the appropriate political inferences can be made. In addition to direct, individual-level knowledge, assumptions about characteristics such as ethnicity can be

imputed to the data records: "A last name beginning with O' might be Irish [and a] last name ending with 'ski' would more than likely be Polish" (ibid., 52). But imputation is not foolproof. "Park" is commonly a Korean name, but many people with the last name Park have no Korean heritage. And distinctions within an ethnic group can be subtle. One researcher has found politically meaningful differences between Hispanic voters with Latin surnames and those without (Pineda 2007).

List production has become a professionalized industry. Vendors offer data sets ranging from zip code sorts to club membership data to magazine subscription lists. Such lists might be rented directly from their owners or through a list broker. For campaigns that want to purchase the information outright, data firms build and maintain nationwide voter databases focused on party registration, probable ethnicity, gender, and so forth. Clients can customize data sets online with a keyboard, a mouse, and a credit card. These data can be merged with house lists and other demographic information to provide not simply a general understanding of the district but also a platform from which to launch precisely targeted voter contact operations. Database companies provide speed and accuracy, and campaign managers can request voter lists, phone numbers, and even entire mailing packages, transforming an onerous process that formerly relied on volunteers into an outsourced operation that can be administered largely online.

The implications of all this technology, and the power of their combined usage, are beginning to coalesce. Ken Mehlman, who managed the Bush 2004 campaign, was proud of his efforts:

> "We did what Visa did," Mr. Mehlman said. "We acquired a lot of consumer data. What magazine do you subscribe to? Do you own a gun? How often do the folks go to church? Where do you send your kids to school? Are you married? Based on that, we were able to develop an exact kind of consumer model that corporate America does every day to predict how people vote—not based on where they live but how they live," he said. "That was critically important to our success." (Nagourney 2004)

Prospective Bush voters were different from their counterparts on the Kerry side, not just in ideology but also in lifestyle. Mehlman noted that "supporters of Mr. Kerry had a preference for Volvos over Lincolns, and yoga over guns." As one example of how this information was used, he explained that "our demographic studies and analysis showed us that a lot of young families get information not at the 7 o'clock news but at the 7 o'clock workout before they got home," so the Bush campaign began running ads on networks that narrowcast into physical fitness centers (Nagourney 2004).

Microtargeting has received praise for helping to lift Virginia Democrat Tim Kaine to the governor's mansion and Montana Democrat Jon Tester to the U.S. Senate (Weigel 2006; Wayne 2008). Private firms on both sides of the aisle are providing their own expertise, running complex calculations on powerful computers using software they buy off the shelf or write for themselves. GOP microtargeting pioneer Alexander Gage admired the Obama operation in the closing days of the 2008 election, saying, "The quality and the quantity of their ground game is measurably better than the Republican campaign of 2004 or the McCain campaign" (Wayne 2008).

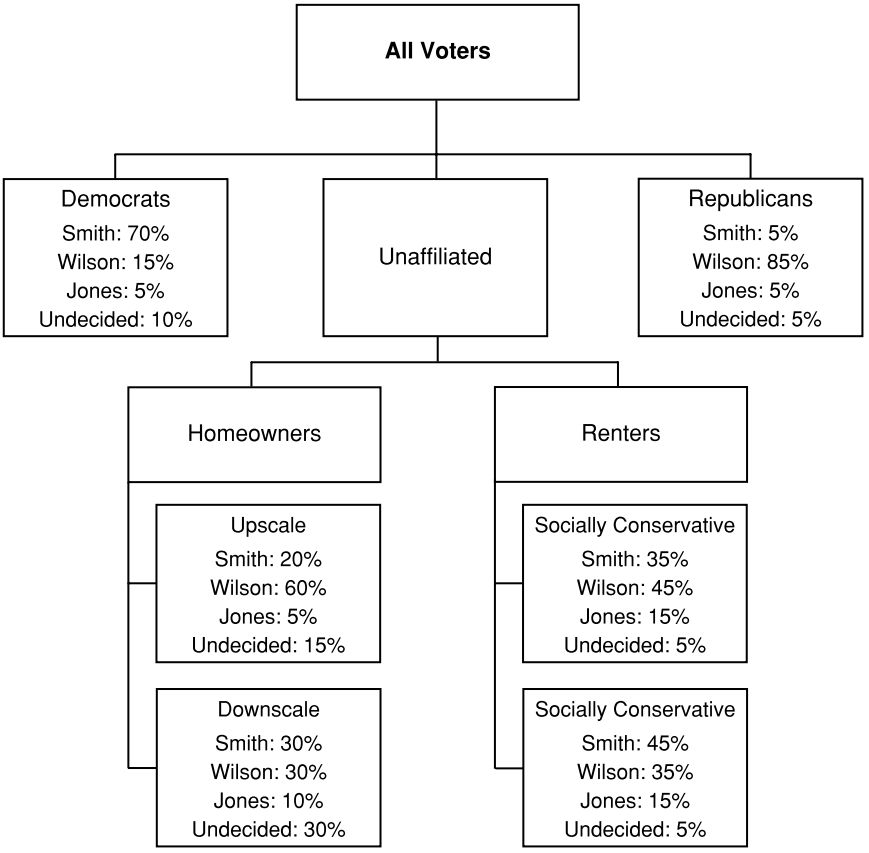
The challenge of microanalysis is largely computational, owing to the "curse of dimensionality." Each unit of complexity increases the number of possible models on an exponential basis. Assume that a campaign wants to run cross-tabulations on a comprehensive benchmark survey. The idea might be to print crosstabs for each possible two-, three-, and four-variable combination, beginning with

1. female
2. Democrats who
3. live in an urban precinct and
4. are persuaded by an environmental message

and then extending this form of analysis to each and every combination of variables. The result could easily be a million cross-tabulations. Unfortunately, breaking down a data set in this way can rapidly deplete the cases available to fill the many individual cells. If each variable has several categories, a four-variable crosstab can result in more than a thousand cells, which is a serious problem if the benchmark survey covered only four hundred respondents. This difficulty can be fixed by combining sparse cells into multicell groupings (e.g., rural women in one category, urban and suburban fused in another), except that including all possible *combinations* of cells in all possible crosstabs can multiply the number of potential cells into the billions.

Mathematical techniques can work around the curse of dimensionality, and segmenting political data often falls to professionals who know how to run "machine learning" algorithms such as decision trees. Roughly put, a decision-tree procedure figures out which variable creates the "best split" within a target variable—that is, which variable can be used to divide the data set into the strongest concentrations of, for example, supporters of Smith, Wilson, and Jones, as well as undecideds (see Figure 6.5). This variable is chosen as a splitting point (called a node), and the process starts with the full data set and continues until

Figure 6.5
Microtargeting Decision Tree



some stopping criteria (such as undersized groupings) is reached. To draw a notional example, the strongest split in an electorate might be among identified partisans, with Democrats going strongly for Smith and Republicans showing their support for Wilson. Among unaffiliated voters, the best split might be on domicile, between homeowners and renters, with a large number of undecideds among downscale voters, suggesting a highly attractive campaign target.

Decision-tree algorithms and other machine-learning procedures such as artificial neural networks fall outside the mainstream of statistical research and are subject to critique from traditional statisticians. Run enough tests and *some* kind of strong correlation will eventually be found, whether or not that correlation is meaningful. One critic of data mining in the field of economics showed that sheep populations can

accurately "predict" stock market behavior in the United States (Leinweber 2007): the same "stupid data miner tricks" can be performed in the service of political campaigns. Analysts must pay attention to detail, or they might find themselves building a model that "overfits" the data, creating a complex diagram that has no meaning beyond the original sample. Hal Malchow, who has been using the Chi-squared Automatic Interaction Detection (CHAID) algorithm to enhance voter contact since 1995, cautions that the technique "works best when you balance statistical measurements with a good dose of common sense" (2008, 96). Additionally, mathematical validation can trap some kinds of overfitting (see Burton 2010), and models can be checked with further research (perhaps by calling ostensible swing voters to see if they really are uncommitted). The sheer complexity of a microtargeting project reinforces the need for professionals.

CAMPAIGN THEMES

The idea behind voter segmentation, whether computer driven or gut-level, is that voters can be distinguished by sets of characteristics that cluster in ways that do not follow such simple traditional categories as partisanship, age, or income. American politics has seen competition for "soccer moms" and "NASCAR dads." In 2000, some Gore operatives scoffed at "Volvo drivers" who supported Bill Bradley. The 2004 cycle brought "security moms" to the forefront and in 2006 "mortgage moms" made a brief appearance, although they quickly gave way to "hockey moms" after Sarah Palin's enthusiastically received convention speech in 2008.

Even if thumbnail categories jam diverse populations into pigeonholes, valid characterizations can enrich a strategist's understanding of a district, adding information beyond the left–right continuum. Formulating segments and clusters can help locate pockets of support that will respond to a campaign theme or help find a theme that will move targeted voters.

A good campaign theme is a carefully crafted merger of what the voters want, what the candidate has to offer, and what the opponent brings to the table. Here lies the connection between candidate positioning, microtargeting, and the formulation of campaign themes: The candidate's position with respect to individual voters is given form and (perhaps) substance by a campaign theme and the issues that it represents.

Many campaign professionals believe it is imperative for voters to hear the theme repeatedly: "If you stick to it, and say it often enough, you will define the criteria for the voters that they should use to make

their choice" (Bradshaw 1995, 44). And creativity helps. Jesse Jackson Jr. was just 30 years old when he first ran for Congress: He said he was "young enough to stay long enough" (Johnson 1995). Peter Hoekstra stunned the Washington establishment by knocking off the chair of the National Republican Congressional Committee, Guy Vander Jagt, in the 1992 Michigan Republican primary. On a shoestring budget, Hoekstra pounded home the idea that Vander Jagt was a career politician more interested in national affairs than in Michiganders. Hoekstra rode around in a 1966 Nash Rambler, a clever reminder of the year Vander Jagt was first elected. The sign on the car read, "Isn't it time for a change?" (Morris and Gamache 1994, 116). In 2002, a year after 9/11, Republicans unified around the idea that they could best protect the American people from terrorism; in 2006, Democrats highlighted a widespread perception of Republican failure on a variety of fronts. These approaches sought voters from different directions, but each seemed to work as intended.

If voters are moved by forces beyond such durable political anchors as party and incumbency, campaign themes would seem critical—and even if party and incumbency are important to a voter's decision, the voters might need some reminding. A theme, as consultant Joel Bradshaw notes,

> is the single, central idea that the campaign communicates to voters to sum up the candidate's connection with the voters and their concerns and the contrast between your candidate and the opponent. It answers the question, Why should your candidate be elected—to this office at this time? (1995, 42)

If the candidate comes from the majority party in a heavily partisan area, party-based appeals might work. If the candidate is an incumbent and voters prefer experience, then a record of accomplishment might provide the right theme. Voters rarely have time to assess candidate appeals on each and every issue; a well-constructed theme links voter concerns with the candidate's approach.

The Bush 2004 campaign found a strong theme in the charge that John Kerry was a "flip-flopper," voting first one way, then the other. Almost every day, Bush supporters used some variation on the idea: Kerry would "flip-flop," he was "flipping and flopping," he "flipped and flopped," and so forth. The term was used so often that it merited an exegesis by William Safire (2004). A young man wearing a giant sandal costume—a monster flip-flop, that is—was seen walking around Boston while the city hosted the Democratic Convention. In a post-9/11

world, when Americans were looking for resolute leadership, the charge of inconsistency seemed a strong line of attack.

A campaign's theme should therefore be consistent with the candidate's past record. One function of opposition research is to locate discrepancies between a candidate's words and deeds, so a candidate whose chosen campaign theme is at odds with his or her past actions courts misfortune—along the lines of the "flip-flopper" charge leveled against Kerry. Also, the theme must be reasonably consistent with the views and actions of a candidate's supporters. Staffers and contributors who may once have worked on the other side of the candidate's current policy positions can become an unwanted part of a news story. On the other hand, if the staff and contributors are *too* consistent with the candidate's beliefs—if, for example, the candidate's platform is overly friendly to major donors—then conflicts of interest may be charged, legitimately or otherwise.

There is a certain redundancy to campaign themes. Strategist Catherine Shaw writes, "It's a story you tell over and over, a story you can tell in a few seconds: 'It's the economy'; 'This is about opportunity'; 'It's the small issues'; 'It's hope'; 'It's about community'" (2010, 39). These themes appear to be, at some level, interchangeable, but which is the better theme: "This is about governing . . . and I've done it" or "The change will do us good"? (Shaw 2010, 60). An operative would want to think about the candidates, the issues, and the electorate before making a hasty choice between the two ideas.

Generally speaking, themes are intended to be inclusive. They encompass diverse issues or a broad range of qualifications. It would perhaps be a mistake to sell a candidate as merely an "environmental leader," even when concerns about pollution are apparent and the candidate is well suited to deal with them. A better approach may well be to present a more general theme, something like "a candidate concerned about the future." A variety of issues, including environmentalism, can be fitted to this overarching message. Likewise, instead of being "tough on crime," a candidate might argue for "a secure community." Security can mean more cops on the beat and tougher sentences for convicted criminals, surely, but also a better educational system, an adherence to traditional family values, pressure on terrorists, investment in housing and infrastructure, and so on. Broad themes can incorporate a variety of ideas, appealing to a wider range of voters.

In addition to the positional issues and valence issues discussed above, wedge issues work within the opponent's constituency. The name comes from a tactic in chess whereby a player forces an opponent to sacrifice a piece or to hold other pieces in a useless position to

prevent the sacrifice. A liberal constituency that holds both environmentalists *and* organized labor gives a Republican the chance to pit "jobs" voters against "environment" voters. A conservative constituency that holds both pro-life and pro-choice elements is also vulnerable to wedge issues. Choosing a theme that splits the opponent's base can seriously dampen enthusiasm among some of the opponent's supporters.

The office being sought might by itself suggest a theme. Candidates for executive posts—governors, county executives, or mayors—might wish to focus on leadership and competence. Candidates for legislative posts, on the other hand, might be expected to deliver pork-barrel projects. Scholars Judith Trent and Robert Friedenberg (2008, 86) argue that candidate status is an important element of communications strategy. An incumbent stressing "change" might be, in effect, asking for his or her own removal (though at least one Republican incumbent made this argument in 2008; see Shea and Medvic 2009). Incumbents would seem on better ground if they highlight the need to "stay the course." Unlike challengers, incumbents can use the symbolic trappings of the office—strength, integrity, competence, and legitimacy; most incumbents try to show a "record of accomplishment." But incumbents have pasts from which they cannot hide, as opposition researchers well know.

Challengers enjoy more latitude—they often have only a slim record—but the need for a powerful theme is heightened. They must convince voters to change old habits. It is almost always necessary to attack the incumbent (see Trent and Friedenberg 2008, 105–7). As Barbara and Stephen Salmore have noted, "Most challengers must simultaneously erode the favorable reputation of the incumbent and build a positive case for themselves" (1989, 128). Many consultants believe that unseating an incumbent means *firing* an incumbent. Without a cutting edge, voters might have little reason to seek a change.

Whether designed for a challenger or an incumbent, a theme must be readily understood. In his successful 1990 bid for the Minnesota U.S. Senate seat, Paul Wellstone developed a straightforward theme: "A man of ordinary means"—a contrast to his opponent, who was ready to spend $6 million on the race. Eight years later, Minnesota voters made former professional wrestler Jesse Ventura their new governor, based largely on his defiance of traditional authority. The Ventura campaign theme was a "no-message" message. One analyst said, "Unlike the practiced politicians he was up against, he never stayed on message, deflecting the tough questions. That really set him apart." This is not to say, however, that there was no theme: An Independence Day T-shirt screamed, "Retaliate in '98" (Beiler 2000, 128).

Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign offers a prominent example of thematic power, as evidenced by the ubiquity of posters that underscored the candidate's likeness with the word "Hope." Such a theme can take many forms: "We are the ones we've been waiting for"; "Yes, we can!"; "The change we need"; "Change we can believe in" (see Pollard 2008). Even if some pundits were skeptical of the "silver-tongued freshman [who had] found a way to sell hope" (Krauthammer 2008), the very fact that Obama was criticized for his effective use of a campaign theme is a testament to its political wisdom.

John McCain, on the other hand, had trouble settling on a message. One reporter counted six different narratives over the course of the presidential campaign: "The Heroic Fighters vs. the Quitters"; "Country-First Deal Maker vs. Nonpartisan Pretender"; "Leader vs. Celebrity"; "Team of Mavericks vs. Old-Style Washington"; "John McCain [now] vs. John McCain [then]"; and "The Fighter (again) vs. the Tax-and-Spend Liberal" (Draper 2008). None of these themes stuck. McCain's shift from Leader to Maverick, which arrived with the unorthodox selection of Alaska governor Palin as his running mate—who was herself short on experience and seemed to enjoy the limelight—threatened to undermine the Republican's best attack on Obama: that the young senator was too immature for the White House.

CONCLUSION

In commercial marketing, professionals wax philosophical about "branding." A brand's identity is said to comprise the full range of attributes that consumers associate with a product or service. Many political professionals have come to use the language of brand management to describe what they do. A smart campaign uses principles of corporate branding as it maintains a basic palette of color combinations, messages, and a vocabulary filled with words that are friendly to the candidate's ideals, all under the rubric of a single theme. Like a corporate manager, a campaign professional wants to create a strong impression among members of the public.

Caution is in order, though. Much of commercial advertising deals with mere perception; much of politics deals with harsh reality. While a retailer might deftly shift its targeting from one demographic category to another by ordering up a new advertising campaign, with different spokesmodels and a new theme, a political candidate who attempts such a feat should beware of the pitfalls. Republican voters in 2008 had trouble warming up to Mitt Romney's newfound position on abortion. Romney said his views had "evolved" (Romney 2005), but many voters saw an

ideological carpetbagger. Bill Clinton's "triangulation" never sat well with liberals, who felt abandoned, and conservatives believed the centrist move demonstrated once and for all that Clinton was little more than a slick politician.

In politics, consistency is a virtue. When Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger reworked his image from super-patriot to bipartisan moderate during the 2006 California gubernatorial contest, his advisers made clear that the effort was "not a rebranding" (Marinucci 2006). Microanalysis might show a tightly packed ideological grouping of likely voters, tempting a candidate to make a drastic positional shift in search of easy votes or perhaps to offer different messages to different groups, but in a time when a candidate's words are recorded and searchable, and when videos of old speeches can race across the district at Internet speed, consistency holds even more value than it once did. The best strategy would seem to emerge from a theme that agrees with a candidate's own biography and the needs and desires of the district.

Of course, it is not enough to know where the voters reside and to develop a theme that might bring them to the candidate; a campaign must reach out to potential supporters. Voter contact is discussed in the final part of this book.

Part III

CONTACT

Chapter 7

Fund-raising Strategies and Tactics

Mark Hanna, William McKinley's 1896 campaign manager, is said to have quipped, "There are two things that are important in politics. The first is money and I can't remember what the second one is" (Safire 2008). In truth, there are many "important things" in campaign politics, as Hanna, who built a large and effective organization, well understood. But campaigns do indeed require money. Volunteers, issues, good looks, and a winning personality can take a candidate only so far. Poorly funded challengers occasionally win, but the shortage of exceptions tends to prove the rule. While cause and effect are difficult to parse, campaign spending remains a strong predictor of electoral success.

To the extent that money helps a candidate win, the power of campaign cash perhaps comes from the fact that money readily translates to other political resources. Old-style campaigns relied on endorsements and volunteers, but volunteers take time to organize and they are sometimes unreliable. In the new millennium, the endorsement of a key political figure is helpful on its own—few would deny that the publicity does some good—but an endorsement carries more weight if it means a powerful name on a fund-raising letter, access to donor lists, and money calls. Given the fluidity of campaign operations, liquid assets give added advantage. Money can be used to pay for phone vendors, media buys, and office technology. Bankable support has therefore become an all-but-necessary precondition of success.

This chapter discusses the fundamentals of campaign fund-raising. It provides a brief look at the history of campaign finance, followed by a discussion of money's role in campaigns, campaign finance law, the

reasons for giving money, and some of the strategies and tactics involved in fund-raising.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF MONEY IN CAMPAIGNS

Campaigns have never been cheap. George Washington's people, it has been said, gave away 160 gallons of rum, rum punch, wine, beer, and cider to "391 voters and 'unnumbered hangers-on'" (Sydnor 1952) in his first bid for the Virginia House of Burgesses. During most of the 19th century, campaigns were run by the partisan press and through party organizations. Rallies and events were held, party workers "hit the streets," and handbills were distributed around the neighborhood. Party organizations, rather than candidates, raised most of the money used in campaigns, and candidates were expected to contribute to the party. Those who received government jobs were also expected to ante up. More money came from donors with a financial stake in the outcome of the election. When Mark Hanna raised millions of dollars, donated in large gifts by wealthy industrialists, to fund the "Front Porch" campaign of William McKinley in 1896, the Republican Party all but purchased the White House. In 1928, roughly 70 percent of the funds raised by the national parties came from contributions of $1,000 or greater, enough to buy a couple of Model T automobiles (Sorauf 1988, 3).

