

A CENTURY OF AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION: From 1901 to 2001

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Abstract

A century ago, candidates for political office would perform stump speeches and town-hall meetings as they travelled around their electorates. They relied on live performances and printed information to get their message across. Their expenditure was modest and their campaigns conducted by an army of party members. Today, electioneering is big business. The two major parties spend over \$30 million, hire a host of professionals and focus on market research, television advertising, direct-mail and new technology. For some commentators, this transition represents a sad departure from earlier more 'honourable' forms of political communication such as face-to-face interaction, printed information and public meetings. This article traces the history of Australian electioneering between 1901 to 2001 by identifying key events, policies and changes in media and communications.

Introduction

For many of today's commentators, the early period of Australian electioneering is viewed as a golden age. Ian Ward argues that political information in this era was print-based, densely-worded and tried to persuade voters by providing them with 'factual information' (Ward 1995, p. 181). Whereas, today, 'with television, "style replaces substance" and image and personality become more important than ideas and argument' (Ward 1995, p. 181). Dean Jaensch laments that 'candidates today use electronic means to "hit" the voters, rather than the rigors of having to face real people in the local hall, and actually interact with them'. Jaensch argues that modern election campaigns 'have become very sanitised, even antiseptic—certainly distant from any face-to-face contact with the voters' (Jaensch 2001, p. 18).

It is true that electioneering methods have changed dramatically from the days of stump speeches, town-hall meetings and handbills. This article seeks to document some of the key changes. It is clearly not possible to outline all of the political, social, economic, legal and technological changes that have occurred over the past century. This paper therefore highlights the author's view of key events, policies and changes in media and communications (see Table 1). It is, therefore, highly selective. Nevertheless, there is significant value in taking such a broad approach in the Australian context.

Table 1: Key events in Australian electioneering history, 1901-2001.

Year	Political	Media/Technology	Policy/legislation/law	Advertising
1901	Federation	21 daily newspapers owned by 17 different owners.		
1902			Universal adult franchise for British subjects over 21 years.	
1923		Radio broadcasting commences.		
1924			Introduction of compulsory voting.	
1925				<i>S.M. Bruce</i> (film)
1942			<i>Broadcasting Act 1942</i>	
1949	Menzies leads Liberal-National Coalition to victory			<i>John Henry Austral</i> (radio)
1956		Introduction of television.		
1972	Whitlam leads ALP to victory after 23 years of Coalition government			<i>'It's Time'</i> (TV)
1973			Voting age lowered to 18 years.	
1975	Sacking of the Whitlam Government	Arrival of colour television.		<i>Turn on the Lights</i> (TV)
1980			ALP and Democrats protest to the High Court about Liberal Party advertising.	<i>Wealth-tax</i> (print & TV)
1982		First major use of direct mail.		
1983	Hawke leads ALP to victory		JSCER recommends truth in political advertising regulation.	
1984			Introduction of public funding.	
1991			<i>Political Broadcasts and Political Disclosures Act 1991.</i>	
1992			<i>Australian Capital Television v. Commonwealth</i> (1992).	
1993				Anti-GST ads (TV & print)
1995			Rate of public funding increased.	
1996	Howard leads Coalition to victory after 13 years of ALP government	First use of the Internet during an election campaign.		<i>'Bolt in'</i> (TV)
1998		10 newspapers owned by 4 owners.		
2001		First use of an Internet election advertisement.		

The need for a broad, historical overview stems from a major gap in the Australian literature. When Australian academics have paid attention to political communication in election campaigns they have tended to write case-studies of specific campaigns (for example, Mayer 1973; Costar and Hughes 1983; Bean, et al 1990; Bean et al. 1997). Few studies have addressed the role of political communication and these have tended to focus on only one specific aspect; such as *political advertising* (Young 2003a; Young 2002; Ward 1999; O'Neil and Mills 1986; Ward 1982; Braund 1978), *the Internet* (Young 2003b forthcoming), *polling* (Mills 1999) or *The Great Debate* (Ward and Walsh 1999). This paper is the first attempt to write a more comprehensive, general and historical account of political communication methods used in Australian elections. It draws together knowledge about specific eras from the sources and research available and places them in a chronological framework to show how the political communication methods used by Australian politicians during elections, have changed.

The '(g)olden' days of electioneering - 1901-48

In 1901, when Australia had a population of 3.7 million, individual electorates contained only a few thousand, or even a few hundred, electors (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2000). Electioneering was dominated by live performances including town-hall meetings and stump speeches, and by printed media such as posters, leaflets, newspaper advertisements and handbills (See Figure 1).

