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PARTY CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATIONS

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Election campaign communications—the most visible public manifestation of an electoral contest—paradoxically remain somewhat obscured from academic analysis. This is because the central element of a communications project, its strategic rationale, remains tightly held among the rival elite campaign professionals. We can, however, by working backwards from the observed communications output, infer many of the strategic considerations that went into the design of the campaigns. Applying this method to communications by the two major parties in the 2019 election campaign helps explain the unexpected Coalition victory.¹

Analysis of Liberal and Labor communications—especially television advertising and direct voter contact—suggests the parties adopted fundamentally different strategic approaches. To draw on international frameworks for the analysis of campaign communications (for example, Trent and Friedenbergh 2004), we can say Labor selected a challenger-style, policy-centred communications strategy, incorporating a largely positive and broad-based message of change. The Liberals—content with a narrower electoral victory—opted for a fiercely negative style, contrasting the risk of Labor and the unpopularity of Opposition leader Bill Shorten

¹ The author expresses his gratitude to representatives of both major party campaigns for their input. All judgements remain the responsibility of the author.

with its own, largely policy-free agenda, emphasising incumbency and leadership. As a result, the campaign was fought over the promises and leadership of the Opposition rather than the record and prospects of the Coalition Government.

It also seems clear that the Liberals executed their strategy with greater consistency and impact than did Labor. Liberal ads carried the message that Prime Minister Scott Morrison had stabilised a divided government and delivered a surplus Budget with imminent tax cuts, while also highlighting the risk posed by Labor to the economy and to families, small businesses and pensioners. Labor's extensive package of spending promises proved unfocused and unwieldy and its key revenue initiatives fatally vulnerable to scaremongering and exaggeration, while its attack on the government misfired.

Strategic approaches

For campaign managers, strategy is defined as the path to electoral success (Mills 2014). Different campaign organisations identify different goals: in the 2019 campaign, the Coalition and the Labor Party adopted office-seeking strategies, contesting every seat in both chambers of parliament and campaigning in every medium to form government; the Greens and Independent candidates pursued seat-winning strategies; activist groups such as GetUp! and the ACTU aimed to defeat certain incumbents; Clive Palmer's big-spending populism aimed to defeat the ALP.

Strategic-level choices are ultimately determined by each party's campaign director, supported by an elite assemblage drawn from the parliamentary wing, federal and State branch head offices and external experts in market research, advertising, digital media and the like. Their choices are driven by collective professional judgement, informed by market research and other data about the relative and changing strengths and weaknesses of the campaign contestants. In 2019, the Liberals' campaign director was the party's federal director, Andrew Hirst; Labor's was its national secretary, Noah Carroll (Williams 2019a; Patrick 2019).

The two teams adopted starkly different strategies. Labor entered the election year with a proven strategy of contrasting the ‘cuts and chaos’ under a disunited Coalition Government with their own political stability, well-signalled revenue measures and a promised raft of welfare and other initiatives. Labor’s expectation—supported by polling and key by-election results—was for potentially substantial electoral gains in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. The Liberals were more parsimonious. Never aiming for a big win, they sought to protect all their existing seats and win a targeted handful of Labor and Independent seats. After the tumultuous cycle of leadership change and internal division, this strategy depended on Morrison stabilising the government, silencing internal critics, hiding vulnerable ministers in ‘witness protection’ (away from media scrutiny) and setting up a favourable ‘one on one’ leadership contrast of Morrison with Shorten. A pre-election Budget promising a return to surplus and tax cuts would also allow a fierce attack on Labor’s supposedly unaffordable policy agenda.

Campaign managers can select from a repertoire of strategic designs, refined in previous electoral contests and adapted to current requirements in ways most likely to persuade target voters (Trent and Friedenber**g** 2004: 81; Mills 2014: 178–79). Available designs include incumbency or challenger campaigns (Trent and Friedenber**g** 2004: 80–111), positive or negative campaigns (Nai 2018) and leader-centred or policy-centred campaigns. In their study of campaign communications in the US electoral context, Trent and Friedenber**g** (2004) provide a checklist of communications typically associated with the challenger and incumbency strategies (Table 23.1). Labor’s communications output—its attack on the government, its optimism and moderate tone, its change orientation and Shorten’s careful delegation of attack lines to key shadow ministers—represents a good fit with many of the challenger criteria (shown in bold in Table 23.1). The incumbency checklist likewise elucidates several aspects of the Liberals’ campaign (also shown in bold).

