CAMPAIGNS ON THE CUTTING EDGE

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Chapter 1

Introduction—Campaigns on the Cutting Edge

Richard J. Semiatin

“I WAS TIRED. I hadn’t slept eight hours in two, three years. I lived on four, five hours of sleep. You can do it during a campaign because thousands are screaming for you. You’re getting adrenaline shots each day. Then the campaign ends, and there are no more shots.” George McGovern told this story about his losing campaign to Richard Nixon for the presidency over forty years ago. Yet this is the same feeling a candidate has after a grueling election campaign today; and it is the same feeling the candidates had 100 years ago. It is also a sentiment that the most conservative (Ted Cruz) and most liberal candidate (Bernie Sanders) will share at the end of their 2016 journeys. Some things remain constant. But some things do change.

A smartphone can be a campaign headquarters in someone’s hands. At one’s fingertips is information about the demographics of voters in every city, in every neighborhood, on every street. A smartphone can empower a twenty-year-old canvasser to know everything about you: what car you drive; what smartphone you have (iPhone vs. Droid); whether you voted in the last election; what you like to read or eat; and, most of all, your voting tendencies. In a sense, technology has democratized politics to a greater extent than ever in the past—because campaigns can access information, communicate concepts, and produce ads more cost-effectively.

Today, campaigns are similar to the rest of the world—acquiring knowledge is an instantaneous proposition. That means parries and thrusts by campaigns, which were the products of deliberate thinking over hours or days or even months in the past, are now decided in minutes or even seconds. The eighteen-month hurricane of perpetual motion we call the modern campaign is driven, in large part, by technology. All campaigns have become more mobile, which has meant
that more campaign functions are integrated together to enable greater efficiencies. Those efficiencies save the precious commodity of time, which is valued beyond price. But efficiencies come with speed; and speed entails danger as well: too rapid a response can fatally injure a campaign because there isn’t time for staff to think things through before they react. For better or worse, this is the world of campaigns today.

Campaigns are becoming more individualized and tailored to you, the voter, because of technology. For the first 150 years, campaigns were largely the domain of party organizations. The birth of television and the advent of advertising spawned personality-driven campaigns. We see the next revolution where campaigns are attempting to reach each voter individually since they can target each household. Campaigns used to be about parties and candidates. Increasingly, campaigns will become about you, the voter, or what Madison Avenue would call you, the customer.

The book you are about to read is neither a review of the political science literature nor a major discourse on the democratic implications of elections and campaigns, although that latter discussion remains valuable and important, and addressed in the book’s conclusion. This new edition shows how campaigns are becoming increasingly integrated with overlapping functions. We call this overlap convergence. For example, campaign advertising now appears online as well as on the television screen. Campaigns target their audiences using “big data” or consumer information blended with voting behavior patterns much as discussed above. In a large campaign, those same data are often shared by the campaign with its consultants. The same data are used to identify donors and to target potential voters for get-out-the-vote (GOTV) operations among other tasks performed by the campaign. You will see a discussion of big data and analytics in a number of chapters because they serve multiple purposes.

This new edition also demonstrates how campaign finance decisions since 2010 have affected how political operatives and candidates run for national offices. The web of decisions is intertwined. Super PAC has become the new buzzword of American political campaigns. The book demonstrates that like Baskin-Robbins ice cream they (Super PACs) come in many different flavors (or forms to be more precise). Super PACs are defined as “independent political action committees which can raise unlimited sums of money from corporations, unions and individuals but [are] not permitted to contribute or coordinate directly with parties or candidates.” Thus, our discussion on fundraising and campaign finance issues manifests itself in three separate ways in the book: The fundraising chapter explains how candidate Super PACs serve as surrogate campaign organizations. The interest groups chapter explains how Super PACs can serve as an issue-related campaign organization. The campaign finance chapter focuses, in part, on how the Supreme Court came to the opinion that resulted in the creation of Super PACs. There is no cookie-cutter approach that puts this all in one basket.
The book explores the most important facets of campaigns (fundraising, paid advertising, new media, polling, and voter mobilization), the institutions that work in campaigns (parties and interest groups), those that report on campaigns (the press), those that govern the process of campaigns (campaign finance and voter ID laws), and emerging groups that are part of change (women and minorities). The chapter on voter ID laws is new to this edition and important because the debate whether such laws prevent voter fraud or whether they infringe on the participation of minorities or both is seminal to today’s politics.