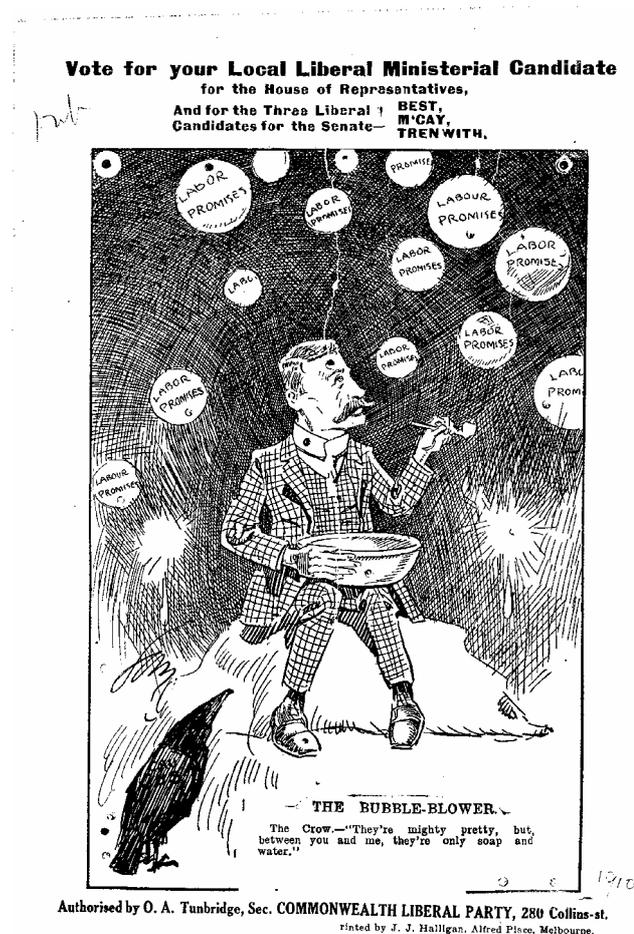


Figure 1: Early political handbill, 'Bubbles', the Commonwealth Liberal Party, 1910 (from the Ephemera Collection of the National Library of Australia).

As Jaensch points out that, at the time, travel was ‘inescapable’ because it was ‘the only way to canvass’ (Jaensch 2001). During 1901, the Free Trade party leader, George Reid, ‘travelled to all states except WA, gave major addresses at 40 meetings, travelled by train and steamer and a buggy drawn by two horses, and spoke at every possible place he passed through’ (Jaensch 2001). 1901 also signalled the birth of the policy speech when one of the contenders for the prime ministership that year gave a speech. (Subsequently, the Policy Speech became an essential feature of the campaign. It came to signal the formal start of the campaign and would dominate the news pages the following day).

In these early years, the formal campaign period was usually preceded by only one month's preparation and campaigns were ‘conducted on a decentralised basis by armies of party members’ (Hughes 1992, p. 88). Campaign expenditure was modest and most money was raised and spent locally in each constituency. Newspapers were the only mass media available but there were twenty-one daily capital city newspapers owned by seventeen independent owners and the volume of political content was high. The press ‘contained pages of reports of public meetings held all over the new nation, from big gatherings in the cities to the parish pump meetings in the small towns in the Outback’ (Jaensch 2001). Both individual candidates and political parties placed print advertisements in newspapers. At first, these were words-only but later included drawings and photographs and began to look very similar to the commercial advertising published in newspapers.

By the 1920s, new options for advertising were opening up. Cinema advertisements began to be used in campaigns, but only infrequently.¹ Most campaigns would produce one or two cinema advertisements of between three to ten minutes in length. One of the oldest surviving of these cinema advertisements is a 1925 silent film advertisement for the conservative government of Stanley Melbourne Bruce (Figure 2).



Figure 2: National Party cinema advertisement, ‘S. M. Bruce’, 1925 (from the author’s collection).

Radio broadcasting began in Australia in 1923. In these early days, it was still accorded mystic properties including ‘the ability to contact the dead and cure cancer’ (Miller 1997, p. 49). But by the end of the 1930s, radio was clearly established in Australian homes and two out of every three dwellings had a set (Miller 1997, p. 51). Radio quickly became a major source of political news. The first transmission of Parliament occurred in 1924, and in the 1930s and 1940s, live radio would carry Policy Speeches at peak listening time. But by the 1940s, party managers and journalists noted that attendance at political meetings had fallen off. They attributed this decline to the mainstream use of radio (Hughes 1992, p. 93).

