

second edition

CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS

PLAYERS AND PROCESSES



STEPHEN K. MEDVIC

ROUTLEDGE



Campaigns and Elections

Stephen K. Medvic's *Campaigns and Elections* addresses two distinct but related aspects of American electoral democracy—both the processes that constitute campaigns and elections and the players who are involved. In addition to this balanced coverage on process and actors, it also gives equal billing to both campaigns and elections and to contests for both legislative and executive positions at the national, state, and local levels.

The book starts by providing students with the conceptual distinctions between what happens in an election and the campaigning that precedes it. Significant attention is devoted to setting up the context for these campaigns and elections by covering the rules of the game in the American electoral system and aspects of election administration and the funding of elections. Then the book systematically covers the actors at every level—candidates and their organizations, parties, interest groups, the media, and voters—and the macro-level aspects of campaigns such as campaign strategy and determinants of election outcomes. The book concludes with a big-picture assessment of campaign ethics and implications of the “permanent campaign.”

Stephen K. Medvic is an associate professor of government at Franklin and Marshall College. His books include *Political Consultants in U.S. Congressional Elections*, *Shades of Gray: Perspectives on Campaign Ethics*, *New Directions in Campaigns and Elections*, and *In Defense of Politicians*.

Campaigns and Elections

Players and Processes

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Stephen K. Medvic

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List of Figures

List of Tables

Preface

Chapter 1 Campaigns and Elections in American Democracy

What are Campaigns and Elections?

Further Distinctions between Campaigns and Elections

Campaigns and Elections in Democratic Theory

Free and Fair Elections

Elections and Popular Sovereignty

Two Visions of Democracy

The Role of Campaigns and Elections

The Functions of Elections

The Functions of Campaigns

Normative Considerations

Pedagogical Tools

Role-Play Scenario

Discussion Questions

Chapter 2 Rules and Regulations I: Voting Rights and the U.S. Electoral System

Campaigns and Elections in the Constitution

Election-Related Protections Afforded by Constitutional Amendments

The Right to Vote

Clearing the Hurdles of Race and Gender

Restricting the Right to Vote

Dismantling Obstacles and Extending the Right to Vote

Contemporary Restrictions on the Right to Vote

The Legislative Electoral System

Choosing Legislators: Single-Member Plurality versus Proportional Representation

Legislative Redistricting

Presidential Elections

- The Electoral College
- Some States Matter more than Others
- Advantages and Disadvantages
- Reform Proposals

State-level Elections

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

***Chapter 3* Rules and Regulations II: Election Administration and the Campaign Finance System**

Election Administration

The Help America Vote Act and “Motor Voter”

Voting Equipment and Election Day Operations

Campaign Finance: Norms and Background

- Debates Over Campaign Finance Reform: Freedom, Fairness, and Anti-corruption
- Early Efforts to Regulate Money in Campaigns
- The Federal Election Campaign Act and Public Funding
- Contributions, Expenditures, and Magic Words
- Soft Money, Issue Ads, and 527s

The Current Campaign Finance System

- The Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act
- Citizens United, *SpeechNow.org*, and Emergence of Super PACs

Campaign Finance Laws in the States

The Future of Campaign Finance Reform

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

***Chapter 4* Candidates and Campaign Organizations**

Who Runs for Office?

Candidate Emergence: Deciding to Run

Incumbency and the Decision to Run for Office
The Influence of Economic and Political Factors
Practical Considerations
Candidate Recruitment

Running for Office

Issue Positions and Image
Under the Microscope
Grueling Schedules

The Structure of Campaign Organizations

Campaign Committees
Campaign Staff
Political Consultants

Pedagogical Tools

Role-Play Scenario
Discussion Questions

***Chapter 5* Political Parties**

What Is a Political Party?

The Two-Party System

The Five “Party Eras”
Exceptions to the Two-Party System

Why Only Two Parties?

Parties as Organizations

Organizational Structure
National Committee Chairs
Other Party Committees
Organizational Activity and Reform

Party in the Electorate and in Government

Perceptions and Identity
Issue Ownership and the Permanent Campaign

The Nomination Process

State and Local Direct Primaries
Presidential Nominations
Arguments for Reform

The National Conventions

General Election Activity

- Campaign Support
- Fund Raising
- Getting Out the Vote

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

Chapter 6 Interest Groups

Interest Groups: What They Are and What They Do

- The Varied Missions of Interest Groups
- The Explosion in Organized Interests

Types of Advocacy Groups

Interest Group Campaign Activity

- Candidate Preparation
- Endorsing Candidates
- Scorecards, Hit Lists, and Voter Guides
- Contributions to Candidates
- Independent Expenditures
- Voter Contact and Mobilization
- The Effectiveness—and Consequences—of Interest Group Activity
- Electoral Influence
- Negative Effects of Interest Group Activity
- The Value of Interest Groups

