

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

Posc 105

Campaigns and “Taking on the Kennedy’s

I. THIS MORNING:

- A. Film: “Taking on the Kennedy’s”
 - 1. Some “viewer” notes.
 - a. You can read these comments during and after the film.

II. MODERN CAMPAIGN TACTICS AND STRATEGIES:

- A. The film illustrates many points about modern elections and campaigns.
 - 1. Background:
 - a. 1994 congressional election in Rhode Island between Democrat Patrick Kennedy, nephew of Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Republican Kevin Vigilante.
- B. Self-selected candidates:
 - 1. *Decline of party influence in candidate selection
 - 2. In this film Patrick Kennedy, a newcomer (some might say “upstart”) barges on the scene and displays the incumbent, regular party member.
 - a. It illustrates the effect of primaries
 - b. Note also that Kennedy’s opponent, Kevin Vigilante, also used the primaries to win the nomination.
 - c. Note in addition that primary elections can added greatly to the cost of getting elected.
 - 3. Other examples: Steve Forbes S. B. Woo, Joe Biden, Pat Buchanan, Jimmy Carter...
 - a. If time allows, I will (on Monday) discuss how these individuals weakened political party discipline and (I feel) made accountability more difficult.
- C. Candidate centered campaigns
 - 1. The Kennedy and Vigilante campaigns are more or less self-sufficient organizations that depend hardly all on national parties.
 - a. They are contests between two men, not two parties or ideologies.
 - b. Consequently, once elected a person’s “loyalty” is to his/her organization, not the party.
 - c. This situation thwarts or hinders party leadership and, I will argue, ultimately undermines accountability.
- D. Adopt policy positions in order to get elected; not run for office in order to get elected, not to advance public policies.
 - 1. Question: do you have the feeling that the candidates, especially Kennedy,

- use issues as tools in their efforts to get elected rather than as ends in themselves?
2. I don’t want to overstate the point. Kennedy, for instance, does care for the elderly and wants to use government to help them. He also believes what he says about gun control. On the other hand, it seems to me that many of their campaign issues are injected mostly for voter appeal.
 3. On the national level, I feel that certain “valence” issues play this role.
 - a. These issues include the death penalty, prohibitions against flag burning, school prayers, getting tough against criminals and drug users, and so forth.
 - b. ***Valence issue:** an issue that has attracts virtually unanimous support to one side and is discussed for its emotional impact.
- E. The impact of advanced technology
1. Television, polling, computers, direct mail
 - a. Notice how heavily both candidates use television.
 - b. In fact, these like most campaigns in America are electronic campaigns.
 2. Next time will talk about some examples
 - a. Focus groups—groups of about 15 randomly selected individuals—are used by political market researchers to develop and test campaign slogans, icons, etc.
 - (1) A good example is the 1988 Bush campaign’s use of focus groups to identify issues that would resonate with so-called “Reagan Democrats.”
- F. *The new breed of political consultants
1. Kennedy and Vigilante work under the direction of a new kind of advisor, a person who is “good at” campaign techniques (polling, public relations, media, computers, voter targeting, etc.) but who may not (usually does not) have much policy knowledge or experience and frequently no experience governing.
 - a. A major point: some one who is good at getting elected is not necessarily good at governing.
 - b. Political skills are not necessarily transferable.
 - c. Conversely, skills that are useful in private activities such as financial or business management may not be useful in the political arena.
 2. Dick Morris is a well know political guru of the type I’m discussing. A clearer example, however, is Michael Deaver.
- G. The strategy of ambiguity
1. Candidates are urged to obscure their positions by saying as little as possible, moving to the “middle of the road,” or wrapping themselves in valence issues.
 2. The Kennedy campaign seems especially clear in this regard.

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- H. *What are the consequences?
1. *Soaring costs of running for office
 - a. Consider how important money is in this relatively small election.
 2. *Trivialization of issues
 - a. What of major importance to the country or Rhode Island was discussed?
 3. Personality over substance
 - a. Note how Kennedy is able to trade on his name and stresses his personal characteristics over substantive policy stands.
 4. Generalization over specifics
 - a. See 2 above.
 5. Negative advertisements
 - a. Attack ads became the dominant means of communication in the Kennedy campaign and forced Vigilante to give up his hopes of running a clean campaign.
 - b. Note that mudslinging seems always to force an opponent to adopt a similar strategy.
 - (1) “Bad money chases out good.”
 6. *The debasing of political discourse.
 - a. Isn’t the “dialogue” between Kennedy and Vigilante very petty?
 - b. Important questions—crime and drug abuse, for example—simply can’t be discussed rationally, calmly, intelligently.
 - c. I think “debates” about the death penalty demonstrate this point.
- III. NEXT TIME:
- A. Political parties.