

CHAPTER 14

THE CAMPAIGN PROCESS

Narrative Lecture Outline

Campaigns start long before most of us notice them. Trial balloons are floated years before the active campaigning begins. Often, political candidates make special efforts to work hard for their party in the run-up to announcing that they would like to be the party's nominee for an office. Some aspirants to political office start out in the local school board or appointive offices first, all the while, harboring desires to run for ever more powerful offices. Some candidates are cajoled, teased, and begged to run by friends, family, their party, the news media, or others. However, all candidates are similar in that each of them makes a decision at some point to run for election.

So once the decision is made, how does one run for election? What happens during a campaign?

The Nature of Modern Political Campaigns

No two political campaigns are the same. Each candidate and each candidate's campaign organization make different choices, wage diverse strategies, and have distinctive strengths and weaknesses. However, all campaigns are waged in two parts. First, for the nomination of the candidate's party and second, the candidate must win over the voters in the general election.

The Nomination Campaign

The nomination campaign is aimed at the party leaders and activists within the party who choose nominees in primaries or conventions. Quite often, the need to appeal to activists pushes a candidate to an ideological extreme. Party leaders are interested in electability, so a candidate must appeal to both constituencies.

Nomination politics start early, often years before an election. As the opening vignette mentioned, the 2008 presidential campaign was already in effect in the fall of 2005. Candidates must cultivate the perception that they can win and that they have momentum. They test out slogans, themes, and strategies hoping to find one that will excite voters. Fund raising is critical in the nomination phase. Only candidates with lots of money are taken seriously.

One of the hazards of the nomination campaign is that candidates can spend too much time and effort appealing to their political base, which is usually more extreme than voters in the general election. This can damage their chances to win in the general election.

The General Election Campaign

Once a candidate has earned the party's nod, the ultimate goal for all candidates is to win the general election. Candidates must woo interest groups and voters, raise money,

and get endorsements. The candidate often chooses a slogan and decides which issues are important in their campaign.

The Key Players: The Candidate and Campaign Staff

Campaign organizations spend tons of money on consultants, pollsters, and professionals. Campaigns are precisely manipulated, candidates are “handled,” and appearances are scripted. However, the single most important factor in any campaign is the candidate!

Campaign techniques can downplay weaknesses and emphasize strengths, but they cannot make a poor candidate win an election most of the time. Most people vote for a candidate, not a slick campaign. Campaigns can enhance the positives and reduce the negatives of a candidate and poorly-run campaigns can lose elections. A well-run campaign with a lousy candidate has few chances of winning.

The Campaign Staff and Consultants

Staff can be paid or volunteer. Staff is a very important part of any campaign. Paid staff do most of the organizational work, conduct polls, write speeches, plan strategy and more. Volunteers answer phones, distribute campaign literature, staff booths at county fairs, solicit voters door to door and do vital get out the vote (GOTV) work.

Campaigns usually have a manager who coordinates and directs the whole campaign. This person is usually a close associate of the candidate and has lots of face time with them. Other key positions include finance chair, pollster, direct mailer, and communications director. Today, campaigns will often have an Internet team including bloggers as well.

There are also private sector “hired guns,” also known as political consultants, who sell a variety of services to campaigns. Media consultants might create ads or a campaign may hire a polling consultant to run opinion polls that are too big for their own campaign organization to run.

Coverage of the Game: The Media’s Role in Defining the Playing Field

Politicians and their staff would like to control the media, but generally do not succeed. They still try to manipulate it, though. Sometimes, staffs insulate a candidate from the media to prevent gaffs or embarrassments. Campaigns often stage media events designed to offer images, slogans, and sound bites that will be irresistible to the media, and therefore, garner the campaign some free media coverage. Also, handlers and consultants try to spin their story. In other words, they work to put a favorable interpretation on a day’s events, a candidate’s activities, or a rumor.

Paid Media

Campaigns pay for ads on television and radio. Therefore, the content of paid media is determined by the campaign. Ads can be positive or negative, and can contrast voting records, personalities, or issue positions. Using inoculation ads, an advertisement designed to stave off the attacks of the other campaigns often before they have occurred, has become popular. Many campaign managers believe that “an attack unanswered is an attack agreed to” and so they respond to negative ads quickly.

Free Media

In addition to paid ads, campaigns try to garner the attention of the media to cover their campaign and candidate. The campaign does not have control over free media coverage, though the campaign tries to orchestrate photo ops and other types of media exposure that will benefit their candidate.