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

Chapter 7 The Media

The Contemporary Media Environment

- Media Organizations
- Media Effects

Reporting Campaign News

- The Game Schema and “Horserace Coverage”
- Polls as News
- Campaign Strategy as News
- Informing Voters

Election Night Coverage

Pedagogical Tools

Role-Play Scenario

Discussion Questions

***Chapter 8* Voters**

Voter Turnout

Comparing Aggregate Turnout Levels

Explaining Aggregate Turnout Levels

Explaining Individual Voter Turnout

Sociological Factors

Psychological Factors

Vote Choice

Aggregate Voting Patterns

Individual Voting Behavior

The Role of Partisanship

The Role of Issues

The Role of Candidate Evaluations

Normative Considerations

Is Low Turnout a Problem?

Can We Trust the Voters?

Pedagogical Tools

Role-Play Scenario

Discussion Questions

***Chapter 9* Campaigns**

How Campaigns Differ

The Campaign Plan

The Campaign Environment

Candidates' Backgrounds and Records

The Audience

Resources

Campaign Strategy

The Campaign Message

Candidate Positioning

Campaign Tactics

Fund Raising

- Television Advertising
- Other Forms of Communication
- Free Media Coverage and Debates
- Polling
- Voter Mobilization

Normative Considerations

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

***Chapter 10* Elections**

The Uniqueness of Presidential Elections

The “Invisible Primary”

- Nomination Contests
- The General Election

Categorizing Elections

Explaining Election Outcomes

- Presidential Elections
- Congressional Elections: District Level
- Congressional Elections: Aggregate Level

Do Campaigns Matter?

Do Elections Matter?

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

***Chapter 11* Conclusions**

Campaigns and Elections: The Big Picture

Campaign Ethics

The “Permanent Campaign”

Pedagogical Tools

- Role-Play Scenario
- Discussion Questions

Appendix

Bibliography

Index

- 2.1 1935 poll tax receipt from Texas**
- 2.2 North Carolina's Twelfth Congressional District, 1992**
- 2.3 2012 Ohio certificate of ascertainment**
- 3.1 The infamous butterfly ballot of 2000**
- 4.1 Campaign organizational chart**
- 5.1 Precinct map, City of Newcastle, Washington**
- 5.2 Map of regions under the NASS's rotating regional presidential primaries plan**
- 6.1 The number of PACs, 1974–2013**
- 7.1 Jon Stewart offers a satirical take on the news**
- 8.1 Voter turnout in U.S. presidential elections (1948–2012), as a percentage of voting age population (VAP) and voting eligible population (VEP)**
- 8.2 Voter turnout in presidential and midterm election years, 1932–2010**
- 9.1 2012 Obama fundraising email**
- 9.2 A negative direct mail piece**
- 11.1 Maine Code of Fair Campaign Practices**
- 11.2 President Obama, flanked by law enforcement officers, campaigns for gun control legislation**

3.1 2014 Contribution Limits

5.1 Selected Third-Party Performance in U.S. Presidential Elections

5.2 Party Committee Expenditures, 1991–2010

6.1 The Top 20 Super PACs, PACs, and 501(c) Organizations, by Total Amount Spent, 2011–2012

8.1 Average Voter Turnout in Countries with At Least Two Elections, 1945–2001

8.2 States with Highest and Lowest Voter Turnout in 2012

8.3 2004 Vote Totals, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania

8.4 Turnout by Education Level, 1952 and 2004

8.5 Self-Reported Turnout Rates, by Race (and Hispanic Origin), According to Education and Income Levels (2004)

8.6 Vote for Obama and Romney in 2012 by Demographic Group

8.7 Party Identification, 1952–2012 (with “Leaners” Included as Independents)

8.8 Party Identification, 1952–2012 (with Pure Independents)

9.1 Hypothetical Message Box for Jeb Bush’s 2016 Presidential Campaign against Hillary Clinton

10.1 State Presidential Election Results, by Number of Victories per Party, 1992–2012

10.2 Mid-Summer Gallup Presidential Approval Ratings and Election Results, 1948–2012

10.3 Incumbent Reelection Rates for the U.S. House and Senate, 1960–2010

10.4 Congressional Seat Gains/Losses by President’s Party, 1932–2010

Most readers of this book will vividly recall the 2008 presidential campaign. The intensity of that race and the historic nature of the outcome were certainly unique, but campaigns and elections are often exciting. When they are competitive, which admittedly is not always, they have all the drama of a championship sports event, with results that are far more consequential.

