

**DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
AND
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS
Posc 150**

**CAMPAIGNS AND ELECTIONS
“TAKING ON THE KENNEDYS”**

- I. CONTENTS:
 - A. Campaigns and elections

- II. SOME BASICS OF ELECTIONS AND DEMOCRACY:
 - A. ✱Elections are the mainspring of “democracy by accountability.”
 - 1. Instruments for holding representatives accountable
 - 2. Educational and motivational functions.
 - 3. Transmission of “demands.”
 - B. Elections American style:
 - 1. ○Eligibility and registration.
 - i. These laws generally discourage participation by raising the “costs” of involvement.
 - 2. ○Number of separate choices
 - i. Sheer number of offices to be filled can be overwhelming
 - ii. Choice may lead to confusion
 - 3. ○Selection of candidates: the nomination process
 - i. Generally speaking, to get on the ballot a person must have a party endorsement or nomination.
 - ii. Conventions and caucuses versus primaries
 - 4. ○*Primary elections.*
 - i. Contests to choose candidates for general elections.
 - ii. Discussed further under political parties.
 - 5. ○General elections
 - i. Presidential and "off year" elections
 - ii. State and local elections
 - iii. Referenda
 - 6. ○Timing: election day is NOT a holiday nor does it fall on a weekend.
 - C. ✱Recall a major effect of the constitution: the creation of independent power centers.
 - 1. Members of the White House, House, and Senate are elected separately.
 - 2. Geographical representation

- III. ILLUSTRATION AND EVIDENCE:
 - A. Refer to the previous set of notes.
 - B. The film, “Taking on the Kennedys,” illustrates many points about modern elections and campaigns.
 - C. Background:

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1. 1994 congressional election in Rhode Island between Democrat Patrick Kennedy, son of Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, and Republican Kevin Vigilante.
 2. First, Vigilante has to compete in a **primary**.
 3. Then, he and Kennedy compete in the **general election**.
- D. Self-selected candidates:
1. ✱Decline of party influence in candidate selection
 - i. In this film Patrick Kennedy, a newcomer (some might say "upstart") barges on the scene and displaces the incumbent, regular party member.
 - 1) It illustrates the effect of primaries
 - ii. Note also that Kennedy's opponent, Kevin Vigilante, also used the primaries to win the nomination.
 - iii. Note in addition that primary elections can add greatly to the cost of getting elected.
- E. ✱Candidate centered campaigns
1. The Kennedy and Vigilante campaigns are more or less self-sufficient organizations that depend only indirectly on national parties.
 - i. They are contests between two men, not two parties or ideologies.
 - ii. Consequently, once elected a person's "loyalty" is to his/her organization, not the party.
 - iii. This situation thwarts or hinders party leadership and, I will argue, ultimately undermines accountability.
- F. ✱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, many "valence" issues play this role.
 - i. ✓These issues include the death penalty, prohibitions against flag burning, school prayers, getting tough against criminals and drug users, and so forth.
 - ii. ✓Example: how seriously do the candidates seem to be when "discussing" drug abuse?
- G. ✱The impact of advanced technology
1. Look at how television, polling, computers, and direct mail dominate the campaigns.
 - i. Both candidates use television heavily.
 - ii. In fact, these like most campaigns in America are electronic campaigns.

- iii. Note that Rhode Island is a relatively small state.
 - H. ✱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.
 - i. A major point: some one who is good at getting elected is not necessarily good at governing.
 - ii. Political skills are not necessarily transferable.
 - iii. Conversely, skills that are useful in private activities such as financial or business management may not be useful in the political arena.
 - I. ✱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.
 - J. For your information.
 - 1. Patrick Kennedy is now a very influential member of the House of Representatives.
 - 2. He is a top Democratic fund raiser.
- IV. NEXT TIME:
- A. Political parties
 - B. Reading:
 - 1. Required: Drew, *The Corruption of American Politics*, Chapters 9 through 12 as noted last.
 - 2. Required: "Elections, Voting, and Campaigns" in the Cyber Reserve Room. (Both articles.)
 - 3. Required: Ronald D. Elving, "'Accentuate the Negative' Contemporary Congressional Campaigns," available in the Cyber Reserve Room or directly. (<http://www.apsanet.org/PS/sept96/elving.cfm>).
 - 4. Recommended: visit "Living Room Candidate" in the Cyber Reserve Room to see how political television advertisements have changed over the years.
 - 5. Strongly recommended for communications, marketing, and political science majors: "Effectiveness of Negative Political Advertising," by Won Ho Chang, Jae-Jin Park, and Sung Wook Shim (Stephenonson Research Center at the University of Missouri's School of Journalism) in the Cyber Reserve Room or directly from <http://www.scripps.ohiou.edu/wjmcr/vol02/2-1a-B.htm#results>