Debates are a hybrid of paid and free media. Debates today are mostly well-practiced and well-scripted, but there are still slips of the tongue and some spontaneity. The importance of debates is usually overrated. They usually firm up a voter's opinion and rarely change anyone's mind, although debates probably do sway some undecided voters.

Campaigns often fax dozens of statements a day to key journalists in hopes of garnering positive press coverage. These tactics often fail because journalists are wise to the tactics and don't like being manipulated.

The New Media

Technology has been changing campaigning for years. The Internet is only the newest tool in political campaigning. Mass e-mails, faxes, recorded phone calls, and other high tech tactics have sped up what happens in a campaign. Instead of having weeks to respond to attack ads, campaigns now respond within hours. Instead of blanketing an entire zip code with direct mail, campaigns can now use databases to target those most likely to receive their message positively via e-mail or by recorded phone calls. In the last presidential election, celebrities like Bill Clinton and Chris Rock recorded phone messages for the Democrats and Arnold Schwarzenegger, for the Republicans.

Blogs are the newest of the new Internet campaign tools. These Web logs allow almost instant communication with supporters and can help create great a buzz for a campaign.

Campaign Strategies to Control Media Coverage

During campaign season, the news media report a lot of political news. However, no broadcast or print media source has unlimited resources and unlimited space, so what they show or print is a matter of choices. These choices are made by editors and producers. What we are shown or read is a selection of a much broader campaign.

How the information is presented also represents a choice. On TV, a report can show actual footage of a speech or a reporter can simply say that "candidate A" made a speech on health care today and so on. In a newspaper, editors can choose to print an entire speech, excerpts, or just a reporter's account of what was said. Alternatively, the media could choose not to report the speech and focus on personal matters like a candidate's marriage or college grades. How and why are these choices made?

Many components go into these decisions. The nature of the media, for example, often determines what is reported. TV is more likely to go for active and visual images. Print media are more likely to focus on the storyline in words. TV tends to have very short reports and print media can often go more in-depth. What else happened that day matters. If there's a tsunami or a huge local story that day, routine campaign activities will receive far less coverage. Polls matter; candidates that have a chance of winning get

more media attention than those who are perceived as potential losers. The media outlet's perspective on their audience matters as well. What do the editors and producers think their readers and viewers want to see? Of course, bias matters as well...but bias isn't as easy as liberal/conservative. There are many different kinds of bias in the media, including "bottom line bias" – worries about how a story will affect their sales or viewership.

The media not only report the news, they reflect their environment as well. Stories running in New Hampshire are going to be different from those in Arizona. Rural papers may present stories differently than city papers. National papers may report stories differently than regional, state, or local papers. TV stations with younger audience demographics will do things differently than those with older audience demographics. When you watch media, think about all of these different issues and how they affect what you see or read.

Campaign Strategies

Voters want information and tend to think that media coverage is more credible than campaign literature. So, campaigns strive to get media coverage that is positive and beneficial to the campaign. To do this, campaign managers use a number of strategies. Because candidates might accidentally say something that could hurt their campaign, many campaign managers limit press access to candidates. The media press for free access to the candidate and chafe at the limitations. Campaigns stage media events or photo ops for the media and craft speeches with sound bites that are positive and easily useable by the media. Consultants practice the art of "spin." Spin is interpretation. For example, when Howard Dean lost the Iowa Caucus in 2004, his campaign used spin to try and reinterpret the results in a positive light. However, spin doesn't always work and can backfire. Candidates also appear on talk shows, such as *Oprah*, *The Daily Show*, and *Larry King Live*, where they can present their views in a less critical atmosphere.

Technology and Campaign Strategies

In the late 1950s, the advent of television changed the nature of campaigning. In 2004, Howard Dean pioneered new uses for the Internet in campaigns. TV, Internet, and other technological advances have enabled candidates and campaigns to reach voters more quickly, and more often, than any other time in history. Consequently, large numbers of political volunteers are less necessary today than they were in the past. This reduces a candidate's need for party support. It has also been one factor in making campaigns more candidate-centered.

These advances have also created a need for speed. Campaigns today practice rapid response techniques, inoculation ads, containment strategies, and opposition research—an array of techniques to fight the fast moving "war" as many political professionals see it (the Clinton campaign even called their headquarters, "the War Room"). Specific examples of these techniques include: recorded phone messages by the candidates or those who endorse them (begun in 2002), video streaming of candidate speeches, and 24/7 information on the campaign and how to donate money to it.

