

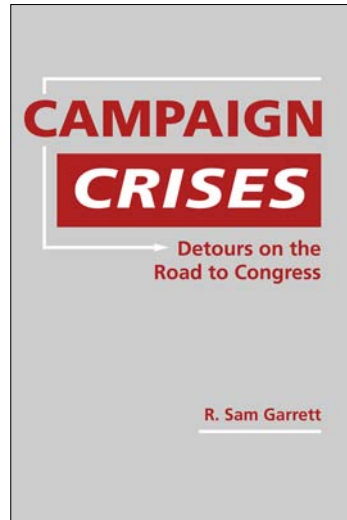
EXCERPTED FROM

Campaign Crises:
Detours on the
Road to Congress

R. Sam Garrett

Copyright © 2010

ISBN: 978-1-58826-671-2 hc



LYNNE RIENNER PUBLISHERS

1800 30th Street, Ste. 314

Boulder, CO 80301

USA

telephone 303.444.6684

fax 303.444.0824

This excerpt was downloaded from the
Lynne Rienner Publishers website
www.rienner.com

Contents

<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
1 Campaigns, Crises, and Modern US Politics	1
2 What Crises Are and Why They Matter	17
3 Campaign Leadership and Strategy During Crises	41
4 Recognizing and Creating Crises: The Cleland-Chambliss Race	65
5 An Environment of Crisis: The Torricelli-Forrester-Lautenberg Race	95
6 A Crisis of Epic Proportions: The Wellstone-Coleman-Mondale Race	121
7 Subtle Crises and Fair Fights: The Cantwell-Gorton Race	141
8 Conclusion	159
Methodological Appendix	177
<i>References</i>	195
<i>Index</i>	209
<i>About the Book</i>	220

1

Campaigns, Crises, and Modern US Politics

There's a tremendous amount of room for research here because this is all done by journeymen politicians who really don't think about what they're doing when we do it. There's no research on this. . . . All of our information is anecdotal, and over the years you just sort of get a feel for it.

—Joe McLean, Democratic fundraiser
and former campaign manager¹

Within hours of Barack Obama's historic victory in the 2008 presidential election, reporters, political professionals, and pundits considered not only how he had won but also how remarkable it was that others had lost. Just four years earlier, Obama was a little-known Illinois state senator. Hillary Clinton, the presumptive frontrunner, was a prominent US senator and enjoyed widespread name recognition as a former first lady. Many viewed the Democratic nomination as Clinton's to lose.

Even if Obama could overcome Clinton and several other prominent and experienced Democratic opponents, the general election would be hotly contested. Prominent Republicans, including former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney and former Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee, had lined up to pursue the GOP nomination. Most formidably, Arizona senator John McCain prepared to enter the race. McCain enjoyed widespread popularity and had decades of experience. But McCain's reputation for bucking conservative elements of his party could also complicate the race. His independence meant the potential to appeal to a diverse group of voters but ran the risk of alienating the GOP base.

Against this backdrop, when the presidential campaign began in early 2007—almost two years before Election Day 2008—the odds facing

Obama were steep indeed. Obama's victory was described as "among the most remarkable and least probable success stories in the history of American politics," partly for the Democrat's widespread appeal, but also because Obama reportedly "ran a near flawless campaign, one that always seemed to know how to respond to crisis" (NPR 2008). That meant being able to "adapt" to unexpected events, ranging from the grueling primary contest with Hillary Clinton (not to mention several other opponents) to "a sudden jolt of dire news from Wall Street," which replaced the Iraq War as the major issue late in the race (NPR 2008). Despite these challenges, Obama's campaign managed to respond as though the events had been expected. The campaign was widely viewed as one of the smoothest tactical operations in recent political memory.