In an attempt to regulate the new media, in 1942, Calwell introduced the *Broadcasting Act*. Part of this Act instituted a ‘blackout’ of electoral broadcasts in the last few days of a campaign. Under this rule, radio (and later, television) stations were forbidden to broadcast any electoral matter between the last Wednesday midnight of a campaign and polling day. Stephen Mills (1986, p. 178) notes that the blackout ‘supposedly prevented candidates from releasing a scandalous allegation or scare story which would deceive the voters and secure some unfair advantage’.

The *Broadcasting Act* also placed other explicit restrictions on electoral broadcasts: their sponsors had to be named and they could not to be in dramatic form (Ward 1999, p. 318). Apparently, this prohibition on the use of dramatic form ‘was prompted by offence taken to a wartime anti-Labor 1940 radio ad in which an actor with a German accent (who was taken to be Adolf Hitler) urged Australian voters to assist his cause by voting for the ALP’ (Ward 1999, p. 318).

Along with all of these new concerns about how to restrict the power of broadcasting and prevent it from corrupting the political process, older methods of political communication—such as the political ‘button’—were still in use (Figure 3). However, enterprising candidates made use of new technology in conjunction with older methods. In Figure 4, a candidate in NSW gives the stump speech a modern twist. Instead of standing on a soapbox or stump, he uses a microphone to broadcast to a small crowd of spectators from the back of a ute.

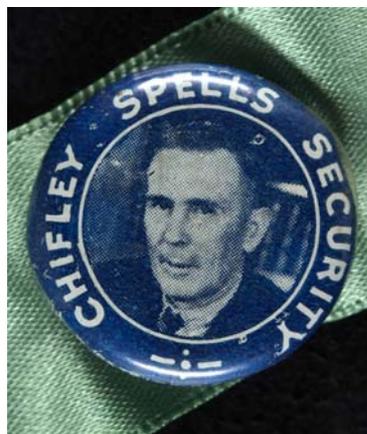


Figure 3: ‘Chifley spells security’ election button from the 1940s (precise date unknown) (from the Ephemera Collection of the National Library of Australia).



Figure 4: Mr Leslie Haylen campaigning at Campsie, NSW (date unknown) from the Pictorial Collection of the National Library of Australia.

A unique campaign foretells the future: 1949-71

Colin A. Hughes points out that the 1949 Liberal election campaign was ‘unusually well funded’ by business interests in Australia and London who wanted to ‘get rid of an ALP government bent on socialist experiments’ (Hughes 1992, p. 92). The Liberals were able to hire Sim Rubensohn (of ad-agency Hansen-Rubensohn) to design their advertisements. Rubensohn usually worked for the ALP but split from them in 1947 in protest at their bank nationalisation plan. (He was later re-employed by the ALP and went on to handle their advertising for several decades).

Rubensohn advised the Liberal Party to buy air-time to run an eighteen month long series of fifteen minute broadcasts using the format of the then-popular weekly radio serial. In these advertisements, the fictional character 'John Henry Austral' denounced Labor's socialism. Individual episodes would deal with the complaints of women about the time wasted waiting in queues to shop for still-rationed food, or with the difficulties ordinary Australians faced in saving for a home. Ian Ward explains that John Henry's part was written as a neighbourly, wise and ‘independent commentator’ who would ‘castigate Labor's bureaucratic and socialist policies, and reveal the hidden influence of communism’ at every opportunity (Ward 1999).

Between April 1947 and December 1948, John Henry Austral spoke to voters twice weekly on more than eighty commercial stations around Australia. There were 200 episodes spanning a twenty month season prior to the election. It was an extremely expensive campaign which some estimate to have cost a million pounds (Mills 1986, p. 92).

The John Henry Austral campaign marked a major turning point in electioneering. Mills (1986, p. 212) notes that it made effective use of the only electronic medium available at the time through ‘saturation of time and imaginative dramatisation of political material’. It picked up on a dominant cultural form—the radio serial—at a time when it was ingrained in Australian life. Overall, this was an early prototype of the modern campaign whose hallmark is ‘a centralised and disciplined campaign of long-term electronic advertising’ (Mills 1986, p. 212).

However, despite the extensive use of radio during the 1949 campaign, other media also aided Menzies’ electoral victory. Damaging charges of socialism-Communism were made against the ALP in newspaper advertisements which relied on emotive images to alarm voters (Figure 5).

