

**Computers and Political Campaigns:  
A Look At  
Technology and Social Change**

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***Program on Information Resources Policy***

Harvard University

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

By changing the nature of the information available to political campaigns, computer technology has helped campaign decision makers change the campaign process. An analysis of the impact computer technology has had on that process is a case study of technology and social change.

Technological change exhibits certain properties: A new tool brings with it a technical potential, a capacity to do something, that people adapt to their needs. Using the tool can shake up established ways of doing things, leading to a process reorganization. While the end results of the reorganization depend on many forces that have nothing to do with the new tool, the tool helps certain people more than others. This differential benefit becomes an additional force acting on the reorganization.

Within the context of campaigns, the computer has routinized information management tasks. It also provides a qualitatively different type of information to campaign decision makers that facilitates a more explicit and rational campaign planning process. The differential benefits of computer applications favor campaigns with the resources to use them and organizations with a long range perspective and organizational stability -- party committees, political action committees, and political consulting firms.

## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION

Political campaigns are the battlefield of an orderly democracy. The winners occupy the seats of elective power; the losers retire to rework their strategy and refine their instruments. This paper is concerned with one of those instruments, the computer, and its impact on political campaigns.

Determining the impact of computer technology on the political campaign process immediately raises several questions. "What exactly is the political campaign process? Who participates? How do they use computers?"

The research methods were necessarily eclectic because little research has been done on campaign organizations and the campaign process. Much of the work involved finding people who think analytically about political campaigns and distilling from their views a useable conception of the campaign process. That involved three phases that followed more or less sequentially. The first phase was the background research to learn what has been written about campaigns, who participates in them, and what the prevailing views are about the directions electoral politics are heading.

That phase begun, the next step was to interview people who run campaigns and understand them on a personal level. With a few notable exceptions there is a dichotomy between people who do scholarly work that relates to electoral politics and those who practice electoral politics. The practitioners, the

political professionals, do not generally write about what they do, and the academics do not generally participate in the process they write about. The professionals have well thought out ideas about the campaign process; unfortunately, their ideas are not easily accessible to the non-participant. Having learned politics from the inside out, they feel no need for concepts that describe campaigns from the outside in.

Much of this paper tries to fill that gap, to describe the campaign process from the outside in. To be able to say anything useful about how the automatic hammer affects the building industry, it is necessary to understand how houses are built. In order to describe the impact of computer technology on the campaign process, it is necessary to know what people do in campaigns.

The third phase, then, was model building -- trying to find a prism, as Daniel Bell would say, with which to see and understand politics. There are several models presented; no single one describes the whole process. Together they explain a great deal, but, being a personal view, they are by no means the last word on campaign politics.

Only a few general conclusions are reached about the integration of computers into campaigns, partly because the integration is continuing, the story still unfolding, and partly because there are so many forces at play that to single out one of them -- technological change -- as the causal element of political change is an untenable position.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, certain properties of technological change emerge. A new tool brings with it a technical potential, a capacity to do something, that people adapt to their needs. Using the tool can

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<sup>1</sup> especially when one considers two concurrent developments: campaign financing reform, and political primary reform. Between the two reforms and the technology, not to mention the cultural forces described by Christopher Lasch (The Culture of Narcissism) and Daniel Bell (The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism), electoral politics are in a state of great upheaval.

shake up established ways of doing things, leading to a process reorganization. While the end results of the reorganization depend on many forces that have nothing to do with the new tool, the tool helps certain people more than others. This differential benefit becomes an additional force acting on the reorganization. The chapters that follow describe this process.

The second chapter presents the technology and describes the various ways political organizations use it in campaigns. The third chapter models the campaign process, concentrating on the campaign organization and showing how the computer applications fit into the model. The fourth chapter describes the groups that provide support to the campaign organization -- political action committees, party committees, and political consultants -- and moves the discussion to the wider campaign arena. And the final chapter looks at the differing experiences of Republicans and Democrats and their adaption to the technology. The computer holds center stage throughout.

## Chapter 2

### THE TECHNOLOGY

Technical potential is an abstract limit that defines the capabilities of a technology. Technological applications tap that potential. This chapter describes computer applications used in political campaigns, the thus-far realized technical potential of the computer that drives the process reorganization described in the ensuing chapters.

For the purpose of this paper a computer will be defined as an "electronic device that accepts input, stores large amounts of data, executes complex instructions which direct it to perform mathematical and logical operations with a minimum of human intervention, and outputs that information in humanly readable form."<sup>2</sup> The computer is the "central electronics complex" in the accompanying diagram (figure 1).

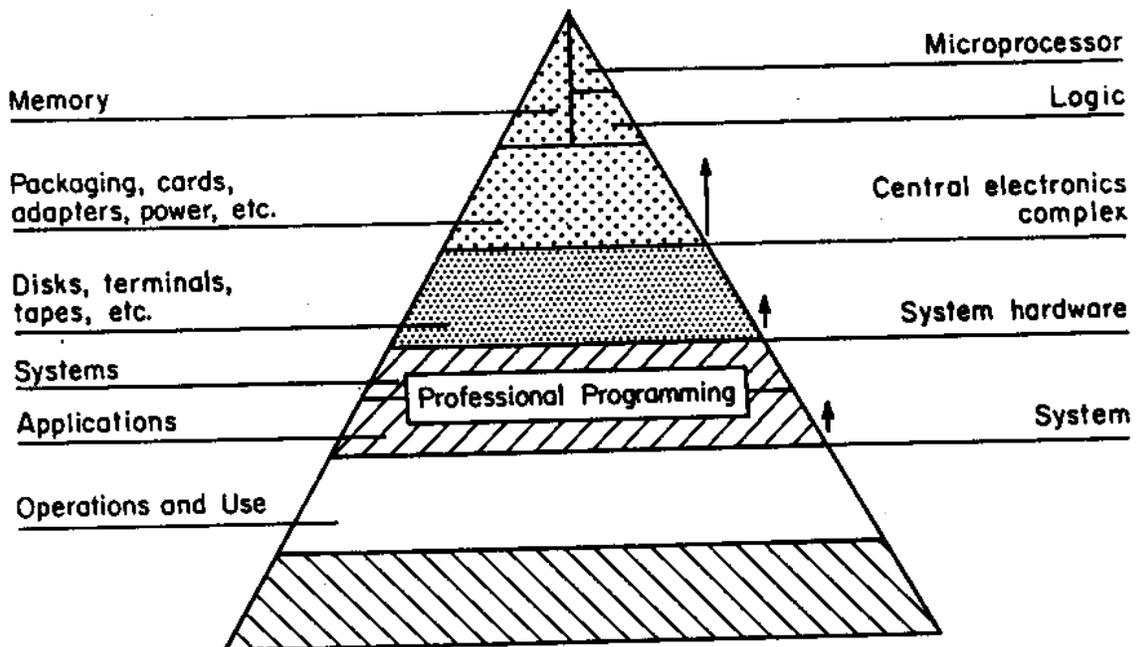
As figure 1 illustrates, the computer forms only a small part of an information system; nevertheless the computer manipulates the data and gives the system its power. The technical potential referred to here is the potential of the central electronics complex. The realization of that potential depends on the rest of the pyramid.

What can a computer do?

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<sup>2</sup> J. Frakes, and W. Moldry, Introduction to the Computer (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1980), p.7.

Figure 1: The Information System Pyramid



Source: Lewis H. Branscomb, "Electronics and Computers: An Overview," *Science*, 415 (February 12, 1982). 756.

A computer can count, compare, list, add, subtract, multiply, divide. A computer performs no operation that the analyst who programmed it cannot also perform. Its merit is that it does these things fast, tirelessly, without forgetting its preliminary results."<sup>3</sup>

This description, borrowed from Ithiel de Sola Pool's ( et al ) Candidates, Issues, and Strategies, emphasizes that a computer is a tool, an information management tool, that can do nothing that could not, in principle, be done by hand. Nevertheless, the computer, a product of the merger of logic and electronics, has given humankind the ability to record, manipulate, and retrieve data with an ease hardly imaginable just a few decades ago.

Campaign operatives have adopted the computer to perform a number of tasks that involve information management. They use computers to manage information bases, to assist with accounting and budgeting, to lighten the load of routine office management, to provide a widespread communication system (in conjunction with the telephone network), and to perform statistical data processing. The sections that follow describe each of these task areas and sketch how computers are involved.

This description should not be taken as a definitive statement of what computers can do for campaigns. Many subtleties are necessarily glossed over; some things may not be covered at all. The object is to make clear the extent of the computer's penetration into political campaigning and to begin suggesting ways that penetration may have altered the campaign process.

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<sup>3</sup> Ithiel de Sola Pool et al, Candidates, Issues, and Strategies (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1965), p. 3.

## INFORMATION BASE MANAGEMENT

Political organizations feed on and disgorge information -- lists of names, voting records, issue briefs, public opinion surveys. Managing that information is one of their primary tasks. Computers help in two major areas: list management and information tracking systems.

Lists are the currency of campaign politics. Who gave how much to whom, and when? Which voters support candidate X and which plan to vote for someone else? What radio stations and newspapers service the district? Who are their producers and editors?

Computer list management allows political organizations to store thousands of names and addresses and additional information in computer data base systems, sort the lists, and retrieve the stored data in many different forms -- punched cards, typed lists, mailing labels, and personalized letters, among others. These systems facilitate fundraising, political education and persuasion, and constituent relations.

An entire industry has grown up around computerized fundraising. There are companies that acquire and maintain lists of contributors to candidates and other causes, that write direct mail and telephone bank fundraising pitches, and that prepare direct mail packages and man telephone banks. Computer data base management systems make this industry possible. Without the computer an organization is relegated to storing names on paper.

Some politicians, such as Congressman Charlie Rose of North Carolina, take computerized list management beyond fundraising. They maintain lists of their entire constituencies, recording correspondence, voting behavior and other pertinent information in each individual's file. One system designed for use in a state legislative race in Massachusetts incorporated telephone and

door-to-door survey information to locate and track favorable voters so that they could be turned out on election day.

Electronic filing systems, or information tracking systems in trade parlance, allow organizations to store large amounts of changing information in an easily accessed and updated data base management system. Computer tracking systems are relatively simple, in principle. The data elements are entered and given a series of modifiers that allow the data elements to be called up when certain commands are given. The system allows cross referencing limited only by the programmer's imagination (and the client's time and money).

For example, one system currently used by the National Republican Senatorial Committee tracks incumbent Senators. Each Senator's "file" lists floor and committee votes, important statements on a number of issues, political junket history, and fundraising and expenditures from previous campaigns. Someone with access to the system could query the computer asking for the names of Senators who voted for a particular bill, who travelled to a particular country, and who received contributions from a political action committee that supports a particular stance in relation to that country, or whatever cross reference may be desired.

