

# Political Campaign Communication

Praeger Series  
in Political Communication



## Principles and Practices Second Edition

Judith S. Trent  
and Robert V. Friedenberg

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## About the Series

Those of us from the discipline of communication studies have long believed that communication is prior to all other fields of inquiry. In several other forums I have argued that the essence of politics is "talk" or human interaction.<sup>1</sup> Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, public or private, but always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act. Communication is the vehicle for human action.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Aristotle recognized the natural kinship of politics and communication in his *Politics* and *Rhetoric*. In the former, he establishes that humans are "political beings [who] alone of the animals [are] furnished with the faculty of language."<sup>2</sup> And in the latter, he begins his systematic analysis of discourse by proclaiming that "rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion."<sup>3</sup> Thus it was recognized over two thousand years ago that politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essential parts of human nature.

Back in 1981, Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders proclaimed that political communication was an emerging field.<sup>4</sup> Although its origin, as noted, dates back centuries, a "self-consciously cross-disciplinary" focus began in the late 1950s. Thousands of books and articles later, colleges and universities offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate coursework in the area in such diverse departments as communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and sociology.<sup>5</sup> In Nimmo and Sanders's early assessment, the "key areas of inquiry" included rhetorical analysis, propaganda analysis, attitude change studies, voting studies, government and the news media, functional and systems anal-

yses, technological changes, media technologies, campaign techniques, and research techniques.<sup>6</sup> In a survey of the state of the field in 1983 by the same authors and Lynda Lee Kaid, they found additional, more specific areas of concern, such as the presidency, political polls, public opinion, debates, and advertising, to name a few.<sup>7</sup> Since the first study, they also noted a shift away from the rather strict behavioral approach. The 1983 edition of *Political Campaign Communication* was the first book-length study of political campaigns from a communication perspective. As such, it predated the series and addressed many of the concerns expressed by Nimmo, Sanders, and Kaid.

Today, Dan D. Nimmo and David L. Swanson assert that “political communication has developed some identity as a more or less distinct domain of scholarly work.”<sup>8</sup> The scope and concerns of the area have further expanded to include critical theories and cultural studies. While there is no precise definition, method, or disciplinary home of the area of inquiry, its primary domain is the role, processes, and effects of communication within the context of politics broadly defined.

In 1985 the editors of *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* noted that “more things are happening in the study, teaching, and practice of political communication than can be captured within the space limitations of the relatively few publications available.”<sup>9</sup> In addition, they argued that the backgrounds of “those involved in the field [are] so varied and plurist in outlook and approach, . . . it [is] a mistake to adhere slavishly to any set format in shaping the content.”<sup>10</sup> And more recently, Swanson and Nimmo call for “ways of overcoming the unhappy consequences of fragmentation within a framework that respects, encourages, and benefits from diverse scholarly commitments, agendas, and approaches.”<sup>11</sup>

In agreement with these assessments of the area and with gentle encouragement, Praeger established in 1988 “Praeger Series in Political Communication.” The series is open to all qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as contemporary and historical studies. The key to characterizing the studies in the series is the focus on communication variables or activities within a political context or dimension. Scholars from the disciplines of communication, history, political science, and sociology have participated in the series.

I am, without shame or modesty, a fan of the series. The joy of serving as its editor is in participating in the dialogue of the field of political communication and in reading the contributors’ works. I invite you to join me.

Robert E. Denton, Jr.

## NOTES

1. See Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Symbolic Dimensions of the American Presidency* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1982); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Gary

Woodward, *Political Communication in America* (New York: Praeger, 1985, Second Edition, 1990); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Dan F. Hahn, *Presidential Communication* (New York: Praeger, 1986); and Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Praeger, 1988).

2. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 5.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 22.

4. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith R. Sanders, "Introduction: The Emergence of Political Communication as a Field," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan D. Nimmo and Keith Sanders (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), pp. 11–36.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

6. *Ibid.*, pp. 17–27.

7. Keith R. Sanders, Lynda Lee Kaid, and Dan D. Nimmo, eds., *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University: 1985), pp. 283–308.

8. Dan D. Nimmo and David L. Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication: Beyond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm" in *New Directions in Political Communication*, ed. David Swanson and Dan Nimmo (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1990), p. 8.

9. Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo, *Political Communication Yearbook*, p. xiv.

10. *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

11. Nimmo and Swanson, "Field of Political Communication," p. 11.

## Series Foreword

I had the pleasure of providing one of the early reviews of the first edition of *Political Campaign Communication: Principles and Practices* (1983). I noted that the book was “an important contribution to students and scholars in the growing area of ‘political’ communication” and that it was “the first book written on political campaigns from a speech communication perspective” (p. 303). To characterize *Political Campaign Communication* as a classic and a seminal work in the field is no exaggeration. Since the book appeared in 1983, research in the area has flourished, especially among communication scholars.<sup>1</sup> It is virtually impossible to pick up any contemporary work in the area of political communication and not find numerous references and citations from the first edition.