The political landscape shifted markedly during the 20th century. In the late 1960s, corruption still existed—Vice President Spiro Agnew was forced to resign in 1974 after Justice Department officials happened across suspicious payments he was still receiving from his days as a Baltimore city official—but parties were no longer at the center of the election process. Candidate-centered campaigns had taken root, but money remained central. Fund-raising had become serious business by the 1980s; so serious, in fact, that retiring Congress members began to blame their departure on the burdens of fund-raising. Illinois senator Paul Simon, who had to raise $8.4 million in his last reelection campaign in 1990, told *60 Minutes*, "When I first came here—man, when there was a Democratic fundraising dinner, I was so eager to go. Now I drag myself. And it's probably a pretty good indication that this is a good time to step aside" (Simon 1995). In the old days, the price of a Senate seat was obeisance to party leadership; in an era of new-style politics, the price became an endless cycle of campaign fund-raising.

In 2008, House incumbents who won close races raised an average of about $2,800 per day over the course of a two-year election cycle; endangered incumbents had to raise a good deal more (Campaign Finance Institute 2010a). Candidates need to raise larger and larger sums for a variety of reasons.

In the first place, there are more voters to reach: The rise of the baby boom generation; continued immigration; the progressive inclusion of minorities, thanks to the Voting Rights Act of 1965; the addition of 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds to the ranks of the electorate due to the 26th Amendment; and the overall growth in the size of the American population greatly widened the pool of voters. The number of votes cast for president in the 2008 election was more than double those cast in 1952.

Not only are there more voters overall, but over the decades the share of the electorate available for persuasion also seems to have increased. In 1952, the American National Election Study found just 12 percent of voters splitting their choice between a *congressional* candidate of one party and a *presidential* candidate of the other; by 1980, that figure had jumped to 28 percent. In the 1950s, roughly 40 percent of voters knew "all along" whom they would support for president; by the 1980s, that figure had dropped to about 25 percent. Put differently, a larger number of voters was up for grabs.

Moreover, campaign techniques have become more expensive. Survey research, direct mail, telemarketing, and computerized microtargeting, not to mention radio, video, and Web site production, have driven up the cost of getting elected. A top consultant can charge hundreds of dollars per hour.

State and local races are not immune from this trend, either. State legislative candidates in Wisconsin, for example, spent a combined total of about $4.8 million in 1994. By 2008, that figure had risen to $11.6 million (Wisconsin Democracy Campaign 2009). When New Hampshirite Carl Johnson first ran for the state senate in 1990, he spent $300 on consultant advice. In 2004, this time as an incumbent, Johnson paid more than $10,000 to the Concord political consulting firm Elevare (Milne 2004, 1). "Consultants play a bigger and bigger role," explains Elevare's president. "It began statewide, races for governor, Senate, House. As we've seen of late, it's gradually working its way down the ballot. Large portions of candidates' expenses are now being paid to consultants" (ibid., 2).

THE ROLE OF CAMPAIGN MONEY

It is possible that candidates are mistaken in their belief that fortunes must be spent on a campaign. But while a precise cost per vote gained may be difficult or impossible to calculate, there are good reasons to believe that money makes a difference. Campaigns might be run

efficiently with volunteers, but money can be used to hire experienced, professional experts, and candidates who raise a lot of money are more likely to be perceived as worthy contenders.

Furthermore, money raised early in the campaign cycle can scare off challengers. Building a war chest and hiring strong consultants can attract media attention, and stories about a solidly funded opponent might make potential contenders think twice about entering the race—a rationale that redounds to the favor of the well-funded candidate. The "scare-off" effect is particularly helpful to incumbents. As Gary Jacobson has said, "The electoral value of incumbency lies not only in what it provides to the incumbent but also in how it affects the thinking of potential opponents" (2009, 42). As the electoral season gets under way, campaign organizations work furiously to raise large sums just before the legally imposed reporting deadlines, hoping that the media will run positive stories on their fund-raising success.

The truth is, most incumbents win most of the time. Some 94 percent of House incumbent candidates were returned to office in both 2006 and 2008 (Center for Responsive Politics 2009a). Reelection rates at the state legislative level are a bit lower overall, but in most states they are above 90 percent (Carey, Niemi, and Powell 2000). Scholarly research was demonstrated that *challengers* gain vote share when *incumbents* spend a lot of money on campaign communications (Herrnson 2008, 253). Presumably, a safe incumbent does not need to spend much money, whereas an endangered incumbent has to fight hard.

Whether campaign spending is a cause or an effect of electoral competition, one thing is clear—incumbents typically spend much more money than challengers. According to the Campaign Finance Institute, in 2008 the average Senate incumbent who won election with less than 60 percent of the two-party vote spent approximately $10 million and the average challenger less than $4.3 million. For incumbents who won with more than 60 percent of the vote, the disparity was much more significant: $5 million to about $1.2 million (Campaign Finance Institute 2010c).

Roughly 45 percent of a House incumbent's war chest comes from political action committees (PACs), while just 14 percent of a House challenger's financing comes from these sources (Campaign Finance Institute 2010b). This disparity likely springs from the strategic calculations of contributors: Because incumbents usually prevail, they represent better investments. As noted by a former director of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, "Washington money, by and large, is smart money. Most [PACs] are not a bit interested in supporting people they don't think will win" (quoted in Luntz 1988, 178).

Other factors may also be in play. Incumbents usually have proven fund-raising experience. After all, if they did not know how to raise money, they probably would not have been elected in the first place. Once in office, incumbents maintain lists of reliable contributors, spend time learning from other candidates, and continue to refine their fund-raising operations. They may even have cash left over from previous campaigns, making their new effort seem credible from the start, attracting a good deal of "early money" from PACs and individuals, and discouraging challengers who can spot the danger signs from jumping into the race, leaving the oppositional field to less qualified contenders (see Maisel 1990, 125).

CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAW

Federal candidates are subject to strict fund-raising rules. The regulations are extremely detailed, and wise campaigns consult attorneys and accountants to guide them through the regulatory maze. The current federal regime was structured by the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act of 2002, which reshaped statutes developed largely in the 1970s. The current law is know by its acronym, BCRA (pronounced BIK-ra), or as "McCain-Feingold" in recognition of the law's key Senate advocates, Arizona Republican John McCain and Wisconsin Democrat Russ Feingold.

The intent of BCRA was to outlaw political contributions that had come to be known as "soft money." This term refers to money raised by political parties for purposes other than direct candidate support. Soft money could be used for "party-building" activities such as voter registration drives, but reform groups argued that party building had become indistinguishable from candidate support once the parties ran "issue ads" that seemed to promote a candidate even if they did not expressly advocate anyone's election or defeat. It was argued that this soft-money loophole was being used as a backdoor for large sums that would otherwise have been prohibited under 1970s-era donation restrictions. BCRA did away with soft money and added new rules on expenditures. Under the new law, any "campaign communication" that would run 30 days before a primary election or 60 days before a general election must be paid for with funds tightly regulated by the Federal Election Commission. BCRA also revised contribution limits for groups, individuals, and political parties.

BCRA was immediately challenged by Republican senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and a host of reform opponents. The core of their argument was that the Act infringed on free speech, which, they said, was protected under the Supreme Court's ruling in *Buckley v.*

Valeo (1976). Supporters of BCRA countered that speech accruing from those contributions was indirect and could therefore be regulated without infringing on constitutional protection. In 2003, the Court ruled on *McConnell v. Federal Election Commission*, finding key provisions of BCRA constitutional.

Afterwards, however, the Supreme Court seemed to roll back some of the BCRA restrictions. In 2007, *Federal Election Commission v. Wisconsin Right to Life* held that an advertisement would be deemed "express advocacy"—and therefore subject to regulation—only if "the ad is susceptible of no reasonable interpretation other than as an appeal to vote for this or that candidate." In 2009, the Court heard the case of *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, involving a documentary called *Hillary: The Movie*, produced by the conservative group Citizens United, a nonprofit corporation. A lower court had held that the film was a form of regulated electioneering, but Citizens United took the case to the Supreme Court, challenging the idea that it was a form of electioneering and arguing more fundamentally that political documentaries, even those created by corporations, are protected by the First Amendment and cannot constitutionally be regulated by BCRA. The case drew wide attention as a challenge to the underlying principles of campaign finance law.

In January 2010, the Supreme Court announced that corporations did in fact hold free speech rights and could engage in express advocacy of candidates—a decision that was widely presumed to allow labor unions to engage in similar practices. The announcement was immediately praised by conservatives and condemned by liberals, and an expectation grew that a great deal more money would be making its way into the American campaign process. Days after the announcement, Media Life Magazine, in an article entitled "The Supremes' Gift to TV Stations: Big Bucks," advised readers to "[f]igure $450 to $500 million on top of the $3.5 billion already expected to be spent on advertising" in 2010 (Stern 2010).

Questions about political documentaries notwithstanding, outsiders continue to play a role in federal campaigns. Political party committees such as the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and the Republican National Campaign Committee can raise money and buy media so long as the "independent expenditures" are not "coordinated" with the campaign organization. Additionally, political organizations that came to be called "527 committees"—the name comes from the provision of the tax code under which these committees must file—can make independent expenditures. Two prominent 527s in the 2004 election were MoveOn.org, which attacked George W. Bush, and Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, which attacked John Kerry. One estimate held that 527 groups spent (coincidentally) some $527 million on television ads

alone in 2004 (Currinder 2005, 122). These groups lost some prominence to a resurgence of party committees in 2008.

Separate from party committees and 527s are political action committees. PACs allow corporations and unions to participate in the electoral process, although the rules can be complicated. While corporations and unions may not donate directly to campaigns, they can pay overhead costs associated with raising federally regulated "hard money" that is donated to candidates. PACs are limited in how much they can give. Those that are not connected to an entity such as a union or corporation, such as a PAC that represents advocates for a deeply held conviction, are called "nonconnected" PACs and must pay for the overhead from the funds they raise.

The evolution of federal rules is important, not merely to understand the current state of play for federal candidates, but also to grasp the dynamic complexity of a legal scenario that is replicated at the state and local level. Regulations at the subnational levels vary, and any responsible candidate would consult the appropriate regulatory body for specific information.

REASONS FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP DONATIONS

Whatever a candidate might think of the campaign finance regime, all the players must live under its rules. The candidates have to raise money if they want to win, and to raise money, they must understand why individuals and groups might give to political campaigns. "The process is bilateral," Frank Sorauf has written; "both contributors and candidates pursue political goals" (1995, 78).

In the days when Spiro Agnew collected payments from government contractors, political donations were easily understood. Campaign finance in the new millennium, however, is more complex. Most constituents would be amazed at the spectacle of a "photo line," in which individuals pay $1,000 or more and wait for a quick "grip-and-grin" snapshot with a Senate candidate. Few policy issues are likely to be discussed, and supporters who try to take a moment of the candidate's time to discuss a pet project are apt to be hurried off by staff. Some aspects of modern campaigning are all but imponderable.

Individual Donors

Campaigns are not wholly financed by a few "fat cat" labor unions and corporate sponsors, as pundits often pontificate; they are largely

funded by individual contributions. The number of citizens giving money to candidates has grown over the past few decades, as has the overall weight of smaller-sized contributions. Campaign finance scholar Michael Malbin (2009) took a close look at the 2008 election and found that some 49 percent of the individual contributions to Barack Obama came in increments of less than $200. For John McCain, this figure was 32 percent. Malbin concludes that today's campaigns, at all levels, are generally not financed by a small number of wealthy individuals, but rather by a large number of average citizens.

But why would anyone give to a campaign? Many give simply because they are asked to do so. If requested to contribute, supporters need to make a decision, but without the "ask," even a supportive voter might choose to withhold money. Quite possibly, "the request for money activates generalized, even vague, feeling of loyalty or sympathy, whether for the cause or the solicitor" (Sorauf 1988, 49). Perhaps contributors give to candidates out of a personal or professional connection to the candidate: "If a candidate cannot count on his closest allies for monetary support he may as well not run" (Klemanski and Dulio 2006, 52).

Donors may believe they are helping someone who, if elected, will change the course of political history. Sometimes contributions are related to a single issue, such as the candidate's stand on military force, abortion, gun control, or economic deregulation. Or maybe the contribution is meant to further a larger set of beliefs, such as a party platform or political ideology. Party activists and those keenly interested in policy are more likely to give, obviously, but loyalty to otherwise apolitical organizations may also impel people to send a check. If, for example, a professional association has long opposed an incumbent's political agenda, its membership may agree that their best interests lie with the challenger.

Dick Morris notes that fund-raising should be a result of long-term cultivation: "Fund solicitation has to be preceded by an extensive process of relationship building, by establishing trust, connection, and shared values" (2007b). Emotion is part of the game. One prominent GOP leader has advised fund-raisers: "Ask yourself, who hates the incumbent, who wants to beat him as bad as I do. This starts the donor list process" (quoted in Shea and Brooks 1995, 25).

Emotion, policy preferences, and loyalty to a candidate are powerful forces—but so is celebrity. It is a well-known paradox that, as a class, politicians are disdained, while as individuals, many public officials are held in high esteem. Officialdom has its own strange magnetism. Some people want to be seen at fund-raisers with successful candidates,

particularly candidates who regularly appear on television. The celebrity factor in politics explains the success of fund-raising events that include popular figures from sports and entertainment. Perhaps for the same reason that some people give to the arts—the chance to participate in the glamour and excitement of a well-known happening—many supporters choose to share in the experience of politics by writing a check.

Interest Groups

The incentives for individual campaign contributions apply to interest group contributions as well. The main difference is that interest groups are more likely to base their donations on strict policy grounds. Fund-raiser Carl Silverberg lists four reasons that a PAC might give money to a candidate:

1. "The legislator voted with them on their issues."
2. "The legislator sits on a committee that has jurisdiction over the majority of the legislation the PAC has set out as its priorities for the year."
3. "There is a good following in the district."
4. "The corporation represented by the PAC has a good number of employees in the district." (2000, 62)

Interest groups want to elect officials sympathetic to their concerns, to have access to officeholders who handle their issues. Incumbents receive the vast majority of group contributions, since there is no benefit to funding losers. It is common to see interest groups giving money to both major political parties in order to make sure their voices will be heard.

While donations may be offered out of concern for policy, there is little reason to believe that interest groups are "buying" candidates in a straight quid pro quo. Rather, groups are said to contribute out of a desire for access—the hope that they will be allowed to present their position to the elected official. Interest groups seek "a chance to persuade, an opportunity to make a case or argue a point" (Sorauf 1988, 314). Sen. Paul Simon put the matter bluntly:

> I have never promised anyone a thing for a campaign contribution. But when I was in the Senate and got to my hotel room at midnight, there might be twenty phone calls waiting for me, nineteen from people whose names I did not recognize, the twentieth from someone who gave me a $1,000 contribution or raised money for me. . . . Which [call] do you think I will make? (1999, 306)

According to scholars John Klemanski and David Dulio, political action committees are generally less active in state legislative races, but they seem to be just as strategic as the federal players. When local interest groups get involved, they usually give to incumbents and likely winners, although if contributions are centered around the group's ideological concerns, challengers tend to fare somewhat better. As in national-level campaigns, interest groups may contribute to candidates in both parties (Klemanski and Dulio 2006, 10–11).

Politicians might even use their own PACs to gain influence for themselves. Leadership PACs led by ambitious politicians have included Hillary Rodham Clinton's HillPAC, Wesley Clark's WesPAC, and Sarah Palin's SarahPAC. In 2008, Illinois Republican Aaron Schock established a PAC called "GOP Generation Y Fund" while he was running for a seat in the House of Representatives. Nathan Gonzales of the *Rothenberg Political Report* noted of Schock's efforts: "I don't know that there's a better way to curry favor with your colleagues than helping them win reelection" (D'Aprile 2008). Schock won his race in November 2008, and became the youngest member of Congress at age 27, the only member born in the 1980s.

FUND-RAISING STRATEGIES AND TACTICS

Fund-raising expert Mary Sabin has summarized the key to successful fund-raising:

> Work, work, and work. If you are not feeling anxiety and stress, you're not doing your job. . . . This isn't rocket science or brain surgery. [It] is working hard, staying at it, and concentrating on raising the money while feeling completely obsessed about it. (Shea and Brooks 1995, 25)

Creativity sometimes leads campaigns and political parties to offer ice cream cones and personalized credit cards as part of their finance plan (Blanchfield 2006), but these gimmicks are generally add-ons to road-tested tactics—techniques that might emerge from a comprehensive finance plan. Part of the work is careful attention to planned objectives. Robert Kaplan is adamant on this point: "Fundraising for political campaigns is normally a chaotic process. Fundraising plans, Fundraising Committees, goals and deadlines bring order, structure and accountability to that process" (R. Kaplan, pers. comm., 2010).

Four principles that might be included in a fund-raising plan are quantity, timing, sources, and tactics. Some campaigns mistakenly base their plans on an assessment of the amount of money that can be raised (Himes 1995, 63). The correct approach is to follow the logic of backward

mapping: Figure out how much money will be needed to implement a winning campaign plan. By setting specific goals, the fund-raising team has a clear motivation. Targets and deadlines are strong motivators. If, for example, the campaign strategy calls for a massive television buy in early spring, fund-raising efforts should probably begin well in advance of the purchase. Traditional sources of money—party funds, local contributors, and the PACs that contributed to other members of the candidate's party—may suffice, but if they do not, the candidate must think about alternatives: regional contributors, PACs that have not contributed to the party, and so forth.

Wealthy candidates have an edge because they can jump-start the campaign with their own money, signaling a concrete commitment. One of the greatest financial obstacles that a campaign faces is obtaining "seed money," the funding needed up-front before the campaign can move into high gear, including consultant fees and benchmark polling. Without early money, a campaign might find would-be contributors hesitant to give.

Pro-choice Democratic women often look to EMILY's List for seed money ("EMILY" stands for "Early Money Is Like Yeast"—it makes the dough rise). EMILY's List focuses on "recruiting and funding viable women candidates; helping them build and run effective campaign organizations; and mobilizing women voters to help elect progressive candidates across the nation" (EMILY's List 2009). In 2008, EMILY's List was one of the top-spending 527s, with total expenditures of $12.9 million (Center for Responsive Politics 2009b).

For all candidates, the list of potential sources might include family, friends, colleagues, associates, partisans, PACs, habitual givers, adversaries of the opponent, and political parties at all levels. Many candidates group potential givers, "prospects," into three general categories: small, medium, and large. These categories are relative, of course, as a large contributor in a city council campaign might be considered small in a congressional race. In fact, most candidates prefer that the public not believe they are relying on fat-cat donors. Former Republican senator Rudy Boschwitz, in his 1996 rematch against populist Democrat Paul Wellstone, went out of his way to let Minnesota voters know that he was drawing large portions of his campaign money from "skinny cats" who gave less than $100.

Personal Solicitation

When GOP representative Rod Chandler of Washington decided to leave Congress in 1992, fellow Republican Jennifer Dunn saw her

chance. Having run the Washington state Republican Party for 11 years, Dunn was able to run a successful outreach program: "With the help of friends and volunteers, Dunn worked her way through the 5,000 names in her personal files, raising $492,444 from individuals and $168,373 from PACs" (Morris and Gamache 1994, 152). She outraised her opponent by a two-to-one margin the "old-fashioned way"—she asked for it.

"Dialing for dollars" is an unpleasant way to spend an afternoon, or several months of afternoons, but personal solicitations produce funds. It can work with small-scale donors, but it takes the same amount of time to ask for $10 as it does for $1,000. When making the "ask," Kaplan has advised, "choose a number that is 10 to 25 percent in excess of what your research shows contributors should donate" (1991, 54).

Some consultants look at the situation from the contributor's point of view: Why donate money to the campaign? Success often lies in the personal and professional interests of the prospect. Solicitors might detail precisely where the campaign is going and why the money is needed, offering polling information, campaign brochures, a summary of the candidate's policy stands, and a list of expenses the money would cover. In some instances, it might be worthwhile to provide a short version of the campaign plan. The purpose of this approach would be to make prospects feel as though they are joining a tightly run, highly organized campaign that will put its money to good use.

Consultants might recommend that separate fund-raising efforts be established for each aspect of campaign operations. A donation to underwrite an ad buy shows a specific return for each campaign dollar. A telephone script for a typical request might read, "We're trying to raise $12,000 for some TV spots that have to be bought now for the November election. Would you be willing to make a pledge or send a gift to support our efforts?" (Shaw 2010, 128).

One of the hardest things that a professional fund-raiser confronts is a candidate reluctant to ask for money. Kaplan has dubbed this phenomenon "fund-raising fear" (2000, 64). Calls from the candidate are perhaps best, but telephone efforts from volunteers and professionals might also be considered. As always, compliance with state and federal rules is required. While people seem increasingly annoyed with telephone pitches, they apparently still work. "Dollars for Democrats was the largest nonfederal fund-raiser for the Democratic Party in 2006," writes scholar Ronald G. Shaiko, and "all of its money was raised via telemarketing" (2008, 111).

A number of campaigns have profited from the development of "pledge systems," whereby the contributor is asked to donate at periodic intervals. This approach can increase the overall contribution. The

more common technique is contacting those who have given once to give again. Both approaches are risky: It is perhaps better to get as much as possible all at once, because future donations may taper off. Since the revolution in online fund-raising during the 2004 elections, some campaigns have offered the option for recurring donations on their Web sites. When a supporter made an online donation to the Obama campaign in 2008 using a credit or debit card, he or she could choose to have the same amount charged to that account each month for as many months as desired. Locking individuals into a donation plan lessens the need to ask them for money again (though it would seem to put a premium on thoughtful notes and trinkets).

No technique is sure to work in every race, and the best mix of tactics will depend on the candidate and the consultant. Some candidates, for example, are comfortable asking for money, just as some consultants are more skilled in direct mail than PAC solicitation. Some prospects consider direct mail abhorrent, preferring that the request be made personally, while others think mail is convenient and phone calls are intrusive. Some will give online, while others worry about sending their credit card number over the Internet.

Interest Group Solicitation

If a candidate is on the wrong side of the policy fence, an interest group donation will probably not be forthcoming. PACs that consistently give to the opponent and the opponent's party are poor prospects as well. But a campaign might find success in a "hook"—a bit of information that draws a PAC into the race. An association might count the candidate as a member, an ideological PAC might take note of issues raised in the district, or a business group might be against the opponent's record as shown in bill sponsorships and floor votes (Yeutter et al. 1992).

Developing a PAC list is a time-consuming chore, and the more detailed the database, the better. From this list, the campaign can develop specific arguments for each PAC, often assembling "PAC kits." A kit might have a cover letter on top of biographies, district profiles, prominent consultants, leadership endorsements, and issue papers, possibly adding campaign materials, poll results, and favorable news clippings. PAC kits can be mailed, but a follow-up telephone call by either the candidate or a campaign official might be made after an appropriate interval (Silverberg 2000). For "hot prospects," it might be wise to have the candidate hand deliver the packet. In addition, "nonincumbents who make a PAC's issues among the central elements of their

campaign message and communicate this information in their PAC kits enhance their odds of winning a committee's backing" (Herrnson 2008, 185). Candidates often host receptions on their own behalf, sometimes with the help of colleagues.

Most PACs send questionnaires wherein even the slightest mistake can prevent a candidate from receiving funds, so parties tutor candidates on proper completion of these forms. Furthermore, while "it is illegal for the parties to earmark checks they receive from individuals or PACs for specific candidates," Paul Herrnson writes that House and Senate campaign committees "help candidates in competitive contests raise money from individuals and PACs" and they "give candidates the knowledge and tools they need to obtain money from PACs" by "help[ing] candidates design 'PAC kits' they can use to introduce themselves to members of the PAC community" (2008, 113). Party leaders might also prod the news media to see certain races as competitive—leading perhaps to more PAC money. Overall, party committees can be a great help with fund-raising, but to get this assistance, the committee must believe that the candidate stands a good chance of winning.

Direct Mail

Direct-mail solicitation can be a powerful finance tool. Following Richard Viguerie's pioneering efforts in the 1960s, George McGovern's successful direct-mail fund-raising in 1972 was followed by the rapid growth of Republican National Committee fund-raising efforts in the late 1970s. The 1980s and 1990s saw an explosion in the number of direct-mail professionals. Journalists Dwight Morris and Murielle E. Gamache (1994, 221) reported that in the early 1990s, several dozen direct-mail firms were making huge amounts of money from House campaigns. Mail firms continue to flourish in the new millennium because the process of sending direct mail can be complex and confusing, far beyond the familiar task of writing a letter and sending it off to a friend.

A direct-mail fund-raising effort might begin with a prospect list—a database of individuals who have shown "some characteristics or qualities thought likely to make them susceptible to a candidate's appeal for funds" (Sabato 1989b, 88). Consultant Kenneth Christensen suggests: "Potential donor lists are the foundation of the fundraising effort, period. These lists can mean the success or failure of your entire effort" (2009). List vendors offer the use of rosters of magazine subscribers, mail-order purchasers, boat owners, and professional accountants, attorneys, and

medical doctors, among many others. Everyone is on a list of some sort. The law restricts the use of some lists, however, so compliance procedures must be implemented.

One trick to profitable direct mail is the acceptance of early losses in expectation of greater future returns (see Sabato 1989b). For example, assume that the prospecting list contains 20,000 names. Production costs and postage might run $1.00 per letter, for a total of $20,000. From this, the campaign receives, say, a 5 percent response rate, or about 1,000 responses, and an average contribution of $19. This $20,000 mail effort thus returned only $19,000, which might look like a $1,000 loss. But there is another way to view the mailing: A list of 1,000 proven donors was purchased for $1,000, just $1.00 per name. Once this "house list" has been established, the cost of the next mailing can be much smaller (the list is only a fraction of its original size), and the rate of return potentially much higher. A second appeal mailed only to part contributors would require just a $1,000 outlay. If the response rate for this new mailing is 20 percent and the 200 repeat donors give an average of $50, for a $10,000 gross, the net is $9,000 for the second letter and $8,000 overall. This success can be repeated time and again with a good house list.

One way to enhance a direct-mail program for lower-level races is to begin with a "suspect list." Rather than sending letters to a large group, the campaign looks for the individuals most likely to give. For example, it may use a list of habitual party donors or the candidate's own business contacts. A candidate for county commissioner may draw up a list of personal friends. A statewide Democratic candidate might solicit all the registered Democrats in his or her hometown. Neesa Hart (1992) suggests a number of other refinements to improve efficiency such as weeding out unlikely donors and combining households into one mailing. Small lists can be created, personalized, and mailed in-house, perhaps saving on production costs. And increasingly, high-end computational techniques are being used to improve prospect lists (Malchow 2008, 102–47).

Whether the campaign proceeds from a big list or a small one, several elements of a direct-mail appeal must be kept in mind. "Dull is dull," notes consultant Ron Kanfer, so "the most successful direct-mail programs are built around [a] compelling story" (1991, 22). Sometimes using a celebrity's name can pay off. The Natural Resources Defense Council used this technique when it mailed a large plain envelope purportedly from Robert Redford (Johnson 2001, 155). Letting prospects believe they have a special status or insider knowledge can help, as can inviting prospects to "special" events in exchange for their financial

support. As to style, some will argue that longer letters, with handwritten notes in the margin, work better than short notes. To get people to send their hard-earned money, it would seem wise to lay out the candidate's case in detail, even if most voters will not read beyond the first page; then again, short appeals take less time to peruse and might be read in full. A large donation can prompt a personal thank-you note from the candidate—partly out of gratitude but also because the heart of direct mail is the notion that people will give more than once.

Direct-mail programs are complex and risky, so many candidates and consultants outsource the task. Professional firms can provide copy, layout, printing, list rental, and postal regulations know-how. But any investment can go bad. A mailing that costs more than it returns produces out-of-pocket expenses that some campaigns cannot absorb. In fact, there is debate over the current value of direct-mail fund-raising. Dick Morris has suggested that direct mail is antiquated and too expensive (2007a). If other avenues for fund-raising bring greater returns, direct mail fund-raising, an inherently risky venture, might become even riskier than it has been in the recent past. In any event, mail sent too late in the campaign might well fail, since time passes while the mail travels to the donor, collects dust waiting for a decision, and travels back to the campaign via the Postal Service (see Cornfield 2006; see also Burton and Shea 2003, 105).

Events: Big and Small

When the president, the vice president, governors, and members of the congressional leadership travel around the United States, they often stop in at candidate fund-raising events. So do Hollywood stars and B-list celebrities. Fund-raising events can be large-scale affairs, such as dinners, cocktail parties, concerts, or boat tours, or they can be small ones, along the lines of coffee klatches, ice-cream socials, and chicken barbecues. Done well, intimate gatherings can produce large sums of money, demonstrate to the media and the general public that the campaign has momentum, reward past donors, and build a list of contributors.

Like direct mail, though, large-scale fund-raisers are a gamble. The logistics can tie up the campaign team for weeks. Ticket sales may falter, and uncontrollable circumstances, including weather problems, can intrude on success. An event that flops causes financial problems and suggests to the media, voters, and potential contributors that the campaign is struggling. Small-scale events do not court disaster in the same way that larger ones might, but they do risk tedium. Chitchat can be painfully boring. A smart campaign uses some imagination in its

programming, perhaps holding auctions, wine and cheese receptions, folk dances, and so on.

Location is important, too. Successful event planners go out of their way to find interesting venues, but whether the event is on the waterfront or in a neighbor's backyard, the setting should have an air of success. Campaigns are cautioned that "perception is reality—especially in the event business. If you're having a small reception with 20 people, don't book a room that can hold 100" (Meredith 2000, 62). A good event staff will ensure that a room can be "cut" with draperies, movable walls, or greenery, just in case the expected number of tickets is not sold. Lawrence Grey adds: "In planning any event, the cardinal rule is to keep it simple, and to keep the costs down. It does not do any good to sell $1,000 in tickets if it cost $900 to put on the event" (2007, 132).

Online Fund-raising

The use of Internet fund-raising in political campaigns has reached new heights. Morris attributes this to its small price tag: "By eliminating the transaction costs involved in direct mailing and phone solicitation, it's clear that online fund-raising produces bigger bottom lines more rapidly than any other method of campaign financing" (2008). When Howard Dean, former governor of Vermont, came into 2003 lacking adequate presidential campaign funds, few political observers took his candidacy seriously. But Dean broke a Democratic record by raising $14.8 million in a mere three months, much of it on the Internet. By the end of 2003, Dean had raised more than any other Democratic candidate, including John Kerry and John Edwards (Nammour 2005). According to one account, "Dean [rewrote] the playbook on how to organize, finance and mold a presidential campaign" (Drinkard and Lawrence 2004).

After Dean's success with Internet fund-raising, Kerry and George W. Bush each raised tens of millions of dollars online. Barack Obama's 2008 campaign for the presidency then revolutionized the field: Over the course of 21 months, 3 million donors made a total of 6.5 million donations to Obama online, adding up to more than $500 million. "Of those 6.5 million donations, 6 million were in increments of $100 or less. The average online donation was $80, and the average Obama donor gave more than once" (Vargas 2008).

These staggering figures were achieved using new strategies, particularly a combination of e-mail, text messaging and social networks to motivate donors. Perhaps the biggest innovation in online fund-raising to come out of the 2008 election cycle was the use of online social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. Both Obama and John McCain

employed social networks to connect with supporters, but the Obama campaign made the most extensive use of these tools. Obama's organization maintained profiles on at least 15 social networks and even created its own network called MyBarackObama.com, enabling more than 2 million supporters to sign up and connect with each other. Users were able to plan fund-raising events and call supporters and donors (Vargas 2008). Anyone who chose to become a "fan" of Obama on Facebook or to "follow" Obama on Twitter received constant status updates reminding them to donate money to the campaign.

Online fund-raising is spreading to state and local elections. As consultants Benjamin and Cheryl Katz have pointed out, "While presidential campaigns are often using some of the most exciting technology, these discussions miss the vast majority of online campaigns—those on congressional, state, and local levels" (2009). For example, during the 2008 cycle, when Democrat Sean Tevis jumped into the race for Kansas state representative, he created an online cartoon strip featuring himself and his opponent in a bid to collect donations online. He netted some $95,000 in 12 days—well over his goal of only a few thousand dollars (Varoga 2008). Because Internet fund-raising is evolving quickly and because it demands a high level of technical expertise, many candidates lack the tools to build and maintain a successful online presence. Naturally, consulting firms have popped up to help. In the spring of 2009, some 44 Internet/Web site consulting firms were listed on *Politics* magazine's "Political Pages" (see Politics 2009a).

Campaigns are moving to Web 2.0. San Francisco mayor Gavin Newsom made extensive use of Twitter in 2009 during the primary races for the 2010 California gubernatorial election. He even went so far as to hold "tweetraisers"—fund-raising events held via Twitter. The tweetraisers involved posting "updates" asking for donations (Thomas 2009). The idea was that supporters on Twitter would "re-tweet" the updates so that others would see them and donate. Although Newsom was among the first to use Twitter as a fund-raising device, his strategies clearly mirror the Obama campaign's efforts to promote fund-raising through social networks, suggesting that this strategy is quickly moving into state and local elections—although questions have been raised about the difficulty of providing disclaimers within the space limitations of a tweet (see American Association of Political Consultants 2009a).

CONCLUSION

In the 2006 election cycle, state legislative candidates who outraised their opponents made up 83 percent of all winners (Jordan 2008). From

1998 through 2006, the major-party gubernatorial candidates that raised the most money from outside sources won 84 percent of their elections (Brown 2009). In the 2008 election for the Ohio House of Representatives, median spending by winning candidates was $258,998, whereas losers spent only $65,734, roughly 25 percent of the winning sum (National Institute on Money in State Politics 2009). Campaign riches seem to improve the odds of victory:

> While some claim that money does not buy elections . . . there can be no doubt that at some point it does. . . . The typical election to the House is not one in which the incumbent spends twice or even three times what his or her opponent spends [but rather] six to twelve times what the challenger spends. (Campbell 2003, 151–52)

Campaign finance scholar Michael Malbin has noted that "you might be able to beat somebody with nobody, but you can't beat somebody with nothing" (Shea and Brooks, 1995). Few candidates or consultants are ready to gamble on the idea that money is meaningless.

The precise manner in which campaigns should go about raising money is a topic of much discussion—perhaps more than any other area of new-style campaigning. There is, however, agreement on a few fundamentals. As Robert Kaplan put it, fund-raising "is about asking—and knowing that one dollar early is better than one hundred dollars late" (2000, 64). Still, while consultants are paid well to give new and improved advice, each has a slightly different spin. Conservative fundraiser Bradley S. O'Leary made his name with large events, including a million-dollar affair in an airplane hangar. O'Leary says, "For a big fundraiser, I want the biggest place I can find" (Hallow 1997, 22). Another consultant confides, "I know a campaign is in trouble when they tell me they are large event driven" (McDevitt 1996, 50). Does it make sense for a campaign to count on Web-based projects, or should it invest in direct mail? What portion of the war chest might reasonably come from personal solicitation or from PACs? What is the right mix? Few can say for sure. The winning combination can be determined only in light of the campaign's specific time, place, and strategic context.

Chapter 8

Strategic Communications

Dwight D. Eisenhower aired the first presidential campaign television commercial in 1952. Richard Nixon, who had paid scant attention to this evolving medium in 1960—John F. Kennedy's win is often attributed to Nixon's poor performance in the TV debates—made the first comprehensive use of television marketing when he ran for president in 1968. But the defining television presidency was Ronald Reagan's. A close adviser to Reagan figured out that the medium truly does shape the message and that "the message" is conveyed mostly by "the picture." Michael Deaver implemented a communications strategy that made imagery the primary focus of event planning. Deaver understood that "unless you can find a visual that explains your message you can't make it stick" (1987, 141). Because Reagan "knew exactly what he was and where he was going," Deaver wrote, the main task was to "draw the image around that, so that the public could see it clearly" (Hines 1992).

While scholars may have disparaged George H. W. Bush's campaign event at a New Jersey flag factory, thinking the message shallow, this occasion was reported faithfully by the news media. It was a powerful image: the vice president draped in patriotic symbolism. Furthermore, the imagery was honest in its own way. By appearing at a flag factory, Bush aligned himself with traditional patriotism while setting his beliefs apart from the civil libertarian views of his opponent, Massachusetts governor Michael Dukakis. The long-term dangers of symbolism, however, could be found in Bush's appearance at Boston Harbor, a polluted body of water that mocked Dukakis's environmental record. The assault on Dukakis was helpful in 1988 as Bush transformed himself into the

"environmental candidate," but four years later, with a meager record on environmental issues, the message came back to haunt the president. In 1992, many of those who called Bush the "environmental president" were derisive Democrats.

Casual observers may think political communication is all about money and message—and it *is* about these things—but it is also about much else. Communications directors must know the fine points of television (broadcast and cable), radio, print, and new media. They need to appreciate the tactical differences between paid media (advertising) and earned media (news coverage), how to buy one and how to attract the other. They must orchestrate the full range of available media as a coherent, strategic unit.

This chapter discusses the fundamentals of media strategy and the differences among the various types of paid media. News coverage, which often runs afoul of campaign strategy, is examined more fully in chapter 9.

MEDIA STRATEGY

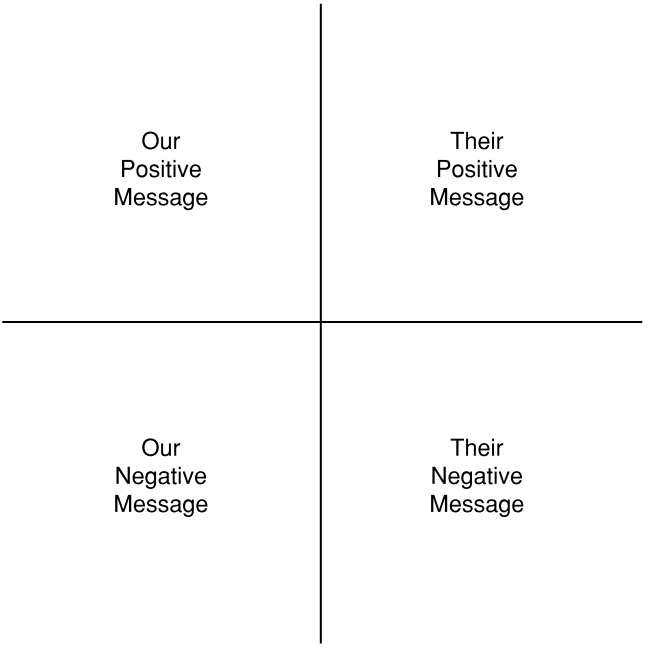
Political communication begins with the basics: What is the candidate trying to say about himself or herself, and about the opposition? Legendary Democratic strategist Paul Tulley has been credited with developing a simple way to frame the question in practical terms. The device is called a "message box," or sometimes a Tully Box. In essence, a two-by-two matrix contrasts the candidate's message with the opponents', the positives and the negatives. The four cells of the box illustrate:

1. What you say about you
2. What they say about you
3. What you say about them
4. What they say about them (Pelosi 2007, 88; Klemanski and Dulio 2006, 49–51)

The message box "frames what's at stake in the debate, clarifies what you say, and helps you play defense" (Pelosi 2007, 87; see also Winston 2010). The basic idea is to draw clear comparisons between the candidate and the opposition in a way that voters will understand, and the concept of a Tully Box can be broadened to include all the positives and all the negatives on both sides of the electoral divide (see Figure 8.1).

Message alone, however, is an abstraction. A candidate's message must fit its medium. Marshall McLuhan (1964) popularized the idea

Figure 8.1
Message Box



that "the medium is the message" in his famous critique of modern culture. The written word, McLuhan argued, was surrendering its power to more compressed formats such as television, and these modes of communication were creating new social arrangements. Print journalists say television offers less information, while television reporters might respond that a picture is worth a thousand words. If a medium somehow circumscribes the message it conveys, then political professionals should know how each one works and how various media can work together.

Coordination is critical. The overall image of the candidate is fashioned by the way in which the various media are assembled. If the media do not interconnect, then voters may not know where the candidate stands, or they may conclude that the candidate does not stand for anything at all. To build a coherent image, a campaign must commit to consistency, efficiency, proper timing, effective packaging, and a well-played expectations game.

Consistency

Political campaigns are well advised to seek "message discipline"—staying "on message," not wandering "off message." During the 2000

cycle, George W. Bush kept the focus on leadership. Whether the issue at hand was foreign policy, the domestic economy, or the need to change the nation's education system, leadership held center stage. Sen. John McCain, Bush's main rival in the primaries, also projected a singular theme. For McCain, it was good government. By McCain's standard, nearly all the failings of the political system—high taxes, irrational public policies, and so forth—could be traced back to "special interests." The proof of McCain's political determination was his dogged fight on behalf of the then-unpassed McCain-Feingold campaign finance reform bill. While pundits criticized Bush for his short experience and McCain for accepting funds that would have been disallowed under his own legislation, both campaigns hammered home their central messages.

Consistency is not a sufficient condition for victory. Two of the most unswerving presidential candidates in recent decades have suffered the consequences of unshakable reliability—Sen. Tom Harkin of Iowa and publishing magnate Steve Forbes, son of the founder of *Forbes* magazine. Forbes pushed for a flat tax in 1996 and 2000, arguing time and again that his scheme would be equitable for the taxpayers and profitable to the economy. The problem was that Forbes did not seem to talk about much else, and using the same phrases over and over again, he was criticized as a "one-note-Johnny" (Tuttle 1996, 3). Much the same problem bedeviled Harkin in 1992. He conveyed a progressive message aimed at unions and other traditional Democratic base groups, and while he received strong support from these sectors, he could not seem to make his case elsewhere. One political reporter said Harkin's "solution to the problem [was] to turn up the volume rather than change the tape" (quoted in Kurtz 1992b).

Efficiency, Waste, and Reach

New-style operatives work toward efficiency. They should be reducing "waste" wherever appropriate. Consider the problem of a congressional candidate running in Chicago. Credibility might demand that a candidate use television advertising—for some people, a campaign is not real until it shows up on TV—but Chicago stations hit a dozen or more congressional districts, some of them in Indiana and others in Wisconsin. Viewers who cannot vote for the candidate represent waste. The job of a media professional is to maximize the number of times that *eligible* voters can be reached with a campaign pitch, either through paid advertising or through news coverage.