I wrote this book, in part, to share my passion for the study of campaigns and elections, which together are, arguably, the most important element of American democracy, but I also wrote it because there are no existing textbooks in this field that address the subject as I do in my campaigns-and-elections course. Many books focus on the nuts and bolts of campaigns or the operation of elections, but not both. I try—in my class and in this book—to balance coverage of campaigns with an examination of elections. Furthermore, I organize my course around the actors involved in campaigns and elections, including full treatment of candidates, political parties, interest groups, the media, and voters. Some books bury the actors under a focus on processes; others place just one of the actors (often parties) at the center of the discussion.

Campaigns and elections are extremely complicated events. The tangle of laws and regulations governing them, the behavior of the various actors, and the myriad processes involved in choosing our leaders and representatives can seem overwhelming. My hope is that, by providing a comprehensive but accessible treatment of the subject, this book helps students make sense of campaigns and elections. Perhaps, in addition, students will come away with a deeper appreciation for elections and the campaigns that precede them. I find them truly fascinating, and I hope that shows in the pages that follow.

► *Themes*

There are two primary themes that can be found throughout the book. The first is the remarkable variety in the laws and regulations that govern campaigns and elections in the United States. These laws and regulations are quite dissimilar, both between the federal and state levels and among the states. The differences in the operation of federal and state elections are readily apparent. The most obvious is the system for choosing presidents; nothing like an Electoral College for governors exists. However, there are other distinctions, including the regulation of fund raising and campaign spending and the media's coverage of campaigns. Among the states, however, there is even greater variation in the operation of campaigns and elections. There are numerous ways of handling campaign finance and redistricting, voter registration, primaries, and election administration. States also differ markedly in their use of initiatives and referenda, the strength of political parties, and levels of electoral competition. This book attempts to capture these and many other differences.

The second theme is that no system of campaigns and elections is perfect; every aspect of a given

system has advantages and disadvantages. Furthermore, though we often say that democracy requires free and fair elections, creating a system that is both free and fair is quite difficult. Indeed, efforts to reform particular aspects of campaigns and elections often require choosing among competing values. Typically, the values at stake are freedom and equality. Campaign finance reform, for example, faces a tension between giving individuals the freedom to spend as much as they would like in support of (or opposition to) a candidate and, conversely, providing candidates with roughly equal resources with which to compete. There are trade-offs as well in the choice of an electoral system for legislative elections. Single-member plurality systems tend to produce absolute majorities, which fosters decisive governance, while proportional representation tends toward consensus and coalition building, which enhances the representative function of government. The tensions and trade-offs inherent in the American system of campaigns and elections appear at various points throughout this text.

► *Approach*

Though there are a number of good textbooks for use in campaigns-and-elections courses, most focus nearly exclusively on either the operation of campaigns or the factors that influence elections, but not both. Furthermore, virtually all of them approach the subject from just one institutional perspective (for example, presidential elections rather than congressional elections) or one level (for example, national versus state and local). This book covers both campaigns *and* elections for executive and legislative races at both the national and, where possible given space limitations, subnational levels. I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible in this approach, while recognizing that some details would have to be left to books with a more specific focus. Nevertheless, my hope is that there is value in providing—in a single, relatively short volume—a comprehensive examination of the essential elements of campaigns and elections in the United States.

The other unique feature of this book is the emphasis placed on the various actors involved in campaigns and elections. Though institutions and laws certainly shape behavior (and are given proper attention in this text), groups and individuals are at the heart of the electoral process. Thus, the text is organized around the major actors. The core chapters are devoted to candidates and their campaign organizations, political parties, interest groups, the media, and voters. This allows sufficient space to explain how these actors function within campaigns and elections. Any laws or regulations that govern the actors' behavior and any processes not covered by a discussion of the actors' place in the system are addressed in separate chapters at the beginning and end of the book.

Finally, normative considerations are included either explicitly or implicitly in every chapter. Reform alternatives are a common part of these considerations, but students are also asked to examine their expectations for the behavior of the various actors covered in the book. Just how informed, for example, must citizens be if democracy is to function properly? Do we demand too much of candidates? There are ample opportunities to compare the ideal functioning of campaigns and elections with the reality of their operation. One goal, of course, is to sharpen students' critical capacities, but I also hope that students will develop reasonable standards by which to evaluate campaigns and elections and the performance of those who participate in them.