After every election, there appears to be a growing trend for journalists, academics, and the general public to call for sweeping reforms of the electoral process. The 1988 presidential campaign has been characterized as one of the meanest and less substantive races in American history. Journalists Jack Germond and Jules Witcover (1989) described the contest as a “trivial pursuit” where politics became open warfare. Kenneth Andersen (1989) argues that the campaign renewed concern for ethics and “will be remembered as one of negative advertising rather than positive advocacy, of sound bites rather than issues, of images rather than reality” (p. 479). According to Paul Taylor (1990), the “political dialogue is failing because the leading actors in the pageant of democracy—the politicians, the press, and the voters—are bringing out the least in one another” (p. 5). For Wilson McWilliams (1989), “the election of 1988 indicates the need for a new civility, and for the kinds

of word and deed necessary to affirm, for the coming century, the dignity of self-government" (p. 200).

In light of such alarming reactions and the growing cynicism of campaigns, *Political Campaign Communication* offers a breath of fresh air, a hope, and a reaffirmation of the belief that political campaigns are essential and necessary to the functioning of democracy. This edition is written in the same belief and spirit that guided the first one. Judith S. Trent and Robert V. Friedenberg maintain their conviction that campaigns are essentially a communication phenomena where the utilization of the principles and practices of speech communication both informs and instructs our knowledge and appreciation of the electoral process.

This book remains an important contribution to the field of political campaign. It is a foundation text that addresses the concepts, theories, and concerns of communication scholars about the process and execution of political campaigns. With each election, campaigns transform into new electoral creatures. Of course principal actors and players change. But there is also the addition of new technologies, new rules, and new strategies. This updated edition provides the most comprehensive treatment of political campaigns in the field.

As with the first edition, this book is both theoretical and practical. It is useful to students, scholars, politicians, and practitioners of politics. By combining both theory and practice, the book provides a blueprint for improving our electoral process.

Politics is our national, collective conversation. Let's hope that it can become a genuine, an informative, and an intelligent one. Reading *Political Campaign Communication* is a step in the right direction.

Robert E. Denton, Jr.

## NOTE

1. For a specific review of the growth of research in the area of political communication and for specific citations, see Keith R. Sanders, Lynda Lee Kaid, and Dan D. Nimmo, eds., *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1985) and David L. Swanson and Dan D. Nimmo, eds., *New Directions in Political Communication: A Resource Book* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1990).

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Germond, Jack, and Jules Witcover. *Whose Broad Stripes and Bright Stars?* New York: Warner Books, 1989.

McWilliams, Wilson. "The Meaning of the Election." In Gerald M. Pomper et. al. *The Election of 1988*. Chatham, N.J.: Chatham House Publishers, 1989.

Taylor, Paul. *See How They Run*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990.

## Preface

When this book was published in 1983 it was the first book-length study of election campaigns that utilized the principles and practices of speech communication to examine elective politics. While we certainly drew on other disciplines, and acknowledged the merit of much of the material they contributed to the study of election campaigns, we argued that communication was the epistemological base of political campaigns. Consequently we wrote from a speech communication perspective. We have been extremely gratified by the reception that our first edition received. We continue to believe the utilization of the principles and practices of speech communication as a means of examining elective politics contributes appreciably to our knowledge of the electoral process.

If there is any one theme of this book, it is that we view political campaigns as communication phenomena and in the following pages have examined those communication principles and practices central to election campaigns. We have sought to offer readers a realistic understanding of the strategic and tactical communication choices candidates and their managers must make as they wage the campaign. To that end all of the four original chapters in Part I have been substantially edited and updated to reflect changes since we first wrote. Additionally, a new chapter, "Communicative Types and Functions of Televised Political Advertising," has been added. Similarly, all of the four original chapters in Part II have been substantially edited and updated to reflect changes since we first wrote. Additionally, a new chapter, "Advertising in Political Campaigns," has been added.

This was a collaborative effort. We examined drafts of each chapter,

shared equally in the writing of the epilogue and various editing chores. Chapters 1 to 5 were written primarily by Juddi, and chapters 6 to 10 were written primarily by Bob. We both share any of the successes or shortcomings of this volume.

We wish to acknowledge many people for their aid in producing this book. Particularly helpful to both authors were our colleagues, students, staff, and libraries of our home institutions, the University of Cincinnati, and Miami (Ohio) University. The staff at Praeger was uniformly helpful and pleasant. We also want to thank Ronald B. Cushing for preparing the index while under considerable time pressure.

In addition, Juddi would like to thank Carol Fathman for her professional and dedicated help in preparing the manuscript, Ronald B. Cushing for his consistently reliable research help and unfailingly good humor, the many University of Cincinnati students in her political communication classes, Communication Department colleagues (especially Teresa Sabourin who shares an interest in the communication strategies of candidates who are women), and political communication colleagues across the country who provided valuable comments about the first edition. And most important, she would like to thank Jimmie for his constant support throughout this and all other endeavors.

Moreover, Bob would like to acknowledge the consistently excellent support he has received from the Miami University libraries. Librarians Becky Zartner and Greg Carlson were particularly helpful in the preparation of this edition. He would also like to acknowledge the *Journal of the American Forensic Association* for permission to use portions of two articles he originally wrote for JFA. Finally, he would like to acknowledge the wonderful support he received throughout the writing of both editions of this book from his mother, Florence, from his children, David and Laura, who were an unending source of delightful distraction whenever writing became difficult, and most of all from his wife, Emmy, for all of her support in so many ways.

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*PART I*

# PRINCIPLES OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION



