

The Seattle Times Newspapers In Education presents

Electing the President: *A Guide to the Election Process*

Produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters



Thank you for joining our Wednesday series about the presidential election, produced in partnership with the League of Women Voters through November 5. Last spring's chapters are posted online at lwvwa.org and will help students of all ages to understand the people, the parties and the issues regarding our election process.

Week Four: The General Election: Strategies and Tactics – 2 Campaign Tactics:

The Candidates in Control — The Federal Election Campaign Act, which establishes the rules for campaign financing, requires candidates to create national organizations to handle contributions and expenditures.

As campaigns have grown more complex, these organizations have become more professional, relying on political consultants, media experts and pollsters to plot strategy and provide information and advice. The campaign has a close relationship with the national party with the presidential campaign playing a dominant role.

A finely tuned and cohesive organization can make the difference in steering a candidate to victory.

Campaign Tactics:

A little help from my friends — The candidates and their organizations aren't alone, however. The political parties still play very important roles in promoting their nominees. Next to the campaign organizations, the parties are the most important players. No other organizations have the resources or can spend as much money as the parties.

Campaign Tactics:

Four campaigns at once — Today's presidential candidates essentially wage four campaigns at the same time. The first is the grassroots campaign. While the candidates themselves have little direct involvement in it, national campaign staff help give it direction. This includes hundreds of local campaign headquarters and party organizations from which volunteers and a few paid staff reach out to local communities. They register voters, make phone calls, send out mail, help voters apply for absentee ballots, put up signs, canvass door-to-door and get out the vote on Election Day. While each of these activities is small in scale, when multiplied by thousands, their combined impact can carry a state.

The second level of campaigning is "on the ground" and includes all of the candidate's appearances and speeches, as well as the appearances throughout the country of key

supporters such as the candidate's spouse and children, the vice presidential nominee, Hollywood celebrities and prominent party leaders. The on-the-ground campaign is tightly controlled by the candidate's campaign organization, with advance teams scoping out locations, rounding up enthusiastic, cheering crowds, creating compelling visuals for television by placing the candidate before a dramatic backdrop and distributing truckloads of banners, signs and American flags among the crowds.

The third campaign is an on-the-air battle of radio and television advertising. This is the most expensive line item in the campaign budget — an estimated one-third of the more than \$1.2 billion spent on the 2004 presidential campaign. The advertising gives the candidates massive nationwide exposure that they couldn't possibly achieve on the ground. It takes the campaign directly into voters' living rooms and allows the candidates to project a fine-tuned, poll-tested image.

The fourth and newest arena is the fast evolving world of the Internet. This includes candidate Web sites and social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook. Campaign material also appears on YouTube, in Wikipedia and in election-related blogs (which also means monitoring the flow of messages in the blogosphere and responding quickly to them).

Campaigning Techniques

Before each election, voters are bombarded with words and images to persuade them to support one candidate while rejecting another.

Citizens should understand the tricks used by candidates, campaign staff members and the media to take advantage of a voter's emotions. Some techniques are:

- **Bandwagon:** Claiming that "everyone else is supporting it" to convince voters to support the issue as well.
- **Cardstacking:** Presenting only one side of an issue. Cardstacking gives only the facts that support the candidate's claims.
- **Catchwords:** Using language that is designed to trigger a knee-jerk, emotional reaction. Phrases such as "law and order" or "The American Way" are in this category.
- **Evading Real Issues:** Talking around a subject or changing the subject to avoid having to give direct answers or details.
- **Generalities:** Promising a lot without explaining how the promise will be kept. For example, candidates talk about benefits and never mention costs or how the nuts and bolts of a program will work.
- **Guilt by Association:** Criticizing an opponent for the views or actions of their supporters or friends.
- **Loaded Statements:** Using half-truths and distorted facts to make an opponent look bad. "I oppose wasteful spending" doesn't say much and it makes it seem like the candidate's opponent is for it.
- **Name Calling:** Referring to someone using a negative name or symbol. An opponent may be called "wishy-washy" or "two-faced" when he or she really is just showing that it's OK to listen to both sides and to change one's mind. Attacks on a candidate's family, ethnicity, gender, race or personal characteristics have nothing to do with how the candidate will do the job.
- **Passing the Blame:** Unfairly accusing another candidate or party of being the cause of a problem beyond their control.
- **Plain Folks:** Pretending to be "one of the regular folks" in an attempt to get people to relate to a candidate.
- **Promising the Sky:** Making promises that are unrealistic.
- **Testimonials:** Having an important person endorse a candidate.

Learn More:

- Read newspaper articles about the election to identify at least two of these campaign techniques candidates are using. How does understanding the techniques help people become better voters? Write a newspaper article describing how this information can help you and others make better voting decisions.

- Some of these techniques are also used in ads to make them more persuasive. Look through ads in the newspaper and identify ads where these techniques were used. Now create your own campaign ad for a candidate using one of these techniques.