The Rules of the Game: Campaign Finance

Campaigns are VERY expensive. House races in 2004 averaged around \$1 million. Senate races cost much more; the average winner of a Senate race spent \$6.5 million. The most expensive race for the House in 2004 was in Dallas and pitted two incumbents against one another due to congressional redistricting. Representatives Pete Sessions (R) and Martin Frost (D) spent in excess of \$9 million. Sessions won the race. In the 2004 Senate race in South Dakota, the candidates spent \$33.8 million, with Tom Daschle (Senate Minority Leader) pouring in \$19.7 million and Republican challenger John Thune, \$14.1 million. House and Senate candidates who competed in the 2004 general election raised \$985.4 million and spent \$911.8 million, an increase of roughly 20 percent over 2002.

The Road to Reform

The expense of elections and the possibility of corruption, especially individuals and groups with lots of money gaining undue influence on the democratic process, have led to numerous attempts at regulating campaign finance. In the 1880s, Congress passed a law to ensure that federal workers would not be pressured to finance political campaigns. In 1907, Congress prohibited corporations from making donations to candidates and a number of other laws addressed these issues as well. But it wasn't until the Watergate scandals of the 1970's that there was any real attempt to limit campaign contributions broadly.

In response to the Watergate scandal, Congress passed the Federal Elections Campaign Act of 1971, 1974, and 1976. The goal of this post-Watergate legislation was to reduce the impact of money on elections and limit the influence of big donors. The law required disclosure of campaign spending and donations. FECA also established the Federal Election Commission to oversee elections and to process/monitor spending disclosures by campaigns. The FECA also established partial public funding for presidential candidates.

In 2002, Congress passed a new law called the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act (BCRA) (formerly McCain-Feingold). The BCRA of 2002 amends the FECA in several important ways: It bans soft money donations to campaigns, increases the amount of hard money individuals may donate to candidates, and imposes new restrictions on political advertising close to an election.

Under the new system, the parties cannot accept "soft money" contributions for such things as party-building and get out the vote campaigns. This money must come from individuals or PACs as hard money and be counted in the campaign finance limits.

Individuals are allowed to donate up to \$2,000 per candidate, per election (instead of \$1,000), up to \$25,000 to each national party committee each year (up from \$20,000), and up to \$15,000 to each state or local party committee per year (up from \$5,000). Individuals are allowed to make a total of \$97,500 in political donations during a two-year election cycle (so, per congressional term). Previously the limit was \$50,000.

Hard money from PACs remains unchanged under the new law. There was a discussion of indexing contributions to inflation, and thus allowing the limits to creep up, but this was not included in the final bill.

The third, and most controversial, aspect of the new law seeks to close the loophole in the previous law on issue ads. Under the old law, groups ran ads that were obviously in favor of, or opposed to, a candidate but didn't use the terms "vote for" or "vote against" and so, were not considered advocacy ads and not covered under campaign finance limits. Under the new law, any incorporated group (corporations, interest groups, trade unions, etc.) is prohibited from "electioneering communications." In other words, no more ads referring to a specific candidate for federal office can be run by these groups. Individuals and PACs may still do "electioneering communication," but if they spend over \$10,000, there are strict disclosure laws and PACs may not use corporate or union funding on such ads.

Almost immediately, the BCRA was taken to court. The case, *McConnell v. FEC*, was brought by Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and argued that restrictions of soft money were an unconstitutional abridgement of free speech. A district court ruled that BCRA violated free speech. However, in 2003, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that the government's interest in preventing corruption outweighed free speech rights to which parties would otherwise be entitled.

Current Rules

Political money is now regulated by the terms of the BCRA. Unlimited and unregulated donations to political parties, or soft money, have been outlawed. There are limits on individual and group donations to candidates as well.

Individual Contributions

Most candidates receive most of their money from individual contributions and most of these fall well below the legal maximums. The current law allows any individual to donate up to \$2,000 per candidate, per election (primaries and the general election are considered separate elections). A person can also donate up to a total of \$50,700 in gifts to all candidates, PACs, and parties combined in a single calendar year. Anyone who pays more than \$10,000 for "electioneering communication" as an individual within sixty days of a general election or thirty days of a primary is subject to strict disclosure laws. The law argues that running an ad for or against a candidate is virtually the same as a donation.