Table 23.1 Challenger and incumbent communications styles

'Challenger style' (Shorten, ALP)	'Incumbency style' (Morrison, Liberal)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attacking the record of opponents • Taking the offensive position on issues • Calling for change • Emphasising optimism for the future • Appearing to represent the philosophical centre of the political party • Delegating personal or harsh attacks in an effort to control demagogic rhetoric • Speaking to traditional values rather than calling for value changes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating pseudo-events to attract and control media attention • Creating special task forces to investigate areas of public concern • Appropriating federal funds/grants • Emphasising accomplishments • Interpreting/intensifying a foreign policy problem • Making appointments to State and federal jobs/party committees • Consulting or negotiating with world leaders • Manipulating the economy • Endorsements by party and other leaders • Creating and maintaining an 'above the fray' posture

Source: Adapted from Trent and Friedenber (2004).

Tactical executions: Labor

Within these strategic parameters, party campaign managers need to make tactical decisions about how to execute the strategy and express its narrative. The checklist in Table 23.1 illustrates the linkage between strategic choice and tactical execution: challenger and incumbent strategies find their expression in forms of communication such as attacks, calls for change, interpretations and so on. Likewise, strategic choice gives rise to the campaign's overall message or narrative, which can also be drawn from a repertoire of available options (Bartlett and Rayner 2014; Medvic 2018: 270–72).

Tactical decisions are technical in nature. Specific messages—slogans, TV advertisements, social media posts, news media stories, leader speeches, debate responses and so on—are crafted for execution on digital, electronic, print and interpersonal channels that best link the campaign with its target voters. Thus, tactical executions are visible manifestations of the more covert strategic deliberations. Given the finite financial, human and intellectual resources available to the campaign organisation—based on its size, structure, membership, wealth, political orientation and level of professionalisation—these tactical decisions necessitate trade-offs and strong organisational coordination to deliver with consistency. In fact, both major parties organised themselves in 2019 in broadly similar

fashion, with separate teams responsible for news media, electronic advertising and digital media; Labor also had a separate team for direct voter contact (DVC).

The contrasting Labor and Liberal strategic approaches gave rise to strongly contrasting tactical executions. This can be illustrated by considering four 30-second television advertisements, two Labor and two Liberal. Television advertising continues to be the most expensive item in campaign budgets, though its share shrank in 2019 relative to radio and print (Pash 2019). Both parties used it to hammer home their main arguments and to frame themselves and their opponents. Each ad considered here was widely broadcast on TV during the election campaign and also distributed on YouTube.

The first ad, titled ‘Scott Morrison—Only for the Top End of Town’ (Plate 23.1), served as the vehicle for Labor’s negative attack on Morrison’s political character and policy record (ALP 2019b). The ad uses black-and-white images of Morrison, Tony Abbott and Peter Dutton to link the Prime Minister with the Liberals’ unpopular and divisive right faction. The voiceover opens with ironic praise: correcting an impression that Morrison ‘hasn’t done very much’, it asserts ‘he’s done plenty’. The audio continues by blaming Morrison for cutting funding for schools and hospitals, supporting cuts to penalty rates and pensions, supporting corporate tax cuts and opposing the banking royal commission. ‘When it comes to what matters to working and middle-income Australians’, it concludes, ‘Morrison is out of touch and only for the top end of town’.



Plate 23.1 ALP 30-second television commercial, ‘Scott Morrison—Only for the Top End of Town’

Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=5baNQ4gSxaU. Reproduced with permission of the ALP.