For electronic media, communications specialists think in terms of *reach* and *frequency*. Reach is the share of a target demographic that

sees the campaign's ad; a campaign might want to reach, say, 30 percent of the market in a given week. Frequency, on the other hand, is the number of times that a single person might be reached; for some target demographic, the campaign might want each viewer to see an ad three times. A *gross rating point* (GRP) represents 1 percent of a media market's total population that is reached by an ad; a GRP is reach multiplied by frequency, and it represents a basic unit of media purchasing. A message that plays three times on a program boasting 5 percent reach achieves 15 GRPs. An alternative approach is to count advertising "impressions"—that is, individual viewings—by increments of a thousand. Hence, there are two measures of cost over reach: cost per point (CPP) and cost per mille (CPM), meaning "cost per thousand." Measured either by impressions or share, an advertising effort can gauge its efficiency as a cost-benefit ratio.

Raw points and impressions are important, but demographics also matter. ESPN offers a large viewership, but would it be the right network for a campaign that wants to reach high-income female voters? The Oxygen Network—with a demographic that skews female—might be a better buy in that case. If a network's demographic tends to represent strong consumers, a campaign that is merely looking for voters must compete with commercial marketers who want to reach the same audience and are willing to pay dearly for the option. MTV's viewership leans toward a narrow, youth-based demographic; if people of all ages watched MTV, its audience would be less valuable—even if the network attracted more viewers—because advertisers generally want to avoid scattershot targeting. During the 2008 presidential primary season, Rudy Giuliani was running ads on *Poker after Dark* and *Law and Order* while Mitt Romney was on *Wheel of Fortune* and *Tyra Banks* (*Politics* 2008).

As a rule of thumb, a political campaign thinks not in terms of simple GRPs, but of the cost to reach voters who are persuadable. Everything outside the district is waste. A lot of the advertising that hits outside the targeted demographic is also waste. The more precisely a campaign can target persuadable eligible voters, the more efficiently the campaign can spend its money.

These principles are relevant for news coverage as well as paid advertising, for print as well as electronic media. Advertising consumes cash, whereas news coverage, though ostensibly free, nevertheless consumes the precious time of the candidate, staff, and consultants. A congressional candidate in a large city must work hard to win a profile piece in a wide-circulation daily paper, but even if the paper eventually decides to run a story, many of the candidate's new admirers will be in the

suburbs and exurbs. Additionally, the paper's demographics might be wrong. Perhaps an interview with a reporter from the city's business journal would be a more efficient use of a candidate's time. The best investment could well be a simple neighborhood weekly, which might have the potential of reaching the campaign's targeted voters more efficiently.

Timing

Part of the strategic equation goes to proper timing. A standard sequence for a challenger might be to introduce the candidate to the public with a series of news interviews combined with a run of "establishment" ads. Once a positive impression of the candidate is created, the campaign might build credibility with a series of "issue" ads, laying out the high points of a candidate's agenda. When the incumbent responds, the challenger might then return fire with "attack" ads. Incumbents might follow a similar pattern, but they generally start off with better name recognition, so they may be able to bypass establishment ads.

Timing is important for another reason. Ad buys and news coverage require advance planning. Reporters may not sit down with a candidate at a moment's notice; relationships are built over time. Moreover, an opponent who enjoys a long-standing association with a reporter might be dropping subtle insinuations all along the way. A challenger who waits too long may find there is no way to erase the bad impression. With broadcast media, the problem is more acute. Buying newspaper ads is a simple matter of phoning the advertising department and requesting display space. Broadcast media, on the other hand, are limited resources. Only a fixed number of radio and television spots will be available during the course of a race. Because nearly every campaign wants to grab the ad slots that run in the last few days of the cycle, a campaign that waits until the last minute might walk away empty-handed—another reason to raise money early.

Packaging and Effectiveness

An electorate that always votes Republican might need only be informed that the candidate is a member of the GOP. In this case, signs, radio ads, endorsements, television spots, and Web ads should probably make the candidate's party affiliation explicit: "Wilson: Republican for U.S. Senate." Sometimes, however, the cues are more subtle, and clever metaphors help make the case.

In the 1980s, few issues were more important than the standoff between the United States and the Soviet Union. Between Democrats and Republicans, the question was whether to build up, freeze, or draw down the nuclear arsenal. President Reagan stood with those who wanted to increase American nuclear superiority. The 1984 Reagan team needed a way to make its case. The campaign's "Bear in the Woods" spot used footage of a bear wandering around his natural habitat, along with simple language and a well-constructed metaphor:

> There is a bear in the woods. For some people the bear is easy to see. Others don't see it at all. Some people say the bear is tame. Others say it's vicious and dangerous. Since no one can really be sure who is right, isn't it smart to be as strong as the bear? If there is a bear.

The bear encounters a man who is standing unafraid, and it steps back. The ad's message was unmistakable: "The best way to avoid a military confrontation with the Soviets was for America to be stronger than [its] Cold War rival" (Weaver 1996, 204).

Campaign ads can be divided into three general categories: positive, comparative, and negative. Advertising designed to establish a candidate's credentials and to lay out a policy agenda are usually positive. The Reagan ad is a good example, but there are others. In a 1998 Georgia race, Republican Dylan Glenn was trying to become the first black Republican congressman from the South since Reconstruction. To introduce himself, he ran a positive biographical sketch: "From Georgia—for Georgia." Comparative issue ads lay out differences between the candidates. In the 2006 Virginia race for U.S. Senate, Jim Webb responded to attacks by opponent George Allen with a spot that said, "Webb's plan cuts taxes for middle-class families and veterans; in fact, only one Senate candidate voted to make college more expensive: George Allen." In North Carolina in 2008, the "Godless" ad that Republican Elizabeth Dole ran against Democrat Kay Hagan (see chapter 3) clearly qualifies as an attack ad; it claimed: "A leader of the Godless Americans PAC recently held a secret fund-raiser in Kay Hagan's honor. . . . Godless Americans and Kay Hagan. She hid from cameras; took Godless money. What did Hagan promise in return?"

Harsh attacks are common. In 2004, former Beirut hostage Terry Anderson challenged incumbent Joy Padgett for a seat in an Ohio state senate election. Padgett attacked Anderson with direct mail featuring a picture of her opponent next to an actual terrorist. The photograph was real, but "missing from Padgett's advertisement was any mention that the terrorist pictured with Anderson was the secretary general of

Hezbollah, the group that abducted him in 1985. Anderson [had] confronted and interviewed the terrorist leader for a television documentary years after he was freed" (Simonich 2004). In 2006 and 2008, a variety of campaign ads suggested links between candidates and terrorism.

Expectations

An important element of communications strategy is something political strategists call the "expectations game." News reporters thrive on drama, and if a front-running candidate wins a primary, there is not much news to report. If, however, a dark-horse finishes a close second, then there *is* news—though not the kind of story that the first-place victor would have desired.

George W. Bush suffered from high expectations early in the 2000 campaign. Through most of 1999, Bush was the presumptive winner of the next year's primaries. He had nowhere to go but down. When Steve Forbes ran just behind Bush in Iowa and John McCain won New Hampshire, media attention shifted to Forbes and McCain. Had the front-runner hit a roadblock? Politically astute observers could probably see that neither Forbes nor McCain had sufficient resources for the long haul. Forbes had little organization outside of Iowa; McCain had some people beyond New Hampshire, but nothing to rival Bush's national network of established Republicans and financial donors. Yet operatives for Bush's nationwide campaign were forced to reassure supporters about their candidate's long-term prospects.

The expectations game demonstrates the relativity of campaign information. The question is not, Did Bush win Iowa? Rather, the question is, Did Bush win Iowa *by the anticipated number of votes*? Critics may say the outcome is all that really counts, that too much attention is given to expectations. That said, the failure to meet expectations might signify an underlying problem. Although Forbes had little hope of eventual victory, his strength in Iowa exposed weakness in the Bush camp. Forbes's advocacy of a flat tax forced Bush to respond with his own tax-cut plan. Forbes's achievement *was* real news. The deeper meaning of the story is that political campaigns work in an environment where perception can become reality, so campaigns must do their best to control expectations.

The expectations game can have serious consequences for front-runners, as Gov. Howard Dean learned in 2004 and Sen. Hillary Clinton

learned in 2008. For years, Clinton had been treated as the presumptive Democratic nominee. But in the first days of the election year, Iowa voters soundly rejected her candidacy. Media coverage turned dark. One prominent analyst wrote:

> If Hillary Clinton had done something terribly wrong in Iowa, she would be better off [going into] New Hampshire.
>
> If she had lost the Iowa caucuses because she hadn't spent enough time or money or because she had a lousy field staff, she could correct that.
>
> But Clinton spent a lot of time and money in Iowa, and she had a terrific field staff. And she still got blown out of the water by Barack Obama. (Simon 2008)

The sense of inevitability that had once fueled Clinton's campaign was replaced by stories of anxiety and reassessment.

There is a routine cycle to the expectations game. At the beginning of a campaign, a challenger gives the impression that victory is possible, hoping to get at least minimal coverage. An incumbent, on the other hand, seeks to show that victory is all but certain, hoping to scare off challengers. As Election Day nears, both sides claim the race is close. To make sure voters go to the polls, front-running candidates do not foreclose the possibility of a loss, telling supporters that they cannot sit out the election. Even an incumbent with a commanding lead might tell supporters on Election Eve that the race is not yet won, that there is still plenty of work to do.

PAID MEDIA

Paid media allow campaigns to control their own message. Unlike news coverage, which inserts a reporter between the campaign and the voters, paid media allow campaign operatives to script the message, target the audience, and, for the most part, select the timing that best suits the campaign. The downside is that paid media, by definition, cost money. A campaign might be advised to spend 65 percent of its budget on voter contact (see Pelosi 2007, 78). Television ads can run tens of thousands of dollars, and even a small display ad in a college newspaper can cost hundreds.

According to congressional scholar Paul Herrnson, "Hopeful challengers [in the 2006 campaign cycle] committed an average of $1.1 million to campaign communications" (2008, 250). Campaigns must be efficient in their targeting, gain the right amount of coverage, and

choose the right media for their message. A study of the 2008 campaign by National Cable Communications (NCC), a spot cable firm, found:

> By FEC [Federal Election Commission] estimates, the Obama campaign spent just over $380 million, or about 50 percent of its money raised, on paid media communications. Here's the rough breakdown:
>
> - $20 million on print advertising
> - $21 million online
> - $338 million for cable, network TV and radio
>
> NCC's internal data puts cable at $41 million and radio around $17 million, leaving $281 million in spending on broadcast and network TV. (Kay 2009)

Campaigns in the new millennium have a wide variety of options, from new broadcast channels to cable systems to the Internet, so they have many places to spend their money. Each medium has its own advantages. Cable allows for narrow targeting. Broadcast television and radio have wide reach, and they sell ad time to candidates at bargain prices. Newspapers are doing their best to remain competitive. Political Web sites, virtually unknown before 1996, are becoming a critical means of voter outreach.

Television

Television is powerful. Combining audio and visual imagery, TV absorbs its viewers in ways that radio and print simply cannot. Joe McGinniss wrote that television was "something new, murky, undefined" and that "the mystique which should fade grows stronger. We make celebrities not only of the men who cause events but of the men who read reports of them out loud" (1969, 28). Why? Because television imagery seems so "real": "the medium is the massage and the masseur gets the votes" (29).

TV production costs can be high. Assembling a television spot might require the assistance of a producer, a videographer, assorted gaffers, and a postproduction house to edit the raw footage (though many political firms know how to minimize costs). An independent filmmaker has warned, "In the quick-turnaround, high-pressure world of media production, there are few situations where margins of error are smaller, time crunches more acute and smooth sailing more essential than in the production of political ads" (Arnold 1999, 62). In the area of politics, where competition puts a premium on speed, television ads can be slow

to produce, expensive to run, and resistant to real-time modifications—but only a rare campaign would turn down the opportunity to use TV ads if it has the money to produce and air them.

Many candidates will enjoy the benefits of discount rates when they buy television spots, though they should be aware that ad rates, even when discounted, can be very expensive. A statewide buy can cost hundreds of dollars per point, and if the goal is to purchase several hundred or a thousand points, then the total expense will obviously consume a large portion of the campaign's budget. Smaller buys might start to look attractive, and a campaign manager may well consider sacrificing repetition to gain a broader reach (only to hear the media buyer urge that hitting a voter once or twice will not be enough for the message to "break through").

Broadcast ad-buy records for federal candidates are public by law. Everyone has a right to view up-to-the-minute reports and to make copies for a reasonable fee. Researchers can find everything from purchase orders and canceled checks to scribbled notes of phone conversations. If a campaign is making a heavy ad buy on daytime soaps early in the electoral cycle, all the paperwork related to that acquisition, right down to the specific time-slot request, can show up in the file. What the researcher might *not* find is documentation as to whether the buy actually went through. Was the requested spot run at the date and time ordered? Or was it bumped by a higher-paying customer? The answer might be inferred by totaling up invoices, but inference in lieu of documentation is a mere approximation. Furthermore, a station might not fully understand all the rules. It is not uncommon to find that a media outlet has failed to keep its records current, and a researcher may end up waiting at the reception desk while the designated file keeper assembles all the documents.

Frequent trips to review public records at broadcast stations can serve as a distant early-warning system, because a campaign that buys early has tipped part of its hand. An additional reason to watch the opposition's ad buys in advance is to monitor broadcasters' compliance with the "Equal Time Rule" (technically, the "Equal Opportunities Rule"). Generally speaking, if a broadcaster sells time to one candidate, it must offer time to any other candidate in the race. In the digital age, some campaigns might wish to avoid manual searches, as electronic filings offer information on some expenditures and fee-based tracking services can record television spots.

Another way to capture ads is by recruiting volunteers to watch for them. A campaign might send instructions to a corps of loyalists who

are willing to note the time and station that the opposition (or even supportive groups outside the campaign) are running spots. With digital recorders, the volunteers might capture content, and with e-mail, a tech-savvy volunteer can deliver a television (or radio) spot to the campaign instantaneously. Supporters can also be organized to capture ads that appear on opposition Web sites and social media outlets such as YouTube.

The most familiar means of receiving television is by way of broadcast. In the mid-1970s, it was practically the only way to see a television program, but with the rise of cable and satellite television, broadcast has lost a significant share of the market. Videocassette recorders, digital video recorders, and video games further diminished the broadcast television audience. With more and more people recording their favorite shows for later viewing, there is an increasing likelihood that political spots will be "zapped." Nonetheless, broadcast television continues to be the mainstay of larger, new-style campaigns because a message can be sent to wide swaths of the electorate with a single ad buy. As noted by one media specialist: "To be successful, we must obtain a market share of 50 percent plus one of the potential pool of political customers. This fact requires us to be mass-marketers. We want market share, not unit sales" (Hutchens 1996, 42). Especially for candidates seeking lower-income voters, broadcast remains a powerful medium.

While broadcast reaches the widest audience, cable has the capacity to target voters narrowly. In 2009, just over 62 percent of American households were receiving cable programming, providing ad buyers with a whole new category of paid media. On the one hand, there is no difference between broadcast and cable advertising. Viewers watching a network television show transmitted via cable TV might be unable to distinguish between ads run from the network and those inserted by the local cable company. On the other hand, the ability to run ads in a single cable market provides a different set of opportunities. Local cable companies have fixed, identifiable borders, and these boundaries might be contiguous, or roughly so, with electoral districts. If the boundaries are favorable, waste is minimized. Moreover, because cable offers dozens or hundreds of channels, "narrowcasting" becomes possible. The History Channel, A&E, BET, and MTV each seek a thin slice of the pie. Many candidates also take advantage of Spanish-language networks to reach Latino voters.

The study by spot-cable firm NCC notes that specific targets can be reached by narrowing the geographic and demographic composition of a political audience simultaneously (Kay 2009). By reducing waste, a

campaign would hope to increase its return on investment. Thus, the new dynamic of media buying requires that political professionals take into account the value of reaching a specialized audience against the cost of doing so.

Radio

Radio lacks the visual element of television, but in some ways it offers the best of broadcast combined with the best of cable. Like broadcast, it reaches beyond paid subscribers, and like cable, it can be used for precision targeting. For example, a talk radio station might attract more conservative voters than a pop station. Narrowcasting to selected talk shows can bring efficiency. Moreover, a radio strategy helps a campaign fly low, perhaps escaping the sort of "ad watch" scrutiny that sometimes diminishes the effect of negative advertising. As Robert Friedenberg has pointed out, "Generally, radio ads are not taped, nor are the transcripts of them closely analyzed by the press" (1997, 143), though it should be said that new-millennium blogs and digital uploads are rapidly diminishing this advantage. Finally, radio has a unique intimacy: "The images it conveys exist in the listener's minds" (Sweitzer and Heller 1996, 40).

While corporate ad production might grow out of extended concept meetings and audience pretesting, political campaigns can use radio in response to unfolding events on a tight deadline, usually with little money invested in production. A campaign might be inspired to make a radio ad in the morning, script the notion in a couple of hours, hand the script to the candidate for editing, drive the candidate to a studio to record the sound about midday, edit the ad immediately after recording, and deliver the spot to local radio stations by late afternoon.

Radio's flexibility can be seen in a pair of ads that the Senate campaign of John Warner produced for the 1996 election. The *Washington Post* described Warner's predicament in the GOP primary: "He must drive up turnout dramatically. He hopes to do that with an aggressive media blitz aimed at mobilizing women, moderates, and especially Northern Virginians, while giving reason to doubt his rival's credentials as a true believer" (Baker 1996). In an apparent effort to tweak the demographics,

> Warner aired a radio commercial featuring a male voice assailing his Republican primary opponent for masquerading as a conservative. It ran just once before being taken off the air. A few days later, it resurfaced—but this time with a woman's voice. (ibid.)

Newspapers

Once the chief means for transmitting partisan ideas on a mass scale, newspapers have lost a great deal of their market. Fewer people are reading the papers, and less money is spent advertising in them. The newspaper readership is aging, as young people look to different sources. There are, however, a few reasons that print ads remain part of new-style campaigning.

First, ad space is almost always available. Whereas television and radio are limited commodities, newspapers can find room for display ads even if they have to insert a few more pages to accommodate an end-of-campaign ad blitz. Second, newspapers have responded to market pressures through customer segmentation. High-tech printing operations allow for geographic variation in advertising content whereby each suburb in a metropolitan area might receive its own set of display ads. Finally, there is a fear factor at play. Political operatives might believe that failing to buy ad space can forfeit a rightful endorsement and might even affect decisions about news reporting. The game can work both ways. Judge Lawrence Grey's campaign manual recommends that, if a paper never runs with a campaign's news release,

> threaten to cancel [campaign] ads and ask for your money back. . . . The editors will hate me for telling you this, but for a small newspaper on a tight budget, this is an effective technique for your campaign. (2007, 189)

Moreover, there is a case to be made for newspapers as a unique and valuable medium on their own terms. Among those who read them, traditional hard-copy papers may seem to have an air of authenticity, and associating a candidate with that feeling may reap a few votes. It should not be surprising that "newspaper readers vote at above-average rates" (Helliker 2007). Furthermore, a 2003 study for the Newspaper Association of America found that people consider newspapers to be generally more believable than other media (Newspaper Association of America 2003).

New Media

Newspapers are old media; Web sites are new media, and the Internet is fast becoming a standard medium:

> In January 2009, the Digital Future Report from the University of Southern California's Annenberg School found that 79% of adult users said the Internet was now their "most important" source of information (not

> just for news), higher than television (68%) or newspapers (60%). (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2009)

In the early 1990s, few political professionals had heard of the Internet, but in the new millennium a strong presence on the World Wide Web is considered essential. A candidate without a Web site appears less than serious, and a confusing or slipshod site hints at a disorganized campaign. By contrast, a visually attractive, user-friendly Web site that offers an abundance of informational content tells a different story. One early study showed that visitors spend the most time with "issue sections, candidate biographies and comparative sections" (Hockaday and Edlund 1999, 14). During the 2000 campaign, it became common to post news releases, calendars of upcoming events, and streaming video and audio, showcasing ads being run through more traditional media. In more recent campaign cycles, the shift has been toward interaction and personalization, making a candidate's Web content feel unique to each individual voter.

The power of Internet advertising lies beyond candidate Web sites. Because candidates can buy ads linked to Web searches, they can be reasonably certain that their pitch is reaching voters who are somehow interested in the message and who are, to use the language of commercial marketing, in "buy mode": Voters searching for information may well be looking for reasons to support or oppose a candidate. Campaigns have purchased search ads tagged to their own names and to the names of their opponents. A voter leaning toward one candidate, hoping to learn a bit about her position on the economy, might be presented with a convenient link to the opposition's excoriation of her views on energy exploration. The message can be offered in plain text or in video. The 2008 cycle witnessed an explosion of videos posted on campaign Web sites and YouTube.

The difficulty with Internet electioneering is that voters must make a conscious effort to find a Web site. Radio and television reach all the listeners and viewers who do not actively "zap" the ad; they are "opt-out" media. The Web, however, is an "opt-in" medium, meaning that some sort of off-site marketing might be necessary to garner a substantial surfer base.