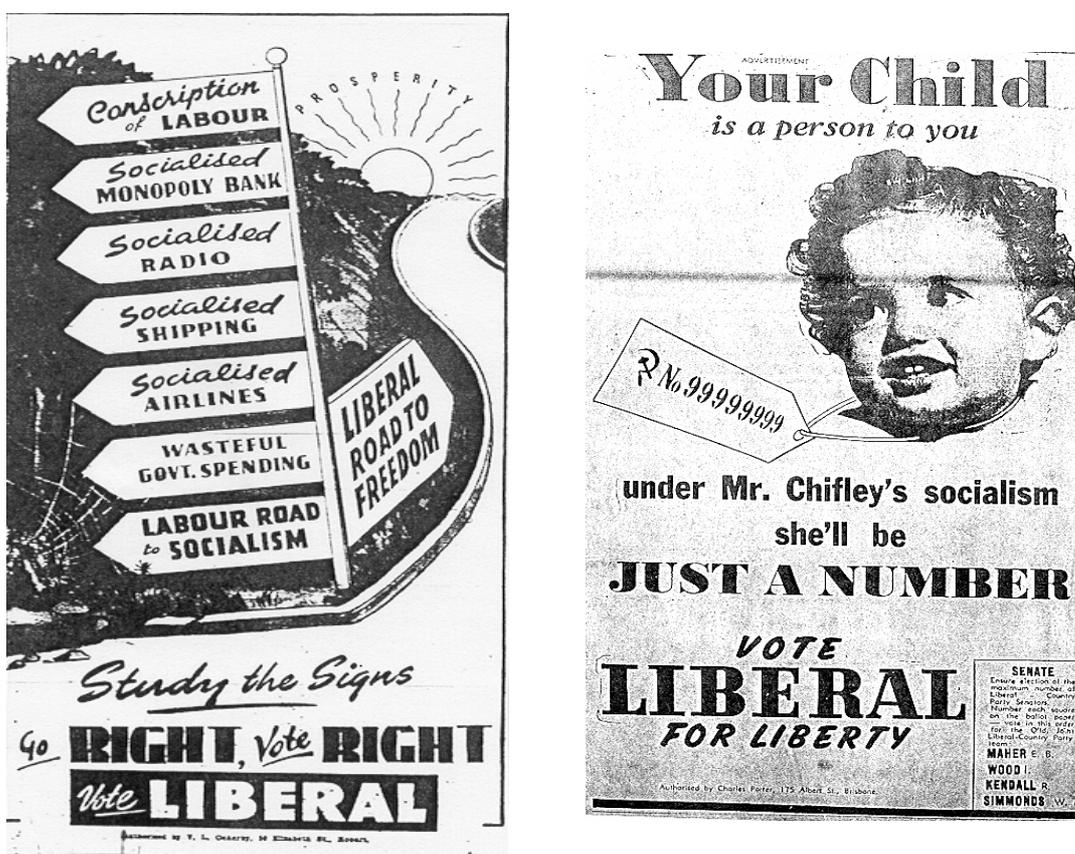


Figure 5: Liberal Party newspaper advertisements from 1949 (from the Author’s collection).

After their resounding victory in 1949, the Coalition dominated federal politics for the next twenty-three years. But the John Henry Austral campaign failed to become the norm and campaigns returned to a more conventional form during the 1950s. In particular, the extravagance of the John Henry Austral campaign was a real exception. Ten years later, in 1958, the major parties were spending only about half that amount (or 500,000 pounds) on campaigning. This was still a modest sum but the rise of television was about to change the way parties’ raised and spent their funds.

Television was introduced in Australia in 1956. During the 1958 election campaign, television stations carried 10.5 hours of party political broadcasts. But by the 1963 election, there were 123 hours of political telecasts during the campaign (Mills 1986, p. 184). In earlier years, money had been collected and spent locally on efforts by party members. Now it began to be gathered more centrally and directed instead towards advertising agents. The expense of TV was a driving force in this move to professionalisation.

It's Time for the rise of TV - 1972-83

Initially, the early political telecasts were usually of the dull 'talking head' variety which used a sole speaker to talk directly to camera. But in the early 1970s, the ALP began to imitate American techniques in television advertising. During the 1972 federal election, the Party unveiled the 'It's Time' campaign (Figure 6).