By contrast, 2008 was less kind to Republican John McCain, who was making his second White House bid (having lost the GOP nomination in 2000 to George W. Bush). McCain's 2008 campaign struggled to respond to the fiscal crisis that shaped the final weeks of the campaign and focused on attacking Obama rather than reinforcing messages about why McCain should be elected (Langley 2008). Nonetheless, his campaign's ability to win the Republican nomination at all represented a monumental shift in electoral fortune. According to media accounts, just months before McCain secured the GOP nomination, his campaign had become a cumbersome organization and was hemorrhaging money. The frontrunner status the campaign expected going into the primaries had not materialized (PBS 2008). A high-profile reorganization managed to salvage the campaign and win the nomination.

Challenging campaign environments and unexpected events were not limited to the 2008 presidential race. Campaigns for US House and Senate seats faced potential crises of their own. The 2008 elections were particularly challenging for congressional Republicans as the Obama campaign gained momentum at the top of the ticket and as public dissatisfaction with the economy and the Iraq War continued. But Democrats, too, were affected. On both sides of the aisle, more than a dozen lawmakers in the House and Senate experienced what the media characterized as "scandals," ranging from continued fallout from a federal investigation of disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff to marital, legal, and financial problems that had become public factors in various reelection contests (Yachin and Singer 2008). In some cases, such as Representative Tim Mahoney's loss in a Florida congressional race following his confirmation of marital infidelity (Bennett 2008; UPI 2008), the electoral environment was uniquely affected by individual circumstances. For others, such as the loss of Republican representative Christopher Shays, a longtime incumbent from Con-

necticut, the defeat appeared to be part of a broader trend that disfavored Republicans, even as they remained largely popular in their own districts. The 2008 (and 2006) congressional races favored Democrats. But Republicans had enjoyed similar advantages during the previous major congressional shakeup, when the GOP won control of the House and Senate in 1994.

The 2008 elections provided fresh examples of pivotal events that shape campaigns. But opportunities to explore how campaigns are won and lost, and how political professionals make strategic decisions in those campaigns, are by no means limited to particular time periods or campaigns. This book examines the decisions and strategies behind key moments in congressional campaigns, including case studies of four Senate races. The lessons learned, however, apply broadly across elections and over time.

Unifying Theory and Practice

A political consultant once advised a campaign intern—this author—that attending graduate school would be a mistake. I would do better, the consultant said, to spend a while working on campaigns first. For the consultant, political scientists spent too little time practicing what they taught.²

A few years later, Democratic media consultant Rachel Gorlin suggested that political professionals might benefit from an academic perspective after all. Gorlin recalled a recent campaign scandal full of sensational details—the juicy material that increasingly falls somewhere between tabloid and political journalism. But Gorlin wanted more than salacious anecdotes. She argued that the sensational nature of this particular scandal had overshadowed important tactical lessons that political consultants could not objectively address and, given the hectic pace of most campaigns, did not have time to adequately understand. The case Gorlin described needed a neutral inquiry to understand how the campaigns had reacted and what lessons could be learned for scholars and practitioners alike. As Joe McLean's quotation at the beginning of this chapter demonstrates, sometimes an outside perspective can help practitioners tell, and learn from, their own stories. Scholars help provide an academic forum for those stories among students and researchers. With that perspective in mind, this book explores academic lessons behind practical campaign politics.

These three consultants (Gorlin, McLean, and the unnamed source) had different views on what benefits political science could provide to practical campaign politics. Each was at least partially correct. Political science often

remains woefully disconnected from the people, decisions, and events it studies. Fortunately, campaigns and elections research straddles the practical and theoretical worlds better than many areas of the discipline. Nonetheless, important questions and practical connections often remain unaddressed.