**The New Political Campaign**

The new political campaign demonstrates the importance of contact, communications, and feedback with voters. Part I on “The New Political Campaign” discusses the various facets of campaigns from raising money, to communicating through paid and new media, to targeting messages to mobilize citizens to vote. Campaigns not only are incorporating new technological changes but also must make them work seamlessly with the techniques of the past. Chapters examine what has worked in the past and what works in the present, and most importantly speculate what the future may hold for national and state-level campaigns.

We begin with money because as former California state legislator Jesse Unruh (D) said: “Money is the mother’s milk of politics.” Money helps facilitate speech and amplify a candidate’s message to a mass audience. Money helps to identify voters and to target them for mobilization. Candidates spend more time raising money than any other task they perform in a campaign.

Robert G. Boatright’s chapter on fundraising demonstrates how various methods of traditional fundraising (direct mail, events, telemarketing) are complicated by new rules that govern how money is raised. In this edition, the author shows us how a Super PAC, such as “Right to Rise USA” for presidential contender Jeb Bush (R-FL), can serve as a surrogate fundraising and campaign operation until a candidate formerly declares for office. Then it can go off and do its own thing. As long as the independent group and candidate do not coordinate or contribute in any manner, it is legal. This is a result of major court decisions on the federal level. The complexities and implications of this are enormous. Boatright argues that campaigns, especially presidential campaigns, are now more donor-driven.

Understanding what donors do, which is often outside the control of candidates and campaigns, is now having a profound effect on how races are shaped at the national and (sometimes) state level.

Most of the money expended in major campaigns goes to advertising. The percentage can range from 50 percent up to more than 80 percent of the total budget in a presidential race. Tad Devine, one of the nation’s leading campaign media consultants, discusses the role of paid advertising in political campaigns in
the third chapter. His career includes working as an ad maker and strategist for
the presidential campaigns of Al Gore (2000), John Kerry (2004), and Bernie
Sanders (2016). This time Devine not only provides insight into the work of an
ad maker and strategist but also draws on recent campaigns he worked on includ-
ing Joseph P. Kennedy III running for Congress in Massachusetts, Seth Magaziner
running for state treasurer in Rhode Island, and Bernie Sanders’s first Senate race
in Vermont. The web addresses are provided so that you can watch the ads online.
Devine’s ad campaigns always tell the story of the candidate and draw sharp con-
trasts with the opposition. One of the ads (available through the web address in
the text), called “People,” is a compelling biographical ad of Sanders’s successful
election to the Senate.

The growth of online communications has exploded in the last decade. New
media, as consultant Michael Turk points out in Chapter 4, changes the way voters
interact with campaigns. In this edition, he shows how digital now enables the
campaign to better interact with itself. He shows that some candidates such as
presidential candidate Rand Paul (R-KY) are constantly on social media comment-
ing on policies and politics. Turk draws on his experiences as a consultant working
as the eCampaign director for Bush-Cheney 2004. He also served in that capacity
for Fred Thompson’s presidential campaign in 2008. Turk shows how the Obama
reelection campaign’s use of technology enabled it to maximize its efforts to con-
tact, communicate with, and mobilize voters. This demonstrates how the growing
mobility of online communications makes the impact of new and social media all
the more important.