#### ACCOUNTING AND BUDGETING

A political campaign is a small business, a small marketing business. Like other small businesses, campaigns have been affected by the revolution in small business computer services. Campaigns employ these services in three areas: accounting and budgeting, office management, and communication.

Computer accounting can improve control over cash flow the same way it improves control in businesses, by giving organizations more information about

the cash on hand, upcoming expenditures, and predicted income. While this control may be enough to induce larger campaigns to adopt computerized accounting systems, the complex Federal Election Commission (and state election commission) regulations and reporting requirements have accelerated campaigns' reliance on computers. Political organizations have to centralize the control over their receipts and expenditures to account for their cash flow. The computer can be programmed to print out all the financial information necessary for FEC reports, in the proper format and at the proper time.

#### OFFICE MANAGEMENT

Office management applications include word processing, scheduling, and correspondence management. In each case the computer handles routine information management tasks -- printing, editing, and filing. When combined with an information network, computer-assisted office management systems can make a geographically spread out organization function as if everyone were in the same building.

#### COMMUNICATION

From a communications standpoint, computers are simply devices for storage, switching, and mathematical transformation of the information being carried by the network.<sup>4</sup>

The merging of computers and communication networks provides opportunities for dispersed organizations like large scale campaigns and political parties. From any location, the filing system, data banks, and other system features can be only a telephone call away. John Connolly's abortive 1980 Presidential campaign

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<sup>4</sup> Joel S. Birnbaum, "Computers: A Survey of Trends and Limitations," in Science, Vol. 215, No. 4534, 2/12/82 (American Academy for the Advancement of Science), p. 764.

was the first to make use of computer communication on a sizable scale. In their system

- UPI and other wire services were available on-line;
- news releases, speech drafts, and schedules were composed, revised, accessed and printed via remote terminals;
- routinized correspondence was printed by computer; and
- intra-campaign communication and the transfer of information among the widely dispersed staff was nearly instantaneous.

"The big problem," said campaign staffer Mead Treadwell, responsible for putting the system together, "was getting people to use it."<sup>5</sup> A lack of understanding and a general reluctance to try something new initially inhibited the use of the services. As the information industries develop data banks and software capabilities that appeal to the information needs of campaigns, we can expect increasing use of these services by dispersed campaign organizations.

#### STATISTICAL DATA PROCESSING

All candidates want to know just what it is they have to do in order to get elected. What are people's views on the issues? What types of people support which candidates, and for what reasons? Ideally, the candidate or campaign staff could interview every voter, decide what issues are important and what kind of leader voters want, and then structure the campaign to fit the voters.

The applications described in this section attempt to provide that type of information at a (relatively) low cost. By aggregating statistical and public opinion data, running it through a number-crunching computer program, and combining the results with political analysis, organizations obtain information

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<sup>5</sup> Personal interview.

that reduces some of the guesswork involved in political campaigning. The computer makes this possible by performing the millions of routine calculations that must be done in order to turn the raw data into something meaningful.

There are three basic campaign techniques that involve statistical data processing: polling, targeting, and simulation. Public opinion polling attempts to monitor the mood and attitudes of the electorate. Targeting helps campaigns spend their resources on those areas and sub-populations that are most receptive to the campaign message. And simulation strives to predict the results of various campaign strategies and circumstances.

To take a public opinion poll, an organization first interviews a certain number of people (generally between 400 and 1500 depending on the nature of the poll) selected at random from the population to be assessed, then performs statistical manipulations on the resulting data, and, finally, analyzes the results. Using a computer allows campaigns to obtain the results in a timely fashion; performing the statistical manipulations by hand would take weeks.

Prior to the development of the 1970s' generation computer, public opinion polling played only a minor role in political campaigns. By the mid-1970s, however, the multi-dimensional analysis of modern polling became an elemental feature of political strategizing. While the computer makes sure that the tabulation and cross-tabulation of polls are done well, the most critical elements of a poll are human: designing the "survey instrument" (the questionnaire), interviewing the respondents, and analyzing the results.

For this reason, assessing the public opinion is less science than art -- a very complex art. A poll is no better than its weakest link; the accurate analysis of improperly gathered or misdirected data distorts every bit as much as the shoddy analysis of carefully gathered data. Nevertheless, polls provide

campaigns with a way to "listen" to an electorate that goes beyond the casual observations of political analysts, and approaches, somewhat, the objectivity campaign strategists desire.

Targeting involves the allocation of scarce campaign resources -- people, money, time, and talent -- to those voters who are most likely to either support the candidate, or to consider supporting the candidate. In an age where 25% of the registered voters in any district determine who will represent them, campaigns maximize their chances by targeting their efforts on friendly voters. Who votes determines the outcome as much as who they vote for. Targeting helps campaigns spend their resources in the most effective media markets, the most promising neighborhoods.

All campaigns use some type of targeting, tacit or explicit; their success often depends on how well. Targeting does not have to involve a computer. It can be as simple as looking over past election results and deciding which areas look the most promising, or as complicated as merging public opinion, census, and electoral history data in a sophisticated computer program. Computers are used in two ways: to store information gathered through phone or door-to-door canvassing, and to manipulate this or other data. The goal is to provide a clear picture of the demographic makeup of the constituency and to determine which people are worth approaching. Like polling, targeting involves more human design and analysis than data processing. The processing extends the power and abilities of the analysts by making available quantified data to assist their decision making.

Simulation takes the types of information used in polling and targeting and combines them to make predictive statements. Briefly, the simulators use demographic and public opinion data to create a model of the population under

study, a model that then exists in computer memory. The simulator develops theories about the behavior of people in the population and incorporates those theories into a series of computer programs that act on the model population in a way that simulates the effects of events in the real world on the real population.

For any computer simulation to be successful, the simulator must have viable theories about the behavior of the system to be simulated, and accurate values for the parameters of the system. To perform the simulation, the computer must be told what to do in logical terms and then must be given numerical data to plug into the logical equations. The computer will do only what it is programmed to do; thus the simulation is no better than the theories that lie behind the computer programs, the programs themselves, or the methods chosen to assign numerical values to human interaction.

The quantifiable data and analytic results of each of the three statistical data processing applications are not an unmixed blessing. Some limitations come, too: such as the temptation to ignore data not easily quantifiable or the discovery of trends or patterns that suggest things that don't reflect what is actually there. Armed with computer printouts and a statistician's blessing, a campaign manager may charge off more convinced of the worth of a particular strategy than the circumstances merit. If the strategy is off, then the computer-generated assurances may delay needed adjustments.

To sum up, we can see that the computer applications do two things: they reduce the amount of labor required for routine information management tasks and

they increase the amount of quantitative data available to campaign managers. Each of the computer applications has a cost. Campaigns have to buy or lease hardware, computer time, and software; they have to pay skilled operators and analysts. When deciding what to spend money on, political organizations have to weigh these costs against other potential campaign expenses, other opportunities. While opportunity cost may not be the only criterion used to make the decision about which computer applications to use, it is certainly an important one. Settling the issue of opportunity cost and computer expense and determining its importance in shaping the influence of computers on political campaigns is beyond the scope of this paper. The survey that would determine exactly what different campaigns use which applications and why they use those applications rather than others, and how much it all costs has yet to be done.

For now it is important to be aware that the preceding computer applications are available to those campaigns that can pay for them and that, generally, the computer cost involved in each application has declined over time, while the human element has become more skilled. And it is equally important to remember that the computer is only an information management tool and, as such, only as good as the people entering the data and writing the programs. As every good carpenter knows, there lies a world of difference between having a tool and using it, and between using it poorly and using it well. "A computer can count, compare, list, add, subtract, multiply, divide." It cannot think.

## Chapter 3

### COMPUTERS AND CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATIONS

Putting the computer applications described in the preceding chapter to work changes the way campaigns obtain information, reach voters, and manage their routine office procedures. Each application has an effect on the campaign process -- the way decisions are made, the assignment of roles and tasks, the projection of the candidate into the view of the electorate, and the way campaign organizations and other groups active in the campaign process relate to one another.

For analytical purposes we can divide the campaign process into two conceptual parts: the internal process, the roles and activities within campaign organizations; and the external process, the roles and activities of the various organizations active in the larger environment. This chapter describes the internal campaign process and discusses the reorganization that process is undergoing today as campaign organizations match their organizational goals with the new range of means computer technology makes possible.

The method of analysis is as follows. Three models of political campaigns are presented. The functions shown in each model which are suited to the use of computer technology are discussed. Finally, some conclusions are reached about the impact of the technology on political campaigns, based on the insights gained from the models.

## CAMPAIGN MODELS

While campaigns share a similar objective, to elect a candidate to office, they differ widely, due to the constituency they seek to represent, their financial and human resources, personal style, and other factors. There are as many types of campaigns as there are marketing businesses, and a far greater number of campaigns. The models presented here are ideal types. They attempt to represent in abstract form the essential elements of a typical campaign. The models do not attempt to describe the definitive campaign; no such campaign exists. The personalities involved, the issues of the day, the voting population, all combine to make campaigning a very complex undertaking. Understanding that undertaking has occupied the lives of more than a few of the politically ambitious.

The three models suffer from the inherent problem of adopting a simple model to explain a complex process, the problem of fit. Each model obscures some subtleties while bringing others to light. It is hoped that the inclusion of three different ways of viewing political campaigns will shed more light than darkness.

### A Conversation Model

At its simplest, a campaign is a conversation between candidates and voters, a conversation mediated through political communication channels. Ideally, a candidate would be able to meet everyone in the district. But the numbers make that impossible. To learn what people think, to learn what people care about, to learn, hence, what to talk about, candidates have to probe and seek voters out. To motivate people to vote, candidates have to actively use the channels of communication open to them.