Many of those unaddressed questions involve how political professionals—particularly political consultants—do their jobs, how they think about those jobs, and why. Beyond consultants, though, this book speaks to broader themes about campaigns and elections, not only in a theoretical sense but also in a practical one. Especially since the 1980s, political scientists have been laying a solid foundation for understanding how elections are resolved—essentially who wins and loses, by how much, and with what segments of the electorate. And especially since the 1990s, the campaigns and elections subfield has begun to focus on the practical workings of campaigns, particularly by studying the growing importance of political consultants—the independent political professionals who work for a variety of candidates, party committees, and other organizations by providing services such as advertising and fundraising. From theoretical and practical perspectives, however, we still know little about some of the campaigns that make the most headlines through tight races, personal attacks, investigative journalism, and the like. What makes those campaigns so close and so fierce? Sometimes, they are simply hard-fought, tough races. Often, though, some kind of a crisis occurs—a pivotal moment in which a sleepy campaign can become a heated battle. These questions are not primarily concerned with the *outcome* of races, on which most scholarship has focused, or even the *organization* of campaigns, on which the campaigns and elections subfield has focused. Instead, these fundamental questions about campaign crises—the central narrative of this book—emphasize how outcomes *occurred*, who and what shaped those outcomes, and why.

This is not to say that crises explain all wins and losses in campaigns. As the following chapters show, political professionals say that crises are defined in a certain way and that individual circumstances—termed “context” throughout this book—shape campaign responses. In other words, one consultant’s crisis might be another’s opportunity. That discussion, too, receives attention in the following pages.

The existing work on campaign behavior largely takes root in two schools of thought on strategy and tactics. On one hand, some authors (e.g., Burton and Shea 2003; Bradshaw 2004) and many political professionals contend that campaigns are driven largely by experience and their assessment of on-the-ground conditions. This view might be called the “gut instinct” school. The alternative approach relies on rational-choice

theory. The strategic politicians thesis (Jacobson and Kernell 1983) is the classic example of a rational-choice approach applied to congressional campaign strategy.

But candidates and campaigns are not always rational. Those who reject rational-choice approaches to campaign strategy say that a blinding optimism often surrounds even the most hopeless congressional campaigns (Burton and Shea 2003, 162). Similarly, even when national conditions or practical matters suggest that candidates should bow out, relatively few members voluntarily retire from Congress (Wilcox 1987). Personal satisfaction, devotion to single issues, and the faint hope of success also keep repeat losers coming back to the campaign trail (Kazee 1980).

Whether influenced by gut instinct, rationality, or something else, political context plays a big role in campaign decisions. Gary Jacobson and Samuel Kernell limit context to national conditions such as the economy and presidential popularity. They also argue that candidates often take cues from national party organizations.³ As the book will show, although political professionals say that context can include national conditions, winning and losing elections are more often determined by lower-profile events: internal operations, local conditions, candidate missteps, and other events that might or might not make the evening news.

In addition, political professionals' views don't always mesh with scholarly theories. Consultants and others say that campaign decisions depend largely on experience (the gut-instinct approach). But relationships among different members of the campaign team, and the context surrounding individual events, influence which decisions campaigns make and why. The fact that political professionals' thinking does not fit neatly into existing academic theory should not be disappointing. Rather, it presents an invitation to explore races as the men and women who run campaigns actually see them—as complex. Campaign crises provide a window into that complexity—and a means for understanding how campaigns really work.

Crises help explain why a once seemingly invincible Vietnam-era triple amputee, Senator Max Cleland (D-GA), lost his seat after being criticized for his stances on national defense and homeland security—a scenario that seemed unthinkable early in the race. In this case, the pivotal event was perhaps not the political advertising for which the race became best known, but the fact that many members of Max Cleland's campaign team said they did not recognize that a crisis had occurred until the GOP challenger, Representative Saxby Chambliss, had virtually clinched the election.

Also in 2002, crises mattered for both sides of a contentious US Senate race between Democratic incumbent Bob Torricelli and Republican

challenger Doug Forrester in New Jersey. As the campaign unfolded, Torricelli was hounded by a recently concluded federal ethics investigation. Although Torricelli was never charged with a crime, the media feeding frenzy that accompanied the investigation made campaigning untenable. Yet Forrester's campaign was unable to capitalize on an unexpected opportunity when Torricelli abruptly withdrew from the race. Instead of enjoying a planned sprint to victory largely by being an alternative to Torricelli, Forrester's team could not overcome the established reputation of Democrat Frank Lautenberg, who came out of retirement to defeat the Republican and reclaim a place in the Senate.