In the early days of Internet outreach, media consultant Mike Connell pointed out that the Web can serve as an extension of broadcast media. He noted that campaigns purchase

> 30-second spots in which the candidate must explain to all the electorate who they are, what they have done, their vision for the future and why

> they are the best candidate. But put the campaign's Web site address on the advertisement and suddenly you've given the electorate access to complete, in-depth information on the candidate. (1999/2000, 58)

One bit of early creativity came from Donald Dunn, campaigning for Congress in 2000, who "ran a list of [Utah residents] who are owed money from their 1998 tax returns on his Web site." It proved to be a smart strategy: "The Dunn campaign . . . held a press conference announcing that they would be posting the names, after which the Web site had nearly 20,000 hits" (Jalonick 2000, 62).

The depth and sophistication of campaign Web sites has increased dramatically since the 1990s (see Gulati and Williams 2007). It is difficult to imagine a serious campaign effort that does not incorporate Web technology into its plan. Web sites in the 2008 cycle contained candidate blogs, rich graphics and Flash media content, photo galleries, volunteer sign-ups, invitations to house parties, gear sales, sample text for letters to friends and to editors, and up-to-the-minute news releases.

A witty tactic from the liberal group MoveOn.org, which was a strong player in 2008, allowed visitors to create a customized video designed to exhort friends to vote: a fake news broadcast blaming Obama's one-vote loss on whomever the sender chose to fill in the blank. A friend of Michael Jones, for example, could order up a well-produced campaign ad in which a fake newspaper appears on the screen, saying, "Nonvoter Identified: Michael Jones; Investigation of Tallies Leads to Culprit," along with fake newscasters talking about the gaffe, protesters forming in the street, and a church sign reading, "All God's children welcome—except Michael Jones."

While campaign Web sites have become feature-rich, campaigns are selective about the features they offer. Apparently, campaigns in non-competitive races are more likely to let voters sound off on their campaign Web sites, whereas close races tend to avoid unsupervised remarks (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin 2007). Competitive campaigns have a strong interest in controlling the message, whereas long shots might be more willing to risk untoward comments in an effort to engage voters.

In some ways, the new media are an extension of the more traditional forms of electronic communication, but it is at least arguable that there is a fundamental difference between the casual viewer of a television commercial and someone who actively searches for information on the Internet. The latter would seem more likely to have made a prior decision, perhaps needing reinforcement or talking points; the former is more likely to be undecided or uninterested.

In the months following Obama's high-tech victory, political professionals eagerly sought ways to campaign like him—perhaps neglecting

the fact that at the core of Obama's operation was a compelling candidate who made people want to receive SMS texts and to forward campaign emails.

CONCLUSION

Some skeptics believe that the increasing use of expensive media in American campaigns stems, in part, from the fact that ad buyers and consultants often receive a percentage return on the cost of an advertising buy. George Stephanopoulos, discussing the huge sums accumulated by Dick Morris during the 1995–1996 campaign cycle, said: "It's inarguable that there's a conflict of interest. . . . That doesn't mean it was bad advice, but it certainly wasn't disinterested advice" (Harris 1998). At least one pollster has noted that survey professionals can operate as "independent auditors," making sure that the candidate knows how well the media efforts are working (Friedenberg 1997, 56).

Direct evidence of media persuasion is hard to confirm, but there are clues. A postelection analysis by Daron Shaw, who advised the Bush campaigns of 2000 and 2004, estimated that 1,000 GRPs for five weeks bought roughly half of a percent in vote share (2006, 136). A study by Richard Johnston, Michael G. Hagen, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson (2004, 83) suggests that ads against Al Gore in 2000 had some effect, while ads against Bush were less influential. A more recent study indicated that "about 3.3% [of respondents] said changing their vote, based on online information, was 'somewhat likely,' and 3.7% said it was 'very likely'" (Acohido 2008). A simple reminder text can increase turnout by a few percentage points (Dale and Strauss 2009).

Research into Senate and presidential campaign advertising by Michael M. Franz and Travis N. Ridout is consistent with a cynical view that political advertising is more effective on people who know less about politics:

> If the dissemination of political information through more difficult-to-process media (news reports and print media, for example) influences only the politically knowledgeable (as some evidence suggests), but political ads influence mostly the politically ignorant, this suggests an important gap in the information resources of voters. (2007, 485)

In the effort to reach all voters, informed or otherwise, media specialists confront a rapidly changing environment. A campaign that depends on television should consider that "ad-skipping," made increasingly simple by digital video recorders, is helping viewers opt out of watching expensive media buys. A 2009 study showed the prevalence of ad-skipping to be in the single digits, but "within two years," the report predicted, "ad-skipping will be closer to 16–18 percent" (Crupi 2009). And with

the rise of new media and the changing roles of more-established formats, which might well require a wide range of different consultants with different areas of expertise, coordinating the crisscrossing channels of communication is becoming a highly complex task.

But at least with paid media, the campaign has some measure of control, even if campaign charges are followed by countercharges as operatives seek to push the other side off message. "Free" media, by comparison, is less controllable, and these media require hard work to earn.

Chapter 9

Earned Media

Paid media outlets allow for control over timing, audience, and message, but campaigns do not have unlimited funds, and while news coverage is not truly free, it does have the benefit of low cost—and of credibility. The message is being presented by a seemingly neutral observer. It resides in a context—on the television news, in the newspaper, during a radio news segment, or on an online Web log—where its audience is thinking about politics. In other words, the news media reach people when they are in the market for political information. Getting into the news can be a wise use of campaign time. Moreover, a campaign that shuns reporters and bloggers may leave the impression that it has something to hide.

Political consultants commonly talk about *earned media*. The term refers to news coverage on television, on radio, in the papers, or on Web-based outlets, where others must be persuaded about the news value of one's message. Consultants call it *earned* media rather than *free* media in order to emphasize the hard work that goes into the quest for coverage. "A cheaply produced press release can sometimes lead to enormous media attention," writes media scholar Joseph Graf, "whereas paid media can have trouble breaking through the morass of advertising we encounter every day" (2008, 53). Breaking through is difficult. The only office for which candidates are guaranteed regular news coverage is the presidency—and even then, front-running candidates complain they are being ignored. Reporters object that politicians try to "manage" the news, even as candidates feel put upon by an unwieldy press. While pundits grumble that candidates offer nothing more than "sound bites," the news media continue to run snappy political phrases as genuine, hard-hitting news.

Positive coverage is never assured. In 2008, as Sarah Palin tried to expunge her reputation as an intellectual lightweight, she stumbled over questions about foreign policy ("As Putin rears his head and comes into the airspace of the United States of America, where do they go? It's Alaska" [Palin 2008a]) and even which newspapers and magazines she might read ("I've read most of them, again with a great appreciation for the press, for the media" [Palin 2008b]). Whether the reporters' questions were fair or not, the damage was done. As noted by one observer: "If you are brilliant, the media will make you appear even better. If you are foolish, incompetent, indecisive, or wimpy, the media can cripple you" (Phillips 1984, 77). To candidates, consultants, and campaign staffers, the news media are a blessing and a curse, an opportunity and a danger—a basic need that looms as a constant threat. Few political operatives believe that the press is "objective" in the sense that it merely reports the facts. By necessity, the news media pick and choose which facts are going to be reported. To say that a paper contains "All the News That's Fit to Print" merely begs the question, What counts as "news" and who decides what's "fit to print"? It is too simplistic to proclaim that reporters are generally liberal while editors and publishers are conservative, that news organizations are just profit-seeking enterprises, or that reporters always base their stories on personal opinion. Political reporting is complicated, and the world of journalism has arguably become *more* complicated and *more* difficult to manage as bloggers and other online commentators have joined the conversation.

This chapter tries to explain earned media strategies by discussing the development of news reporting, with an eye to "newsworthiness," the new media of news coverage, and the tactics that campaigns might bring into play.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF "NEWS"

A *Gazette* or *Intelligencer* of early America looked nothing like today's *New York Times*. Lacking a drive for objective, dispassionate reporting, the "news" was unabashedly partisan (Dinkin 1989, 7–9). Publications aligned themselves with one side of politics or the other, and they did so according to the whims of the parties that helped fund them. In the first half of the 1800s, publishers began to understand that people might be willing to pay for the news, and the "penny press" was born. For one cent, readers could get the news of the day, along with feature stories. A larger readership meant higher profits, so there was little reason to restrict a paper's viewpoint to one particular party.

Thereafter, publishers found they could make more money if space was sold for advertising. With the rise of profit-driven "yellow journalism" in the late 1800s—which gave front-page coverage to crime, scandal, and personal tragedy—newspapers became big business.

In much the same way that broader sales freed newspapers from their partisan roots, the Associated Press (AP), a national wire service, started to release the press from its parochialism. The AP was formed in the mid-19th century as a cooperative that pooled the resources of New York newspapers. Instead of having dozens of reporters arrive at the same news site, the publishing community could recycle stories written by a single, local journalist. As the AP spread across the United States, reporting on the Civil War and other domestic news, regional perspectives gave way to a more national point of view. A backlash against yellow journalism reinforced the idea that "objectivity" should be the guiding principle. Progressives in the early 1900s hailed the arrival of "muckraking" journalism, which exposed government corruption and corporate greed. Focusing on journalistic responsibility, the muckrakers paved the way for professional standards that distinguished facts from analysis and editorializing. An ethical framework that would have seemed foreign to the early partisan press had taken hold.

The predisposition of journalistic "objectivity" has fluctuated considerably over the past hundred years. In the first part of the 20th century, politicians were often treated with kid gloves. Many journalists accepted whatever they were told, and they rarely scrutinized the private lives of candidates. Larry Sabato has labeled this a time of "lapdog" journalism (1991, 25). During the 1960s and 1970s, the industry entered a period of "investigative journalism." Shocked by revelations of government misinformation, reporters covering the Vietnam War and the Nixon administration no longer presupposed the sincerity of politicians. Their colleagues began digging for political dirt, leading to an era of "watchdog" or "attack-dog" journalism. Looking toward campaigns, there was a growing interest in the horse race—who is ahead and who is coming up from behind—and even the internal workings of campaign operations. By the late 1980s, Frank Luntz could say that "the mechanics of campaigning have become a better story than the campaign itself" (1988, 33).

Much of the criticism is reserved for broadcast news. In the first half of the 20th century, radio started broadcasting news events, but unlike print outlets, which cover news in depth, radio distilled all the day's news into a few brief moments. Radio was belittled for its superficiality, but it gained credibility from serious journalists like Edward R. Murrow, whose voice gave Americans urgent, passionate reports from

the Battle of Britain. After World War II, a number of radio reporters, including Murrow, moved to television, which also suffered under time constraints. The high cost of television production meant that viewers had limited options: Three broadcast networks decided what constituted "the news."

Lacking depth, television news was open to attack by the likes of Marshall McLuhan and Daniel Boorstin. Boorstin wrote: "Our national politics has become a competition for images or between images, rather than between ideals. The domination of campaigning simply dramatizes this fact" (1964, 249). The news media, Boorstin thought, were full participants in the trivial performance, having allowed themselves to become mesmerized by "pseudo-events."

Boorstin's critique can be directed at all news media. Journalists chafe at the idea that their profession is anything less than objective, but objectivity is an elusive ideal, and news is a business. The fact remains: media outlets that go out of business are not able to inform the public, so news content must hold consumer interest. Television is good for pictures, though it tends to blur complexity; detailed information works better in print. In Minnesota, during the 2008 Senate campaign and its protracted recount battle, the news media were focused on every nuance of the race between incumbent Norm Coleman and challenger Al Franken (see, e.g., Bacon 2009). Perhaps due to the drawn-out nature of the contest and Franken's past career as a *Saturday Night Live* comedian, major newspapers and the network news covered the battle extensively (ibid.).

Most reporters work hard to separate political partisanship from news coverage, and they are acutely aware of the distinctions between fact and analysis. But they are forced to make decisions on the credibility of their sources and the relative importance of the events they cover. Are politicians, as a class, believable sources of information? In the early 1960s, the answer was assumed to be yes, but no longer. Does money influence policy? Perhaps, and this notion has become a basic motif for campaign coverage.

The history of the profession requires journalists to write stories that are both fair and newsworthy. But sometimes fairness is not so newsworthy. For example, while the idea that George H. W. Bush was so out of touch with the American people that he could be shocked by the workings of a simple grocery store scanner made for great copy with journalists and a funny punch line with comedians, the reality was probably quite different. One reporter who was on the scene when the surprise was alleged to have happened called the whole matter "completely insignificant as a news event" (Kurtz 1992c). And yet, the

original version of the story, which invited a cartoonish picture of a sitting president, has been allowed to circulate unabated.

NEW MEDIA

Newspapers are moving away from traditional print toward online delivery. Smaller papers like the Ann Arbor (Michigan) *News*, which stopped publishing a hard copy after nearly 180 years, are falling prey to a new business reality (see Pérez-Peña 2009). Since the mid-1990s, independent Web sites have been competing with traditional news providers, often supported by groups that had no other publishing outlet. One early endeavor was Web, White, and Blue, an online network that had 17 charter sites at colleges and universities (Lupia and Baird 2003). Earlier, traditional news sources had begun repurposing their content to online sites. CNN and the large news networks clearly overwhelmed the nonprofit and independent Web sites with their massive content and aggressive outreach.

The rise of comprehensive online news sources and the development of news-aggregators such as the *Drudge Report* and the *Huffington Post* have shifted much of the electorate toward the Web. A survey of Web, White, and Blue users found that they had in general "*substituted* the Internet for newspapers as one of its two main election news sources" (Lupia and Baird 2003, 80). Further, television news was found to be the most common news source, followed by Internet news consumption. By 2008, some 46 percent of Americans had used the Internet to acquire political information (Smith 2009).

Once on the Internet, voters will find blogs that contain personal observations and tend to be sharply opinionated. Many people like reading blogs about candidates because they think they can get a more "honest" opinion from average individuals, even though feelings are commonly presented as facts. The blogosphere has been expanding exponentially. In August 2004, there were approximately 3 million blogs; a year later, the number had grown to 12 million; by August 2006, the number had increased to approximately 50 million, and it nearly doubled again by August 2007. In the fall of 2009, about 6,000 blogs could be classified as "political." Most blogs do not concentrate on politics, but the ubiquity of blogging underscores the importance of this new medium.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, a powerful connection has emerged between the blogosphere and the established media. Very often, campaign topics are first raised on blogs and are later picked up in mainstream outlets. Mark Halperin and John Harris have noted that

the influence of Matt Drudge and his *Drudge Report* "derives only in part from the colossal number of people who visit his site. . . . His [real] power comes from his ability to shape the perceptions of other news media—Old and New alike" (2006, 54). This phenomenon can also be seen locally. If a community-based blog or news site picks up on a campaign event, there is a good chance that the traditional media will also move on it. Campaign organizations have begun to strike up relationships with bloggers and have also started generating their own blog content.

Of course, campaign-generated blogs that hew the official line can be tedious and uninteresting. Even the "faithful" may shy away from such blogs. Most devotees of political blogs seem to prefer the independent variety—and here a campaign must be ready to contend with helpful (and not-so-helpful) allies and the serious possibility of an Internet smear campaign, whether intentional or the product of overzealous partisans.

COMMUNICATIONS TACTICS

A campaign story must be fresh and should relate to public affairs in a way that affects readers, listeners, and viewers, but two caveats are in order. The first is strictly economic. The information marketplace is highly competitive, with an array of vehicles, ranging from newspapers to cable opinion shows to Web sites offering up-to-the-minute reporting. Without good stories, the audience will not consume the information, and advertising dollars dwindle. Dull pieces are a hard sell. A blogger who earns money from advertising "click-throughs" might throw red meat to attract an audience. Similarly, events that are costly to cover will not get much play. A story that would require a television crew to lug equipment over a mountain pass is far less likely to get covered than events conveniently situated near the television station.

The second caveat goes to journalism as a profession. Reporters are trained to uphold standards that have matured over a couple of centuries, complete with heroes like Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, who literally changed history with their reporting of the Watergate break-in and its cover-up. Journalists are professionals, and they have their own views of newsworthiness and the comparative importance of news stories.

News Releases

Campaigns that fail to recognize the tenets of journalism and the business of news are unlikely to earn a great deal of media. A smart campaign knows how to market stories. The campaign operation puts

its best foot forward, even if it can never truly "manage" the news. Perhaps the most important tool for selling a local candidate is the news release. Releases announce candidate statements and upcoming events, attempt to spin breaking news, highlight endorsements, and provide background facts that help reporters make sense of the race. This form of communication, inexpensive in both production and distribution, plays a central role in earned media strategy.

The difficulty is that media outlets receive countless news releases from businesses, civic organizations, and individuals, not to mention other campaigns. A major paper might receive hundreds of news releases daily. Some are selected for follow-up, but most are not. The cardinal rule is that one should make the text newsworthy and informative; few editors or producers want to run boring stories. To make life easy for reporters, campaigns provide everything needed to write a positive story. Many find that the best approach is to draft the release exactly the way the campaign would wish the news to appear in the paper. Communications directors might employ the same notation that reporters use, adding, for example, a "###" or a "-30-" to indicate the end of the release (see Hewitt 1999, 57).

Imitating journalistic style can help fit a story into the mindset of a reporter, editor, or broadcast producer, and some smaller newspapers might run the story word for word. Thinking like a reporter, a communications director might include at least one quote from the candidate or campaign official (clearly identifying name and title). Quite commonly, the quote will be in the form of a "zinger"—a pithy remark with a powerful message. News releases stand a better chance of publication if they contain a headline, a strong lead sentence, and photographs, particularly when they are written in the journalist's inverted-pyramid format, with the most important information at the top and less important information farther down.

Campaign news releases generally follow a distinct style. They are written in the third person, using action verbs as much as possible and relying on facts instead of generalities. They use simple language. The format of a good release will match that of the targeted outlets. Radio, editorial pages, Sunday morning magazines, and political bloggers each have their own manner of speaking.

Candidates must establish credibility with the media so that reporters will feel comfortable using their releases. Accuracy is important. Puffery has been called the single most common flaw in news releases (Randolph 1989).

In addition, the name and telephone number of a campaign contact person are usually noted at the top of each release. Some stories are

"embargoed" for later publication; "For Immediate Release" indicates that the story can be run upon receipt. In the Internet age, communications directors also include links to online documentation.

As to the rate of sending news releases, the profession seems divided. Some believe "the more the better," arguing that a campaign can never tell when an outlet will have a slow news day. Favorable news stories sometimes stem from releases that were not expected to be picked up. Frequent releases also keep the election at the forefront of an editor's mind and let reporters know what is happening. But daily releases run the risk of being discounted. Reporters and editors who receive a stack of releases from the same campaign might tire of them and assume, perhaps rightly, that the releases are fluff. The most important releases may get rejected with the rest.

The video analogue to a news release is the "feed." One masterful use of feeds was the distribution of the GOP's "Contract with America" signing in 1994. According to Barrie Tron, who built the event, "We produced a multicamera live broadcast" that was distributed to news departments around the country (1995/1996, 51). Tron has written that the "signal was distributed live, via satellite . . . to every television station around the country. The feed was free and produced as if we were feeding our own network" (51). The whole event, from start to finish, was offered to the media because "news directors want the most options—especially in the midst of a campaign" (51). Plus, "an audio bridge fed the audio portion of the program, [accessible] via telephone and made available free of charge to radio stations" (52). As a result, the hard work that went into setting up a massive, tightly choreographed event on the Capitol steps paid off with nationwide coverage.

As the Internet opens new channels for audio and video—both to stations and to the public at large—campaigns must find new ways to distinguish themselves. "Satellite media tours" have been used for well over a decade to reach a large number of stations in a short period of time. From a single studio, a candidate might be interviewed by one television reporter after another (Ouzounian 1997, 51). With the Internet, video can also be fed to news outlets as digital files posted on the campaign's Web site or social media sites. Image quality becomes a concern, but as viewers become accustomed to Internet-style imagery, news outlets have become more willing to run the compressed video that pervades the Web.

News Conferences

If the news release is a campaign's workhorse, the news conference is the campaign's show horse. News conferences bring reporters into a

controlled environment to see and hear the candidate. They allow for personal explanations of complex issues or dramatic campaign developments, and they give reporters the chance to ask questions. Although the odds of coverage are poor for run-of-the-mill political items, many candidates use news conferences to announce their candidacies. News conferences are also employed to level attacks, defend against opponents' charges, introduce new rounds of campaign commercials, announce important endorsements, highlight fund-raising activities, introduce celebrity supporters, and so on.

In deciding whether to cover a news conference, assignment editors must undertake their own cost-benefit calculation. They weigh the merits of getting the story firsthand with the price of sending a reporter into the field. This balancing act suggests that the topic of the news conference should be exceptionally important and that the news conference itself must be logistically straightforward. Even when these conditions are met, most candidates still have a hard time getting coverage. If reporters choose to cover a candidate's news conference at all, their story may not always carry the message that a campaign has in mind. A waste-of-time news conference will be scorned by the media and might be the last one that reporters cover. "If you call a press conference and it ain't news, they might not cover you again" (Shirley 1997, 23). The campaign may be written off, or worse yet, ridiculed. After all, the campaign wasted the reporters' precious time; *someone* will have to pay.