Political Action Committee (PAC) Contributions

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of campaign finance is the political action committee. Some see them as corrupt special interests buying candidates and elections. Others think they are more benign. PACs are criticized as being representative mostly of affluent white people and ignoring the interests of the poor and minority groups. Most political scientists see PACs as normal, and a natural outgrowth of interest groups and pluralist, democratic politics.

Modern PACs are an outgrowth of campaign finance reform in the 1970s. But it is unclear whether PACs cause interest groups to be more influential or even if there is more interest group money in elections now than prior to 1971. A PAC can give no more than \$5,000 per candidate, per election and \$15,000 to each of the units of the national party. Roughly 4,000 PACs are registered with the FEC.

The charge that PACs only represent certain groups is a serious one. PACs that have “parent organizations”—corporations, labor unions, and trade PACs—have an advantage. The parent can pay for administrative costs, overhead, and so on. PACs formed by individuals must raise money to pay those costs.

Not all PACs are created equal! A mere 6 percent of PACs contribute 62 percent of the total dollars to congressional candidates. However, PACs do not contribute the bulk of campaign finance, individuals do!

Political Party Contributions

Candidates also get money from their party. The Democratic and Republican Parties have state and national organizations that regularly donate money to campaigns. Each house of Congress also has a branch of the party that raises and gives money for campaigns. In 2006, the two major parties gave \$768 million through direct contributions and coordinated expenditures to their party’s candidates.

Member to Candidate Contributions

In Congress and state legislatures, incumbents who have large campaign war chests and secure seats give money to their party’s candidates who need financial help. Some members have their own PACs. In 2004, two Democratic senators established a PAC that contributed \$3 million to 221 House and 19 Senate candidates. In the South Dakota senatorial race in 2004, the Republican challenger, Larry Diedrich, received \$423,000 from other members of Congress. In 2006, Stephanie Herseth (D-SD) won her reelection bid, raising almost \$1.4 million.

Candidate’s Personal Contributions

The Supreme Court ruled in *Buckley v. Valeo* (1976) that no limit can be placed on a candidate’s own spending. He or she can spend as much of their personal funds as they like. The Court equated spending one’s own money with free speech. There are a few candidates who spend millions of their own money, but most candidates put less than \$100,000 of their own money into their campaign. In 2004, a candidate for the Senate seat in Illinois, Democrat Blair Hull, spent \$29 million of his own money but he lost in the primary election. In 2002, twenty candidates for Congress spent over \$1 million of their own money on their campaigns. Only one of them won, Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ). In 2006, Republican Pete Ricketts of Nebraska and Democrat Ned Lamont of Connecticut both lost their bids for the Senate despite spending over \$10 million each of their own money. Generally, candidates spend less than \$100,000 of their own money.

Public Funds

Only presidential candidates are eligible for public funding. Public funds come from general tax revenues and candidates must qualify to receive them. Once a major party candidate has raised \$5,000 in individual contributions of \$250 or less in 20 states, he or she becomes eligible for federal matching funds. The government will match whatever money a candidate has raised in increments up to \$251. This money comes from a check-off box on our taxes where we can designate \$3 to go to the campaign fund (fewer than 20 percent of Americans do this). For the general election, each candidate gets a lump sum payment (\$75 million in 2004) and they are limited to spending this

amount. Third-party candidates receive smaller amounts proportional to their vote total in the last presidential election, as long as they broke the threshold of 5 percent of the vote. They will only receive their federal funds after the general election, though.

In 2004, both candidates (John Kerry and George W. Bush) opted out of public financing and so, they did not have to abide by spending limits during the primary. John Kerry accepted the \$75 million lump sum and its concomitant spending limits for the general election. Bush did not accept public funding and thus had no spending limit.

The Fall of the Soft-Money Loophole and the Rise of the 527 Loophole

Hard money is campaign money given to candidates. Soft money is campaign money raised and spent by parties for a variety of expenses, including get out the vote campaigns, administrative expenses, party activists, party overhead, etc. Soft money could not be regulated until recently. As party expenditures grew, the idea of soft money became more and more problematic. National parties began to transfer large amounts of money to state parties. They paid for yard signs and bumper stickers. They paid for political advertising. The last one was the most controversial. Soft money could not be used for “express advocacy ads” – that is, ads that expressly say to vote for candidate A – only hard money could pay for those. However, soft money was widely used for “issue ads” that did not expressly say “vote for,” “vote against,” “support,” and the like. The federal courts upheld this distinction. Many of these issue ads targeted an opponent’s voting record, pictured the candidate from the opposition party in a negative sense, and did everything short of express advocacy.