Senator Paul Wellstone's death in a Minnesota plane crash weeks before the 2002 election was a crisis of epic proportions—most of which had nothing to do with politics. In political terms, though, professionals in the remnants of the Wellstone campaign and Minnesota's Democrat-Farmer-Labor (DFL) Party, along with national Democrats, had to decide, in a matter of hours or days, how to mount a competitive campaign in a radically changed, grief-stricken environment. Republican challenger Norm Coleman also faced a crisis in determining how to continue an effective but respectful campaign in the wake of the tragedy that killed the popular Wellstone along with his wife, daughter, campaign staff, and two pilots. Meanwhile, former vice president Walter Mondale, who was drafted to replace Wellstone, faced the daunting task of jump-starting and finishing his campaign in just ten days.

In contrast to these three cases that clearly involved campaign crises, political professionals disagreed about how, or whether, crises mattered for Democrat Maria Cantwell and Republican Slade Gorton during the 2000 US Senate race in Washington State. Some political professionals argued that the race's narrow margins alone represented a crisis for both campaigns. (Gorton lost by fewer than 2,300 votes of 2.4 million cast; a three-week recount followed.) Others pointed to activities from outside interest groups and Cantwell's unexpected criticisms of Gorton's environmental record. Nonetheless, some political professionals believed that the race was simply a tough one that someone had to lose.

These four races—the 2002 Senate contests in Georgia, New Jersey, and Minnesota and the 2000 Senate race in Washington State—will receive detailed attention. Importantly, however, the discussion is not limited to these cases or even to the 2000 and 2002 election cycles. Rather, this book's primary lesson is about an ever-present facet of American politics: campaign crises.

Why do crises matter? What can the subject explain beyond illuminating sensational cases that occasionally involve sex, drugs, alcohol, or just

plain stupidity? In fact, it would be easy to dismiss campaign crises as an anomaly if all or even most crises really involved lurid subjects. The problem with dismissing crises as only sensational or unusual, however, is that most crises are not extraordinary. In short, most *crises* are not *scandals*. Indeed, there is an important distinction between the two.

When allowed to think and talk at length about their world, political professionals' comments establish that although campaign crises are major events, they matter for various reasons that extend beyond winning or losing elections. Crises, how campaigns respond to them, and who inside the campaign makes decisions about crisis management provide a window into critical contests in which Americans choose their elected officials. Although some things about crises are unique—such as the pace of decisionmaking or divisions of labor—much about crises presents broader lessons. Lessons about leadership among political professionals, candidates, and their families, strategic attacks on opponents, negative advertising, and the roles of political parties and “outside” organizations can all be found by studying campaign crises. Although crises often have negative connotations, effective crisis management can help campaigns solidify their standing and turn a challenging situation into an opportunity. Whether positive or negative, crises often mark turning points in campaigns. As examined here, they represent detours (often with an uncertain outcome) on the road to Congress—or any other Election Day objective.

Despite this rich potential, scholarly attention to campaign crises is virtually nonexistent. Even defining what “crisis” means is challenging. Electoral “scandal” is illicit and involves extramarital affairs, abuses of power, financial misconduct, and the like. To paraphrase US Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart’s famous summation of obscenity, scandal is difficult to define, but we know it when we see it.⁴ But *crises* are more difficult because there is so little knowledge of what they are or what they mean.

This book broadens the dialogue by asking how political professionals define crises, whether crises are different from scandals, how crises affect campaigns, and what strategies and tactics campaigns employ when managing crises. Crises are intense—sometimes extraordinary—events. But they are not uncommon—and they have more similar characteristics than often seems the case from ten-second sound bites on the evening news.

The in-depth interviews and case studies presented here demonstrate that political professionals view campaign crises as complex, interactive events. Although popular and scholarly wisdom focuses on campaign scandals as key variables in congressional elections, the findings show that political professionals classify a range of behavior and events beyond scandals

as crises and argue that the consequences have broad implications. After categorizing the different ways that political professionals define crises (see Chapter 2), a typology provides an analytical tool for considering crises as internal, external, expected, and unexpected events. The typology is illustrated with examples from the four US Senate races identified previously.⁵ This book is, therefore, devoted to building theory about campaign crises. By establishing analytically generalizable (sometimes called “theoretically generalizable”; see Yin 1994, 2003) lessons about what crises are and how they affect campaigns, this book lays a foundation for future research about this unexplored facet of American elections.