► *Pedagogy*

To reinforce the importance of actors in the political process and to introduce active learning, each chapter contains role-play scenarios in which students are asked to imagine themselves as particular actors in a situation related to campaigns and elections and then respond in one way or another to the scenario. This feature can easily be used (or adapted for use) as a source for course assignments. In addition to the role-plays, the chapters include discussion questions, online resources, and suggested readings.

► *Content*

The first three chapters of this book establish the theoretical and legal foundations of campaigns and elections. [Chapter 1](#) explores the role of campaigns and elections in democratic theory, including an examination of the requirements for free and fair elections. The chapter also distinguishes between the functions of campaigns and those of elections.

[Chapter 2](#) is the first part of a discussion of the “rules and regulations” governing campaigns and elections. It begins with an examination of the U.S. Constitution and identifies the provisions that pertain to elections. The bulk of the chapter, however, is devoted to voting rights and the electoral systems in use in the United States. [Chapter 3](#) covers the second half of the rules and regulations, which include election administration (voter registration, voting equipment, and the like) and the campaign finance system.

[Chapters 4](#) through [8](#) are devoted to the major actors involved in campaigns and elections.

- Candidates and their campaign organizations are the focus of [Chapter 4](#). Special attention is paid to the question of who runs for office and why, and political consultants are highlighted as integral elements of the campaign organization.
- Political parties are examined in [Chapter 5](#), which discusses the two-party system, including a brief history of that system; parties as organizations; the nomination process, which is described as a vital piece of party business; and the parties’ general election activities.
- [Chapter 6](#) explains what interest groups are, charts their growth over time, and examines their role in campaigns and elections.
- [Chapter 7](#) describes the current media environment and the way campaign news is reported. Particular attention is given to what has been called the “game schema” in use by campaign media. Election Night coverage is also discussed in some detail.
- Voters are the topic of [Chapter 8](#), which begins with explanations of voter turnout at both the aggregate and individual levels. The second half of the chapter examines vote choice and the various influences on voting behavior.

[Chapters 9](#) and [10](#) cover those aspects of campaigns and elections respectively, that were not dealt with in the previous eight chapters. In [Chapter 9](#), campaigns are described as dynamic processes that require sound planning, strategic thinking, and tactical maneuvering. [Chapter 10](#) explores the uniqueness of presidential elections, examines the realignments literature, and identifies the factors

that influence the outcomes of presidential and congressional elections. The chapter ends with discussions of whether campaigns matter—that is, whether they have an impact on election outcomes—and the extent to which elections affect governance.

Chapter 11, the final chapter of the book, begins by taking a step back to paint a broad picture of campaigns and elections in the United States. It then introduces campaign ethics and examines two standards by which campaign behavior can be judged. The chapter concludes with a description of the “permanent campaign” and considers the consequences of this relatively new phenomenon in American politics.

► *Acknowledgments*

Like all authors, I am indebted to many individuals for their support and assistance while I wrote this book and revised it for a second edition with a new publisher. James McCann, of Purdue University, gave the original publisher my name as a potential author for a campaigns-and-elections textbook. I’m forever grateful for his having done so and for the confidence he had in me.

Without the help of Michael Kerns, at Routledge, this book would have disappeared after a single edition. That would have been almost too painful for its author to bear. So Michael is due more thanks than anyone. He not only prolonged the life of the book, he has improved it in countless ways with his keen insights. Michael is a marvelous editor, and it is always a pleasure to work with him.

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At various times, both in writing the original manuscript and in revising it for the second edition, I relied on the assistance of other experts and scholars for specific pieces of information or for access to work that either hasn’t yet been published or was not available to me at the time of writing. For their rapid responses to my queries, I thank Richard Winger (Ballot Access News), Anthony Corrado (Colby College), Jennifer Lawless (American University), Michael McDonald (George Mason University), Gary Moncrief (Boise State University), and Stephen Farnsworth (University of Mary Washington).

I have had the good fortune to have worked with, and learned from, a number of wonderful political scientists over the years, and they have each had an impact on some part of this book. First among these is the late Barbara Hinckley, who served as my dissertation chair at Purdue University and who still serves as my role model as a political scientist. Others include, in alphabetical order, Stephen Caliendo (North Central College), David Dulio (Oakland University), David Farrell (University College Dublin), Paul Herrnson (University of Maryland), David Jones (James Madison University), Quentin Kidd (Christopher Newport University), Robin Kolodny (Temple University), Silvo Lenart (Zanthus Corp. and Portland State University), David Magleby (Brigham Young University), James McCann (Purdue University), Candice Nelson (American University), Kelly Patterson (Brigham Young University), William Shafer (Purdue University), Dan Shea (Colby

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I am reminded every day of how fortunate I am to teach at an institution such as Franklin & Marshall College. The students at F&M are fantastic, and those who have taken my campaigns-and-elections course have shaped this book in countless ways, without even knowing it. Two of my former students, Caitlin Krutsick and Anne Hazlett, served as research assistants as I revised the book for this second edition, and they were extraordinarily helpful. They are among the best students I have ever taught, and they have very bright futures ahead of them.

