

Chapter 1

The Campaign Plan

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

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

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

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

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

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

THE NEED FOR CAMPAIGN PLANS

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

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

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

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

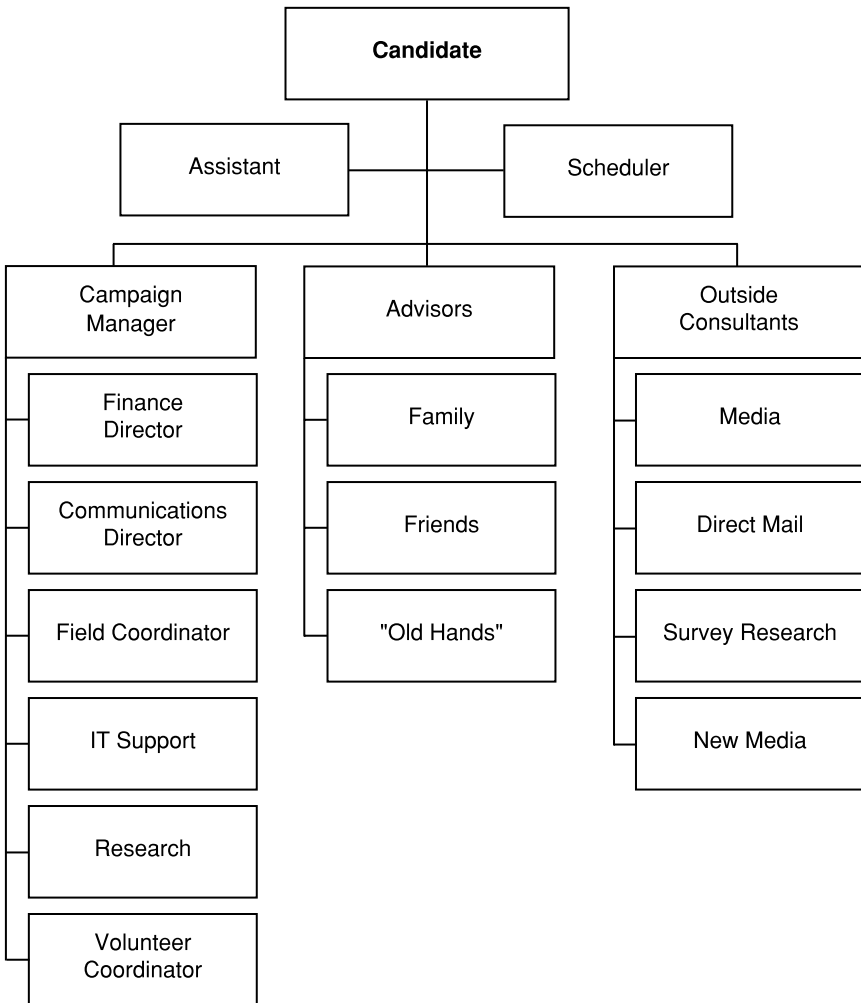
“On a single page of paper,” one consultant has advised, “you must be able to succinctly match dollars, strategy, timeline, and cash flow” (Allen 1996, 51). Voter contact might demand two-thirds of the budget, but campaign organizations would also want to think about costs such as office space and supplies,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

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

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

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

Figure 1.1
Notional Campaign Organization



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

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

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

ELEMENTS OF A CAMPAIGN PLAN

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

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

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

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

THE CHALLENGES OF PLANNING

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

The Context of the Race

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

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

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

THE OFFICE BEING SOUGHT

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

Voter Expectations

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

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

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

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

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

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

Media Relations

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Overall Interest in the Campaign

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

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

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

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

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

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

INCUMBENCY STATUS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

MULTIPLAYER SCENARIOS

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

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

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

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

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

THE ELECTION YEAR

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

NATIONAL TRENDS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CANDIDATES FOR OTHER OFFICES

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

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

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

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

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

PHYSICAL GEOGRAPHY

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

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

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

DEMOGRAPHICS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OTHER CONTEXTUAL MATTERS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

CONCLUSION

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