Why Political Professionals?

This book relies on insights from those who know campaigns best: the political professionals who run campaigns. Political professionals help campaigns and candidates make strategic decisions. Although consultants’ increasing dominance in campaign strategy is well-known, there has been little attention to how decisionmaking and leadership inside campaigns really work. Throughout the book, the phrase *political professionals* refers to political consultants, party officials, campaign managers, and others who make their living from campaigning. The book places special emphasis on political consultants because of their major leadership roles in modern campaigns. Here, too, the book’s lessons extend beyond individual cases, consultants, and time periods. In particular, although aspects of who consultants are and what they do have been explored in detail previously, there has been little attention to consultants’ detailed responses.

Most previous studies of political consultants rely on surveys or general descriptions to summarize the profession (Rosenbloom 1973; Sabato 1981; Luntz 1988; Johnson 2000, 2001, and 2007; Medvic 2000; Thurber and Nelson 2000; Thurber, Nelson, and Dulio 2000). These works focus on the impact political consultants have on electoral outcomes such as vote-margin or fundraising (Dulio 2004; Herrnson 1992; Medvic and Lenart 1997; Medvic 2001) or provide anecdotal data through case studies (Loomis 2001; Thurber 2001). Few works explore what consultants think, how their thinking influences campaign strategy, or how they behave in critical campaign situations. There is also little understanding about how political professionals think and feel about the evolution of their profession, their role in modern campaigns, and how they and others run campaigns. Comprehensive scholarly discussion about political professionals’ perspectives on campaign crises is virtually untouched.

Moving Beyond Scandal

Political science confines its analysis of campaign crises mostly to political scandals, meaning candidates' alleged ethical transgressions. A small body of work emerged mostly in the 1990s, in the aftermath of the House bank scandal, in which dozens of lawmakers were voted out of office after essentially bouncing checks at the chamber's financial institution amid widespread negative publicity. Some works on congressional elections have continued to adopt a dichotomous scandal variable (e.g., scandals were present in a race or they were not). Overall, however, political scandals are a very small subset of the literature on campaigns and elections. The existing scholarly literature lacks a comprehensive, systematic, and theoretically oriented discussion of crises.⁶ As a result, scandal has served as a proxy for campaign crises—albeit a narrow one. Furthermore, even the work that discusses crises fails to investigate how the nuances of those events affect campaigns.

The data collected for this book reveal that political professionals view a range of circumstances (beyond the scholarly scandal confines) as crisis situations. More important, political professionals reported that crises can be devastating under the right conditions and in ways not measured by election returns or fundraising. Campaign crises have broad implications not only for the outcomes of particular races but also by providing insight into critical decisionmaking and professional developments in modern American politics.

Context, Crises, and Modern House and Senate Campaigns

Behind all the theory—scholarly and otherwise—political campaigns are human enterprises. Political consultants and their colleagues certainly feel the pressure to perform when crises occur and to prevent them from happening in the first place. According to pioneering Democratic media consultant Ray Strother (2003, 1):

In political consulting, winning is everything. . . . A win, even a fluke victory over a scandal-ridden opponent, throws the spotlight on the consultant and allows him to prosper. A noble and principled campaign that did not use negative ads and talked about issues of substance turns into ashes if it loses by even one vote. . . . Thus, political consulting becomes a Darwinist, ferocious business in which the law of the jungle rules and the weak are massacred by bigger and stronger predators.⁷

It goes without saying that campaigns matter for candidates, too. The literature suggests that electoral pressures can be particularly complex for Senate candidates. Senate elections are traditionally more competitive than House contests and receive more intense media scrutiny (Abramowitz and Segal 1992). Senators also face unique advantages and disadvantages in constituency size, relative power in funneling pet projects to their states, and in other institutional differences that can affect electoral outcomes (Lee and Oppenheimer 1999). Same-state senators divide and conquer constituencies, media markets, and casework (Schiller 2000), all of which allow them to develop broader constituencies compared to House members.