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Two dear friends also have my deep gratitude. Keith Shimko (Purdue University) offered sage advice about the textbook writing process as I first embarked on this project. He has always provided wise counsel, and he remains a trusted adviser. And, for an international relations scholar, he's a pretty good election analyst! When I have a question about some aspect of campaign ethics or political philosophy or when I really want to put an argument to the test, I turn to Dale Miller (Old Dominion University). More important, it's Dale I call for a learned assessment of the latest performance by our beloved Pittsburgh Steelers.

My greatest debt is to my family. This book was written in memory of my father, Steve Medvic, and is dedicated to my mother, Nancy Medvic. My parents' sacrifices made it possible for me to become a professor, and my mom's influence on me is immeasurable. I am tremendously grateful for her unflagging support throughout my life. My sister, Allison, is a phenomenal elementary school teacher, an even better person, and a continual source of inspiration to me. My stepsons, George and Ross, are smart, funny, and very active young men. If only I understood as much about soccer as they do about politics. My amazing wife, Laura, is a model of patience, strength, and kindness. She never complains about spending every two years as an "election widow," and she singlehandedly kept our household intact when I neglected my household responsibilities to fulfill writing, teaching, and administrative obligations. I hope she knows how much I appreciate all she did to allow me to finish this book and its revisions—and how much I love her. Finally, no father could be prouder of his children than I am of Colin and Abigail. They are talented, thoughtful, and intellectually curious, and they're lots of fun. No matter how stressful or frustrating my work can sometimes be, Colin and Abigail brighten my mood by their presence alone. I hope they forgive me for spending too much time in my study, but I also hope they understand that they are never out of my thoughts, that I cherish our time together, and that I love them more than anything in the world.

S.K.M.
Lancaster, PA
June 2013

1 Campaigns and Elections in American Democracy

Elections can occur without democracy, but democracy cannot endure without elections.

—Dennis Thompson, *Just Elections*¹

ELECTIONS ARE among the most interesting and important political events in the life of a country. Even non-democratic governments reinforce the value of elections by routinely using them to justify a regime's existence. The 1936 constitution of the Soviet Union guaranteed "all Soviets of Working People's Deputies, from rural and city Soviets of Working People's Deputies to the Supreme Soviet of the U.S.S.R., inclusive, are elected by the citizens by direct vote." Furthermore, elections were to take place "on the basis of universal... and equal suffrage by secret ballot."² In practice, of course, the Communist Party controlled nominations, and candidates ran largely unopposed. More recently, Saddam Hussein "won" a reelection referendum in Iraq with 100 percent of the vote just months before he would be deposed by the U.S. military. Seven years prior to that, he had received 99.96 percent of the vote.³ In terms of raw numbers, nearly as many elections were held in dictatorships from 1946 to 2000 as in democracies. However, there were also significantly more dictatorships than democracies throughout the world between 1960 and 1990. When this disparity is controlled for, elections are found to have been held almost twice as often in democracies as in dictatorships.⁴ Nevertheless, that so many dictatorships have held elections will likely come as a surprise to many readers.

Though elections under totalitarian regimes and dictatorships may serve as propaganda, they are the *sine qua non* of democracy; without them, there can be no democracy. Indeed, one could argue that the degree to which a political system is democratic can be measured by the meaningfulness of its elections, although this point is debatable for a number of reasons. One such reason is that some scholars of democratization prefer to treat the concept of democracy as a dichotomous variable (that is, a country either is or is not a democracy) rather than a continuous one (whereby a country is more or less democratic).⁵ According to this view, there can be no *degree to which* a political system is democratic: Either it is, or it isn't. Even so, a political system would never be considered democratic if it didn't hold elections.

There are, of course, numerous requirements for democracy beyond elections. These include free expression, the right to association and the freedom to create political organizations, unfettered access to information, and an array of other citizenship rights. Determining which of these is *most* essential for democracy is, of course, futile. Nevertheless, elections certainly can claim historical primacy over other democratic practices. Robert Dahl—a preeminent democratic theorist—has noted that in the common pattern of development in the world's "older" democracies, elections to