The famous ALP television advertisements featured well-known celebrities such as Little Pattie, Bobby Limb, Bert Newton and Jack Thompson, singing the 'It's Time' theme song. The ads varied from thirty seconds to two minutes and there was a colour version made for theatres and drive-ins. Mills (1986, p. 97) notes about these advertisements that;

not a single policy is hinted at. not a single mention of Vietnam. not a single solid clue is given about the future of Australia... It's Time for what? No specific answer is given: indeed the slogan's ambiguity was intentional according to Paul Jones who invented it: 'You say 'It's Time' and they'll fill in what it's time for... whatever is important to the individual. There's nothing to disagree with. It's the perfect statement'.



Figure 6: Australian Labor Party television advertisement, 'It's Time', 1972 (Author's collection).

At the time, journalist Laurie Oakes described 1972 as the year of the 'soft-sell' campaign—a time when Australia caught up to the US and Britain in electioneering techniques and scientific methods. He declared the campaign had 'been more about the presentation of issues than issues themselves, of style and technique rather than substance' (Oakes 1972, p. 5).²

The preliminary research behind the 'It's Time' advertisements is revealing. The market research (performed by Spectrum International) found that voters did not feel connected to Labor leader Gough Whitlam: they found him cold and distant (Australian Labor Party 1972). 'It's Time' was therefore not only about celebrity and glamour, but was also a promotional vehicle for Whitlam. It included shots of him in early photographs as a schoolboy, a rower, a barrister and with Margaret on his wedding day. It was no coincidence that the ad ended with a shot of Whitlam with his wife. Including Mrs Whitlam was, as the market research recommended, meant to show that Whitlam was 'not a political automat, but has a wife and family' (Australian Labor Party 1972).

'It's Time' reflected a re-learning of two of the hallmarks of the John Henry Austral campaign—long term advertising and disciplined centralisation. Labor had appointed a full-time campaign director a year before the campaign began and the campaign started twenty-one months before polling day. But this was the first time television commercials had been made the centrepiece of the campaign. It was also the first campaign to be heavily based on market research—including surveys which generated the 'It's Time' slogan.

Following the success of 'It's Time', election campaigns became more centralised, there was greater professionalisation, greater reliance on polling and advertising professionals, a substantive focus on market research, on television and on learning from overseas (particularly, from the US). 'It's Time' heralded a new era of longer campaigns and higher levels of expenditure.

One of the key changes it encouraged was centralisation. During the 1972 campaign, the federal Liberal Party had played no part in the planning of the national publicity or advertising campaign—this was left to the state branches of the party and even to local candidates. Liberal state offices often worked with different advertising agents in each state. As a result, 'campaign methods and issues varied greatly from state to state' (Oakes & Solomon 1973, p. 124). It was not until late 1973, spurred on by their loss, that the Liberals appointed a national advertising agency.³

Following their electoral success in 1972, the ALP attempted a program of radical social change, but in 1975, the Whitlam government was dismissed, precipitating a complex constitutional crisis. The double dissolution which followed the dismissal set a record for televised political advertising; 294 hours during the three week campaign (Mills 1986, p. 184). The Liberal campaign centred on two television advertisements (the 'Three Dark Years' and 'Turn on the Lights') produced by the Masius advertising agency. These advertisements were dubbed by Mills (1986, p. 100) as 'among the finest, most inventive and powerful ever produced in Australia'. They were highly targeted towards swinging voters and a post-election report by the Liberal's pollster noted about their success, that the content of the advertisements was 'nowhere near as important [to swinging voters] as the emotive tone and form' of them (Mills 1986, p. 158).

This lesson about the impact of emotive messages was to help the Liberals again in 1980. Initially, the Liberal campaign had been poorly organised and fragmented. But in the last week, the Liberals ran a series of wealth tax advertisements which accused

the ALP of planning a tax on wealth which would really attack 'unwealthy' people who owned modest homes. The wealth-tax advertisements were highly targeted to homeowners in the big city marginal electorates. Both ALP and Liberal politicians believed that these advertisements were responsible for swinging the electorate back to the Liberals in the last week of the campaign (Mills 1986, p. 153).

The Labor Party complained that the 'wealth tax' advertisements were false and deceptive and had cost them victory. Following the election (along with a Democrat candidate upset by another piece of Liberal advertising which claimed that a vote for him was a vote for the ALP), they protested to the High Court, under a provision of the Electoral Act. Both cases were thrown out. The Court said the provision 'was aimed at attempts to mislead voters about the process of actually casting their vote—such as wrong information about the hours of polling—rather than of deciding for whom to vote' (Mills 1986, p. 175).