However, Jonathan Krasno (1994) demonstrates that much of the common wisdom about incumbent senators facing unique obstacles compared with House candidates does not hold up to empirical data. Rather:

The results directly point to the campaign itself as the source of the different reelection rate of incumbents in Senate and House races. . . . The campaign is the beginning of trouble for senators who face reelection difficulties. This evidence is the last piece of the reelection puzzle: senators' political struggles come about because of their opponents. They do not start off more vulnerable than representatives, but by election day their challengers have made them more vulnerable. (Krasno 1994, 155–156)

Furthermore, “the key point is that elections are contests between two candidates. No senator or representative is actually in danger of defeat until someone runs against him or her” (Krasno 1994, 158). In other words, campaigns matter.

Against that backdrop, and despite *general* differences between House and Senate campaigns, this book does not uncover significant *strategic* differences in how House and Senate campaigns experience or manage crises. Regardless of the type of race, pivotal events such as crises influence how, when, and why campaigns matter to voters. Political professionals play a large role in shaping and responding to those moments. This book emphasizes Senate campaigns, but its lessons about crisis management apply to other kinds of campaigns, too.

Although this book does not focus on public opinion in detail, it is worth noting that campaigns can face mixed incentives when deciding how to manage crises that unfold publicly. Even competitive elections often involve so-called low-information campaigns that focus more on spin and imagery than on substance about policy issues (Thurber 2001a). More generally, public knowledge of Congress and congressional campaigns is frequently lacking, sometimes intentionally so (Gilens 2001).⁸

Therefore, it can be difficult to call attention to a campaign's preferred message—sometimes including attacking an opponent—if the public (or the media) is unwilling to pay attention.

Crises, by contrast, provide events that voters remember. For example, even though the 1990s House bank scandal broke no laws, it “ended many more congressional careers than policy disasters such as the savings-and-loan debacle, which left taxpayers holding the bag for hundreds of billions of dollars.” Furthermore,

members of Congress routinely escape individual blame for major policy failures because the legislative process diffuses responsibility; the action is so complex, the details of policy so arcane, each individual's responsibility so obscure, that it is impossible to figure out who is culpable and who is not. Everyone with a checking account understands what it means to balance a checkbook, however, and each House member's culpability was precisely measured in the count of unfunded checks. (Jacobson 2001, 176–177)

To summarize, crises matter because they shape the electoral environment and often determine the outcome of races for both House and Senate campaigns (and others) in ways that can't be ignored.

Methodological Overview

This book relies on 106 in-depth interviews with seventy-six political professionals based primarily in the Washington, D.C., area. Eight of the 106 interviews were early field tests; the core data included 98 interviews (37 theory-building interviews and 61 case-study interviews). I conducted all interviews in person or by telephone between 2003 and 2005. Most interview subjects were political consultants holding the rank of principal or vice president in major firms actively engaged in providing strategic advice to US House and Senate candidates. I also interviewed experienced campaign managers, party campaign committee officials, and senior congressional staff. Additional information about the interview pool appears in the Methodological Appendix.

This book examines two major themes: (1) understanding what crises are and how they affect campaigns generally; and (2) how crises unfolded in specific campaigns. The thirty-seven first-round interviews are exploratory and theoretically generalizable. They provide a foundation for understanding what campaign crises are, how political professionals think

about campaign crises, how they believe crises affect campaigns, and how congressional campaigns manage crises. These interviews establish how experienced political professionals from both parties define crises. This analysis appears in Chapters 2 and 3.⁹

The sixty-one case-study (second-round) interviews provide an in-depth understanding of crises and crisis management in four US Senate races from 2000 and 2002.¹⁰ This analysis appears in Chapters 4–7. The case studies include the 2002 contests in Georgia, Minnesota, and New Jersey and the 2000 race in Washington State. Chapter 4 discusses case selection, introduces the case studies, and reviews the Georgia race. The case-study chapters examine three key elements in each race: (1) how political professionals defined crises; (2) how crises affected each campaign organization; and (3) what strategic and tactical decisions campaign officials made in battling crises. These three themes follow the project's two theory-building chapters (Chapters 2 and 3) developed from the first-round interviews.

