



NEWS IN EDUCATION

NIE 4-Week Lesson Series: All About Elections & Government - Week 4

Week 4: Candidates, Campaigns, & You

Have you ever wondered how politicians get people to vote for them? Running a campaign is a huge task that requires exorbitant amounts of time, energy, money, effort and hard work.

Does your school hold elections for student government? Think of your classmates who have run for president, vice president, secretary or treasurer of your school. Was there a time when they passed out flyers, hung posters, or promoted their race for the position in office?

These kind of elections are just a very small picture of what it's like when people run for local, state, and national governmental offices.

Bumper Stickers, Picket Signs, & Friendly Waves: How Campaigns Work

- What is a campaign?

A political campaign is an organized effort to reach and influence voters, gain maximum votes, and present information about the candidate's agenda, policies, and objectives in running for office. The goal of a campaign is to influence the public toward a candidate and secure their vote.

Spreading the Word: Campaign Marketing

Candidates work toward their goal of election by hosting events, appearing on TV, in debates, at town meetings, and other public events. Almost all candidates hire marketing and design teams to create merchandise such as the signs you see scattered throughout your town, bumper stickers, billboards, TV commercials, buttons, pins, and other materials - all for the purpose of getting the word out there and putting themselves in the public eye. The more money a candidate has, the better their marketing efforts will be.

Campaigns spread their message through media such as direct mail, email lists, advertisements, news coverage, social media, and other avenues. You may notice that during election seasons, you receive a ton of political mailings every day from candidates running for an elected position. You'll also see dozens of political commercials if you watch network television. The races are on and political candidates ramp up their campaigns with more exposure and frequent interruption - they want to be seen and heard and gather as many votes as possible.

Political Marketing in the Digital Age

Nowadays, marketing for political candidates has become much more complicated as the marketing world in general has evolved in today's society. It's not as simple as producing an enticing commercial or putting signs on every corner. Today's candidates and their marketing teams must be more advanced than ever.

Because most people consume information through a vast array of sources - computers, phones, television, news, etc., old ways of marketing are no longer as effective. An increase in information leads to higher consumer intelligence, so campaigns must be able to produce content that connects with consumers (voters), and connects with the *right* consumers, on a wide variety of channels, in order to get their message in front of the people they most want to reach to gain votes. They must use personalized and data-driven knowledge to do this.

What does all of this mean? Well, simply put, effective campaign marketing has to know the people, and what the people want, and then channel that knowledge into real results. This much more complex way of campaigning means more time and investment, which leads us to our next topic: money.

Dollars and Cents: Campaign Funding

Have you ever wondered how much money a politician spends on their campaign? While the answer varies widely based on the candidate and the type of election for which they are running, a simple list of predicted expenses can be insightful. Let's look at a few of the most common political campaign expenses:

- The campaign team or committee. This is the group of people spearheading and leading the campaign. (Salaries)
- Consulting services
- Voter files and databases
- Polling and research
- Office space and supplies

- Website expenses
- Fundraisers
- Postage, forms, letterheads and donation cards
- Marketing team
- Direct mail
- Advertisements
- Signs
- Literature & paraphernalia
- Events and meetings
- Consumer data for targeted marketing (this is that complex campaign process we talked about)
- Travel expenses
- Volunteer expenses
- Fees and extra charges

Where Does the Money Come From?

So, where do political candidates get all the money they need to pay for all of this? Here are a few of the most common ways:

- Personal investment by the candidate
- Fundraising
- Loans
- Special interest groups that endorse candidates with aligning policies
- Public funding programs that allocate taxpayer money for eligible campaigns
- Major donors

Primaries & Caucuses

Let's back up a bit. Who gets to run in an election, and what stops any old Joe-off-the-street from seeing his name on the ballot? There are two main ways to determine who gets to run for a certain position.

Caucuses are held to select nominees for governing offices. The main purpose for the caucus system is to help organize the political parties at local levels. Caucus meetings are closed off to the general public, and are open only to registered members of the party holding the caucus.

During a caucus, there will be long discussions and community participation before a final decision is made. Participants are primarily choosing delegates who will represent them in voting for their candidate at the next convention level (such as county, district, state, and eventually national.)

Caucuses were the original method for selecting candidates until the primary was introduced in the early 1900's.

Primary elections are held for the purpose of narrowing down the nominees for a candidacy to one individual. There are two types of primaries: closed, in which only registered party voters can participate, and open, in which voters are not required to be registered with the party. During a primary, nominees will debate with each other and answer voter and reporter questions to try and sway the vote in their favor.

Pros & Cons

Caucus

PROS	CONS
Weeds out casual voters	Time consuming
Cheaper than primary	Most voters are excluded
Brings early exposure to candidates & issues	Very small number of people choose nominee
No polling or ballots	Many dedicated and informed voters may not be able to attend

Primary - Open

PROS	CONS
More representative of the people as every registered voter can vote	Casual voters get to select delegates
Brings early exposure to candidates	Political parties lose control
Does not require voters declaring party affiliation when they register to vote	Invites corruption from the opposing party

Primary - Closed

PROS	CONS
Only dedicated and informed party members get to vote for the party's nominee	Excludes Independents from voting
Prevents members of the opposing party from attending to vote for the weaker candidate to influence the election	Excludes voters from the opposing party who have changed their mind and genuinely want to cast their vote on the other side
Somewhat democratic as voters from that party get to vote	Requires a party affiliation when registering

The Ugly Side: Negative Campaigning

The world of politics is not a friendly one. People have so many differences. When politicians compete with each other for an elected position, they don't play nice. After all, it's a race to get to the coveted seat in office, and being nice won't get you there.

Many politicians participate in something called negative campaigning. This is not a campaign to further their own cause, but rather to go after and attack their competitor. While candidates will certainly campaign for themselves, most will also actively campaign against their opponent. This is done through ads and information exposing the flaws and missteps of the other candidate, direct attacks, and sometimes directly-aimed outright slander.

While negative campaigning isn't liked by most voters, it is definitely noticed. People have a draw toward gossip and negativity, and especially the "dirty laundry" of others, so it only makes sense that negative campaigning turns heads. That's why politicians use it. They want to convince voters of why their opponent is not a good choice, and in-turn, sway the election in their favor.

Is this effective? Maybe. It's just the world of politics. So if you don't have thick skin, you probably shouldn't consider running for office!

What About You?

So, how does all of this effect you? If you're a voter, it does. The best thing you can do as a voter is to do your homework. Research, ask questions, and find out all the information you can from trusted sources. Be an informed voter. Don't vote for a candidate just because your friend or your mom is. Know the issues your

country is facing, and know where you stand on those issues. Then, learn where the candidates stand, and decide for yourself who will get your vote. Learn how to recognize hype - and don't be quick to give in to outrage. Hype is exactly that - stirred up for the purpose of getting *you* riled up. Be skeptical, and keep an open-mind. Most importantly, hold on to a love of learning, because that love is what will enable you to continue being an active, engaged, informed citizen of your country.