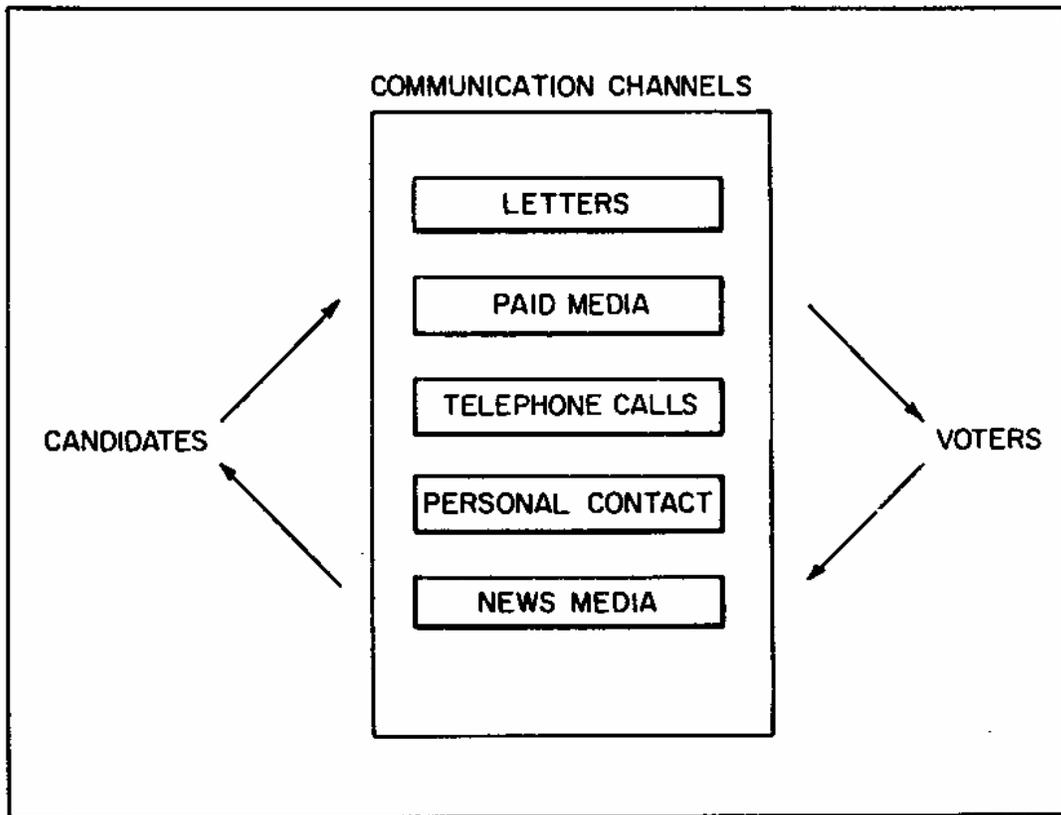
This information exchange takes place on three levels. The first level is what we usually think of when describing communication: the content of the words. A candidate may say, "I stand for the rights of the working man." The words convey a certain meaning, ambiguous though it may be. The accompanying non-verbal element of the communication is the second level. As everyone knows, Ted Kennedy stands for the rights of the working man. Now, if he were to appear in a television commercial dressed to the teeth in front of his home, the statement, "I stand for the rights of the working man," would seem absurd. Instead, his commercials show him with his shirtsleeves rolled up, face glistening, and arms pounding as he fights for pro-labor legislation on the Senate floor.

The third level is far more difficult to control. It relates to the meaning particular word combinations and non-verbal signals have for the people who interpret them. The phrase "rights of the working man" means entirely different things to different people, as does the image of Ted Kennedy working hard in the Senate. On the one hand, for someone who believes that organized labor unions lie at the root of our economic ills, the "rights of the working man" include the right not to join a union, even though an individual's fellow workers may desire to. On the other hand, for someone who believes that labor unions are the bulwark of a free society, the "rights of the working man" include the right to force all employees in a specific sector of a company to pay union dues, as long as a majority of them supports the union.

Campaign organizations use five different "channels" to reach voters. They write letters, make telephone calls, buy media time, appear on the news, and meet people face to face. Three of these can also convey information back to the campaign from the people: telephone calls, news media, and personal contact.

This very simple model, as shown in figure 2, emphasizes the major function of any campaign: communication. No matter how capable, a candidate cannot win a campaign without reaching people with a message that strikes a responsive chord on all three levels. Decisions as to which channels to use and what message to convey determine, to a large extent, the image of the candidate in the voters' consciousness. And on election day, the truth, as mayor Frank Skeffington in Edwin O'Connor's The Last Hurrah so profoundly understood, is what the voters think.

Figure 2: A Simple Conversation Model



### A Feedback Model

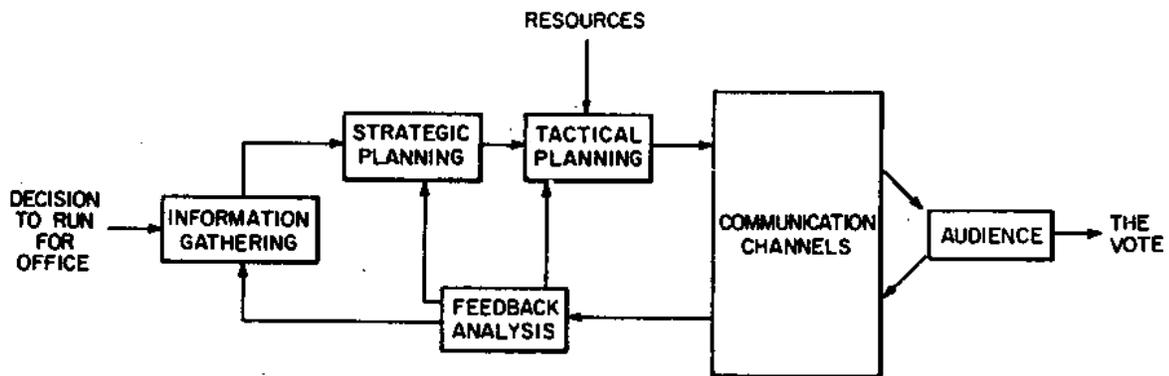
The feedback model attempts to overcome some of the shortcomings of the conversation model by suggesting the process through which campaigns make plans and allocate resources. To do this, the model breaks campaigns into seven inter-connected elements: research, strategic planning, fundraising, human resource recruitment, tactical planning, communication, and feedback. Figure 3 shows how they fit together.

Information gathering is the process of collecting data (formally and informally) about the electorate and the candidates. This information, whether obtained purposely or ad hoc, serves as the (explicit or otherwise) basis for decisions made throughout the campaign.

Information on voters comes from survey research, the Census, the voting history of the district, voter registration files, advice from people, and from a variety of other sources such as canvassing, library research, newspaper archives and travelling around the district. Information on the candidates (both the campaign's own and the opposition) comes from survey research (to determine what people know about them), past voting and employment records, media coverage, and a variety of other sources -- friends, co-workers, former employees, campaign literature. As more information becomes available during the campaign, the two information "bases" can be modified.

Strategic planning is the process of determining which voters to appeal to and determining why those voters should prefer the campaign's candidate. The model refers to the target voters as the "target audience" and the reasons they should vote for the candidate as the "campaign message." Certainly, all campaigns do not explicitly decide on an audience or a message; nevertheless

Figure 3: A Feedback Model



their actions indicate an implicit decision. Like the information bases, these decisions can be modified throughout the campaign.

The main feature of the third element, tactical planning, is resource allocation. Campaigns have finite amounts of time, money, people and talent, all of which they want to combine in the most effective way possible. Here, the campaign organization decides how and when to communicate the campaign message to the target coalition, given the financial and human resources of the campaign. In allocating the resources, the manager considers (again, either explicitly or implicitly) the characteristics and cost of each communication channel that reaches the coalition, the requirements of the message,<sup>6</sup> and the amount of time, money, people, and talent the campaign has. After choosing among the different channels, the campaign faces the technical problem of packaging the message to fit each communication channel and audience, and then "aiming" the channel at the target group. The organization can use feedback information to re-evaluate and improve the communication.

Fundraising may well be the most crucial element of the campaign. The amount of money raised has a major effect on resource allocation. Briefly, the organization selects potential contributors and then contacts them. Some will contribute to the campaign. While the model does not adequately indicate this, fundraising depends on the course of the campaign as a whole. Potential contributors receive information through the political communication channels as well as through fundraising solicitations. Their decision to contribute or not depends on their assessment of the campaign along with the contribution appeal.

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<sup>6</sup> Some channels cannot carry certain types of messages, e.g. a 30-second commercial cannot convey a complicated issue stand (although David Garth, a political media impresario, would disagree).

Human resource recruitment is much like fundraising; the volunteer recruitment process is the same. Potential volunteers are located and then contacted. Like fundraising, volunteer recruitment depends a great deal on the public perception of the campaign. Three other human resources include political consultants, party networks, and political action committee networks. Whether or not campaigns have access to these resources depends on a multitude of factors including their election chances, their financial resources, their party affiliation, their ideological predisposition, and the networks of the candidate and campaign staff.

The communication channels convey information from candidates to voters and from voters to candidates. As the conversation model illustrated, campaign organizations use various communication channels to reach and understand voters. From the discussion above it should be clear that this is not the random process one might expect from looking only at the conversation model, but rather a controlled process in which campaigns try to contact specific groups of people with a specific message.<sup>7</sup>

Feedback analysis is the process of obtaining information about the effectiveness of the campaign communication and then using that information to modify the campaign. Managers use both statistical procedures like public opinion polling and ad hoc information like suggestions from observers. Feedback can reach every other element in the model and, because a campaign is dynamic, a change in one element can reach every other, as the model illustrates.

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<sup>7</sup> The degree of control varies from campaign to campaign.

The feedback model provides a conceptual illustration of campaign planning and decision making. It describes the type of information that lies behind strategic and tactical choices, and suggests the process by which those choices are made. While few campaigns carry off their planning in the linear, rational fashion pictured here, each must make crucial decisions about target audiences, campaign messages, resource allocation, and campaign communication. Each of these decisions will be made on the basis of some information "base" (even if it's only the personal memory "bank" of the campaign manager) and some adjustments will be made according to feedback from the electorate.

### An Organization Model

The previous two models have taken a conceptual approach to political campaigning without treating their organizational characteristics. The structure of campaign organizations and the roles and activities of the people in them can tell us a great deal. Studying the campaign organization should fill some of the gaps left by the other models.

Campaign organizations\* are characterized by a non-hierarchical, task-based structure in an environment of great uncertainty. The campaign manager and one or two close advisors may hold ultimate authority, but beyond that there are usually no clear lines of decision-making authority. A campaign exists to elect a candidate to office; the means to that end, the campaign tasks, dominate the organization and provide the basis for its internal structure. Because campaign staffers will be selected, to a degree, on the basis of their ability to perform these tasks, the tasks, in a sense, determine who will be around to make further decisions. The process is recursive.

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\* Some of the material for this model was drawn from Xandra Kayden's Campaign Organization (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1978).

Campaign personnel fall into three major categories: full-time, part-time, and outside consultants. Part-time workers participate in those areas where there are jobs which don't require a full-time commitment (such as making telephone calls, typing, canvassing, and research). Consultants work in technical areas where the regular campaign workers lack either the skill, experience, contacts, or objectivity required to do something, such as polling, direct mail, or computer simulation. Full-time workers do everything else: press relations, organization building, scheduling, etc. The particular mix of workers, their skills, and their roles in the decision-making process are determined in part by the jobs they have to perform.

#### COMPUTERS IN THE CAMPAIGN MODELS

The models pointed out several important characteristics of political campaigns. The conversation model emphasized the different levels of communication between candidates and voters and described the various channels candidates use to reach voters. The feedback model reduced the complex campaign process to a conceptual linear scheme, highlighting the importance of information in strategy and tactical development. And the organization model pointed out the recursive nature of campaigns' organizational decision making: the tasks to be done influence what types of people will be involved in subsequent decision-making. These insights help determine how the computer applications described in the previous chapter affect the campaign process.