To interpret the interview data, the book employs a mixed methodology combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The interview data are primarily presented in narrative form, highlighting the project's emphasis on grounded theory and descriptive research. Some of the interview data are also coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics. Archival media coverage and political advertising data from the Wisconsin Advertising Project (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002; Goldstein and Rivlin 2005) supplement the case-study interviews.¹¹

Grounded theory, which utilizes practitioner expertise to illuminate an unexplored phenomenon that is theoretically and practically important (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Rubin and Rubin 1995; King, Keohane, and Verba 1994), provides a foundation for the interviews. Especially in unexplored territory—like campaign crises—an “imperfect fit” between research design, theory, and data often emerges (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 13). These methodological perspectives (see also Yin 1994, 2003), because they are exploratory, typically do not involve hypothesis-testing; the same is true for this book.

Because of the sparse academic literature specifically about campaign crises, allowing political professionals to think and talk at length creates a better scholarly and applied understanding not only of crises but also, perhaps more importantly, of what those events suggest about campaigns and elections in general. Qualitative interviews are, therefore, essential. The emphasis on “encouraging people to describe their worlds in their own terms” (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 2) is especially important for understanding the relatively closed world of professional politics. This “thick description” (Geertz 1973) is “rooted in the interviewees’ firsthand experience [and] forms the material that researchers gather up, synthesize, and analyze

as part of hearing the meaning of data” (Rubin and Rubin 1995, 8). To borrow Richard Fenno’s (1996, 8) comments on the value of participant observation, the interviews’ contribution to the book is essential. Through the inside expertise they reflect, the interviews remind us that “it is, after all, flesh and blood individuals, real *people* we are talking about when we generalize about our politicians” and, in this case, about political professionals.¹²

Overview

Political professionals define crises and explain how they affect campaigns in Chapter 2. Chapter 2 also establishes that political professionals view scandals as one kind of crisis, but not necessarily the most important kind of crisis or the most prominent. Based on the interview data, a typology considers crises as a combination of internal, external, expected, and/or unexpected events. Chapter 2 also provides political professionals’ first-hand perspective about why crises matter and how disruptive they are to campaigns. The debate over how frequently crises occur and how they affect campaigns sheds light on important disagreements about the state of modern campaigns and professional politics.

Continuing on those themes, Chapter 3 explores how crises affect campaign organizations, who assumes strategic leadership roles during crises, and how campaigns respond to crises. Despite the focus on crises, much of Chapter 3, and others, highlights the real world of House and Senate campaigns. Political consultants emerge as major leaders during crises. Although this finding is not surprising, the data reveal a distinction between *strategists* and *implementers* that becomes especially important during crises and that signals a largely unexplored transition in professional politics. Much of this discussion highlights the changing relationship between consultants and campaign managers. Here, political professionals also explain strategic decisionmaking during campaign crises. *Context* (individual circumstances) is the key factor behind those decisions. In short, how crises affect campaigns, and the choices political professionals make when responding to crises, depend on individual situations.

Detailed case studies include the 2002 Senate races between Max Cleland and Saxby Chambliss in Georgia (Chapter 4), Paul Wellstone, Norm Coleman, and Walter Mondale in Minnesota (Chapter 5), Bob Torricelli, Doug Forrester, and Frank Lautenberg in New Jersey (Chapter 6), and the 2000 contest between Maria Cantwell and Slade Gorton in Washington State (Chapter 7). All case studies address both sides’ perspectives on the race. The Methodological Appendix and the beginning of Chapter 4 provide more information about how the case studies were selected and how

they illustrate the typology of campaign crises established in Chapter 2. Chapter 8 summarizes the findings and addresses the implications for previous and future research.