In 1983, when the ALP was in government, this issue of truth in political advertising was picked up by the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform (JSCER) resulting in an amendment to the *Commonwealth Electoral Act* (section 329(2)) which outlawed 'untrue, misleading and deceptive' electoral advertising. Punishments for electoral dishonesty included large fines and strict penalties. However, MPs 'began to have second thoughts once the implications of the new law sank in' (Mills 1986, p. 175). Media companies claimed they would have to seek legal advice about every ad during a campaign at great cost. The law allowed any candidate to seek an injunction against allegedly untrue and misleading advertisements thus opening 'the doors for nuisance complaints by minor Party candidates and routine obstructionism by the major Parties'. Critics also pointed to the broader philosophical difficulties with defining the nature of political 'truth' (Mills 1986, p. 177).

In its second report in 1984, the Joint Select Committee on Electoral Reform (1984, pp. 26-7) concluded that it was not possible to legislate for electoral honesty:

Political advertising differs from other forms of advertising in that it promotes intangibles, ideas, policies and images... [T]he Committee concludes that even though fair advertising is desirable it is not possible to control political advertising by legislation...

Parliament thus decided to scrap efforts at legislating for electoral honesty and leave the decision about the truth or falsehood of advertised claims up to the electors. This situation still applies today.

During the 1980s, political parties began to place greater emphasis on new election technologies such as computers, focus groups and direct mail.⁴ In 1982, the NSW Liberals invited two American direct-mail specialists to help them send fund-raising letters to residents in Liberal-held electorates. Although they had initially been sceptical, the Liberal leaders were astounded by the results; 42,000 non-members sent money in response to the direct-mail letters (Mills 1986, p. 195).

As these new methods of electioneering took off, some of the older methods began to decline. Originally, no election campaign would begin without the Policy Speech in front of the party faithful. But in 1983, Hawke's policy launch at the Sydney Opera

House was edited for free-to-air television and excerpts were included in paid political advertisements. This new style launch (copied by the Liberals in 1984) signalled the death of the old policy speech. From now on, policy launches would be about receiving maximum favourable coverage on free media rather than elaborating policies in front of the party faithful.

The era of public money and political marketing - 1984-2001

By 1984, the ALP and Liberal Parties were spending \$12 million on their campaigns, including \$5.7 million on television and radio broadcasting. In response to this massive expenditure, the Hawke government introduced public funding of election campaigns. Under this scheme, taxpayer funding is used to reimburse candidates for their campaigning expenses.⁵

Public funding legislation was supposed to address the extravagant costs of campaigning but it did nothing to limit those costs. It set no legislative restrictions upon either the volume of advertising or the amount that the parties could spend purchasing political advertising. As a result, the parties soon found that the rate of public funding was not keeping up with their desire to purchase television advertising. In 1990, for example, the ALP spent seventy per cent of its media budget on television (Hughes 1992, p. 103), but was only able to recoup \$5.2 million of its total campaign costs from public funding, leaving the Party with a debt of \$7 million (Ward 1995, p. 222).

In a more drastic move, in 1991, the ALP government introduced the *Political Broadcasts and Political Disclosures Act*. This legislation prohibited political advertising on commercial television and radio during state and federal election campaigns, and provided instead for blocks of free air time to be allocated between the parties based on their share of the primary vote at the previous election.

The Act was 'vigorously opposed', 'widely painted as an undemocratic restriction on free speech' and 'a cynical attempt to [boost the Labor Party's] own flagging electoral and financial position' (Ward 1995, p. 192). Once in place, the legislation was promptly challenged before the full bench of the High Court of Australia. In August 1992, in the case *Australian Capital Television Pty Ltd. v Commonwealth*, the High Court ruled that the amended law was constitutionally invalid (See Mason 1992; Tucker 1994). This ruling guaranteed that paid televised advertising would remain a permanent central feature of Australian election campaigns.

During the 1993 federal election, the Liberal Party ran on a program of economic reform called *Fightback!* which included the introduction of a broad based consumption tax—the Goods and Services Tax (GST). The GST allowed the ALP an easy target and Labor ran a series of anti-GST advertisements which focused on people's fears about paying increased prices. Conventional wisdom holds that the GST was central to the Liberal's loss of what should have been the 'unloseable' election. The ALP's advertising seemed to play a role in this with post-election polls showing that concern over the GST more than doubled during the election campaign (Bennett 1996, p. 165).

