

Scrambling for A Narrative: What to Do When Campaigns Go Wrong

Week 4 Lecture: Monday 21 October

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Last week

5 steps: (1) diagnose the problem, (2) highlight the urgency of the moment, (3) diagnose your opponent's character, (4) distinguish it from your own character, and (5) reinforce the message.

George Lakoff reading – How Liberals and Conservatives frame debates and speak to voters on the other side of the political divide.

Today

- What can go wrong during an election campaign?
- When does a mistake become a disaster?
- What different roles do each member of the campaign team play during a campaign disaster?
- What are the classic mistakes of crisis management?
- Why might this be useful to you?

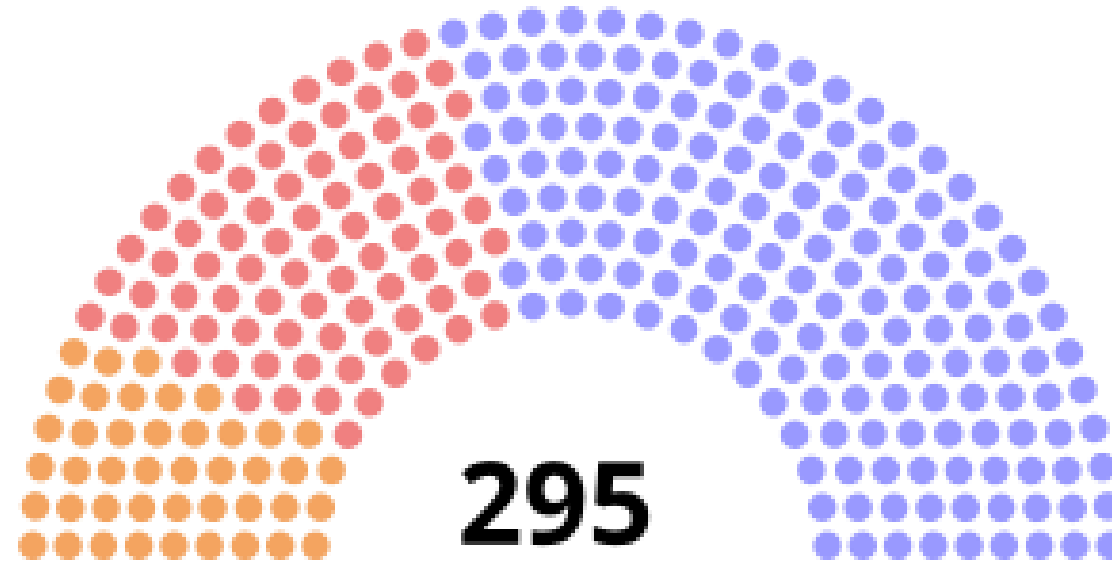
The Curious Case of Canada's Kim Campbell

- Incumbent PM of Canada
- Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party since June 1993.
- Took over as leader from Brian Mulroney, who resigned over his unpopularity since the 1990s Recession, and the rise of the right-wing Reform Party.
- Election held 25 October 1993