The BCRA prohibits soft money donations, and third party issue ads can now be considered donations to a campaign, hence regulated by the FEC. In the last year they were allowed, soft money donations raised nearly \$430 million. Republicans raised \$219 million from pharmaceutical, insurance and energy companies. Democrats raised \$211 million from unions and law firms. Banning these donations was supposed to make special interests less influential and limit any possible corrupting influences of unregulated monies.

Instead, the emergence of 527 political committees was an unintended consequence of the BCRA. The name comes from the provision of the tax code that gives them legal status. 527s are, basically, unregulated interest groups that focus on specific causes and work to influence the outcomes of elections. These groups now pay for issue ads in lieu of parties. There are a few limits on these committees. Again, they can’t expressly advocate for or against a specific candidate, but they come awfully close. 527s cannot coordinate with any campaign or candidate. The BCRA forbids airing these ads within 30 days of a primary and 60 days of a general election.

In the 2004 presidential elections, Democratically oriented 527s raised and spent more money than Republican leaning 527s. The largest of the Democratic groups were the Media Fund and Americans Coming Together (ACT). On the Republican side, Swift Boat Veterans for Truth may be the best known. The 2004 election cycle hit a new spending record in almost every possible category of campaign spending, so the campaign finance reform laws didn’t seem to have much effect at all.

The Main Event: The 2004 Presidential Campaign and Election

Election 2004 was a close race throughout. The two major party candidates, George W. Bush for the Republicans and John Kerry for the Democrats, were neck-and-neck at the national level right up to the end.

Since the Republican candidate was the incumbent president, the Republican primaries received little attention. The Democrats, on the other hand, had ten candidates at the beginning of primary season (Table 14.2 gives a list of the candidates and their strategies) and garnered lots of media attention.

Howard Dean seemed to have momentum in the fall of 2003. His grassroots Internet campaign and strongly anti-Bush rhetoric were newsworthy. Dean was endorsed by prominent Democrats, including Al Gore and Tom Harkin. Despite these endorsements, he came in third in Iowa behind John Kerry and John Edwards. This surprised everyone. Dean was supposed to win. Kerry hadn't stood out at all and John Edwards was a total neophyte—albeit pledged to run an optimistic and positive campaign. Dean's liabilities seemed to be his temper (later he was immortalized in JibJab.com's animated short "This Land is Your Land" screaming) and his campaign made some poor choices in how to spend their money. In addition, since the nine other candidates had named Dean the one to beat, there was a lot of mud being thrown at Dean. Some of it stuck. Kerry eventually won the primaries without much trouble.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 became an issue in a number of ways. Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* came out during the campaign and the 9/11 Commission held hearings during the summer as well. President Bush refused to testify publicly. Condoleezza Rice, the National Security Advisor, also refused but eventually testified due to a public outcry. Richard Clarke, a former member of the Bush administration, wrote a book claiming Bush had ignored Clarke's warnings about al Qaeda. Joseph Wilson also wrote a book decrying the fact that the Bush White House leaked the identity of his CIA agent wife (Valerie Plume) and put her in danger. He claimed the leak was revenge for his criticism of White House policy toward Iraq. And there were other attacks on Bush as well.

Given all these criticisms of the Bush administration, the war in Iraq, and so on, Kerry ought to have had a field day, or not? Americans might also have had reservations about changing leaders during a crisis (the war on terror and in Iraq) or electing an untried leader during a crisis.

The Third Force

Compared to 2000, third parties were insignificant. Ralph Nader, who won 3 percent of the vote in 2000 on the Green Party ticket, didn't receive federal funding for the 2004 race and chose not to run as a Green Party candidate, running instead as an independent and endorsed by the Reform Party. Nader was officially on the ballot in 34 states and Washington, DC (9 fewer than in 2000).

The conventional wisdom in 2000 asserted that Nader had been a spoiler, tossing the election from Gore to Bush in key states. This affected both major party strategies in dealing with Nader in 2004. Republicans reportedly gave money to Nader and helped him with ballot access, and Democrats were reportedly trying to thwart his campaign. For a variety of reasons, Nader got few votes in 2004.

The Democratic Convention

John Edwards was named vice presidential running mate by John Kerry prior to the convention. This was earlier than the usual vice president announcement. Edwards was chosen to balance the ticket with a southerner (from North Carolina), a moderate, and someone who worked their way up (didn't inherit or marry money). He also brought youth, energy, and campaign skills to the Kerry campaign.

The convention was held in Boston, July 26-29. Both Clintons and former president Jimmy Carter spoke at the convention, taking shots at Bush and endorsing Kerry. Ron Reagan, former President Reagan's son, also spoke. Reagan spoke about embryonic stem cell research, something the Bush administration opposes. But it was Barack Obama who stole the show. A Democratic Senate candidate from Illinois and the son of a Kenyan immigrant father and a poor Kansas-born mother, he was the highlight of the convention. He spoke about creating opportunity and unity in America and launched himself onto the national political stage. The convention focused a lot on national security issues and ended with Democratic Senator Max Cleland, a disabled Vietnam Vet, and Kerry's swiftboat crewmates testifying to Kerry's leadership and strength.

The Kerry-Edwards ticket had a solid convention but didn't get a "bounce" from it – their poll numbers didn't jump up as they usually do. Bush and Kerry were neck-and-neck.

The Republican Convention

The Republican convention was held in New York City from August 30 to September 2. Despite rumors of a change in vice president, Bush named Dick Cheney once again as his running mate. Moderate Republicans dominated the stage: Arnold Schwarzenegger, Rudy Giuliani, and John McCain spoke on behalf of the Bush ticket. Bush's record in the war on terrorism was among the main themes of the convention. The Republicans also invited a Democrat to speak, Senator Zell Miller (D-GA), who attacked the Democrats and Kerry on national defense issues.

There were a number of protestors and hecklers but the Republican convention was declared a success and President Bush got a 2 percent bounce in the polls.

The Presidential Debates

Debates rarely sway voters. However, in the 2004 contest, the race was so close and swing votes so essential, that this time, the debates did have an effect. There were three presidential and one vice presidential debates. Each was 90 minutes and presented in a different format.

The presidential debates each had a theme: the first was a foreign policy debate moderated by Jim Lehrer of PBS; the second was a town hall meeting at which undecided voters asked questions with ABC News anchor Charlie Gibson; and the third focused on domestic issues and was moderated by CBS News anchor Bob Schieffer. John Kerry had been behind in the polls before the debates and finished tied with Bush. Most analysts thought the rise in poll ratings was due to the debates.

The Fall Campaign and General Election

The race was so close that many Americans feared a tie in the Electoral College or another election like 2000 decided by recounts and court actions. The race was especially close in several states: Ohio, Florida, Pennsylvania, New Mexico, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

Web Sites for Instructors

The Brookings Institution's Campaign Finance Web Page

www.brookings.org/GS/CF/CF_HP.HTM

Campaigns and Elections magazine's Web site is oriented toward campaign professionals, but is also useful to teachers and students. It offers articles, their table of contents from the print version, job opportunities, and more.

www.campaignline.com

Common Cause offers information on soft money donations, PAC contributions, and voting records on campaign finance issues as well as other information.

www.commoncause.org

Democracy in Action: P2008 is Eric Appleman's take on the upcoming election. He has been running the Web site since the 2000 presidential election and has a reputation for fairness and balance. It looks at all the key players/actors in politics and has links to many other sources.

www.gwu.edu/~action/P2008.html or www.p2008.org

The **Democracy Project of PBS** offers a Web site called "**Dissect the Ad**" that features a changing set of campaign ads that visitors are asked to criticize, dissect, and discuss. The point is to determine how the message is constructed—what images, tones, music, etc. and how it is designed to sway us. There are numerous current and past ads on which to practice, from all ends of the political spectrum. You can read the content of the ads or, by downloading a player, you can view them. Following each ad are commentaries on both sides discussing the ad. You'll also get the chance to post your comments and read the comments of others. It's fun!

www.pbs.org/pov/pov1996/takingonthekennedys/dissect.html

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee -DCCC

www.dccc.org/

Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee - DSCC

www.dsc.org

Federal Election Commission Web site on campaign finance laws.

www.fec.gov/

The **Living Room Candidate** is from the American Museum of the Moving Image and is an online repository for presidential political TV advertisements since the presidential election of 1952.