The campaign survey research world is changing where a mix of landline/cell
or online samples is increasingly used for polling. This is all very challenging and
cutting edge for campaigns because the response rate is so low as explained by
Candice J. Nelson in the fifth chapter. Nelson shows that cell phone users who do
not have landlines are a growing proportion of the population. To raise the response
rate, pollsters are experimenting with using social media as a way to do survey
research to reach more voters as a cost-effective way to build a representative
sample. Which modality or technique, if any, will become most prominent in the
future? Nelson addresses what is known, and not known, at this time. The results
are alarming for campaigns because they are not always sure how they can attain
the most accurate information on voter attitudes truly representing the population
as a whole.

Parties and campaigns have put a concerted effort into voter mobilization,
which has paid off in the last decade. The chapter on voter mobilization merges
the high-profile technology of the present with the shoe leather of personal contact
from the past. In a sense, technology has enabled campaigns to personally contact
more of the right people (meaning those who can potentially support their candi-
date) than in the past either by going door-to-door or by phone. The Obama
campaign did this over 100 million times in 2012 as pointed out in the chapter. The results are somewhat counterintuitive from what we hear—that, in fact, campaigns are becoming more personalized because technology enables campaigns to better identify and connect directly to voters.

**The Evolving Campaign: Adaptation by Political Institutions and Groups**

Part II on “The Evolving Campaign” features political parties, interest groups, and press coverage in the campaign process. Moreover, the administrative institutions that govern campaign finance and state voter registration agencies are also coping with new technologies and laws, with cutting-edge changes coming at a rapid pace. Finally, women and minority groups are utilizing these new techniques to increase participation and expand their electoral power.

Political parties have been reinvigorated according to Tari Renner in Chapter 7. Parties are potent forces that provide a full spectrum of assistance to candidates. Both parties have run successful voter turnout and fundraising operations (Democrats 2012, Republicans 2014). Even more so, they have ventured into communications where they keep constant contact with supporters—both financially and voluntarily. In a sense, Renner tells us that parties no longer go to sleep for a year between elections. Instead, they operate 365 days a year providing outreach and contact with their constituents. In many ways, they mimic large campaign organizations in the way they provide services to campaigns. The difference is that an individual campaign goes out of business the day after the election. Political parties do not. Even when party leadership changes, the organization still provides a sense of continuity for voters.

No entity has benefited more in recent years from the changing political landscape than interest groups as discussed in Chapter 8. Nina Therese Kasniunas, Mark J. Rozell, and Charles N. W. Keckler point out that U.S. Supreme Court decisions resulted in associations or interest groups having an unlimited ability to spend money in campaigns via the Super PAC. Their chapter looks at traditional interest groups and Super PACs associated not with candidates but with issues, interests, and organizations. Interest groups now have more tools at their disposal to maximize their influence in campaigns by serving as an external force that can influence the outcome. The authors argue that the change emerging from campaigns is toward group-centered politics. This contrasts to Boatright’s earlier chapter where he argues that campaigns are becoming more donor centered. What they share is that both show how campaigns have moved away from the candidate-centered politics of the last forty years.

Nothing has changed more than news coverage over the last decade. Chapter 9 discusses campaign press coverage and how the decline of traditional media
coverage has had a profound effect on the way campaigns operate and what really is and is not news. The authors show that the rise in hundreds of blogs, partisan websites, online videos, and so on can turn the ordinary citizen into a powerful advocate “reporting” the news. The problem is that there is no arbiter confirming the information of the citizen-reporter. Press coverage has become even more personality driven than before, particularly in the electronic media where the sensationalism of stories and people rather than substance have become fodder for discussion on cable news networks. And technology enables bloggers, and other social media “reporters,” to put extravagant rumors in the public eye—very similar to the role that partisan newspapers had in the early 1800s, when John Adams was disparaged as a royalist and Thomas Jefferson as an infidel.

