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Political Communication in the 2000 Election: Guest Editor's Introduction

BRUCE BIMBER

What are the forms and consequences of contemporary political communication? This issue of *Political Communication* addresses that question through a focus on a single political episode, the remarkable elections of 2000. The articles were conceived as a coordinated collection early in the campaign season, well before it was clear just how uncommon the last election of the 20th century would turn out to be. They originated as a set of papers from "Campaign Studies 2000: Lessons Learned," a conference held at the University of California, Santa Barbara about six months after the election was finally decided. That meeting of researchers as well as the contents of this issue were the creation of Professor Steven H. Chaffee. His intention was to draw on the fact that many eminent scholars were studying the 2000 campaigns in order to produce a symposium of leading-edge research in political communication. The product of the conference he designed was a broad assessment of many dimensions of communication in American politics, using the election as a common focus.

The conference papers, presented here in revised article form, cover much of the landscape of political communication. They encompass political advertising and campaign effects, elite discourse, political deliberation and communicative action, public opinion, direct candidate communication through campaign appearances, media framing, and priming. For the most part, the articles avoid the most atypical aspects of 2000: the split between the electoral college and popular votes, the effects of the Nader candidacy, and the disputes in Florida and involvement of the judicial system in settling the outcome. The authors leave to other venues explanations and interpretations of the specific electoral dynamics of 2000.

To the great sorrow of his friends and colleagues, Steve Chaffee passed away shortly before his conference was scheduled to happen. Steve's enormous contributions to the field of political communication are widely known and were honored in the April 2000 issue of this journal, shortly before his unexpected death. With the concurrence of all involved that he would have wanted his plans for the conference and journal issue brought to fruition, the event took place and the presentations were prepared as articles. As his final project with other scholars, the present issue of this journal constitutes a small but fitting legacy to Steve's expansive career as a scholar.

This issue also marks another, far more positive event, the transition in editorship of *Political Communication*. David L. Swanson, outgoing editor, managed most of the

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present issue in his last duties at the journal. David L. Paletz, the new editor, managed the final preparation of the issue. On behalf of the authors and Steve, I would like to express our appreciation to both editors for their support and assistance with this project. By arrangement with the outgoing editor, participation in the selective Santa Barbara conference substituted for the usual peer review process in this issue of the journal.

The first two articles in these pages explore campaign advertising. Kenneth Goldstein and Paul Freedman examine campaign communication at the presidential and congressional levels in 2000. They employ a new source of evidence about the broadcast history of campaign spots. Their method advances the study of campaign advertising beyond the limitations inherent in the more traditional technique of assessing only the content and number of ads produced. Their analysis illustrates distinctions between presidential and sub-presidential communication, shows the importance of campaign advertising by parties and interest groups, and helps illuminate the relationship between competitiveness and campaign negativity.

Nicholas A. Valentino, Michael W. Traugott, and Vincent L. Hutchings examine media effects through a study of race in campaign advertising. Using a two-method research design, they explore how race cues can prime political ideology. In addition to its relevance to the study of race itself, their article bears importantly on campaign strategy and the relationships between political communication, ideology, and issue constraint in voting.

Scott L. Althaus, Peter F. Nardulli, and Daron R. Shaw explore a more traditional form of political communication and campaigning, the candidate appearance. Their article complements the focus by the other authors on mediated communication and broadcast advertising. Using newly constructed data, they are able to explore patterns and test for trends in presidential appearances over time. Their innovative analysis of data begins to fill a void in the systematic study of campaign behavior by candidates, showing some surprising features of candidates' activities in an age of such high reliance on electronic media.

The next two research reports turn to citizen-level processes. In the first of a pair of articles dealing with deliberation and public opinion, Joseph N. Cappella, Vincent Price, and Lilach Nir report the development of a new measure of opinion quality they label "argument repertoire." They introduce the measure and test it in a research design involving political deliberation through the Internet. Their article advances the literature on deliberation and deliberative polling as well as contributing to our understanding of the nature of public opinion. In their second piece, Price, Cappella, and Nir build on the first, focusing on the relationship between exposure to political disagreement and opinion quality. Their findings are revealing about the effect of political discourse on public opinion.

The final article deals with the last stages of the 2000 election. Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Paul Waldman address the nature of elite communication in the period following election day, comparing two possible press frames for coverage of the events in Florida. Their article evaluates the homogeneity of elite discourse surrounding elections and is revealing of how media elites can influence public opinion through framing.

In addition to providing a variety of interesting substantive findings, these articles draw on several potentially important new data sets from surveys, experiments, and databases of electoral, media market, and broadcasting records. The articles demonstrate the methodological and theoretical robustness of the subfield of political communication at the outset of the 21st century, a period when communication in politics is undergoing many stresses and changes as a result of technological and economic developments. As

a collection of articles about the 2000 election, this work should be of interest not only to scholars of campaigns and political communication, but also to those concerned more generally with the state of the public sphere and the relationship between democratic elites and mass publics. The best research in a scientific subfield not only answers specialists' questions but also works to illuminate far larger problems that span subfields and disciplines. It is our hope that this collection rises to that level.