livingroomcandidate.movingimage.us/index.php

National Republican Congressional Committee-NRCC

www.nrcc.org/

National Republican Senatorial Committee-NRSC

www.nrsc.org

OpenSecrets.org is the Web site of the Center for Responsive Politics and offers lots of information about campaign finance and other political issues. The site won a 2002 “Webby” award for best politics site on the Web.

www.opensecrets.org

Oval Office 2008 is a UK based blog tracking the 2008 presidential election.

www.ovaloffice2008.com/

Polling Report.Com reports on the polls about all candidates and possible candidates in the race for president 2008.

www.pollingreport.com/2008.htm

Project Vote-Smart is a nonpartisan information service funded by members and nonpartisan foundations. It offers “a wealth of facts on your political leaders, including biographies and addresses, issue positions, voting records, campaign finances, evaluations by special interests.” It also offers “CongressTrack,” a way for citizens to track the status of legislation, members & committees, sponsors, voting records, clear descriptions, full text, and weekly floor schedules, as well as access to information on elections, federal & state governments, the issues, and politics. Includes thousands of links to the most important sites on the Internet.

www.vote-smart.org/

The Public Campaign offers articles on campaign finance reform at the state and national levels, as well as numerous links.

www.publiccampaign.org

US Department of State Foreign Press Center

This site was designed to help foreign press and diplomats understand the American political system, but it can be extremely helpful to Americans who lack a basic understanding as well. It covers many issues, as well as elections.

fpc.state.gov/

The University of Michigan Library has a great set of political science resources including lots of elections links at:

www.lib.umich.edu/govdocs/psusp.html

The Washington Post reports on campaign finance.

www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/campfin/campfin.htm

Web Activities for Classes

- 1) Have students search the Internet and find a cache of campaign commercials and free media coverage of one of the last few elections. They should compare tactics, strategies, and content of the ads. How would you classify them? How effective is each ad? To whom are they targeted? Discuss what these ads tell us about the political process and the candidates.
- 2) Have students use the Web to research the current campaign finance laws and the reform proposals that have been discussed. Have them devise a reform plan of their own, and consider how they would sell it to the people, the incumbents in the House and Senate, the president, and other interested parties.
- 3) Have students go to *Campaigns and Elections* magazine on the Web, (www.campaignline.com/). Each student should choose two issues on campaigning that have not been covered in class and write a short paper or do a short oral presentation.
- 4) If you are technically proficient, take a look at “Dissect an Ad” found at:

www.pbs.org/pov/pov1996/takingonthekennedys/dissect.html
Have your class create a newer version, looking at ads from the last couple of elections, as a public service project.

General Class Activities and Discussion Assignments

- 1) Hold a discussion on independent expenditures and 527 groups. What are the constitutional issues and concerns surrounding them? In particular, have students find information on Mitch McConnell’s challenge to the new campaign finance laws and the recent lawsuits about the 2004 ads run by 527s. What is the likelihood such challenges will prevail?
- 2) Hold a discussion on candidate debates. How effective are they? Are they truly debates? How might they be changed to make them more effective and useful?
- 3) Discuss the following: Can the press be “handled”? Does “spin” work? How do the media cover political campaigns?
- 4) You could have students watch an episode of the TV show “West Wing”, that deals with campaigning, on DVD and play it in class. Have them talk about how

- realistic it is and what effects of incumbency or spin they might see in the episode.
- 5) Stage a debate on negative advertising and campaign ethics.

Possible Simulations

- 1) As a class project, run someone (or several people) for Congress. Call both local political parties and ask for copies of their grassroots electioneering materials or candidate training course materials. Using these materials, write up a campaign plan for a candidate for the House or Senate. Be sure you can explain why you chose your tactics and strategies.
- 2) As a class project, run someone (or several people) for the presidency. Begin with the primary season to choose the parties' nominees, then square off a Republican, a Democrat, and if you like, a third-party candidate. Have a plan for media, fund-raising, scheduling and travel, get out the vote, and other aspects of the campaign.
- 3) Stage a candidate debate. Meet in groups to determine what the format of the debate should be, who should be allowed to participate, and where the debates will be held. Each group should prepare their candidate to "perform well" in the debate. Choose a strategy and a message for your campaign. What tactics, etc. will help you win the debate?
- 4) If you have already done the Court and want to integrate two sections of the course: Assign Supreme Court roles and two teams of lawyers (pro and con). Stage an oral argument on the merits of the new campaign finance law.

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