The repercussions of campaign finance in the five years following the *Citizens United* decision are the focus of the tenth chapter. The decision stated that limits of spending by associations of individuals violated the First Amendment because money helps amplify speech; and by limiting speech, you are limiting the voice of citizens individually or as a group. However, they may not coordinate with candidate committees or political parties. The recent case of *McCutcheon v. Federal Election Commission* (2014) eliminated the cap on the aggregate amount of contributions that citizens could give to federal campaigns, parties, and political committees. Peter L. Francia, Wesley Joe, and Clyde Wilcox argue that empirical evidence demonstrates that big donors now play a much more significant role in federal races. The authors then proceed to examine plans to reform campaign finance on the federal level, such as the Fair Elections Now Act (FENA). FENA would incentivize smaller donations to federal campaigns. However, major campaign finance reform in the near future is not likely on the federal level. Instead, campaign reform may occur by thinking “outside the box” or looking at what states are producing. One example is Montana, where the state legislature enacted a disclosure law that requires greater transparency of where money comes from—whether from individuals or from independent groups—where the disclosure of names has not been required in the past.

When we think of cutting-edge changes, we often think of techniques and tactics. But voter access has become a major issue in recent years. While court decisions have governed campaign finance (as we will see in Chapter 10), they also govern the constitutionality of voter identification laws that have been passed in a number of states. Jeffrey Crouch examines the issues associated with voter access laws in the book’s eleventh chapter. He looks at what states have such laws and whether such laws are necessary, nefarious, or neither. The author peruses what states have enacted laws following the Supreme Court’s decision in Indiana’s *Crawford v. Marion County Election Board* (2008), which led to eleven states passing strict voter identification laws since the Supreme Court decision. The protagonists argue that it will cut voter fraud, and the opponents argue that
such laws are race based since more minorities are less likely to have state-issued identifications.

The role of women, African Americans, Latino Americans, and Asian Americans has been mainstreamed in politics today. Each entity has increased its participation, not only as electoral and representational forces but also as campaign managers, campaign staff, and consultants. In 2012, Barack Obama’s three deputy campaign managers (Jen O’Malley Dillon, Julianna Smoot, and Stephanie Cutter) were all women. The Romney campaign had fewer, but still many, top-level positions filled by women (Beth Myers, Katie Packer Gage, and Jackie Rooney).

Susan A. MacManus shows us that campaigns are targeting women through generational approaches, which differ according to whether one is a Millennial, a Gen-Xer, or a Baby Boomer, in the twelfth chapter. MacManus enables us to understand why this is true. She shows that there are now sophisticated efforts to get women out to vote—and that these efforts are very savvy and technologically sophisticated. Given that women represent over 50 percent of the turnout in most national campaigns for Congress, the Senate, and the presidency, the “Suzy homemaker” approach to persuade female voters is a falsehood long buried. Women are no different from men in their desire to be treated the same in the political arena whether as voters or as candidates.

Research shows that a majority of the U.S. population will be non-white and Latino by 2042. Atiya Kai Stokes-Brown examines the role of minorities in campaigns. She shows us that the methods of communicating with minority groups converge with those of nonminorities. Since the last edition, the author shows us that more minority candidates are communicating via social media and that some of the most prominent minority politicians are rising outside the Democratic Party (such as Senator Ted Cruz of Texas or Tim Scott of South Carolina). The myth that social media is a white-only phenomenon is dispelled in this chapter. Stokes-Brown points out that the landscape for minority candidates in a world complicated by social media and other new technologies underscores how they must compete to attract new voters in a changing world.

The conscience of the book is still in its conclusion. Technology increases participation, but does not it also increase the ability to manipulate voters? Author Dick Simpson, who has politicked in the wards of Chicago, gives us reason to pause: the wonderful cutting-edge changes discussed in the book, no matter how inviting and exciting, have the potential for great harm as well as hope because democracy is fragile. The implications of new technology may need to be questioned when it risks rights that we hold dear. Consultants, citizens, and officeholders should understand that longtime rituals in politics are still virtuous. If they do, there is hope, and if not, the seeds of destructive politics will be sewn for the future.

But the present does have great possibilities for the future. And the future is now. Several years hence, the “now” of today may already be passé.
Notes