The second ad, 'Labor: A fair go for Australia' (ALP 2019c), presents Labor's positive policy message built on the central theme of fairness and introduces its senior leadership. Bill Shorten is depicted in a powerful role (office, desk, urban background) opening and closing the ad, and is seen in a 'high-vis' vest in the community. Five senior shadow ministers appear in outdoor settings, summarising policies on health and hospitals, energy prices and climate change, school funding, wages and job creation. Each successive speaker adds to the previous speaker's sentence and the last four repeat the slogan 'for a fair go', demonstrating the unity and rapport of the team and the breadth of the policy package.

Taken together, these ads express the party's strategic intent. What they suggest, however, is that the strategy itself was flawed. As a result, both ads misfired. Considering the negative ad, it seems that Labor, having used the 'top end of town' tag effectively against the previous prime minister, Malcolm Turnbull, who was lampooned as the top-hat-wearing 'Mr Harbourside Mansion', sought to carry forward and apply the same critique to the current Prime Minister. Yet the baseball-cap-wearing dad from 'the Shire' proved to be a different and more elusive target; Labor's strategy had not taken account of the new reality. Likewise, the strategy recycled Labor's previously successful attacks on Liberal cuts to welfare spending, but this also faltered in the wake of the 2019 federal Budget, which had not announced new cuts. Indeed, the 'cuts and chaos' theme Labor had been promoting since before the campaign began² was, according to Labor's market research, failing to hurt Morrison (Williams 2019b). On the evidence of this ad, then, Labor's strategy seemed flat-footed—reluctant to shift from attack lines that had damaged Turnbull and unable to identify and target the vulnerabilities of Morrison. Ultimately, with the campaign half-over, Labor did switch its line of attack, pivoting to tarnish Morrison by association with Coalition preference deals with PHON and Clive Palmer. But this proved insufficient in itself and was swamped by Palmer's advertising barrage in the campaign's final weeks.

The positive ad also exposed a deeper communications problem about Labor's impressive range of policy promises. Its strategic intent is clear: roll out the positive benefits of Labor's platform; present a stable and united team, ready to govern; and push back against Shorten's poll-demonstrated

2 See, for example, Shorten's video posted on Facebook (Shorten 2019a). Shorten continued the theme in his speech in Burwood, in Sydney, on 14 April: 'After six years of cuts, chaos, of division—friends, it is time for change. It is time, friends, for a stable, united Labor Government' (Shorten 2019c).

unpopularity as leader by emphasising his capable team.³ But in enumerating the individual policies, it fails to demonstrate (as opposed to assert) how these constitute an overall ‘fair go plan’ or to prosecute (as opposed to assume) the overall case for expansive policy change. This problem was perceptively foreshadowed by Trent and Friedenberga (2004), who warned that challengers taking the offensive position on issues should probe and question the incumbent but should ‘never present concrete solutions for problems’. Yet Labor entered the campaign with a set of detailed policy promises, on both the revenue and the spending sides, and continued to announce new spending commitments during the campaign. Indeed, Labor offered the biggest policy offering of any Opposition party since Liberal Leader John Hewson’s *Fightback!* package in 1993. At the end of the 2019 campaign, Labor’s website featured no less than 178 separate commitments.

Labor, and Shorten, however, appeared to lack an overarching theme or narrative for these policies. This was not for lack of trying. At a rally at the Revesby Workers Club in Sydney in October 2018, Shorten launched Labor’s ‘Fair Go Action Plan’. Six months later, delivering his Budget reply speech in the House of Representatives, he declared the election would be a ‘referendum on wages’ (Shorten 2019b). At a campaign rally in Sydney on 14 April 2019, he declared: ‘After six years of cuts, chaos and division, it is time for change.’ In his final campaign speech, on 16 May, at a Whitlam-style rally in Blacktown, he declared a Shorten government would take the climate change emergency seriously. But, as with the TV ad, the speeches failed to encapsulate the disparate elements of the platform in a compelling rationale for change. On 28 April, for example, Shorten (2019d) declared it was ‘time to draw the threads of the story together, to explain to the Australian people the vision we offer’.⁴ But he then listed nine separate ‘threads’ without providing the story. His Blacktown rally concluded with a stirring peroration that listed

3 Likewise, Shorten’s travelling party on the campaign bus also saw him surrounded by senior female leaders—Tanya Plibersek, Penny Wong and Kristina Keneally—demonstrating Labor’s stronger representation of women and allowing Shorten to delegate attack roles to others. Labor used the same technique in 1980, positioning Opposition leader Bill Hayden in a ‘triumvirate’ of the more popular NSW Premier Neville Wran and ACTU President Bob Hawke (Weller 1983: 72).