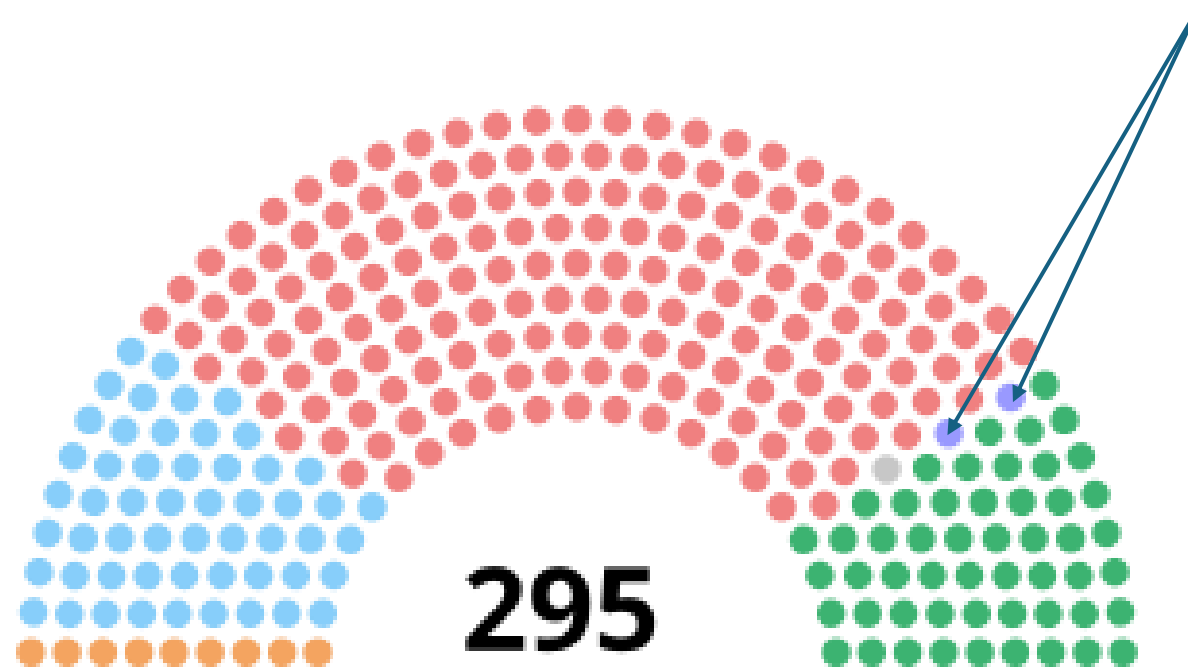
1988 Election

- The Progressive Conservative Party won 169 seats (majority)



1993 Election

- The Progressive Conservative Party won 2 seats (yes, 2!)



- Kim Campbell lost her own seat.

Why did this happen?

- Support for the Conservatives was evenly spread out, meaning that under First-Past-The-Post (FPTP) electoral system, they struggled to retain seats.
- The Conservative vote share collapsed from 43% in the last election to just 16%.
- In 1988, Mulroney had won power by putting together a coalition of voters. This fell apart in 1993.
- The emergence of the Canadian Reform Party.

Australian Labor Party leadership 2007-2013



2007 Election: Labor Win (Kevin Rudd becomes PM, Julia Gillard becomes Deputy PM)



June 2010: Gillard challenges Rudd for the leadership. Rudd withdraws. Julia Gillard becomes first woman PM of Australia.



2012: Rudd challenges PM Gillard for the leadership. Rudd loses. Gillard remains PM.



March 2013: Gillard responds to rumours of another challenge by Rudd. Calls a spill and is the only candidate to stand. Gillard remains PM.



June 2013: Rudd challenges Gillard again for the leadership. Rudd wins. Gillard resigns and Rudd becomes PM again.



October 2013: Labor Lose Election.



When does negative campaigning go too far?

When and why do negative campaigners make mistakes?

- In trying to negatively define your opponent, you inadvertently prove their own negative framing of you is accurate.
- When do “too personal” attacks become too personal?
- Has this boundary changed over time? If so, how and why?



Options

Double down

Sacrificial lamb (often junior staff)

The candidate “misspoke”

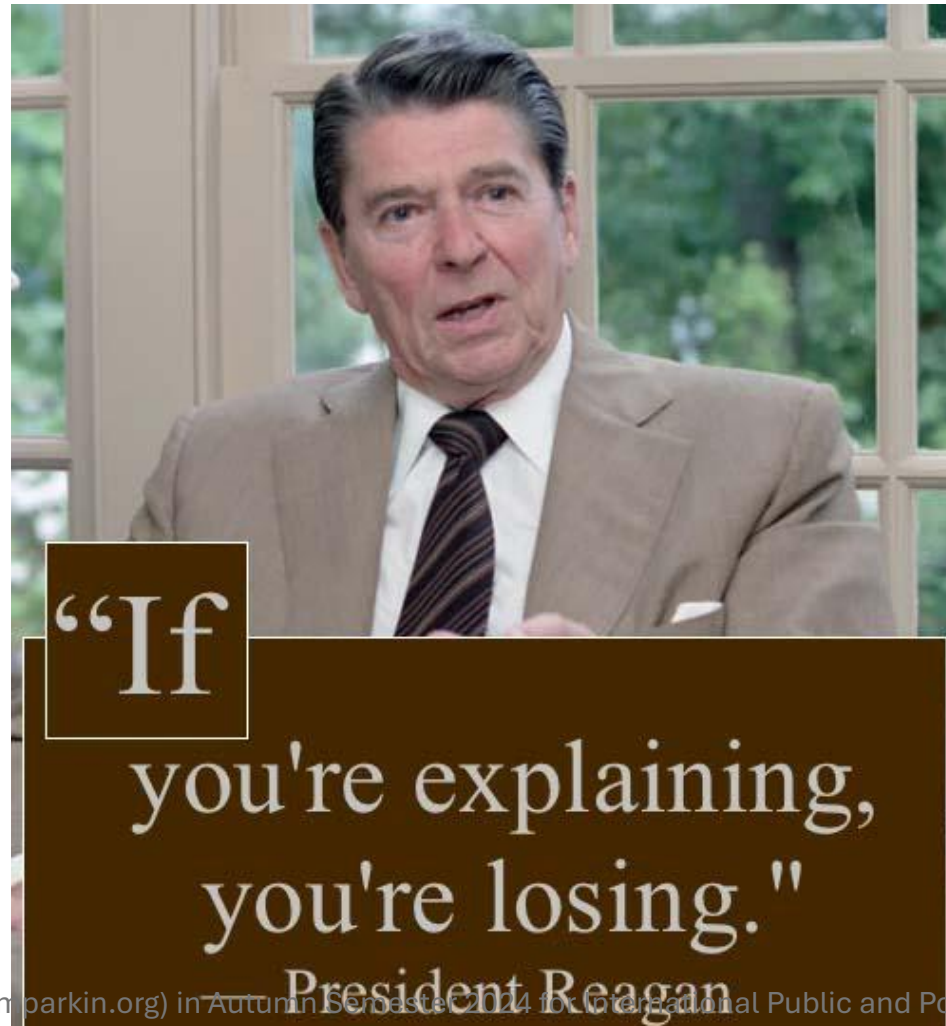
“Taken out of context”