Before a news conference is set up, therefore, the campaign communications team must be certain that the topic is newsworthy. If the campaign chooses to proceed, a notice is sent to each outlet, outlining the importance of the issue, where and when the conference will be held, and the name and telephone number of the contact person. Campaigns may then follow up with an e-mail, telephone call, or even a personal visit. Occasionally, this sort of prodding tips the scales in a campaign's favor. Pushing too hard, however, can have the opposite effect. Sometimes it is better to just hold a conference call for all the reporters who want to link in.

When a full-blown news conference is held, preparation is crucial. In new-style campaigns, close attention is paid to the backdrop behind the candidate. Good visuals are a boon to the campaign and the media—a powerful shot helps convey the right message while giving an incentive for media outlets to run the story. Well-organized campaigns help the shoot go as smoothly as possible. A "mult box" can let several television and radio stations plug into the candidate's microphone simultaneously. Good angles are established in consultation with camera

operators, and the distance between the press riser and satellite trucks will be paced off beforehand. If the campaign wishes to make the 6:00 p.m. news, the event might be held at 3:00 p.m., leaving plenty of time for editing; the same logic applies to newspaper deadlines. Smart campaigns pay attention to parking and electrical power; seating; and room for recording equipment, lights, and cameras, and even the menu for a complimentary lunch.

Media Events

The struggle for attention has led candidates to walk across states, work blue-collar jobs, sleep among the homeless, clean up neighborhoods, visit toxic waste sites, meet with senior citizens, greet workers at factory gates, and climb into hot-air balloons. In 2004, John Kerry went on a goose-hunting expedition in Ohio. It was no coincidence that such a candidate—holding a low rating with the National Rifle Association and reportedly having difficulties relating to voters—would choose to go hunting in a swing state where gun rights were important to many voters (Romano 2004). One of the most memorable political media events in recent history came when Barack Obama delivered a speech to 200,000 people in Berlin on a visit to Germany during the 2008 campaign (Issenberg 2008). The dramatic setting and monumental turnout conveyed the sense that Obama was popular overseas and adept at handling international affairs.

As always, the challenge of earned media is controlling the message. While supporters probably thought Obama's speech in Berlin and Kerry's hunt in Ohio were perfectly good ideas, some in the audience used these events to their own advantage. Kerry was portrayed as a phony who donned camouflage to hide his patrician background (Hurt 2004), and the very popularity of Obama, as evidenced by adoring European crowds, was cited as proof that the Democrat was a mere celebrity, not a leader.

Of course, genuine celebrities often play their parts in a campaign show, and endorsements by movie and television stars can be persuasive. Leading up to the 2008 Democratic primary contests, Obama held a rally with famed African American talk show host Oprah Winfrey. The power of a campaign event can be leveraged if the backdrop is colorful and meaningful, and if the message is thoughtful and reinforced in a variety of media outlets.

There is an art to event construction. All the rules for political staging apply: There must be enough chairs to seat the attendees, but not so many that the event looks poorly attended. The lighting must be bright

enough to distinguish the candidate from the background, but not so powerful that the candidate starts to sweat. Unlike a standard news conference, though, the idea behind a news event is that the action itself is the message.

When things go right, the result is a great picture and positive coverage. When things go wrong, the message can be disastrous. During the 1996 presidential race, Bob Dole fell through the railings of his stage at a campaign stop, a mishap that reflected on the competence of the Dole campaign and "led to questions about the senator's age and physical health" (Sockowitz 2008). Good advance staffers check every detail of event staging. It is not beneath them to jump up and down on a riser to check for squeaky joints and weak spots—and they might carry "the absolutely essential tools of the trade: Sharpies, a roll of duct tape and lots of index cards" (ibid.).

Michael Deaver, master of "the picture" for Ronald Reagan, thought the image must convey the message before a single word is spoken. "I am sure the purists, who want their news unfiltered and their heroes unrehearsed, gag on the word *visuals,*" he wrote, "but in the Television Age, [an event] hasn't happened, or at least it hasn't registered, if people can't see what you see" (Deaver and Herskowitz 1987, 141). Matthew Bennett, who served as trip director for Vice President Al Gore, said in 2000 that visuals are important because "we can't control the decisions made by the writer or editor about what will be covered" (Bennett, pers. comm. 2000); if Gore wanted to talk about policy but all the media wanted to run was a "horse race story," the advance team could at least convey the intended message visually.

Debates

For many local and third-party candidates, debates might be the only opportunity to earn some media. Coverage of debates is generally balanced, meaning that each candidate gets about the same amount of attention. Unlike higher-profile presidential or gubernatorial debates, there are few winners or losers at the local level; not enough people see them to make a difference. If, however, the coverage reinforces themes articulated in paid media, the one-two punch can prove effective.

Debates can help poorly funded candidates get their names out—which is precisely why front-runners are often reluctant to debate: There is no reason to give a lagging opponent this kind of exposure. Nevertheless, most high-level candidates are expected to debate, and approximately nine out of ten House and Senate candidates debate their opponents (Herrnson 2008, 239).

Candidates who want to maximize news coverage might gear their remarks more to the news media than to the audience at home. Many people who attend debates personally or watch debates on television have already made up their minds, but influential reporters and editorial boards pay close attention.

Candidates in the debate format strive to make clear, brief, and novel statements. Sometimes candidates are confrontational. It is important to reinforce the campaign theme, but simple repetition can be interpreted as "old news" (see Hershey 1984, 23). New wrinkles and off-the-cuff deviations can draw media attention. Anything out of the ordinary can catch the eye. A candidate might hold up the opponent's campaign literature or cite a scandal story. However, overly aggressive tactics can bring a media backlash. When a 2008 debate between Minnesotans Norm Coleman and Al Franken took an angry tone, with both candidates hurling accusations at each other, third-party contender Dean Barkley started to look like a viable alternative (Condon 2008).

Candidates should be well prepared, because the media are primed to seize on gaffes. Candidates who deviate from the preset message place themselves at risk. Gerald Ford may have sunk his chances to win the 1976 election when he opined in the course of a debate with Jimmy Carter that "there is no Soviet dominance of Eastern Europe." Michael Dukakis seemed to miss the point of the question, "If [your wife] Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?" when he replied, "No, I don't, and I think you know that I've opposed the death penalty during all of my life," and went on to discuss constitutional issues. Sarah Palin's performance in the 2008 vice presidential debate seemed *overly* scripted and insufficiently responsive to either the questions or her opponent—illustrating the downside of a trend toward preparing candidates with briefing books, canned replies, cutting attacks, and clever defensive maneuvers.

Interviews, the Editorial Page, and Nonattributed Information

News conferences and media events are open invitations to reporters. Other earned media options include radio and television talk shows and community programs.

As Democratic senator Dianne Feinstein of California struggled to hold her U.S. Senate seat in 1994, she was facing an increasingly conservative electorate and a multimillionaire opponent. Feinstein's team went on the offensive. The opponent, Michael Huffington, had endorsed Proposition 187, which was designed to limit the influx of illegal

immigrants into the state. It was discovered, however, that Huffington had employed an illegal immigrant as a houseworker. The hypocrisy was sure to drain support from Huffington. Feinstein led the attack on CNN's *Larry King Live,* and the charge was carried by California news media. Huffington's negatives skyrocketed, and Feinstein was returned to the Senate.

Candidates for local office are rarely invited to appear on national talk shows, but opportunities might be available on local radio and television and on the editorial page. The prevailing wisdom is that "placing an op-ed is one of the most difficult things to do in public relations. Especially if your client or candidate is not a well-known figure" (Shirley 1997, 23). The reason: Lots of people want to get their opinions in the paper, so editors have a large number of op-eds from which to choose. An alternative route is a humble letter to the editor. A campaign might try to get letters into a broad range of newspapers in hopes that arguments will be read far and wide.

A campaign that does not have to fight for coverage can get its message out with nonattributable "backgrounders." The messages are often called "leaks," even as many are given to reporters by authorized parties who strike a deal to remain anonymous (see Devine 2008). While the boundaries are hazy, there are four levels of communication with reporters:

1. *On-the-record conversations* can be printed with direct attribution to the source. All conversations with a reporter are assumed to be on the record unless another agreement has been made ahead of time.
2. *Background conversations* are those that can be attributed to a nonspecific source. The campaign staffer might, for example, negotiate references to "a campaign official."
3. *Deep background exchanges* should not be attributed at all, but they can be used to guide a reporter's research. The most famous example is "Deep Throat," the hidden voice behind the *Washington Post*'s coverage of Watergate (who turned out to be an FBI official).
4. *Off-the-record conversations* should not be used in any way. For the most part, the only statements that are kept off the record are discussions about personal and family matters.

Talking "on background" helps reporters write their stories. As one consultant explains, "On background is useful to outline a complex plan yet to be announced or to explain something not generally understood by the media in which the speaker is not the primary source" (Scudder 1997, 25). Research on nonattributed sourcing will always be sketchy,

but the anatomy of backgrounders can be seen in Bill Clinton's handling of fund-raising controversies that followed the 1996 election. White House special counsel Lanny Davis was in charge of media inquiries. He answered questions as fully as possible, even when the truth was ugly. The idea was to establish a "baseline": "Help the reporter write the first story, make sure it's complete, with everything in it," Davis says, and "from that point on, other reporters will find it when they search the LEXIS-NEXIS database of published newspaper stories, and so it will become the starting point for all future reporting" (1999, 43). Embarrassing documents that seemed at the time to have been leaked by Republican investigators actually got their start at the White House.

As Election Day nears, daily and weekly newspapers declare their preferences in editorial endorsements. Although procedures vary from paper to paper, the decisions are usually made by an editorial board. Reporters play only an advisory role in the endorsement process; they are sometimes asked for their opinions, but the final determination is typically not theirs to make. New-style consultants therefore make special efforts to win the favor of decision-makers. Periodic visits might help, and the candidate will attend any meeting requested by the editorial board. Campaigns that get the nod might reprint the endorsement for last-minute literature drops. Unfortunately, the editorial decision could wind up going the wrong way.

CONCLUSION

James Carville has called news media "the Beast"—if the campaign does not feed it, it feeds on the campaign. Whether or not this assessment is accurate, the media play a critically important role in new-style campaigns. The 24-hour news environment has erased the old deadlines, with regional and statewide news networks transforming the character of local races. Bloggers create and rehash news in real time. Campaigns have long relied on newspapers, radio, and television to carry the earned-media message, but online news consumption is becoming more and more prevalent. And as voters start receiving news in their cars and on the run, with direct feeds to handheld devices, the news environment is undergoing drastic change.

Chapter 10

Direct Voter Contact

Even as television and radio came to dominate campaign spending in the 1960s and 1970s, direct voter contact remained a key part of American political campaigns. Whereas television and radio broadcast a message to a broad demographic, direct voter contact reaches out to individuals in hopes that the right message aimed at the right person can move a voter the right way. Direct contact might come in the form of a candidate visit, a neighborhood volunteer canvass, a phone call, an e-mail, or a piece of campaign literature sent through the post. Nowadays, direct contact can even come in the form of an SMS text message from a good friend. Ironically, with the rise of technologies that allow for detailed, computerized segmentation of the electorate, the personal touch becomes, in some ways, easier to achieve.

This chapter discusses the purposes of direct contact, the main forms of contact used in contemporary campaigns, and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) drives, along with some notes on election recounts.

PURPOSES OF DIRECT CONTACT

Direct contact is frequently used to find and register new voters. While the numbers vary from one district to another, citizens age 65 to 74 have the highest registration rate—roughly 78 percent—whereas those age 18 to 24 have the lowest—about 59 percent (U.S. Census Bureau 2009). Voter registration can be an important part of a direct contact effort. Subject to local laws, a campaign volunteer might visit the homes of unregistered eligible voters and try to persuade the residents to fill out a voter registration card. Unregistered people tend to

have weak partisan ties, so when these voters *are* registered, they might be open to persuasion. Moreover, it is possible that new voters will be absent from opposition lists and that the only campaign material these individuals will receive during most of the race may come from the candidate who signed them up in the first place. Voter registration drives are time consuming, but they keep volunteers productive. In districts with a large, mobile college student population, registration can make or break a candidacy.

A training manual from the Florida Democratic Party lists persuasion as one of the top goals of voter contact: "Repetitively move the campaign's message to key groups, areas, and individuals in an effort to persuade them to support your candidate" (Florida Democratic Party n.d., 1). Every election cycle, voters receive uncounted pastel-hued self-introductions from candidates, along with harsh black-and-white attacks on the opposition. According to the Florida Democrats, "Over the last decade, direct mail has become a very powerful campaign tool. As television and radio costs have skyrocketed, direct mail has become more cost effective." Importantly, this form of contact "can be used to send specific messages directly to target voters" (ibid., 3).

Toward the end of the campaign, the purpose of direct contact shifts to getting out the vote. The stereotype of this activity involves volunteers firing up buses and vans to bring elderly voters to the polls. While GOTV operatives still use this well-tested approach, efforts to maximize turnout among supporters has become increasingly high-tech. Not only is microtargeting helping campaigns to focus on the most valuable voters, but the outreach to voters now relies on such campaign technologies as blast e-mails and SMS texting—neither of which existed, nor could have been readily conceived, in the heyday of mass-media campaigning.

TYPES OF DIRECT CONTACT

Direct contact can be separated into four broad categories: *candidate contact, volunteer outreach, mail efforts* (including e-mail and SMS texts), and "*netroots*" politicking. Each technique has its own costs and benefits, and each is enhanced by smart targeting. Candidate contact taps a limited resource: a candidate's own time and energy. Volunteer efforts rely on (and perhaps build up) supporter enthusiasm. A mail drive is less personal but can be cast more broadly. Finally, netroots campaigning, which encourage supporters to reach out to friends and acquaintances, depends heavily on technologies and relationships that did not exist in the recent past.

Candidate Contact

The pinnacle of direct contact is a conversation between a candidate and a voter. Voters who meet a candidate may see it as a more personal endeavor with a human face. They might be persuaded by physical appearance or body language. Facial expressions, hand movements, and vocal inflections mean a great deal. Personal campaigning humanizes a candidate whereas messages sent over the airwaves can seem distant and impersonal. Even in the new millennium, voters might want to be reminded that their representatives are people, not products.

Some candidates use coffee klatches and cocktail parties to meet voters. A supporter invites neighbors to his or her home, and the candidate drops by for a visit. Holding several get-togethers on the same evening allows the candidate to touch base with a large number of voters. Alternatively, candidates might visit regularly scheduled meetings of civic and business organizations or accept invitations to speak to these groups. Appearing at a factory during a shift change or at a subway stop during rush hour can mean a lot of voter contact over a short period of time—many dozen hands might be shaken in 15 minutes during a morning when little else is going on. Giving voters an opportunity to chat informally helps candidates build strong connections.

It is possible to go overboard with handshakes, however. If a candidate believes the best way to meet voters is to visit the local mall or county fair or to stand on the street corner because "thousands of people will be there," it is worth considering that such a scattershot approach is antithetical to new-style campaigning. The campaign would be unlikely to know people's residency, partisan predisposition, or registration status. Untargeted activities can be an inefficient use of precious time. Efficient campaigning is not about meeting as many people as possible but rather about meeting the *right* people and providing the right message.

Given that the candidate's time is limited, smart targeting would seem the best option. Targeting is particularly important when candidates knock on doors and chat with the people they meet inside.

The Walk Plan. Candidate walks are based on "walk sheets" containing the names, party affiliations, and perhaps some limited biographical data on the occupants of each house in a targeted neighborhood. For example, the walk sheet might read:

1 Maple Street: Alma Jones (R), Morris Jones (R)
3 Maple Street: Bert Smith (D), Carol Smith (R), April Smith (D)
7 Maple Street: Andrew Johnson (I)
9 Maple Street: Betty Hill (D), Stephen Fisher (D)

By listing only the voters who live in odd- or even-numbered houses, the candidate can work one side of the street at a time. Including party affiliation allows the candidate to skip disobliging households, or the lists might be filtered to exclude voters from the opposite party or unaffiliated voters. Rather than going into a neighborhood with only a modest idea of individual voter concerns, microtargeting can help candidates understand voters in greater detail and therefore be selective about their approach.

In preparation for the walk, cards can be mailed to each household (or, if the campaign is short on funds, the materials can be hand-delivered by volunteers). These "prewalk cards" might contain a picture of the candidate and a small note, something like:

> I'll be stopping by in the next few days to visit. I hope we get a chance to chat about your concerns and what I might do in the state legislature to help.

Prewalk cards can serve several purposes: They get the candidate's name and message out, prime the voter for a visit, and can provide a picture of the candidate so the voter knows who is coming to the door. Even if the voter is not at home on the day of the visit, a prewalk card suggests that the candidate will "listen to average folks."

The Walk. Volunteers from the neighborhood can introduce the candidate to all the residents, maybe providing background information along the way ("Mrs. Smith is a retired teacher who loves bird-watching"), or giving a quick rundown of the area ("We used to have a toy factory here"). The volunteer can carry the walk sheet—allowing the candidate to shake hands—keep the candidate on task, provide directions, and serve as the "bad cop" when needed. If a cheerful voter is eager to have the candidate in for coffee and cookies, the volunteer will suggest that they need to be moving along.

After shaking hands at the door and engaging in a brief discussion, the candidate might provide an informational pamphlet in hopes that the voter will read the material once he or she goes back inside. Immediately after the meeting, the volunteer might record notes about the conversation: the name of the person contacted, the voter's concerns, the voter's hobbies, and so forth.

If the voter is not at home, the candidate might leave a handwritten note on the back of the literature:

> Sorry I missed you. I stopped by to say hello and discuss your concerns, and perhaps we can get a chance to talk another time. Please feel free to call.

The notes can be written in advance so that the candidate and the volunteer can move steadily along.

To the voters who were home, a follow-up mailing might be sent after the visit. The mailing thanks the voter for his or her time and highlights the candidate's commitment to voter input. Any information or material that the voter requested should probably be sent immediately after the visit. Repetition and careful attention to message content distinguish this type of walk plan from an untargeted canvass in which the candidate simply knocks on doors.

Volunteer Outreach

The volunteer canvass mirrors the candidate walk plan except that it is members of the campaign team, not the candidate, who are going door-to-door. Like a candidate prewalk card, a note might be sent indicating that "a volunteer will be stopping by soon." Door-to-door workers hopefully will be familiar with the themes of the campaign; training sessions and scripts can help, and the importance of careful recordkeeping as to who was home (and who was not) and the interests of the contacted voters might be stressed. A follow-up note from the candidate might say, "Thanks for chatting with one of my volunteers." In the closing days of the campaign, this sort of canvass can serve as a "rapid-response" operation—a door-to-door blitz.

Literature drops are a related option. Unlike the canvass, "drops" entail simply placing a piece of campaign literature on the porch or in the doorjamb; they are not meant to involve a conversation. A drop can be done by anyone, including volunteers unfamiliar with the candidate—even kids. The idea is to cover an area quickly. Drops are much less expensive than mailings (no postage required), and they are helpful in improving early name recognition or during a last-minute push.

Microtargeting can also come into play. Literature on different topics can be dropped according to probable household interests in hopes that a tailored message would prove to be more successful in motivating potential voters to cast their ballot than would a generic piece of campaign literature. In the contemporary campaign environment, volunteers might expect their walk lists to come with data-overlay maps that pinpoint where each house can be found.

Telephone banks are another way to reach a large number of voters in short order. They keep volunteers busy, particularly those not able to walk door-to-door, and they are relatively inexpensive. Empirical evidence suggests that telephone contacts made by local volunteers seem to be an efficient means of turning out voters, while computerized "robo

calls" appeared to be ineffective (Green and Gerber 2008). Additionally, robo calls are subject to a range of legal restrictions (*Politics* 2009b).

A full-service phone operation has three elements: persuasion, identification, and activation. A persuasion pitch simply targets voters with a brief message. In a voter identification process, the key would be a few short questions regarding the voters' preferences in the coming election—who they intend to vote for, what their main concerns are, and so on. This information is carefully recorded, and voters are marked as "for," "against," or "undecided." Undecideds might be given another call, mailed information on the candidate, or perhaps even visited by a volunteer. Activation calls urge persuaded voters to go to the polls on Election Day. The activation list might start with those labeled "for" during the identification phase, but the list might also include those deemed merely *likely* to support the candidate.

The number of phone contacts that can be made during a given period of time can be predicted with a good deal of accuracy by multiplying the number of volunteers by the number of hours each volunteer will spend on the phone by the number of calls a volunteer can make per hour. Some evenings will have more volunteers than others, and some will see fewer hours of service, but a campaign can roughly calculate how long it will take to make a series of telephone contacts before the end of the campaign. Some campaigns hire a telemarketing firm to carry out this operation.

Direct Mail, E-Mail, and SMS Texts

Direct mail can be a powerful weapon in new-style campaigning due to its precision and because it operates quietly. GOP strategist Richard Viguerie has said that "direct mail is like a water moccasin—silent but deadly" (quoted in Meredith 2004/2005, 37). If the campaign fears that fish-and-game voters are worried about gun rights, a direct mail campaign might target these voters quickly and send a pro-gun message to this narrow group.