A Note to Readers

Some final points will help readers navigate the text. The political professionals interviewed for this book are identified by name whenever they consented. Those who asked not to be named are identified as agreed during interviews (e.g., as a “senior strategist”). All professional titles refer to the experience that warranted participation in the project, not necessarily the individuals’ positions at the time of the interview or now. For example, former National Republican Senatorial Committee (NRSC) political director Chris LaCivita participated in interviews after his tenure at the NRSC. However, because he was interviewed based on his NRSC service, the text identifies him as an NRSC official. The same is true for Max Cleland’s 2002 campaign manager, Tommy Thompson, who by the time of his interview was engaged in consulting work for a state party. In many cases, as is common in professional politics, those interviewed have since moved on to other employers. Most political professionals stressed that their comments reflected personal views, not necessarily those of their employing organizations.

Throughout the text, *specific types* of campaign crises are identified by italics when necessary (e.g., *organizational* crises). Specific dimensions of the typology of campaign crises are set off in boldface (e.g., the **internal** dimension of the typology). This identification system does not apply to generic discussions that fall outside the typology. Chapter 2 provides additional details.

Finally and perhaps most important, this book relates political professionals’ understandings of, and opinions about, campaign crises, modern campaigns in general, and some specific races. Some of those opinions are blunt. However, I do not draw normative conclusions or make partisan endorsements at any point in the book and hope that those affiliated with either party (or none) find the work to be equally accurate and objective. Any opinions I do express are mine alone.

Notes

1. Joe McLean, personal interview with author, December 1, 2003, Washington, D.C. Throughout this book, all named sources consented to be identified.

2. The consultant's name and identifying campaign references are omitted to preserve the objectivity of presentation.

3. Several works have tested and revised the strategic politicians thesis. One major critique of the model is that it fails to account for important local political context (Livingston and Friedman 1993), which can be especially important in campaign crises.

4. See Stewart's concurring opinion in *Jacobellis v. Ohio* (1964).

5. The book focuses on recent House and Senate campaigns because the limited literature on campaign scandals—the closest existing proxy for crises—emphasizes congressional elections. Limiting the inquiry to congressional campaigns also keeps the project manageable. However, because this book allows political professionals who possess a wealth of experience to define crises and describe their effects, the lessons established here should carry over to other areas of electoral politics.

6. Of course, case studies of single campaign crises do exist. For example, Jaspersen (2004) offers a case study of the “sympathy vote” in Minnesota after Paul Wellstone's death.

7. This is not to say, however, that political professionals are unethical—a subject discussed later in the book.

8. This is Martin Gilens's (2001) “rational ignorance” concept.

9. Interviews were solicited until findings became predictable and a rough balance in party and professional specialization was achieved. The thirty-interview threshold also increases reliability in analyzing the data with descriptive statistics.

10. Eight field-test interviews were also conducted. They are not included in the dataset but are reflected in the 106 figure listed at the beginning of this section. Excluding the eight field-test interviews yields a total of 98 sessions (37 first-round interviews and 61 case-study interviews).

11. Use of the 2000 Wisconsin Advertising Project data (Goldstein, Franz, and Ridout 2002) requires the following disclaimer: “The data was obtained from a joint project of the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law and Professor Kenneth Goldstein of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and includes media tracking data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group in Washington, D.C. The Brennan Center–Wisconsin project was sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed in this [book] are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Brennan Center, Professor Goldstein, or The Pew Charitable Trusts.” Use of the 2002 Wisconsin Advertising Project data (Goldstein and Rivlin 2005) requires the following disclaimer: “The data was obtained from a project of the Wisconsin Advertising Project, under Professor Kenneth Goldstein and Joel Rivlin of the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and includes media tracking data from the Campaign Media Analysis Group in Washington, D.C. The Wisconsin Advertising Project was sponsored by a grant from The Pew Charitable Trusts. The opinions expressed in this [book] are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Wisconsin Advertising Project, Professor Goldstein, Joel Rivlin, or The Pew Charitable Trusts.”

12. Emphasis in original.