By now, the role of television advertising as the central focus of election campaigns had been guaranteed both by the High Court's ruling and by perceptions of the proven

worth of advertising used in the 1980 and 1993 elections. However, the rate of public funding was still failing to cover television advertising costs so in 1995, legislation was introduced to raise the rate of public funding. Between the 1993 and 1996 elections, public funding rose by \$17 million (or fifty-four per cent) allowing the parties to increase their spending on television advertising by \$5.8 million (or thirty-eight per cent) (Tucker & Young 2001, p. 64).

Campaigns were now focussed on expensive TV advertising, pollsters, advertising agents and, underlying all of this, the principles of political marketing. The Liberal Party's search for a candidate for the 1995 Canberra by-election provided a stark example of the extent to which political marketing now dominated their campaigning:

According to poll research, the candidate should be in his/her thirties, be married with children, be active in community affairs, be an employee, and be a resident of the Tuggeranong Valley... Brendon Smyth was the only candidate of five who fitted this profile, and although he finished third in the preselection ballot, the Party's management committee intervened to ensure that he was nominated...' (Bennett 1996, p. 98).

For the 1996 election campaign, the Liberal Party dumped their former advertising agency and instead used an in-house campaign team made up of specialists. The most striking feature of the Liberal campaign was its emphasis on negative advertising. The campaign team had gone through political advertisements from the last twenty-five years to try and find out what made advertisements work. Their conclusion was that being 'always negative and stressing the risk of voting for the opposition - was the only way to go' (Williams 1997, p. 159).

The Liberals' strongest ad was the 'Bolt In' ad which included footage of a smirking Prime Minister Keating saying that the ALP was going to 'bolt [it] in' (i.e. win the election easily). The Liberal Party campaign team ordered the advertisements to 'be screened in ascending order of nastiness, with [this] ugliest assassination reserved for the final blitz' (Williams 1997, p. 206). For many commentators, this represented a worrying shift towards negative advertisements which focus on attacking the character of one's opponent rather than the quality of his/her policies (see for example, Beresford 1998).

By 1996, electioneering had become highly centralised, professionalised and expensive. Table 2 shows how the parties spent over \$30 million that year on polling, research, broadcasting, publishing and direct mail. Significantly, due to the rise in public funding rates in 1995, the parties were reimbursed ninety-three per cent of these costs from taxpayer funding (Australian Electoral Commission 1996).

Table 2: Election expenditure during the 1996 federal election (From AEC, 1996).

Party	Broadcast -ing	Publish -ing	Display	Direct Mail	Research	Other	Total
Labor	9,037,759	840,223	6,444	1,981,931	751,490	1,188,245	13,799,650
Coalition	6,652,777	2,723,082	58,298	2,929,342	1,296,122	3,032,473	16,692,096

1996 was also notable because it was the first time both major parties used Internet websites for campaigning. The ALP's website received 11,000 hits a day during the 1996 campaign. By 1998, all ALP policies were being released on the Internet simultaneous to their release to the media and the ALP website was providing games and online chats with local MPs. Use of the Internet as a political communication tool seems to be on the rise. Some commentators even predict that 'in the next ten years, the Internet will become the central vehicle for political campaigns' in Australia (Miller 2001).

Extreme optimism about the Internet as a political medium is reminiscent of how, in the 1950s, many commentators predicted that television would revolutionise politics and create a more responsive democracy. Later, many of these commentators were disappointed (Mickelson 1989). However, the Internet seems to present a better opportunity to revive public participation. Unlike television, it is fast, inexpensive, flexible, personalised and interactive. Television is mainly controlled by commercial broadcasters who impose limits on the amount of political content they will show. In contrast, political parties and other political actors are in total control of their own Internet websites and can include a large volume of political content at relatively little cost. The Internet does provide the opportunity to distribute information and to communicate directly with citizens. It has interactive features which could be used to encourage greater participation. This suggests that the Internet does have some potential to enrich our political system. However, the unfulfilled potential of television teaches us that technology by itself will not automatically change the political system for the better. Everything depends upon how it is used *in practice* (Young 2003b).

While the use of new technology in campaigning such as the Internet, is receiving increasing attention, many of the older forms of political communication are still around. Even in this era of high technology, both major parties still spend up to twenty per cent of their campaign budgets on publishing. Politicians and their advisers see newspapers as an effective medium for reaching important voter groups such as split-ticket voters, swing voters, opinion leaders, elites and the elderly (Kinsey 1999, p. 119). Radio also remains an important medium. Talkback radio has become a particular favourite of party leaders, while appearances on FM radio are seen as an important way of appealing to young voters who can be difficult to reach through other media.