In terms of the conversation model, these applications have two implications. First, a campaign that uses one mix of channels to reach voters will have a different "look" than one which uses a different mix. Computerized direct mail and phone banks reach the voters very differently from media buys or strong

organization. Campaigns can track individual voters, sending them personalized letters and asking for them by name on the telephone. The overall effect is a more direct link between candidate and voter. What channel to use is a strategic decision to be made by individual campaigns -- what "look" to present to the voters, the shotgun media approach, or the rifle direct mail approach. Nevertheless, as campaigns opt for the rifle approach, campaign strategy shifts. Media-intensive and organization-intensive campaigns remain, but they remain as conscious alternatives to the direct mail campaign.

Second, campaigns can use the statistical computer applications to learn about voters in order more consciously to manipulate their communication on all three levels. For example, one consultant designs his surveys so they measure the values and beliefs of the people interviewed. That information, imperfect though it may be, gives the strategist a way to estimate how people will receive the campaign message on the second and third levels, where the meanings that particular words, ideas, images, and concepts have for people determine their attitudes towards candidates and their messages. Again, while individual campaigns may not avail themselves of the, admittedly imperfect, polling instrument, whether for lack of money or mistrust, using or not using polls becomes a decision. The overall effect on campaigning is greater attempts to measure people's attitudes and beliefs and greater attempts to use that information to design effective propaganda.

The feedback model leads to other implications. Survey research data provides not only a snapshot view of people's ideas, attitudes, and beliefs, but also a way to measure these parameters over time. Campaigns use survey research techniques to measure the effectiveness of their efforts. For example, in the 1982 Massachusetts Democratic gubernatorial primary race, the Dukakis campaign

took a series of polls that showed, among other things, that among those people who considered crime to be the most important problem in the state, Governor King was picking up some momentum. Consequently, the Dukakis campaign began stressing crime in their public appearances and media events. The decision about the allocation of resources was informed by the poll. Without the technology, managers would have had access to the same raw data, but no way to manipulate them in order to discover patterns. The danger of this approach lies in the human elements: designing the questionnaire, interviewing the respondents, and analyzing the results. By asking the wrong questions, asking the right questions in the wrong way, or misinterpreting the results, the pollster can lead the campaign astray. Either way -- with good or bad polls -- the campaign decisions will be more firm than without the poll; the figures justify what they call for. The overall effect is to increase the emphasis on measureable strategies and conscious campaign feedback.

Computer targeting information also affects resource allocation decisions. By giving managers a clearer view of what types of people live where and how those people fit into the overall strategy of the campaign, the information gives managers the tools to make more rational decisions. For example, in the 2nd Suffolk State Senate district in Massachusetts there are a number of small weekly newspapers that reach different areas of the district. Knowing what kinds of people live in those areas and (an assumption) read the local weekly helps campaign managers in that district decide which papers to advertise in and how much money to spend. While someone with political experience in the 2nd Suffolk district may already have this information, a computer targeting program would make the information easier to replicate. Computer targeting provides more precise information about voters and media audiences than is otherwise

possible, allowing campaign managers to make decisions with greater surety (running the risk, as with survey research data, of being more sure about a wrong decision). Deciding not to use computer targeting (as with survey research) leaves one with the awareness of consciously choosing not to have the information the service provides, the knowledge that such information could be had, and, thus, the desire to obtain that information, or a substitute, in another way.

A third implication from the feedback model is more difficult to pin down. It relates to the way campaigners make decisions when using computer-generated information. This information can force the people involved to be more explicit about the way they arrive at their conclusions. Knowing that the candidate can win by garnering 70% of the senior citizen vote, 80% of the young professional vote, 75% of the gay vote, 70% of the Hispanic vote, and at least 40% of the blue collar vote, and also knowing where these people live and how to measure what their attitudes are, changes the campaign strategy from motivating an undifferentiated mass of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans to a focused effort aimed at the people the candidate absolutely has to motivate to vote in order to win. The computer does not cause campaigns to plan their strategy and tactics more rationally. Nevertheless the information computer applications provide facilitates this type of planning.

The organization model raises another set of questions. Because campaign organizations are task-based, anything that affects what people do in campaigns, or how they do it, should also affect their organization. In the case of computer applications the changes revolve around the types of people who are brought into the campaign to provide computer services, the roles they subsequently assume in campaign planning, and the people whose positions are affected as a result.

Computer applications require specialized knowledge. Designing a questionnaire, pulling a sample, and writing targeting programs are all complicated undertakings that the old-time political operators never had to do. Except in very large campaigns (like Presidential campaigns and competitive statewide races in some of the more populous states), most campaign organizations have neither the time nor the money to develop the computer programs and skill these applications require. In economic terms, the costs of creating the systems outweigh their benefits to any one campaign.

In order to take advantage of computer services, then, campaigns generally have to buy them (or receive them as a donation) from someone outside the campaign. The people who control these resources have to be invited into the campaign where they will hold a certain power by virtue of their expertise.

One effect of using computers in campaign organizations, then, is to expand the role of the technical professional. Another is to re-direct part-time workers from "make-work" activities like folding brochures, licking envelopes, and indiscriminate canvassing, to more structured activities which use computer-generated lists of names. Volunteers can telephone potential voters and contributors, canvass neighborhoods where support for the candidate is very strong, and conduct surveys (with proper training and oversight).

At the same time that the technical professionals are playing a larger role and volunteers are becoming more effective, the non-technically oriented, full-time staffers find their role reduced. Speech writing, scheduling, old-style fundraising, organization building, and all the other tasks are still important, but some of the critical decisions about the allocation of resources and the themes of the campaign are being made elsewhere, creating the potential for conflict between those comfortable with the computer applications and those

who are not familiar with them. The unfamiliar have a tendency to see the professionals as "Computer Rasputins," eager to pervert the campaign's goals for their own nefarious interests, while the professionals view the others as "stick-in-the-muds" who don't understand the realities of modern campaigning and (perhaps) deserve to be taken advantage of. Regardless of which side is correct, computer applications have made their mark on the internal process of campaigns.

The (alleged) success of campaigns which employ survey research, computer targeting, direct mail, and the other applications leads to an increased demand for people who understand and can use the applications. This places a larger premium on technical skill and reduces, relatively, the importance of the political enthusiast. Why bother catering to a mass of prima donna volunteers when, for pennies a letter, one can send personalized, targeted mail and then measure its effectiveness with a follow-up poll? Ironically, the very technology which cut the cost of information handling and made targeted direct mail and multi-dimensional statistical analysis affordable has also raised the cost of campaigning. With the disparity between the effectiveness of technical (read "computer-assisted") and non-technical approaches, the value of the next dollar (which can buy the next technical "unit") increases relative to the value of the next volunteer body. Up to a certain point (and no one seems certain about what point, if any) every additional dollar can buy real, measureable changes in voter opinion and preference.

There are still many non-monetary aspects that play as important, or more important, a role in determining the outcome of any election. But the availability and effectiveness of the computer services lead to their demand and, perhaps, eventual necessity. This internal demand reaches out to the

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external relationships of campaigns -- to the various support groups that provide people, money, and talent to individual campaigns. The next chapter describes this external process reorganization and raises some more questions about the internal workings of campaigns.

## Chapter 4

## COMPUTERS AND CAMPAIGN SUPPORT GROUPS

Along with campaign organizations, there are three other major actors in the campaign process: political party committees, political action committees (PACs), and political consultants. These campaign support groups provide resources to campaign organizations and to each other. Together with campaigns they define the external campaign process.

Like campaign organizations, each of these groups has its own internal process, its own internal logic that brings much to bear on how it fits into the external campaign process and is, simultaneously, shaped by that external process. This chapter examines the support groups, suggests how they fit into the larger campaign arena and then discusses the effects of computer technology in that arena.

These concepts, the descriptions they allow us to make, and the conclusions they encourage us to draw don't exactly describe what happens in campaign politics. Rather, they serve as tools for understanding the complexity of interdependent organizations, each with its own goals and capabilities, adapting to the new range of means computer technology makes possible, remaining all the while part of a larger campaign process that is itself only a small part of the even larger process of governing our society. The reverberations of each "system" affecting and being affected by the other levels of organization around it make the real world far more intricate than what is presented here.

## PARTY COMMITTEES

A political party is a complex social phenomenon, difficult to define. For the purposes of this paper, we will heed political scientist V.O. Key's advice<sup>9</sup> and concentrate on the party organization. In the accompanying chart (figure 4), party organization appears extensive and well-coordinated. There are local committees, state committees, and national committees. The national convention, which is the governing body of the party, meets once every four years to decide the direction and scope of party activity, then appoints the National Committee to oversee the party in the interim. The National Committee assists the state committees; and the state committees, the local committees. The local committees then register members and make sure they vote. Or so it seems:

On paper at least, there is a perfect party hierarchy based on the precinct executive and capped by the national committee, with special organs formed around each important electoral unit -- ward, city, county, legislative district, state, and nation.<sup>10</sup>

But, as Key observed in 1942, in practice the committee structure is less cohesive than the organizational chart would indicate.

