

Then: Political Campaigns

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, you will focus on the agility that has always been needed to run a political campaign. Successful politicians have always used the tools at their disposal to reach potential voters. While using available tools has always been required for successful campaigns, the tools at hand have changed. Whether the most advanced technologies for reaching potential voters was a bullhorn/microphone, newspaper, radio, television or the internet, successful politicians adapt to, and use, whatever they can to reach voters. Specifically, this lesson will cover:

1. Political Campaigns
 - a. William McKinley
 - b. Harry Truman



BEFORE YOU START

How have politicians adapted to new tactics in order to communicate?

1. Political Campaigns

Today, politicians have the advantage of being able to use communication technologies like television and the internet to get their messages directly to voters. In the past, however, some U.S. politicians had to find creative ways to reach the American people with the technology they had available.

1a. William McKinley

William McKinley is an example of a politician who connected with voters in an informal setting—so much so, in fact, that he ran his presidential campaign from his front porch! He wanted to stay home to care for his ill wife rather than go on the campaign trail, so he adapted to his situation by inviting Americans to visit his home in Ohio to hear about his vision for the country. It was a clever example of agility and problem solving. Almost 750,000 people stopped by McKinley's porch to meet the candidate in 1896, and ultimately he won the presidency with this unconventional communication style (Morgan, 2001).

1b. Harry Truman

Another presidential candidate who applied an agile mindset and adapted to the challenges of reaching Americans to share his ideas was Harry Truman. He took his family on a train tour of the United States in 1948 to meet as many Americans as he possibly could in what is now known as his “whistle-stop campaign.”

Truman made brief stops and speeches at dozens of railway stations around the country (Missouri State Archives, 2002).

Although more advanced travel and communication technologies were available at the time, Truman's train campaign helped emphasize his connection to the American people. He used the tour as an opportunity to share a message that he was the candidate who best understood where voters were coming from and, therefore, could best lead the country.



BIG IDEA

In both of these examples, we see presidential candidates who understood the importance of their message reaching individual Americans. They thought about available communication and travel technologies, and they were strategic about which ones they decided to use.

In the next lesson, we'll examine one of the most important methods presidents have of communicating with the public once they're elected: the speech.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned about how two politicians – **William McKinley** and **Harry Truman** – used agility to make smart choices about how to communicate with voters during their respective **political campaigns**. Although neither used the most advanced technology available, they thought creatively and strategically about how best to use the communication and travel technologies that existed.

Best of luck in your learning!

Source: Strategic Education, Inc. 2020. Learn from the Past, Prepare for the Future.

REFERENCES

Morgan, H. Wayne. (2001, February 18). *The View from the Front Porch: William McKinley and the Campaign of 1896*. Rutherford B. Hayes Presidential Library and Museums. www.rbhayes.org/hayes/the-view-from-the-front-porch-william-mckinley-and-the-campaign-of-1896

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