Apologise in the public arena.

Apologise in private, then press release.

Pivot to new issue/campaign focus (“Red meat strategy”)

When does a mistake become a disaster?



Written and Delivered: Tom P. J. Parkin (tomparkin.org) in Autumn Semester 2024 for International Public and Political Communication (IPPC) MA, The University of Sheffield's School of Information, Journalism and Communication (UK)

What are the classic mistakes of crisis management?

- No campaign consensus on the best messaging.
- Destabalising actors from within the campaign (leaking/briefing).
- Responding too early
- Responding too late
- Not foreseeing the problem
- Backtracking



Communicating Values in a Team



Personality of
leader/candidate



Leader's values



Priorities of
leader



Personalities of
staff



Staff's values



Priorities of staff



What different roles do each member of the campaign team play during a campaign disaster?

- The candidate
- Campaign surrogates (substitutes) on TV and radio
- The campaign manager
- Digital media team (including videographers)
- Event organisers
- Supportive think-tanks
- Pollster
- Finance and fundraising team

What different roles do each member of the campaign team play during a campaign disaster?

- **The candidate** – Face the public? Keep a low profile?
- **Campaign surrogates (substitutes) on TV and radio** – Play defensive or offensive?
- **The campaign manager** – Mediate between candidate and campaign team. Sometimes consulting with candidate, sometimes telling them how to respond.
- **Digital media team (including videographers)** – Play defensive or offensive?
- **Event organisers** – Is the candidate going out in public or keeping a low profile?
- **Supportive think-tanks** – Can they provide the fact checking and counterarguments?
- **Pollster** – What new constituencies need to be reached/secured? Think ahead.
- **External media consultants?** – What role do they play? What is their relationship like with the campaign manager?
- **Finance and fundraising team**

Ingredients needed for campaign crisis management to work....

- ✓ Clear chain of command
- ✓ Clear short, medium and long-term objectives
- ✓ Team must be open to new ideas and people
- ✓ Minimum level of trust sustained

Blair to Johnson: The Number 10 “Grid”

- “The Grid” has 5 columns: Economy, Leadership, Crime, Health and Ukraine (Harry Cole, The Sun)