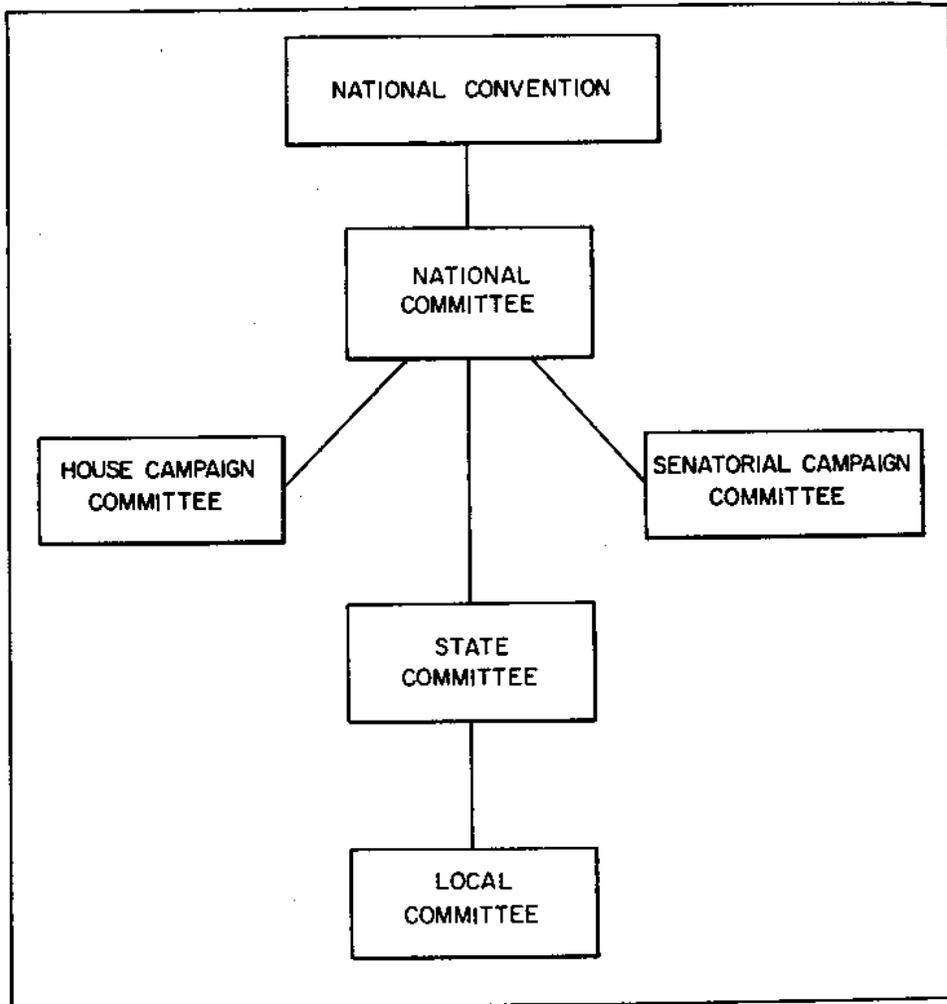
Party committees form a loose national alliance whose strength varies from state to state and within states. Committees, when they are active, can do a number of things for the political candidates they support. State and federal laws limit the amount of money and "in-kind" services that party committees can give. For federal elections in 1982, party committees may give House candidates \$5000 per election in direct cash contributions and no more than \$18,600 in expenditures made on behalf of the candidate (called "coordinated

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<sup>9</sup> Key wrote "in the examination of party activities it is well to concentrate attention on the inner core of the organization, for that really is 'the party.'", Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1942), p. 247.

<sup>10</sup> Key, ibid, p. 295.

Figure 4: National Party Organization



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expenditures"). Senate candidates may receive no more than \$17,000 in direct contributions per election cycle, along with \$20,000 or 2 cents multiplied by the voting age population of the state (in 1976 dollars), whichever is larger, in coordinated expenditures. State laws vary.

Along with cash contributions and coordinated expenditures, party committees can provide campaigns with advice, technical expertise, training sessions, and a network of potential supporters. With the decline in party enrollment and strength across the country, the role of party committees has shifted from mobilizing the party faithful to providing general assistance to campaigns. How much assistance they can provide depends primarily on their financial resources and secondarily on such intangibles as their ability to mobilize party activists, the political acumen and expertise of committee staffers, and the receptivity of candidates and their campaign staff.

#### POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEES

Political action committees (PACs) are the principal instrument for participation in the electoral process by organizations other than political parties. Conceptually, PACs are the modern campaign arm of the "pressure groups" V.O. Key described in his classic, Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups. They contribute to campaigns to elect politicians who will support their political agenda.

There are five major types of political action committees: labor PACs, corporate PACs, trade-membership-health PACs, cooperative PACs, and unconnected PACs. Trade-membership-health PACs represent trade associations (e.g. the National Realtors Assoc.), health associations (the American Medical Assoc.), or other membership organizations outside of labor unions (e.g. the Chamber of

Commerce). Unconnected PACs are either issue-oriented committees like the now-famous National Conservative Political Action Committee, or committees set up by Presidential contenders like Ronald Reagan's Citizens for the Republic, organized in 1976. Cooperative PACs represent cooperative agricultural groups, for the most part.

Although political action committees have a much lower legal contribution ceiling than party committees, they can do the same things for candidates. PACs contribute money, provide volunteers, analyze polls, produce television commercials, and organize get-out-the-vote efforts. Not all PACs offer all of these services; organizational objectives and resources, along with a host of other more idiosyncratic factors like the technical skills of committee members, determine the services of particular committees.

#### POLITICAL CONSULTANTS

Political consultants are professionals who operate outside of formal political committees, providing technical expertise, political experience, and specialized services to campaign organizations and political committees. Although they have recently become a dominant force in federal elections and the subject of a number of academic works,<sup>11</sup> consultants did not suddenly appear on the American political scene. Candidates have always had advisors. What distinguishes the new breed of political consultants from the old political advisors is their autonomy, and the type of services they provide.

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<sup>11</sup> including The Rise of Political Consultants by Larry J. Sabato (New York: Basic Books, 1981) and The Election Men by David Rosenbloom (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1973).

Political advisors were usually party men, tied like their organizations to a single geographical base. The new consultants are tied to no such base. Their skill lies not in teaching politicians how to gain control over an organization and direct it to political victory, but rather in leading candidates to victory without, or even against, an existing party organization. Consultants teach politicians how to use the media to reach voters, how to use the polls to listen to them, and how to create their own campaign organizations to raise money and contact voters.

There are several types of political consultants: generalists, who provide campaign management assistance; media experts, who perform any one or combination of the several steps involved in producing and airing political advertisements; direct mail experts; telephone fundraisers; private pollsters; computer simulation firms; and professional organizers. Each depends on winning elections to attract clients.

There's nothing like a consistent string of losses to send race horses and political consultants into early retirement.<sup>12</sup>

Affixing blame is much easier in the case of consultants than political committees. This pressure on winning gives consultants the incentive to create the best campaign tools possible; their livelihood depends on it. Consultants professionalize campaigning.

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<sup>12</sup> Joseph Napolitan, The Election Game (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1972), p. 20.

THE CAMPAIGN ARENA

To study voter behavior, political scientists look at election results, voting patterns, demographic characteristics, and survey research data. To study the behavior of the actors in campaigns -- campaign organizations, political committees, consultants, and contributors -- they look at the exchange of money. Both approaches have in common a concern for quantifiable, "hard" data. Both approaches overlook the behavior of single individuals; nevertheless, the approaches help set an overall view of the electoral process. Keeping in mind that there is no such thing as an average campaign organization, party committee, political action committee, or individual contributor, and that such statistics obscure even as they reveal, we can use these figures.

In the external campaign arena, campaign organizations are at the focal point. They pay the consultants and seek the resources of party and political action committees. Table 1 gives financial data for the average Senate and House races in the 1980 election cycle. These figures help describe the relationship of campaign organizations to contributors and support groups. Individual contributions (including contributions made by candidates to their own campaigns) constituted the greatest source of campaign money, followed by political action committees, and party committees. The Republican committees gave their candidates approximately four times as much as the Democratic committees gave Democrats. Republican candidates for the Senate were the most dependent on political committee contributions, receiving over 40% of their contributions from committees (party and political action committees).

These figures suggest that campaign organizations are more or less on their own, receiving only a small percentage of their resources from any one source. The figures also suggest that campaigns depend more on political action

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TABLE 1

## Funding Sources for Congressional Campaigns, 1979-80

(in thousands of dollars)

CATEGORY	1)TOT. RECEIPT	2)IND. CONT.	3)PARTY CONT.	4)PAC CONT.	5)TOTAL COMM.
<u>Senate</u>					
Democrats	1,166.8	911.1 (79%)	46.1 (4%)	209.6 (18%)	255.7 (22%)
Republicans	994.4	586.4 (60%)	169.8 (17%)	238.2 (24%)	408.0 (41%)
combined	1,079.33	745.1 (69%)	110.1 (10%)	224.2 (21%)	334.4 (31%)
<u>House</u>					
Democrats	142.2	93.9 (65%)	3.0 (2%)	45.3 (32%)	48.3 (34%)
Republicans	154.7	99.9 (65%)	14.2 (9%)	40.6 (26%)	54.8 (35%)
combined	148.3	96.8 (65%)	8.4 (6%)	43.1 (29%)	51.4 (35%)

1) This figure represents the average total campaign receipts of each individual major party (Democrat or Republican) candidate who participated in the general election in November, 1980. This figure and the following are average totals for individual candidates in thousands of dollars.

2) This figure represents the total of all individual (i.e. non-committee) contributions to the campaign, including personal expenditures made by the candidate.

3) This number represents the total of all direct contributions made by national, state and local party committees plus all coordinated expenditures made on behalf of campaigns by national and state party committees. With few exceptions, this money came exclusively from national party committees.

4) This figure represents the total direct contributions (in-kind and cash) made by political action committees, of whatever type.

5) This number is the total PAC and party committee contribution.

Source: Federal Election Commission Press Release 3/7/82.

committee money than party money and that Republican campaigns depend more on party committees than their Democratic counterparts.<sup>13</sup>

The figures tell us nothing about how political consultants fit in. Interviews with consultants, party officials, and political action committee staffers, however, revealed that consultants are woven throughout the campaign arena. They consult for campaigns, parties and PACs and, occasionally, join the staff of a committee or campaign organization. As professional campaigners, they prefer the independence of consulting to the relative stability of political committees. New consultants graduate from the campaign and political committee training grounds continually. These organizations are both the clients and the academies of the consulting firms.

#### COMPUTERS AND CAMPAIGN SUPPORT GROUPS

##### Party Committees

The models in the previous chapter showed four major inputs to political campaigns: money, information, manpower, and technical expertise. Party committee resources could include all of these, plus such campaign "essentials" as a television studio.<sup>14</sup> The limiting factor is financial; with money, committees can buy nearly everything else. Understandably, fundraising has a crucial part in committee operation.

Properly applied, computer technology has great potential in fundraising, as direct mail professionals like Richard Viguerie and others attest. While campaign organizations often fail to exploit the full potential of direct

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<sup>13</sup> The following chapter looks at these findings in greater depth, focusing on the differences between the Republican and Democratic experience.

<sup>14</sup> The National Republican Congressional Committee actually owns one.

response fundraising<sup>15</sup> because of their short life, political committees have no such problem. Campaigns are like annual flowers; they sprout once, flower, and die. The parties are perennial, blooming (or wilting) again and again. They have the long term objectives and, potentially, the organizational stability needed to take full advantage of a direct response fundraising program. After building a contributor list, a committee can draw off it for years.

Because federal law limits the amount of money committees can contribute to campaigns to a fraction of the total candidates spend, committees have to provide non-monetary services to make a greater impact. For FEC purposes, neither the salaries of committee staff nor committee overhead expenses count toward the contribution limits. Contributions are marginal expenses. In economic terms, in-kind contributions are valued at their marginal cost to the committee.<sup>16</sup> Thus, to maximize the value of their contributions, committees give candidates services which have a high fixed cost and a low marginal cost.

Many computer services fit this description. After purchasing the hardware, purchasing (or developing) the software, and acquiring the data base, the committee faces a relatively low cost for using the system. Provided the system is a good one, its value to any one campaign will exceed its marginal cost to the committee. Even if there were no FEC provisions that encouraged party committees to invest in computer systems and other high fixed cost items, many of these investments would still make sense on purely economic terms, provided that campaign organizations could not obtain the same service from a private

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<sup>15</sup> Direct response fundraising refers to both direct mail and telephone bank fundraising.

<sup>16</sup> This is somewhat of a simplification (some part of the fixed cost of some services must be counted as a contribution), but officials in both parties say that the conclusions reached using this simplification are consistent with those reached using the more complicated FEC reporting requirements.

business at a price less than the service's average cost when produced by the committee. For example, loaning a candidate the committee's direct mail contributor list (in which the committee has invested much time and effort) is a service that cannot be duplicated by a private concern.

While cost is certainly not the only factor considered when committees allocate their resources, given an incentive for acquiring computer systems and the money to pay for them, a rational "influence maximizing" committee would acquire them. To determine how these systems affect committees, it would be helpful to consider how committees use the technology.

As described in the technology chapter, the computer applications fall into five major areas: information base management, accounting and budgeting, communication, office management, and statistical data processing. Political party committees use computers for direct response fundraising, financial management, information tracking, voter information services, computer simulation, polling, word processing, and intra-party communication.

Word processing, financial management, and information tracking systems rationalize certain routine information management tasks. Word processing cuts down on typing; financial management systems can improve cash flow; and information tracking makes information easier to access and reproduce. Direct response fundraising can lead to more fundamental changes in committees. By raising money in small amounts from larger numbers of people, a committee expands its active contributor base. Going from an annual budget of \$10 million with an average contribution of \$250 to an annual budget of \$50 million with an average contribution of \$30 (perfectly reasonable numbers, given the Republican experience outlined in the next chapter) expands the number of contributors, people who have a financial stake in the committee, more than 40-fold. In the process, the character of the contributors has changed.

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The current consensus among direct mail professionals is that direct mail fundraising works best when the letters make a strong emotional appeal for money to stop a group which threatens to take some undesirable action in an area of interest to the reader. In other words, negative, single-issue appeals are the most effective money raisers.<sup>17</sup> Consequently, organizations which use direct mail fundraising are tempted to rely on single-issue groups for financial support. In order to continue soliciting money from these people, the committee must maintain the proper stands on the issues, making compromise financially costly.

According to political scientist Xandra Kayden,<sup>18</sup> party committees tend to raise money on issues for which there are no established, mass-based interest groups advocating a particular stand. Examples include the Panama Canal Treaty, military preparedness, and social security. By taking a strong position against the Panama Canal Treaty or for military preparedness, the party does not necessarily lose its ability to compromise on issues that affect the real governance of the country. The danger comes, in Dr. Kayden's eyes, when the people who advocate extreme positions on these issues gain power within the party structure, or when a substantive issue like Social Security reform is turned into a symbolic issue for fundraising and political purposes.

Computer simulation and polling both provide decision makers with quantitative information about large groups of people. Committees can acquire simulation and polling capabilities for their own planning or to provide to candidates. Their use has the same effect on party decision making as that

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<sup>17</sup> "Direct Mail Roundtable: The Pros Speak," in Campaigns and Elections: The Journal of Political Action, (Washington, D.C.: Robert Reed), Fall, 1980.

<sup>18</sup> Personal interview. See also Xandra Kayden, "Nationalizing the Party," in Parties, Interest Groups, and Campaign Finance Law, Michael Malbin, ed. (Washington: AEI, 1980).

noted in campaigns and described in the previous chapter, namely facilitating a more rational and explicit decision-making process (and, conceivably, leading decision makers to ignore factors not readily modeled).

Voter information services provide electoral, demographic, and geographic data to help candidates target their resources. After collecting and entering the data, committees can provide them to candidates and other committees at low cost. This is perhaps the best example of a high fixed cost, low marginal cost computer service.

Finally, intra-party communication computer applications can take various forms. An integrated national information network could (there is none in existence; the Republican plans for one were scrapped in late 1981) routinize communication among the many party committees and campaign organizations. The effects of this network on party power and structure would depend on the network design and implementation. Centralized data base management and network design would tend to centralize power; a decentralized network design could have the opposite effect. The system now used by the Republican national committees employs mobile units for their field men and a phone link to a standard modem in some state committee headquarters. So far the effect seems to be a spreading out of the central office control, rather than greater state committee involvement in decisions.

In sum, computers reduce the labor required for routine information handling, improve small contributor fundraising efforts, increase the amount of relevant information committees can make available to campaigns, and provide a high fixed cost, low marginal cost service. They can also help stabilize organizations by serving as an institutional memory that persists through staff rotations and off election years.

### Political Action Committees

Everything said about computer technology in party committees holds for political action committees as well. Computers give both similar potential; they help rationalize information management in whatever organization they are employed.

The networking power of computerized direct mail has had a more immediate effect on political action committees than on parties, by helping to bring into existence a new type of committee, the mass-based, ideological issue PAC. Ideological issue PACs are quite different from other political committees. Unlike the others, they are not primarily interested in access to power or in a particular agenda; they are primarily interested in defeating or electing particular candidates, who are chosen on ideological grounds. The long term impact of these new entrants into the political campaign process remains to be seen. The leaders of the New Right PACs claim to have had a significant impact already, pointing to the conservative majority in the Senate (97th Congress), as proof.

### Political Consultants

Computers and consulting are inextricably connected. The consultants shepherded computer technology into campaigns, proselytizing the benefits of the new technology. The computer fit their purposes well. It does exactly what it is told to do, very fast; its statistical applications give consultants a way to measure the results of their campaign tactics; and, what may be equally or more important, it imparts an aura of sophistication to the computer illiterates who often populate campaigns.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Not all are ignorant of computers. Thanks to concerted efforts on the part of both major parties, as well as political consultants, more and more

The computer strengthens consultants' position in the campaign arena. Few others know how to use it well, so campaign organizations and committees become dependent. As the consultants familiarize political activists with the services, they create a broader and more sophisticated market that allows individual consultants to specialize and the large consulting firms to diversify, without threatening their hold on that market. The expense of developing the computer applications, the time involved in building a track record, and the trouble of soliciting clients in the early stages inhibit all but the most daring from entering the market. The risks are too great.

#### EXTERNAL PROCESS REORGANIZATION

While there have been no neat models to represent the external campaign process, we can see that each campaign support group has adapted its organizational goals to meet the new range of means computer technology makes possible, thereby changing not only its internal processes but also the larger campaign environment. Party committees and PACs have routinized their fundraising and expanded the range of services they can offer to candidates. And consultants have strengthened their hold on candidates and committees by developing new and better ways of applying the technology. The trend, then, is toward campaign organizations receiving more outside help from organized groups and doing less of the campaign "work" themselves, hiring consultants instead. On the national level, both the Democratic and the Republican experiences reflect this trend, as the next chapter illustrates.

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The differential benefits of the technology favor those organizations with a long range view -- parties, PACs and consulting firms. How this affects the campaign process, other than through the trend noted above, is difficult to determine. Too many other events and trends are acting here to even suggest a technological deterministic view of politics. Computer technology creates a potential. The realization of that potential depends on the people who harness it.

Chapter 5  
DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS

One of the Big Events of the post World War II period is the Decline of the American Party. V.O. Key predicted it in 1942; political scientists document it in 1982. Nevertheless, while the commentators mourn the weakness of our parties, predicting continued decline and, perhaps, eventual demise, the Republican Party claims an organizational resurgence that rivals that of the Democratic Party in the 1930s. Computer technology is an important factor in that resurgence. Direct response fundraising helps provide the party with the financial resources; money and sophisticated campaign techniques give their candidates an edge in elections.

A party, according to Max Weber, is a group "struggling to gain domination."<sup>20</sup> Parties do not struggle in a vacuum; they struggle against one another in a societal context, knowing that to exercise power they must first gain it. In the United States, political power of the sort desired by parties is gained by winning elections. Thus, the technique of winning elections, the technique of gaining the power of political office, becomes all important in a party's struggle for domination. As the tools used in campaigns change, so does this technique, and the candidates, parties, and the political process.

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<sup>20</sup> Max Weber, "Class, Status, Party," in Gerth and Mills, Eds From Max Weber (New York: Oxford, 1978), p. 195.

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Change in any one institution can rarely be attributed to any one isolated event or process; political parties are no exception. The computer has entered the political process, but it is only one factor in that process, which is itself only one factor (an important one) influencing political parties. By changing campaign technology, computers have helped the parties change the role they play in electoral politics.

#### THE NATIONAL COMMITTEES

Representatives from all six national committees (the Republican National Committee (RNC), the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC), the National Republican Congressional Committee (NRCC), the Democratic National Committee (DNC), the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee (DSCC), and the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC)) were interviewed and asked to describe the services they provide to candidates and to describe the computer applications they use. Those self-descriptions were then compared with the views of political consultants familiar with the committees in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how the committees fit into the campaign process.

#### REPUBLICANS

While each of the three Republican national committees is run independently, they share ideas and techniques formally and informally and offer similar services to their constituents. The RNC is responsible for state and local party development, in addition to providing campaign assistance for all Republican candidates. The National Republican Senatorial Committee and the National Republican Congressional Committee are strictly concerned with electing

party members to the Congress and providing some support services for the winners after the election.

Since the campaign activities of the three committees are similar and overlapping, for the sake of brevity we will look at just one of them in depth, the National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC). The NRSC employs 60 people in five divisions: political, finance, research, communication, and incumbent services.

The political division takes care of the nuts and bolts of campaigning. They lead training sessions for candidates and campaign staff, offer advice on campaign strategy, and provide information on political consultants and advertising specialists. The committee also prepares and analyzes survey research. They maintain a nation-wide field support network, and give campaigns advice on political action committees and how to enlist their support. With an overall budget for 1982 in the range of \$25 million<sup>21</sup> and a maximum of \$9.5 million that the party could legally give to Republican Senate candidates in 1982,<sup>22</sup> the committee had a substantial amount of money left over to pay staff and do research, all of which helps the candidates but does not count against the committee's contribution ceiling. The political division spends much of that money.

The finance division raises the money the committee needs to perform all its other services. According to committee staff, approximately two-thirds of their money comes from direct response contributions; the rest comes from fundraising dinners and special groups like the Republican Eagles, who each contribute \$10,000 a year to the committee. Along with raising money, the division helps

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<sup>21</sup> According to their executive director, Vincent Breglia.

<sup>22</sup> This sum equals the total of all direct cash contributions and expenses paid by the party on behalf of candidates.

candidates raise money for themselves. They give direct mail and phone bank tips and will point the campaign staffs in the direction of Republican-minded fundraising operations. The RNSC will also introduce candidates to representatives from various political action committees, and provide the candidates with information on PAC resources and contribution patterns. This networking can yield candidates tens of thousands of PAC dollars.