Direct mail allows the campaign to create a running narrative whereby each letter builds on the prior mailing. Through the course of the campaign, a detailed story can be told. Direct mail can also complement other outreach activities, such as radio and television advertisements. Voters hear the message on their way home from work and then read the same message as they open their mail in the evening. Mailers also allow for the creative use of pictures, graphics, and charts. A piece of direct mail might reproduce an editorial, an endorsement, or a scathing (but helpful) news story. It might offer a picture of the candidate or

the opponent, or it might present a telling photograph. Direct mail is not cheap, but it can be highly targeted—much more so than television and radio advertising.

Many campaigns hire direct-mail services to produce, label, and mail their literature, but others call upon volunteers to do some of the work. Large tables can be set up in one location, and a team of helpers can eat pizza, drink soda, and affix labels to mailers. Many volunteers enjoy the camaraderie. If a campaign is fortunate enough to have a legion of unpaid assistants, it might consider addressing particular mailings by hand. Some of the people who discard mass-produced literature might still open a hand-addressed envelope. In fact, hand-addressing may be a good way to communicate a specific message to a targeted group of voters. But the job is labor intensive even for short lists. Careful attention should of course be paid to regulations regarding return-address information and bulk-rate fees.

Simply adding a Web address to a postcard can leverage the mailer's impact. Democratic presidential candidate John Edwards experimented with sending DVDs, rather than simple flyers or brochures, to potential supporters (Blanchfield 2007). In 2009, an advocacy campaign for a gambling initiative in Ohio attached an application for an absentee ballot to a large flyer urging citizens to "Vote by Mail. Vote Yes on Issue 3."

Microtargeting is taking a strong role within the direct mail business as well. If voters are ranked by their persuadability or their likelihood of voting, it makes sense to mail them based on those scores. Speaking to the benefits of combining microtargeting with on-demand printing capabilities, Ravi Singh, the CEO of ElectionMall Technologies, says: "I don't necessarily have to print 5,000 or 50,000 pieces. Rather than waiting for a scheduled drop, I can do pieces in response to my strategies" (Blanchfield 2007). While microtargeting is primarily employed by high-level campaigns with financial clout, campaign organizations farther down the ballot are also beginning to use this tactic.

Repetition is important for all forms of campaign communications, but it seems especially necessary for direct mail. A single mailing (or even a handful of mailings) might not move voters, but repetitive mailing increases costs. Moreover, direct mail takes time to produce and to move through the postal system. Several days can pass while the campaign and mail consultant produce, label, and send a piece of literature. Radio spots, by contrast, can be produced and aired in the same day. Still, while some are quick to dismiss direct mail as a bygone campaign tactic (Morris 2007a), consultant Liz Chadderdon says that, no matter how much people may utilize or rely upon the Internet, they will always have a physical address they call home (2009).

E-mails are not replacing postal mailers outright, but they are a growing part of new-style message strategy. As campaign advisers point out:

> All grassroots activities are opportunities to collect emails and cell phone numbers and upload those lists onto the campaign's bulk email and mobile text service. Yes, this is great for early fundraising, but down the homestretch, a campaign that has collected an extra couple of thousand emails early on can have a terrific competitive advantage over their opponents in terms of mobilizing supporters. (All and Armstrong 2009)

Using a commercial e-mail service can be important because spam filters are becoming more and more sensitive to e-mail that Internet providers deem unwanted, and moving mail through the system without getting blacklisted is increasingly difficult for amateur messaging.

Beyond e-mail, SMS text messaging was used to some effect in the 2008 presidential election, especially by the Obama team, which announced the choice of Joe Biden as vice presidential running mate via text message (though traditional news outlets actually broke the story first; Puzzanghera 2008). Texts might be intended to rally supporters, solicit funds, or organize campaign events. By virtue of its permission based nature, text messaging serves primarily to build support among those already prepared to vote for a specific candidate, thus making it a less-than-ideal tool for reaching undecided voters. In 2008, as a GOTV technique toward the end of the campaign, the Obama organization sent text-message reminders to subscribers shortly before and on the day of the election that urged them to cast a vote.

Netroots

Howard Dean's bid for the Democratic presidential nomination undertook perhaps the best-run online grassroots—or as it is now known, *netroots*—campaigns to that date, and in doing so, the Dean campaign may have changed the nature of electioneering. Dean's campaign manager, Joe Trippi, later wrote that the 2004 election

> was the opening salvo in a revolution, the sound of hundreds of thousands of Americans turning off their televisions and embracing the only form of technology that has allowed them to be involved again, to gain control of a process that alienated them decades ago. (2004, xviii–xix)

The reach of the Obama effort was massive, including some 13 million e-mail addresses, 7,000 distinct messages over a billion separate e-mails, a groundbreaking SMS texting program, 5 million voters signed up on

social networking sites such as MySpace and BlackPlanet, and a half billion dollars collected from the Internet (Vargas 2008).

Social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter allow campaigns to reach a new, typically young and tech-savvy, group of voters. Potential supporters can add the candidate as a "friend," post comments on the candidate's profile, and share this information with online associates. Capitalizing on the power of netroots, blogs, campaign Web sites, and social networking sites, Obama's supporters overwhelmed the McCain team. As noted by one observer, "The architects and builders of the Obama field campaign . . . have undogmatically mixed timeless traditions and discipline of good organizing with new technologies of decentralization and self-organization" (Exley 2008). Marshall Ganz, a labor organizer who led training sessions for Obama staffers and volunteers, noted:

> They've invested in a civic infrastructure on a scale that has never happened. It's been an investment in the development of thousands of young people equipped with the skills and leadership ability to mobilize people and in the development of leadership at the local level. It's profound. (United Press International 2008)

A quick visit to my.barackobama.com or johnmccain.com during the 2008 campaign allowed supporters to coordinate such events as an "Obama small family farms house meeting" (Caldwell 2008). These gatherings could be organized by supporters who had no formal connection to the campaign. In this sense, netroots communication occurs horizontally, friend to friend, not vertically from the campaign down to the voters. With increasing opportunities to build support around their favorite candidates in the form of blogs, online commentaries, and video postings, campaign professionals are likely to find a double-edged sword. On the one side, the opinions of a voter's friends, family, and other associates are a powerful source of political persuasion; on the other side, bloggers and other members of the Internet community are difficult to manage or keep on message.

A central advantage of a motivated netroots base is speed. In 1996, Democrat Loretta Sanchez was able to defeat conservative Republican congressman Bob Dornan in California in part because she ran an under-the-radar outreach campaign that did not catch Dornan's attention until the final months of the election; Dornan had difficulty responding because he relied on direct-mail fund-raising for much of his campaign war chest (Burton and Shea 2003, 89–111). This episode can be compared to the near-defeat of Rep. Michele Bachmann of Minnesota in the

final weeks of the 2008 cycle. When Bachmann said in an interview, "I am very concerned that [Obama] may have anti-American views" and "The American media [should] take a great look at the views of the people in Congress and find out, are they pro-America or anti-America?" the liberal blogs fired up, video was posted on political Web sites, e-mails raced among Democrats, and Bachmann's opponent raised $450,000 in 24 hours (Aquino 2008). In the new era of netroots, it is increasingly difficult to imagine how future media campaigns will find a way to fly under the radar.

GET-OUT-THE-VOTE DRIVES

The value of last-minute campaigning can be seen in the Oneonta, New York, school board election of Rosemary Shea, the late mother of this book's coauthor, Dan Shea. With an hour to go before the polls closed, the campaign team had exhausted its list of favorable voters. In fact, two or three calls had been made to each. Determined to work until the last minute, the candidate scoured the list of those who had not yet voted. With 15 minutes left, she drove across town to visit a household of three would-be Democratic voters, convincing them to get into her car and be driven to the polls so that they could fulfill their "civic duty." With seconds to go, all three cast their ballots. Out of the thousands of votes cast, Shea won the election by exactly three.

GOTV efforts are among the most important activities undertaken during a campaign. While democratic principles call on everyone to vote on Election Day, the goal of a campaign's GOTV drive is to concentrate on the voters most likely to support the candidate. There are many different ways to figure out whom to contact, including voter identification calls, demographic and survey research, and electoral history. One rule of thumb is to target roughly 10 percent of the votes needed for victory; for example: "If you are running a state legislative race and need 15,000 votes to win, you must have at least 1,500 identified supporters whom you will push to the polls" (Allen 1990, 38). Whatever numbers are used, it is important to remember that last-minute pushes are designed to get the candidate's voters to the polls, not simply to kick up turnout across the board.

Yale scholars Donald Green and Alan Gerber (2008) have developed research showing what does and does not work when trying to get out the vote, charting the cost-effectiveness of different techniques. Are automated robo calls worth the time and money? Likely not. Does it help to have a celebrity make the voice recording? No. Are in-person

visits effective? Yes. But are they more cost-effective than telephone-based programs? Sometimes. In the field, techniques that rely on volunteers have proven effective, particularly when the efforts are organized according to a thoughtful method.

The team might begin planning the GOTV drive about a month before Election Day. This probably means establishing a plan of action and assigning a coordinator. The plan lays out specific tasks, deadlines for accomplishing crucial jobs, and the people responsible for completing them. Moreover, the plan lists the resources needed for implementation. Three to five days before the election, a GOTV mail piece might be sent to swing voters. This mailer could stress the importance of the election and the difference that every vote can make. It might be a good idea to include an anecdote of an election won by just a few votes. If the campaign is strapped for cash, pamphlets can be hand-delivered during the weekend prior to the election.

As technology has advanced, new voting options have emerged. Many voters are casting ballots by mail. Early voting at central locations has also become quite popular. Indeed, early voters may have comprised nearly 30 percent of all voters in the 2008 election (McDonald 2009). In some states, residents can now vote weeks ahead of the election. As of 2009, 32 states allowed some form of no-excuse early voting (Early Voting Information Center at Reed College 2009). Advocates say that increased ease of voting is a boon for the democratic process and that absentee-style voting is quick, convenient, and less costly than traditional Election-Day voting, and the public seems willing to move in this direction.

Changes in voting procedures mean a great deal to campaign operatives. It is possible that enthusiastic voters might cast their votes early. These votes will already be "in the box," or "banked," as many operatives call it; no more persuasion is needed. Mail-in ballots can be used to encourage participation among low-frequency voters—those who are registered but have skipped a few elections or vote only in presidential contests. Senior citizens might fall into this category. Of course, whenever a new pool of voters is added to the electorate, uncertainty is created. Will electoral targeting prove accurate? Will new voters break for candidates of one party more so than the other?

Early voting procedures also shift strategic timing. Campaign workers need to take note of the deadlines for the submission of mail-in or absentee and early voting ballots, making sure that every would-be voter has this information as well (see National Conference of State Legislatures 2009). In jurisdictions that provide such information, absentee lists might be secured from boards of elections. Volunteers

can review these registries and send messages to absentees throughout the race. For some, it may be the only concrete information they receive. Campaigns that engage in this kind of activity might find that "Election Day" is stretched to three or four weeks. Instead of building up to a single moment in time, a campaign might have to spread its most intense efforts—media buys, news events, and campaign mailings—over a month-long period, with particular attention paid to the first few days after the voting window opens.

On the eve of the election, the campaign's telephone room might shift into full gear. If possible, the entire GOTV target group would be contacted. The message on the phone might be quite similar to the message in a mailer already sent. Early on Election Day, e-mail and text messages might be shipped to likely supporters who still need to go out and vote.

Some jurisdictions allow for "poll watching." On the morning of the election, volunteers go to each polling place, find a comfortable place to sit, and then record the names of each person who votes. The resulting lists are picked up throughout the day and delivered to headquarters, where the names of those who have voted are scratched off a master list. By keeping track of which voters have already gone to the polls, the campaign knows who still needs a reminder.

Most people vote early in the morning or just after work. Some people need assistance getting to the polls: child care and rides to the polling stations are sometimes offered. This process continues throughout the evening, relying on updated lists from the poll watchers in order to scratch off recent voters. Prospective supporters are called until the polls close. A rally might be held in a targeted neighborhood. Massive literature drops might help, along with yard sign blitzes, but the campaign may wish to steer clear of untargeted activities such as waving signs at intersections, handing out leaflets at shopping malls, and canvassing precincts that did not make it onto the target list.

NOTES ON RECOUNTS

Recount procedures gripped public attention during the six weeks following the 2000 presidential contest. Many people were surprised by the complexity of recounts and the fragility of election results. Every time the ballots were counted, the vote totals changed. In 2002, the Help America Vote Act sought to correct many of the problems encountered in 2000. Most agree, however, that the system remains imperfect. The potential for irregularities and miscounts continues.

In a well-prepared campaign, a voter protection plan might begin by assembling the laws on recount procedures ahead of time. An attorney with a working knowledge of state election law might be kept on tap. Legal questions should be clarified well before Election Day—in terms of both initiating a recount (if the campaign loses) and opposing a recount (if the campaign wins), and campaigns might consider placing trained volunteers at the polls to watch for irregularities. Among those who would sit on a recount team, both legal and political responsibilities should probably be made clear, contact information shared, and the necessary addresses and telephone numbers of election offices, election commissioners, and appropriate judicial authorities readied. Recounts are generally initiated on Election Night or the following morning, and there is little time to waste.

Some jurisdictions have automatic recounts for close elections, but whether the process is automatic or must be requested, it will likely be a time-consuming and labor-intensive affair. The focus is often on mistakes in tabulation. In 2000, the problem in Florida was a combination of poor ballot design, voter error, faulty voting procedures, and improper instructions. In the razor-thin outcome of the 2008 U.S. Senate race in Minnesota, the question boiled down to the validity of a few hundred ballots—and the issue was settled only after several months and a series of court challenges. Outright election fraud is far less frequent than accidental mishaps. In any event, attention must be paid to both the legal implications of the recount and the attendant communications issues, for, in politics, the court of public opinion is also important.

Operatives on all sides should understand that election results are hard to overturn even when the evidence seems clear. One attorney relates the story of an election his client lost by 30 votes. A precinct, which went 55 to 125 for the opposition, showed clear indications of machine malfunction, even if the exact problem could not be located in the device itself. With a seeming undervote of a hundred ballots,

> we canvassed the precinct and got about 150 affidavits from people who said they had voted for the Democrat. I checked them against the precinct sign-in list and every one of them had been there. At the hearing, I proffered the affidavits to show that my client had been the victim of a machine malfunction. The judge said he trusted the machine. My client decided not to take an appeal. (Still, Law-Courts Listserv posting, December 9, 2000)

Some candidates believe it is more dignified to bow out gracefully than to fight for a contested victory.

CONCLUSION

An enthusiastic volunteer effort suggests that others in the community are supporting the candidate, and this image, in turn, might bring still more volunteers and increased support. There are few better ways of getting the bandwagon rolling than with a visible outpouring of help by members of the community. This same enthusiasm might bring media attention and campaign funds. Candidates flanked by volunteers send a positive message. Potential contributors take notice, as do editors and reporters. An air of grassroots popularity can be a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If the campaign is low on funds and receives a last-minute endorsement, a massive volunteer operation can spread the word quickly. Grassroots campaigning can be narrowly targeted, as well. With careful planning, it can bring the right message to the right voters without the waste that accompanies broadcast media targeting large demographic groups.

The effort should probably start with the candidate. It is difficult to ask volunteers to lend a hand if the candidate is unwilling to do so. The candidate's friends might presume their efforts should be geared toward "strategy," not implementation, but these friends might also be reminded of the need to knock on doors. Some local parties are as robust as they have been at any time in the past 30 or 40 years, and there is a growing number of politically active organizations in the field. Many Democrats are assisted by labor unions, and many Republicans get a boost from business organizations and church groups. Yet another source of volunteers is the pool of student organizations at the local college or university. The rise of youth-oriented political groups in the 2004 and 2008 elections was truly impressive. At the other end of the spectrum are senior citizens. Older Americans are a rapidly growing group, are politically active, and often have a good deal of spare time for making phone calls.

As with all other facets of electioneering, political judgment is vital. In some places, it is common to find door-to-door volunteers out on a Sunday; in others, this would be taboo. On any day, campaigns should be wary of calling too early in the morning or too late at night. Yard signs are acceptable in some places but considered tacky in others. Professionals must understand the social, religious, and political norms of any area in which they undertake grassroots campaigning.

In a larger sense, campaigns must channel volunteer enthusiasm properly. Smart campaigns make sure the candidate attends volunteer functions in order to express gratitude and maintain interest. Pizza, bagels, soda, and coffee are served, and on Election Night there will likely be

an extravagant blowout. The race should be fun. Sour looks and hot tempers corrode relationships. Even as microtargeting and media advertising have surpassed many traditional campaign activities, politics remains a very human endeavor. As such, campaigning can be one of the most rewarding missions that a person can accept. The rush of Election Night can be thrilling. Candidates, consultants, and campaign staff always want to win, but professionals should not forget that it is only an election. There will be others. Win or lose, life will go on.

Conclusion

The New Style

Political strategists tend to speak in martial language because

> politics and war follow the same principles: armies face off in battle, each with different plans, different strengths and weaknesses, limited resources, generals with different styles, and all sharing the same goal of crushing the enemy. (Sweitzer 1996, 46)

For a political strategist, campaigns are civilized warfare, a form of single combat (see Burton and Shea 2003; Pitney 2000). But politics is also a form of commercial marketing (see Newman 1999). The language of voter contact speaks of "gross rating points," "spot production," "list management," and "demographic research." It can be said that "every campaign is a small business startup with a short time to build and sell a concept to potential supporters and to achieve a winning result" (Pelosi 2007, 62).

Adlai Stevenson, who railed against those who "merchandise candidates for high office like breakfast cereal," would be greatly dismayed at the present state of affairs. For more than half a century, political campaigns have absorbed innovative technologies with amazing speed. Databases, video editing, smart phones, and laptop computers have become standard equipment. Advanced technologies such as SMS text-casting are used in high-profile campaigns and some down-ballot races. As with all other areas of life, the tools employed by an organization transform the structure of the organization itself, and the tools of political campaigns are the tools of political marketing.

This final chapter highlights some of the technologies that reinforce the new-style business of electioneering and discusses the implications of these forces on the connections between candidates and the electorate.

POLITICS, TECHNOLOGY, AND BUSINESS

When the political parties dominated campaign politics, the relationship between bosses and voters was a one-to-one affair, with ground-level leaders listening directly to voter concerns and shaping their pitches accordingly (perhaps with the added incentive of a Thanksgiving turkey or a government job). With the rise of candidate-centered campaigns, the relationship involved mass outreach, a one-to-many relationship; no longer did the parties customize their approaches to individual voters, but instead the candidates reached out to an audience en masse. The technology available to contemporary campaigns, however, allows for the tailoring of messages to individual voters in a business revolution that is bringing profound changes to the relationship between voters and candidates. In the process, campaign consultants are working toward the reestablishment of one-to-one relationships, but this time on a mass scale.

The "mass customization" of politics can be seen in the increasing power of database management and the astounding proliferation of communications technology. The developments go hand-in-hand. Database management produces specialized lists of voters, and these voters can be targeted by new modes of communication.

Even in the digital age, advisers to down-ballot races understand that campaign managers might rely on hard-copy records: "If you are using index cards," writes one, "place all information for each volunteer on a single card" and do the same for all campaign contacts (Shaw 2010, 77). Low-tech procedures make sense for small races because the start-up costs of professional databasing can be high. As the costs of data management decline, however, even down-ballot campaigns are likely to go digital.

Professionalism is transforming campaigns. The difference is not just the media of message dissemination but also the strategy that new-style electioneering sustains. Early mass media took a shotgun approach. The candidate's media strategy—to the extent that it had a well-planned line of attack—broadcast the message widely. The goal was to reach as many people as possible. This meant getting the message out through newspapers, rallies, and district-wide door-to-door canvassing. Each of these tactics was effective in contacting a great many people, though not always in reaching the most persuadable voters. Little could be done to link the right message with the right person. In the new millennium, scrupulous efforts are made to discover voter preferences through survey research, and a carefully rifled message, it is hoped, will be directed to each persuadable voter group, even to each individual voter.

In the golden age of parties, campaigns were constituent parts of a centralized chain of command. By the early days of new-style campaigns, the decomposition of party structures meant a trend toward multiple hierarchies, with each candidate running his or her own operation. As the transformation toward candidate-centered campaigns was unfolding, candidates began to rely on outside consultancies. Even the resurgence of political parties reflects this trend. The parties are no longer just a pecking order of elected officials and staff. They are clearinghouses for money, expertise, and political information. One result is a new party structure in which campaigns are far more adaptable to change in the political environment because they are tapping into the expertise of outside consultants.

Another result is that electioneering has evolved into a business-oriented profession. It has a professional organization, standards of conduct, industry magazines, and a collection of norms and practices that set consultants apart from the old party bosses and their own candidates. Professional consultants can have more in common with their colleagues on the other side of the partisan aisle than with outspoken ideologues within their chosen party. But most important, the profession has been locked in place by the increasing technological complexity of new-style electioneering. This was true as far back as 1980, when Sidney Blumenthal wrote, "The arrival of new techniques based on computers—direct mail, voter identification methods, sophisticated polling—reinforces the role of consultants." The reason for the shift to professionals, according to Blumenthal, was simple: "In order to have access to the new technology, a candidate needs a consultant. He can't run a viable, much less a respectable, campaign without one" (1980, 3).