22-28 Sept	Mon 22	Tues 23	Weds 24	Thur 25	Fri 26	Sat-Sun 27-28
Main News	Hutton inq session CMO: TB action plan (tbc)	Hutton inq session UN General Assembly (23-3) inc Bush speech	Hutton inq session AEBG: rept on GM public debate	Hutton evidence sessions conclude (tbc) Straw speech to UN Gen Assembly (1745)	Item to be confirmed Healey/HO: HMCE/Met criminals' assets Initiative	
Statistics		International migration 01 River water quality 02	Defence 2003; vehicles (Aug)	Teaching staff survey Road accidents 2002 Popn Trends (Autumn) Inc migration; higher ed	NHS vaccination & immunisation 02/03	
Other Government News	Amos: World Bank Development Ctte, Dubai DPM in US (to 24) Johnson: 16-19 planning guidance inc 6 th forms	PM: regeneration event / visit (poss) Court of Appeal ruling on asylum support Schwartz con doc on HE access	00.01 Melanie Johnson: more accurate smear tests Blunkett speech on citizenship DPM in US inc peace award	Kelly: Child Trust Fund tech doc for industry Blunkett mts police (with Sun) Timms/Morley: rules on disposal of old cars	Falconer speech to Law Soc inc indep complaints procedure ACRE rept on GM trial problems & Defra event Silcott parole hearing	Blunkett on Dimbleby (28)
POSSIBLE IN WEEK	Blairs speech on police international cooperation Jowell: new chairman of NESTA Hodge reply to UN rept on UK children's rights	Chx: IMF/WB annual mtgs, Dubai (23-24) Blunkett speech to Black Police Assoc Darling: 1 st mtg of road charging group Blairs: schools & mobile phone thefts SRA: con doc on Kent integrated franchise inc CTRL	Hodge: more extended schools & children's centres CMO: rubella vaccine	Darling speech on rail Goggins: rept on drug treatment orders Whitty/Timms: sustainable production strategy Johnson: rept on HE demand Lewis: rept on EMAs Ofsted rept on SEN in ordinary schools	BNSC: UK-built satellites launched for global monitoring Jowell on Any Questions, Somerset	
Europe	EP plenary (22-25)	ECJ judgements on application of EU laws to Gibraltar & on entry of spouses to UK		Prodi before EP ctte re Eurostat fraud; Berlusconi anti-immunity petition to Italian court	European Day of Languages	
Political	Lib Dem annual conf, Brighton (21-25) Kennedy Q&A session	NEC Lib Dems: econ & educ	Lib Dems: home, overseas (inc Iraq/terror) health, welfare SNP annual conf, Inverness (24-27)	Kennedy speech to Lib Dem conf (1145) Hewitt on Question Time		
General	Trial of doc re death by wrong injection in spine UN AIDS conf Cancer Research UK anti-smoking campaign	Bush & Chirac speeches at UNGA ACPO conf on domestic violence (Bns Scotland)	Schroder speech to UN & China OPEC mtg, Vienna California candidates' debate	Putin speech to UNGA Law Society conf, QEII (25-26) National Archives monthly release (1700) Nigerian appeal court decision on strikers	NUS/TUC anti-HE fees rally	Autumn rail timetable starts (28) CTRL 1 route opens (28) US Grand Prix (28)

Analysis

Boris Johnson resigns: Prime minister's 'dead cat' strategy failed - so how did he use up his nine lives?

Covid Crisis Management: Boris Johnson



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Why did it start to go wrong?

Covid Crisis Management: Jacinda Ardern



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Why did it start to go wrong?

Covid Crisis Management: Donald Trump



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Why did it start to go wrong?

Covid Crisis Management: Joe Biden



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Why did it start to go wrong?

Ecological Disaster: Scott Morrison



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Why did it start to go wrong?

Wartime Leader: Volodymyr Zelenskyy



- What did they do/use to communicate their message?
- What went well?
- What went badly?
- Has Zelenskyy made any major communications mistakes?

Let's have a go...

In the final part of the session, I'd like you to focus on these two problems. Imagine you are either the campaign manager, or a senior staffer working for an embattled candidate/leader. How would you respond? What first comes to mind? What would you absolutely NOT do?

There's no right or wrong answer.....

Problem 5

- Your candidate is running for President of France. They're an “outsider” who is closing in on a right-wing “establishment” candidate. 48hrs before voters go to the polls, a whole load of emails from within your campaign team are stolen and published online.
- Newspapers pick up on an email sent by your campaign manager to his team. In it, they describe your opponent's conservative supporters as “*bigoted*” and “*racist scum*”. Your opponent has beaten you to a response. They have gone on national television and called you “*elitist*” for your disdain for the “*ordinary people*” of France.
- You have 5 minutes before your candidate goes on national radio to respond. What do you do?

Problem 6

- Voters are going to the polls tomorrow and the race is close. Your candidate is a junior member of the shadow cabinet caught on “hot mic” (live microphone) saying to a friend: *“The sad fact is [our party] is never going to win the election on Thursday. [Our leader] is awful, and we’ve got no good policies worth voting for. I’m surprised we’re polling this high. Who knew the electorate are this insane to want [party leader] in Downing Street?”*
- An audio recording of this conversation has been leaked on the Mail Online and Guido Fawkes websites.
- Journalists are ringing your phone to ask for a response.