The research division focuses on incumbent Senators. The NRSC has a computer tracking system which contains all the incumbent Senator's voting records (subcommittee, committee, and floor), information on their campaign expenditures and contributions, their official travel (junket) history, and special interest group ratings (like the Americans for Democratic Action and the American Conservative Union). With the committee's help, candidates can use these records to exploit their opponents' weak points, or to find their own and anticipate attacks.

The communications division performs all public relations services for the committee. The incumbent services division assists Republican Senators, especially those recently elected. They help Senate staffs with office operation and public relations, and provide Senators with services like video and radio coaching. The division also pays some official expenses not covered by Senate office accounts.

With a terminal on nearly every desk, computer technology pervades the Republican Senatorial Committee. Its executive director, Vincent Breglia, is a former vice-president of Decision/Making/Information, a firm that pioneered the application of computer-assisted statistical analysis to political campaigns. Breglia carried that spirit with him to the NRSC. The committee employs a coordinator of computer services who directs computer use in four of the areas

outlined in the first chapter: information base management, accounting and budgeting, office management, and statistical data processing. Specifically, the committee uses computers for fundraising, issue and survey research, scheduling, office management, maintaining a PAC information base, correspondence, preparing Federal Election Commission reports, and accounting.

#### The NRSC in Senate Campaigns

The Senatorial Committee does not back candidates in primary elections. Federal campaign finance law effectively prohibits the committee from providing enough money or other support to make sure their candidate wins. Consequently, committee leaders have decided to avoid picking favorites in primary races, rather than risk a party split by backing a primary candidate who could lose. Before the primary the committee provides the same services to all the Republican candidates.

Once nominees are selected, the NRSC weighs the nominees' financial, organizational and information needs, and their chances of success, and then makes contributions accordingly. By law the Republican Party may give each nominee \$17,500 in cash and, in addition, may pay the nominee's expenses to a total of \$20,000 or \$.02 multiplied by the voting age population of the state, whichever is larger (these figures are 1976 dollars; the law provides for indexing contributions to the Consumer Price Index). By this time the nominees may well have consultants referred by the committee, campaign managers trained by the committee, and committee field men assigned to their campaigns. Committee members have introduced them to political action committee leaders. And the experienced and professional Washington staff is at the disposal of their campaigns.

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The NRSC acts very much like a large political consulting firm, as do the other two Republican national committees -- consulting firms with a difference. They give advice for free, and then pay for some of the polls, media, and additional consultants they recommend. This approach nets the committees some influence over things Republican. The committees have placed themselves in the hub of campaign activity. As a result, they are able to impose a degree of party discipline and orthodoxy through their control over campaign resources.

#### DEMOCRATS

The Democratic national committees command far less money, information, and campaign expertise than their Republican counterparts, and correspondingly less influence over their elected officials. Walking into the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee's headquarters (three rooms in the Amtrak building on North Capitol St. in Washington) after leaving the National Republican Senatorial Committee's headquarters (a three-story townhouse on Constitution Ave. north of the Capitol) presents a contrast. Gone are the computer terminals, printouts and the sense of a well oiled machine. In its place are seven hardworking staff members trying to make \$2.0 million look like \$20 million.

They simply do not have the money, the research director explains. Like the Republicans, the Democratic committees act as consulting firms. But without the money and staff to spread around the 30-plus Democratic candidates running in any election, the DSCC has a hard time making a difference. That is not to say that their candidates do not have money, information, or campaign expertise, only that they are not getting those resources from the committees.

The Democratic national committees have embarked on what they see as a major fundraising effort. They concede to being far behind their GOP counterparts and

mention direct mail as being the Republican's major advantage. A DNC finance expert said:

Direct mail has been given inconsistent attention over the past several years. And now it is being given very consistent attention. I think there's probably a ten-year gap between Republican direct mail capacity and Democratic capacity. Fundamentally, that's the difference between Democrat and Republican finance -- why they have more money. And I think we can probably close that gap in five years.<sup>23</sup>

Catching up will take more than a dedicated committee staff. It will also take the support of the party leadership, an amorphous and difficult-to-define group which, for whatever reason, has not seen strong central party committees to be important in the past. One consultant put it this way:

I think there's a conviction that being morally right is worth something in real votes, nothing else being considered. There's a great feeling that we're right, therefore we're going to win because God will save us. And we don't need all of this hotsie totsie technology....

We do a fair amount of work on the Hill. The people there are sort of convinced they've got a problem, but not really convinced they've got a problem. Inertia can be a strong force in this. Bodies at rest stay at rest, and they've been at rest so long that getting moving is real hard to do....

I think it's going to take really getting hit in the gut three or four times before the party really wakes up and says, "Say, you know what, this guy's tougher than we thought. Who would have ever thought that what you're supposed to do is mail and phone and use computers and all that?"<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Personal interview.

<sup>24</sup> Personal interview.

## The Democratic National Committees in Campaigns

On the Democratic side we (political consultants) take care of the technical side and the party either takes care of the political work or doesn't do anything.<sup>25</sup>

Talking to Democrats in the national committees one gets the feeling that they are treading water, and building a boat. Until they finish the boat, they remain in the water, unable to go any faster than arms and feet permit. But after completing the boat, they will leave the water for good. The boat is the direct mail fundraising program and the campaign support systems they are copying from the Republicans. The estimated launching date varies between 1984 and 1986.

Until then; the national committees are quite limited in what they can do for candidates. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee is one or two steps ahead of the others, having started a direct mail program in 1979. For the 1982 elections, the DCCC put together a media campaign and a House of Representatives tracking system which may be comparable to that in the NRSC and the NRCC -- listing votes, special interest group ratings, floor comments, etc. They also ran training weekends and provided some consulting services to campaigns. Chairman Tony Coelho has begun approaching political action committees to increase their contributions to Democratic House candidates, as the Republicans have been doing. Talking about his Republican counterpart, National Republican Congressional Committee Chairman Guy Vander Jagt, Coelho says:

I have this favorite little saying that I use on him. I say, "Guy, you've done such a great job that I'm copying everything you've done." And he gets upset with me every time I use that. But I am. I'm going out there and copying a lot of the things they've done.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Personal interview with a Democratic consultant.

<sup>26</sup> Arnold Sawislak, "Tony Coelho -- Poking the Elephant," United Press

With \$6 million in the 1981-1982 election cycle and a 25-person staff, the DCCC may be getting ready to enter the boat.

#### DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS

By using computer technology to help them raise money and manage information, and by making the decision to centralize control over party resources, the national Republican committees gained a decided edge over their opposition in what they can do for their candidates. A number of factors, including the Republicans' minority party status, their relative homogeneity, their close ties to business, and the far-sighted leadership of former National Committee Chairman William Brock, led the party to move in this direction. Computer applications facilitated the committee's efforts, they did not cause or determine the results.

The difference between the Democratic and Republican Party committees demonstrate that technology is not the determining factor for party structure. Both parties could have developed a direct mail fundraising base. Yet the Democratic Party, the party of the "common man," did not. While the Democrats are trying to catch up to the Republicans, it is not yet clear how seriously the party is committed to developing the strong national committees "catching up" would entail.

Computer technology creates a potential. In the case of the Republican committees it has served as the catalyst to money and centralized information. In the case of the Democratic committees it has been ignored, until recently. Political consultants on the Democratic side have been using the technology all along. George McGovern raised his money in 1972 through direct mail. The

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Kennedy campaign in 1960 pioneered in both computer simulation and public opinion polling, tools that Bobby Kennedy and Eugene McCarthy used in 1968 as well. And the Matt Reese & Associates Democratic consulting firm was the first to use a sophisticated computer targeting system. Nevertheless, the party committees waited until nearly 1980 to adopt the technology themselves.

The committees of the two parties have quite different roles in elections. For Democratic campaign organizations the support groups can be modeled as shown in figure 5. Individuals and PACs provide money and some campaign services. The campaigns use part of the money to buy the services of consultants who help the campaign with whatever they need. Party committees provide a small amount of money and some information and training.

On the Republican side the situation is different as figure 6 shows. Party committees have become a more pervasive force, acting as an intermediary: between campaigns and individuals, by taking small contributions and funneling the money into campaigns and by helping campaigns raise money for themselves; between campaigns and consultants, by paying the consultants to do work for candidates and by providing referrals for candidates and consultants; and between campaigns and political action committees, by introducing the two and by being able to prod the PACs into giving to candidates and prod elected officials into voting for certain bills. An article in The Washington Post in January, 1982, stated:

In addition to its own resources, the GOP has gained considerable leverage over the money flowing from corporate and trade association political action committees. The knowledge of this party leverage, which works to maintain party discipline, was one of the unstated bases for the exceptional party-line voting by Republicans in the budget and tax fights last year.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Thomas Edsall, "Why the Republicans Can't Lose," in The Washington Post, 1/17/82.