Capital Costs

Merging communications and technology requires substantial funding. Telemarketing costs money, and so does sophisticated Web design. Voter lists cost money, too. In fact, new-style campaigns can cost a *lot* of money, because they rely on specialized expertise. An article in *Campaigns and Elections* titled "Can Political Candidates Afford to Allow Their Data to Be Managed by Anyone but a Professional?" suggested that professionals "can take the burden of mission critical database management and related targeted communications off of the plate of the campaign manager" (Grefe 1998/1999, 18). The logic is compelling. Electoral competition necessitates technical proficiency; technical proficiency is capital intensive, and because campaign operations cannot afford to absorb the initial costs by themselves, campaign managers,

who may well be employed as consultants in their own right, must rely on a range of outside consultancies.

User-friendly software can help almost any techno-savvy supporter build a Web site. The difficulty is that Web sites built by amateurs can end up looking amateurish. Surfers are accustomed to a visually attractive Web experience, and they will be disappointed with a poorly designed site. Even worse, unless the designer is thoroughly familiar with a variety of server platforms and the fine distinctions among Web browsers and browser versions, the candidate's site might not display properly, possibly losing a vote in the process. Top-notch sites require first-rate talent if for no other reason than Internet security is a growing necessity. To be hacker-proof—a particular concern for political Web sites, which are prime targets for mischief—the technology team must know more about server technology than nearly all other Internet users. When the campaign starts to deploy e-commerce applications to collect campaign contributions, the need for paid professionals increases. The relative value of volunteer Web designers is diminished, and it becomes more and more doubtful that an in-house campaign staffer will be capable of designing a stable, secure, and up-to-date Web site.

The capital costs of research, development, and experience would be hard to shoulder within any single candidate operation. Loyalists might be unable to build professional Web sites, manage complex databases, layer demographic and electoral variables on a computerized map, and develop an integrated television, radio, Internet, call center, and mail outreach program. Polling and electoral targeting are becoming more sophisticated. The abundance of information available at the turn of the 21st century has made opposition research an advanced skill. The competitive nature of electoral politics ensures that each new technology escalates the need for campaigns to be faster, stronger, and more capable of doing battle with techno-savvy opponents. In the 21st century, it would seem that only the uninformed would try to run a major campaign without drawing on experienced consultants using advanced technology.

In the late 1800s, the capital costs of campaign management were borne by the major parties, as knowledge was stored within Tammany-style organizations. If, in the new millennium, traditional parties were still intact, there might be no need for consultants. But in the 1960s and 1970s, with the rise of individualized campaign operations, party structures loosened, and consultants picked up the slack. Consultants, for their part, are loyal to party organizations in that they represent certain political ideals and require a ready stock of clients. Few consultants are interested in joining party hierarchies, and they might treat their selection of candidates as a business decision. James Carville's minimalist

criteria from his days as an active consultant for American campaigns seems representative of the culture: "I will work for a Democrat who I can get along with who is neither a bigot nor a crook" (Matalin and Carville 1995, 55). Nevertheless, Scholar David Dulio found that "over half . . . of all the consultants in [his] study reported that they once worked for a candidate who they were later sorry to see serve in office" (2004, 79).

The decline of parties led to a fragmented political marketplace and the rise of independent consultancies; some of the resurgence of political parties can be attributed to the recognition that party organizations can serve as brokers, harnessing the power of professional expertise by distributing money and referrals to candidates in targeted races. But even as parties respond to the new consultant-centered environment, the fact that they are using political consultants, not bringing them all on staff, demonstrates a concession to the new reality: Independent campaign operatives have taken over the management of political campaigns.

Campaign consultants provide specialized expertise. Imported from the private sector, television advertising and research-driven market segmentation were deployed in the 1952 Dwight Eisenhower campaign, which drew on the services of television advertising pioneer Rosser Reeves, whose best-known slogan was "M&M's—Melts in your mouth, not in your hands." In 1968, Richard Nixon relied on a specially selected media team, including Roger Ailes, executive producer of *The Mike Douglas Show*. In 1996, Bill Clinton used Bob Squier of Squier Knapp Ochs, a Washington-based media firm that handled a wide variety of clients. As if to demonstrate that the component parts of media consultancy are truly interchangeable, Ailes, who had also worked for Ronald Reagan and George H. W. Bush, would later return to television as president of the Fox News Channel, and Squier, whose knowledge of damage control was virtually unrivaled, helped America Online respond to bad publicity when customers complained about busy signals interrupting their online service.

George Stephanopoulos, when he first met James Carville, reflected on the changes that had taken place since John F. Kennedy's time:

> Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President, 1960* described the major political advisors of the day as a few dozen Washington lawyers, "who in their dark-paneled chambers nurse an amateur's love for politics and dabble in it whenever their practice permits." By 1991, that description had the dated feel of a sepia-toned photograph, harking back to an era when political consultants, like tennis players in long pants, were not paid for their work. There were still amateurs who loved the game in 1991, but campaigns were now run by professionals. (1999, 45)

From the early 1990s to the turn of the 21st century, the campaign marketplace required increasing specialization. According to one observer, general consultants like Carville, who supervised political campaigns from top to bottom, had become "dinosaurs of the consulting world" (Glasser 2000a). The profits that can be had by skillful entrepreneurs and the increasing complexity of political campaigns make for a campaign context in which specialization is sometimes prized over broad-spectrum talent. A large campaign might hire a strategist who charges a flat fee, a professional fund-raiser who keeps a percentage, a pollster who charges a fee per completed survey, an opposition researcher who runs up billable hours, a media consultant who bases costs on a mix of production fees and commissions, an ad placement consultant who takes an additional cut of the media buys, a telemarketer who invoices the campaign for a retainer plus a cost per call, and a direct-mail consultant whose fees vary according to the type of mail requested, the lists used, and the size of the mailing sent. The strategist, in turn, might purchase consumer data from an outside vendor and voter lists from yet another vendor, and the media consultant might work with a new-media specialist who subcontracts visual production, site hosting, and e-commerce services to another set of experts. General campaign management becomes the business of integrating a variety of professional services.

Americans have been campaigning so long and so well that overseas politicos have taken notice. Elections in Europe, Latin America, and the democracies of the former Soviet bloc are assisted by Americans. They bring the technology of new-style campaigns with them, along with a strong understanding of strategy. While Americans must be sensitive to the locale in which they are working—"the American approach with hard-hitting contrast ads may prove counterproductive in cultures that prefer to avoid confrontation" (Panagopoulos and Dayanand 2005, 45)—the idea that voters must be segmented and prioritized has global appeal. Indeed, "Latin America, with its culture of *presidentialismo*, is one of the hottest markets for U.S. consultants" (ibid.).

Mitigating Forces

Despite the powerful centrifuge that breaks up campaigns and distributes their parts to a wide range of outside contractors, campaign decentralization is limited by constraints inherent in political operations. In most small, municipal-level campaigns, the benefits of consultancy are not realized. Examples of consultant-free campaigns abound. Ed Baum, the Republican for city council discussed in chapter 4, gained his seat with a self-run campaign that cost only a few thousand dollars. Baum's team

was made up of friends and acquaintances, and his strategy was developed by reading a few good books. He built name recognition with yard signs and ran ads in the local paper. After his victory, Baum sat down and figured out what went right and what could be improved. The need for a highly paid political consultant in this sort of race seems remote.

Aside from economic calculations, a number of other factors mitigate against the power of consultants in campaigns and elections. First, the public is not infinitely malleable—some candidates just do not persuade voters. In media-driven California politics, both Michael Huffington's losing campaign for Senate in 1994 and Al Checchi's disastrous bid for the gubernatorial nomination in 1998 suffered from backlash against candidates who seemed to be buying the election. Huffington was seen as an "empty suit" whose $30 million campaign was orchestrated by his then wife, Arianna. Checchi's advertisements and campaign materials, coordinated by top consultants Mark Penn and Bob Shrum, reflected the corporate professionalism that one might expect from a $40 million campaign run by an airline executive, but they were never able to connect the candidate with the voters. As media consultant Alex Castellanos has said, "You know, sometimes the problem is not the label on the can, it's the dog food. And sometimes there's just dog food dogs don't like" (1998). In campaign politics, media can make a difference, but rarely can they make *all* the difference.

Second, loyalty still counts. Even as candidates look to outside consultancies, they continue to rely on inside advisers. Wise candidates form kitchen cabinets of trusted friends and colleagues. During the electoral season, the group might become a formal campaign committee. Both major party presidential candidates in 2000 commanded loyalty: Al Gore had long depended on his former chiefs of staff—Peter Knight, Roy Neel, Jack Quinn, and Ron Klain—all of whom worked high up in the vice president's campaign; George W. Bush's inner circle was filled with staffers who had demonstrated loyalty for years in the Texas governor's office. Barack Obama would later find his strongest supporters within his sphere of Chicago loyalists. Candidates turn to intimates for confidential advice, alternative interpretations of polling data, and a listening ear for the musings and frustrations of the candidates in the middle of a tough campaign. Consultants—who must treat politics as a business, who may be tied to a party committee, who are probably working for several clients at once, and who may fade from view days after the election—are not always privy to internal decision making.

Third, the same technological advances that complicate campaigns can also simplify, to a degree, the campaign process. With more than half a million electoral offices in the United States, there is a rich

market for campaign goods and services. No one size fits all, but the commonalities that allow for modularization also create a market for the tools of the trade. Campaign handbooks provide generalized advice. A new-style candidate at ease with computer technology can, over the course of a long weekend, download voter lists, combine this information with precinct data, and display the results on a computer-generated map. Digital technology can reduce the costs of shooting video, and ill-funded candidates can post their ads on YouTube. "Large campaigns can afford the consultants," notes ElectionMall CEO Ravi Singh, "but the medium and small campaigns have to figure things out as things go." ElectionMall's solution: A product called Campaign in the Box, which the company says contains "a Web site, online fund-raising platform, permission-based e-mail tools, widgets, online advertising, yard signs, and a plethora of promotional items" (ElectionMall 2009).

Fourth, good management demands limitations on the number of consultants involved in the campaign. With each stratum of consultants comes a new risk of media leaks, cost-control problems, and administrative headaches. Simple communication can become problematic. Managing a large number of profit-driven consultants who need to work together can be daunting for even the ablest of political candidates. That was one of the problems on the Checchi campaign, it seems, where battles reportedly broke out among consultants who became overly aggressive in seeking fees (Glasser 2000b). Even when the consultants are all cooperating with one another, the distributed nature of campaign consulting can lead to a counterproductive "silo effect," whereby a campaign organization's well-paid tacticians are spread across the country and must therefore coordinate their efforts through the narrow bandwidth of a weekly conference call.

Finally, an electorate that demands authenticity will perhaps see something untoward in the hiring of people whom James A. Thurber and Candice J. Nelson have called "campaign warriors" (2000). Mercenaries are little more respected in politics than in battle, and the very fact that an opponent's campaign has hired an out-of-state consultant can be used to impugn the opposition. Consultants who use the same tricks of the trade over and over again might have a homogenizing affect on American politics. Voters seek out authentic candidates. Arnold Schwarzenegger's recall campaign against Gray Davis succeeded partly because the Terminator so often departed from routine campaign messaging. Any hint that a campaign is mass-customized threatens to chip away at a candidate's seeming genuineness. For many, the rise of political consultants and voter targeting signifies a move away from the politics of personal connection and toward an era of hypermediated politics.

POLITICAL CONNECTIONS

Did the citizens of earlier times have a closer connection to public officials than those of the new millennium? In some ways, they did; in other ways, they did not. At no time was there truly a golden age of American politics. Never has money failed to provide some degree of access to politicians, nor was there a moment when campaigns did not attempt to change the public mind for political reasons. The Civil War was a violent extension of partisan and sectional politics. Later, Mark Hanna, William McKinley's strategist, took in $250,000 from John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil, the fortunes of which were endangered by populist presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan. What passes for mean-spirited politics in the new millennium pales in comparison to the partisan witch-hunts of Joseph McCarthy.

There is, however, a sense in which all these comparisons are irrelevant. First, each tends toward the extreme. The Civil War, Rockefeller, and McCarthy are outliers in the American experience. Second, the forms of voter contact provided by campaign organizations have changed so radically that any comparison of old- and new-style campaigns is problematic.

One of the most common bases of comparison is the infamous political operation of George Washington Plunkitt. Plunkitt boasted personal knowledge of everyone whom he represented. While there may be self-aggrandizement in his claim, certainly the urban political machines, which merged social and political affairs, fostered a more personalized connection between voters and elected officials. The old party hierarchies had a one-to-one connection with their members. But a closer read of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (Riordon 1995) shows an attenuated relationship between candidates and constituents.

Plunkitt got his start when he built a political following of voters who would cast their ballots the way he requested. The voters in his base of support were "marketable goods" (Riordon 1995, 8). Plunkitt used his newfound assets to link up with the party leaders at district headquarters, which, in turn, was beholden to city and state organizations, on up to the national party level. In the world of the old party machines, hierarchies were stratified through multilayered echelons. The idea that one of Plunkitt's loyal supporters might have a substantive conversation with a governor or president is all but unthinkable. On the one hand, the old party structure was highly personalized: Plunkitt had an immediate relationship with his initial supporters, as indeed his first loyalists were a cousin and his friends. On the other hand, there was virtually no contact between low-level supporters and leaders high

up the political chain of command: Party hierarchies mediated relationships between leaders and voters by inserting thick layers in between.

New-style campaigns have fundamentally changed old-style relationships, bringing novel forms of voter alienation. As campaign scholar Christopher Arterton once noted:

> Modern politics have eviscerated [the old party] networks, replacing them with polling and mass communications. In the process, the individual voter has become a cipher, a statistical construct rather than a living, breathing person. Targeting involves creating an electoral majority by sending out messages to voters on the basis of the probability of support, depending on certain demographic characteristics or known "facts" about the individuals in a given group. Given the large number of citizens involved, campaigners cannot treat (or even conceptualize) these voters as individuals. In fact, to some degree, the individuals themselves are unimportant. As long as the total number of supporters can be pushed over the 50 percent mark, one voter is more or less substitutable by another. (2000, 22)

Depersonalization was a hallmark of American politics in the period that followed the decline of traditional parties. The rise of microtargeting has, some believe, merely exacerbated the trend that Arterton highlighted nearly a decade before the routine use of voter microtargeting procedures took hold.

In some ways, however, the fall of old party hierarchies resulted from the forging of new relationships between voters and candidates. When Ronald Reagan campaigned in the 1980 primaries, he "went over the heads" of the party leadership by speaking directly to Republican voters. The appeal was made on the airwaves—it was in no sense a personal, one-to-one relationship—but Reagan's politics were arguably a great deal more personalized than the "smoke-filled rooms" of Plunkitt's day. Nixon could run his own campaigns because television allowed him to bypass the established party leadership. George McGovern received the Democratic nomination in 1972 in large part because he had mastered the art of direct mail. Jimmy Carter made effective use of television to present himself as an outsider at the precise moment when the political marketplace demanded such a president. In 1992, Bill Clinton used "town hall" meetings to great effect, dispensing with the probing questions of skeptical reporters. In 2000 and 2004, George W. Bush "connected" with the voters far better than his adversaries. And in 2008, Hillary Clinton, once the front-running choice of established Democratic Party stalwarts, was selected to become secretary of state by President-elect Barak Obama, who seemed to master the electronic media.

In the new millennium, voters benefit from more and more opportunities to join the debate. YouTube, launched in 2005, quickly saw the posting of user-generated political ads. Bloggers have gained prominence as watchdogs, muckrakers, incendiaries, and fact checkers. Traditional news outlets allow readers to post instant reactions to unfolding news events, heightening the sense of participation—and sometimes the *reality* of participation, as in the case of political amateurs like "Obama Girl," who released a catchy, funny, and seductive video supporting her favored candidate. YouTube and other video-sharing sites allow small campaigns to post clips and forward them to supporters. Poignant segments from campaign events, such as the kickoff, a debate, a press conference, or an endorsement from a well-respected luminary, might be posted online and spread around the country. As noted by one scholar, "Because social media often consists of user-generated content or campaign content forwarded from one person to another, it can be even more influential" (Graf 2008, 53).

In the 2008 campaign, online social networking emerged as an important component of campaign strategy. Social networks had been around for several years, but they had rarely been used in campaign politics. These networks bring individuals together in an online environment with the explicit goal of forming groups around common interests. Online tools have included chat rooms, Web design, messaging, video and photo posting, blogging and video blogging, discussion forums, file sharing, and more. MySpace was an early player, and its worldwide audience is a testament to its innovation, but in the United States the growth of Facebook has been astonishing. Started in 2004 by a student at Harvard and originally offered only to Harvard colleagues, by the beginning of 2010 Facebook had over 350 million active members, many of whom vote in U.S. elections. A mid-2008 Pew report said that "two-thirds of internet users under the age of 30 have a social networking profile, and half of these use social networking sites to get or share information about politics or the campaigns" (Rainie and Smith 2008).

With low-cost video recording equipment, campaign workers can attend an opponent's public events and keep a video log of what happens there. If gaffes are caught, the video can be posted, and the word will get out. In 2008, candidates and their consultants began thinking about YouTube and how it might help campaigns win. A few candidates have officially announced their runs on YouTube (Shea and Reece 2008). This strategy can heighten an otherwise dull story or enhance an exciting one. When Obama announced he was running for president, the posting of his announcement on YouTube was a newsworthy event in itself. YouTube gave the story better legs and more exposure. It is

increasingly common for small-town campaign events to be posted on YouTube in the search for coverage by at least the local media, if not the national or even international outlets.

As they review all that is said on the Web, watching their opponents working to define the electoral competition, "campaigns must fight an online tug-of-war between good press and bad. They have to create enough positive stuff to outweigh the negative" (Berg 2008). The new, more horizontal media environment, in which candidates now compete with lay politicos who publicly talk to one another at the speed of the Web, means that campaigns need to keep up with Twitter, watch what activists are saying online, figure out if a "virtual town hall" is worth the effort, deal with the integration of a new variety of message outlets, and generally manage a new ecology of Web content that has only the barest resemblance to the old, two-party, two-candidate, two-message competitive world of mass-media politics. A decade into the new millennium, even the traditional news outlets have to deal with opposition research, as political activists digitally record network news producers attempting to rally crowds or as they catch the politicians using the wrong footage to make a visual point.

And younger voters are turning to alternative sources for their political information. Comedy news and opinion programs such as *The Daily Show* and *The Colbert Report* are attracting wide audiences of people who use Jon Stewart and Stephen Colbert as their main sources of news. *Saturday Night Live*, which brought Sarah Palin look-alike Tina Fey back on board for the 2008 campaign, is a mainstay of political news, where candidates mingle with the performers who make fun of them. Blogging has grown enough to receive national attention from political strategists at all levels. Campaign volunteers initiate and maintain blogs that trumpet their candidates, and candidate Web sites sometimes encourage voters to establish their own outlets for commentary. The holy grail of earned media is the news event that "goes viral" on the Internet. Ironically, with the rise of amateur involvement increasing the complexity of contemporary electioneering, the help of campaign professionals may be more crucial than it ever has been.

Blumenthal noted that "consultants . . . embody many of the virtues espoused by the turn-of-the-century Progressives. They are usually dispassionate critics of politics, wary of control by party bosses" (1980, 7). The institutionally corrosive power of technology in the hands of outside consultants has, for better or worse, sealed the fate of traditional party hierarchies. Precision targeting and sophisticated marketing techniques hold out one-to-one customer relationships as their ideal. New-style campaigns do not necessarily foster the warm, enduring relationships that one

tends to find in sentimental depictions of American politics, in which public officials know each voter personally, but neither do they create the remote interactions of mass-media advertising. Arterton saw a possibility that Internet technology may help to "establish a new, more personalized connection between candidate and voter," perhaps even helping to "restore some balance and mutual respect to the relationship" (2000, 22).

It is possible for less serious observers to romanticize new-style politics with talk of the rich new connections that might accompany an interactive Web environment. A review of contemporary elections, however, suggests that technology has neither brought candidates and voters closer together nor pushed them farther apart. Rather, the nature of the relationship has been so profoundly altered that comparisons between old- and new-style politics are difficult to render. When a candidate's voter contact strategy targets individual voters with exactly the right message, does it make politics more or less personalized? When party leaders enlist independent consultants to win state senate races, have the parties reconsolidated their power or ceded it to outsiders? The critical transformation that has taken place in American elections has filtered down from presidential campaigns to mayoral races, and as students of politics try to appreciate the accompanying changes in U.S. government, they must unravel the new style.

Central to understanding contemporary political campaigns is the recognition that professional electioneering is a novel enterprise. It is no longer a high art—if it ever was such—in which the intuitive faculties of candidates would impress the electorate with spontaneous oratory and principled debate. Nor is it a pure science in which the voter is held up for detached observation by pollsters and then manipulated by media consultants. Instead, in the competitive environment created by America's two-party system, campaign operatives must constantly refine their expertise, merging technology and creativity in the search for electoral success. Consultant-centered campaigns are less beholden to the old party structures than their predecessors were, as candidates have released themselves to set up their own campaign operations and have come to rely on professionals who know the strategies and tactics of campaign management. In this sense, new-style electioneering is both art and science—the product of ingenuity as well as research, experience, and analysis. Consultant-based electioneering is best understood as a new campaign craft.

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