During the 2001 election campaign, there was a growing concern about the increasing distance between citizens and their representatives. Political communication methods were pinpointed as one of the factors which had brought about this 'crisis of representation'. Both of the major political party leaders were criticised for running very stage-managed campaigns in 2001. John Howard was criticised for conducting only three 'highly choreographed' street-walks where he went out to shopping malls accompanied by TV cameras and numerous aides. But Howard accused Kim Beazley of going through the entire campaign without meeting any 'real people' (Crabb 2001, p. 6).

The past and the future: 2001 and beyond

Contrary to assumptions, political information in the early years of campaigning did not always try to persuade voters by providing them with densely-worded 'factual

information'. The two examples of advertisements provided in this article (Figure 5) show that some print advertisements relied on images and on appeals to the gut emotions of threat and fear, rather than persuading through textual argument. Along with the John Henry Austral radio campaign and the 1940 anti-Labor (Hitler) radio advertisements, these print ads also demonstrate that negative campaigning is not new.

'Presidential-style' politics is not a recent phenomenon either. Early cinema advertisements (such as the 1925 S. M. Bruce ad) were often focussed entirely on the party leader and this 'personalisation' was not confined to electronic media. During the Menzies era, there were scores of print advertisements in newspapers which focused exclusively on Menzies. One from the *Mercury* in 1949 is simply a picture of Menzies face with the caption 'He's here!'. As we have also seen, buttons and handbills (Figures 1 and 3) often focussed on the party leader.

There never was a 'golden era' of electioneering. Australian elections have always been fiercely combative, emotive and full of imagery. Only the tools of competition have changed — becoming more sophisticated, more professional and thus, seemingly more insidious. This is not to say that all is well with modern electioneering. Rather, that some of our concerns have been misplaced because they were based on idealising the past and on assumptions about the ideal voter.

In the traditional view, the ideal voter attends meetings, asks questions, reads policy papers and party manifestos and makes an informed choice of candidates by weighing up the pros and cons of each. In this view, the ideal forms of political communication are personal contact or printed information. But the ideal voter is a fiction. Only two per cent of Australians have ever helped a political candidate or attended a political meeting (McAllister 1998:18). Very few would read policy papers or party manifestos. Indeed, the declining circulation of newspapers shows that many do not even want to read about politics in newspapers anymore. Instead, two-thirds of Australians look to television as their main source of news and information (FACTS 1994, p. 2). And, many view television as 'a more reliable and credible source of information than either radio or newspapers' (Ward 1995, p. 208).

As this paper has shown, lies, emotive claims and negativity can (and have) been made in print and undoubtedly, through personal contact as well. Today, Australia has a population of nineteen million. Ninety-nine per cent own television sets and over fifty per cent have access to the Internet. Politicians are opting for the methods which allow them to reach the most number of voters at once; television, direct mail and the Internet. Rather than seeing these as necessarily 'evil' forms of political communication, we need to monitor how media such as TV and the Internet are used in Australian election campaigns and evaluate what impact this has on the nature of political discourse. This is important because it is no longer realistic to pine for a return to a golden age of print and limited face-to-face interaction. While we should appreciate the colour and interactivity of earlier years (and their contrast with modern campaigns), we also need to go beyond nostalgia in order to recognise and encourage other types of political participation which are appropriate for the Twenty-First Century.

¹ By the 1940s, cinema proprietors were only allowing political advertisements to be screened in the last two weeks of a campaign (Mills 1986, p. 138).

² Yet, Oakes also acknowledged that 'Labor's advertising.. [has] for the most part, concentrated on the party's plans for Government action in fields such as health, education, social welfare, transport, urban development and decentralisation' (Oakes 1972, p. 5).

³ By 1975, Michelle Grattan noted that their campaigns were run by a 'formidable national election organization which ran with military precision'. (Grattan 1977, p. 112)

⁴ Note that direct mail was not entirely new. Examples of letters to constituents from MPs soliciting their vote can be found from as far back as 1917. However, what was new was the type of direct mail which was centrally co-ordinated, produced based on professional advice and mass circulated through targeted letter box campaigns.

⁵ To qualify for public election funding, a candidate must obtain four per cent of the first preference vote. The number of first preference votes obtained is then multiplied by the rate of payment.

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