Figure 5: A Democrat Model

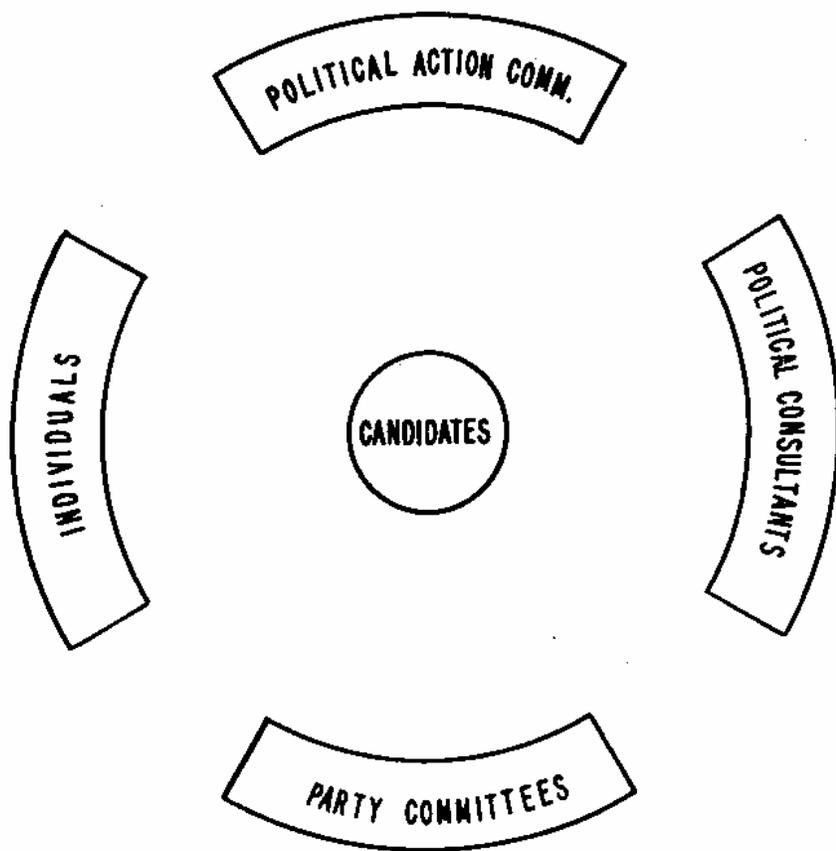
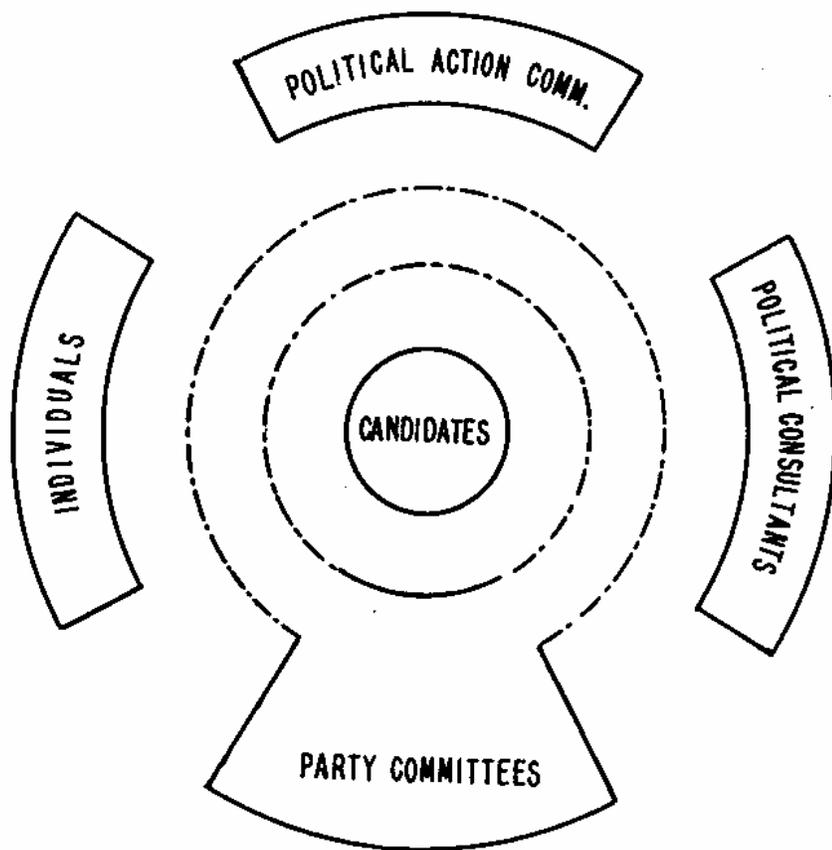


Figure 6: A Republican Model



As the dotted lines in the illustration suggest, candidates do not have to go through the party to reach individual contributors, consultants, or political action committees. Republican committee staffers (backed up by the FEC data reported in the table in the preceding chapter) say that many do not, unless they have to. As a rule, the more money, volunteers, and consultants candidates can muster up on their own, the less they need the party. Long-time incumbents generally have less trouble with campaign resources, while challengers and recently elected officials need more help.

As this survey illustrates, the Republican national committees have made considerable use of computer technology. Nevertheless, they are far from realizing the computer's potential. Their targeting system lacks the sophistication and comprehensiveness of privately available systems. They have not put together a national information network; they have not applied computer simulation; they have not made it possible for most campaign organizations to use committee computers on a time-sharing basis; and they have not developed software for small computers in Congressional-sized campaigns. This last area would be an ideal way for the NRCC to help its constituents without reducing its ability to contribute money and other services. The marginal cost of reproducing the software for any particular campaign would be extremely low.

The Democrats need to raise more money. Nevertheless, that need not preclude them from thinking about computers as well. Compiling voter information data bases, developing targeting systems, and exploring computer simulation do not have to wait until the committees own a computer. Commercially available

time-sharing systems would allow them to get started at an affordable initial cost. The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee uses a time-sharing system to run its direct mail program: Why not a vote-targeting program as well?

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSION

Among political consultants the word magic has a special connotation. It is not that the consultants consider what they do to be magic, only that their clients, and, to some extent the press, treat them as magicians. Political consultant Ralph Murphine tells an illuminating story on this theme about Malinowski's Magic, Science, and Religion in the Trobriand Islands:

In Bronislaw Malinowski's anthropological work Magic, Science and Religion in the Trobriand Islands, there is a concept of value to students of political communication: the islanders' difficulty in distinguishing causes for observed effects, that is to say a tendency to attribute the growth of plants or the movement of tides not to scientifically discoverable principles of biology or physics but to "magic".

For Trobriand Islanders the biological process of plant growth is easily explainable by "magic". If a tree dies, falls over, decomposes, and eventually disappears into the ground over a period of time, plants growing in that area at a later date grow larger and faster than plants in another area. What has occurred is that the magic which made the tree grow has passed from the tree into the ground and then back into the new plants. Not an irrational conclusion from the observed events, merely an incomplete one. The simple, easy to grasp, concept of magic replaces the complex, difficult to understand, processes of biology and chemistry.

For both observers of and participants in the political process of electoral campaigns, in the United States and elsewhere, the natural result of political communication is frequently viewed as "magical". If a candidate purchases television time and a poll of public opinion and a political consultant (magician?) he is more likely to win election than a candidate who does not. What has occurred is that these "pieces", these "things", have caused success. Not an irrational conclusion from the observed events, merely an incomplete one.

Of course there is no more "magic" in television, or computers, or multivariate geodemographic analysis, or in political consultation, than there is in biology and chemistry. There only seems to be a "magical" result to those who fail to understand the complex rules of the process.<sup>28</sup>

Now, the computer can be looked at as magic in the sense described above, or it can be considered a communication tool. To the extent that it improves the communication between a candidate and the voters, it improves that candidate's chances of winning the election. Computer technology does this by increasing the amount and the quality of information politicians can learn about voters and by routinizing certain information-processing activities like list management, direct mail, and telephoning.

#### TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIAL CHANGE

The preceding chapters have illustrated how one technology, the computer, has worked through one social process, the political campaign. From this particular example of technology and social change, certain properties have emerged that may have some general applicability.

The key concept to understanding computers and the political campaign process is technical potential. The computer as an information management tool gives political organizations the technical potential to do certain things: the tasks described in the chapter on the technology. How any one organization applies the technology depends on a host of other forces: its legal framework, organizational structure, membership, financial resources, and constituents' needs, among others. As the different experiences of the Democratic and the Republican Party committees suggest, the existence of computer technology does not guarantee its use.

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<sup>28</sup> Ralph Murphine, letter to Anthony G. Oettinger, 3/3/83.

Nevertheless, once campaigns or organizations apply the technology, the way they do things often changes. This process reorganization will have certain tendencies. Using computer technology will tend to place a premium on people with computer-related skills; using statistical applications will tend to move decision making toward a more explicit and rational process that makes use of quantitative data and, conversely, may ignore parameters that are difficult to measure; using fundraising applications will tend to expand the financial base and resources of the organization; using communication applications will tend to reduce the strain on a geographically spread out organization; and so on. The success of any particular system depends on the quality of the data it draws on, the programs used to manipulate the data, and the interpretation and implementation of the results.

The introduction of computer technology benefits people who use it to their advantage. Sometimes, certain people or groups are especially suited to a particular technology. On the one hand, individual candidates, with their personal appeal, were better equipped to use television as a communication medium than were the old party committees, with their reliance on organization and personal contact. On the other hand, present day political committees (party committees and others), with their stability and long term outlook, are better equipped to use direct mail and other computer applications than are campaign organizations. The differential benefit of technological change is one force behind social change.

## COMPUTERS AND THE CAMPAIGN PROCESS

The use of computer technology has contributed to the rationalization and professionalization of campaign politics. Political power, the goal of political campaigns, is a strong motivating force for some people in our society. This goal remains unchanged, but the means to achieve it have evolved. The new route to political power travels along pathways populated by computer programmers, analysts, and simulators, as well as the political utility men, who remain indispensable.

Computer technology is a tool politicians use to control their communication. Through survey research and simulation they can learn how voters respond to the verbal content of particular messages. Through targeting they can make sure that their communication reaches the desired people. And through direct mail and computer-assisted telephoning, they can reach more people through more personal media, affecting the non-verbal content of their message.

These and other applications change the way campaigns that use them structure their organization and make decisions. Computers work with and generate quantitative information; they can take into consideration, in a rigid and highly structured way, great numbers of explicitly defined parameters at once, helping analysts synthesize and examine relationships among parameters. Using this information well requires understanding how it is obtained, what its limitations are, and how it fits into the campaign process. Using the information in this way can force campaign decision makers to be more explicit and rational in deciding among different approaches. And having gathered the quantitative data, and having decided upon a strategy using that data, campaigns will gauge their progress according to additional quantitative data.

Computer applications also affect the people who make campaign strategies and tactics. Campaigns that use these applications need to get them somewhere, whether from consultants or committees, or by hiring people who can then take surveys, run direct mail, etc. in-house. The people brought in to take care of the technical jobs will gain a certain authority within the campaign, displacing those who don't understand the technology.

As a result of these applications, campaigns have different needs, both financial and technical, than before computers entered the picture. These new needs lead to repercussions in the external campaign arena as candidates and their organizations seek help from consultants and political committees. This external process reorganization then affects, recursively, the way campaign organizations meet both their new and old needs.

The differential benefit of computer technology favors those organizations with a long range perspective, organizational stability, and access to the technology. Computer applications expand the purview of political consultants, who are largely responsible for tapping the technical potential of the technology, and facilitate the growth and stabilization of political committees. Campaigns remain independent of any one committee or consultant, but dependent on the resources and services they provide.

The campaign environment of the 1980s -- characterized by strong national party committees (and more active state committees), a plethora of political action committees and consultants, and high price tags -- crept up on us slowly. The success of Republican candidates for federal office in 1980 drew attention

to the possibilities that political committees hold and the importance of sophisticated campaign technology. But to equate that success with coordinated political committees and technology would be a mistake. These factors played a role, to be sure, but Carter's presidency, the economic conditions, Reagan's charisma and other intangibles set the stage. Similarly, the success of Democrats in 1982 does not mean that the Democrats caught up to the Republican technological advantage, nor that the technology is not important.

As campaigns become adept at controlling communication, the electoral process moves toward more conscious symbol manipulation. Symbol manipulation is nothing new; in the past politicians just used less precise tools.

While computers help, they do not manipulate symbols. People do. The way politicians use computers and the results of that use depend on a multitude of personal and public perceptions. For the present, and for the near future, at least, political applications of computer technology are more art than science, as this paper has illustrated. The campaign remains an art form, living theater that Antonin Artaud would approve. If their symbols are more carefully chosen than before, their actors better choreographed, the campaign strategists of today have hit upon no sure method of audience control. Campaigns in the 1980s are littered with as many first-night closings, not-selling reviews, and box office hits as those of the past.

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