4 The nine threads were jobs, wages, Medicare, education, infrastructure, the NDIS, tax fairness, a better deal for pensioners, help with the cost of living and ‘real action on climate change’.

16 separate policies.⁵ *Crikey* commentator Guy Rundle was surely right when he observed mid-campaign that Labor's campaign was 'big ticket ... not big picture' (Rundle 2019). In the immediate campaign post-mortem, Deputy Labor Leader Tanya Plibersek acknowledged: 'When you've got such a large agenda, it's sometimes hard to explain all of the details to all of the people who benefit' (ABC 2019).

Tactical executions: Liberal

Turning to the Liberal Party's television advertising, we see a simpler, stronger and more impactful form of campaign communication. The first ad, titled 'Labor can't manage money' (Liberal Party of Australia 2019c), uses a violent image—the smashing of a piggy bank and theft of its contents, repeated three times—and colloquial language to frame Labor as the party of financial mismanagement and deficit ('breaking the bank') and of leadership turnover. By contrast, the post-Budget Coalition is the party of surplus ('turning it around'). The ad concludes with a black-and-white image of Shorten and a clever pun that brought together the unpopularity of Shorten with fear of the Opposition's economic policies: 'Labor: The Bill Australia can't afford.'

The second Liberal ad, titled 'Australia can't afford Labor' (Liberal Party of Australia 2019b), features another image of violent destruction: framed family photographs being squeezed and broken in a vice labelled 'Labor' (Plate 23.2). The contrast between the photographs, representing the domestic sphere, and the rusty vice, representing the industrial sphere, has conceptual echoes of Robert Menzies's 'Forgotten People'. The point of the ad is to personalise the hurt of Labor's revenue measures (colloquially, 'put the squeeze on') on Australian families, small businesses and retirees. To substantiate this claim, the ad ruthlessly reduces Labor's complex range of fiscal initiatives to 'taxes': limits on negative gearing concessions become 'housing taxes'; elimination of cash rebates from franking credits becomes a 'retiree tax'; a commitment to carbon emissions targets becomes an 'electricity tax', and so on. While technically flimsy, the argument has

5 The text of the Blacktown speech was not posted on Labor's website but was carried in full by *The Guardian* (Remeikis 2019). The 16 reasons were wage rises, Sunday penalty rates, childcare assistance, Closing the Gap, Indigenous constitutional recognition, the NDIS, restoration of school funding, tertiary education access, apprenticeships, dental care, cancer treatment on Medicare, a national integrity commission, having an Australian head of state, infrastructure spending, arts spending and saving the ABC.

rhetorical strength and throws Labor's disparate policies together into a single comprehensible category—something Labor could not do. Invoking the deep-seated popular view about Labor's skills in economic management, the ad closes with the damning conclusion: 'Labor can't manage money. That's why they're coming after yours.' The final few seconds are devoted to the same image of Shorten and the same pun.



Plate 23.2 Liberal Party 30-second television commercial, 'Australia can't afford Labor'

Source: www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWcTKF6G66E. Reproduced with permission of the Liberal Party of Australia.

Characterising Shorten as an unaffordable 'bill' was a masterstroke that became the unifying message for the Liberals' entire campaign. It was widely used on Liberal Party direct mail, along with dark images of Labor's threatened 'taxes', and appeared on the bunting adorning polling stations on election day. In the wake of the election victory, Adelaide ad agency KWP was quick to claim credit for the slogan, as well as 'marketing strategy, strategic messaging, creative execution and production' for the Liberals' federal campaign (Cheik-Hussein 2019).⁶

If simplicity of language, starkness of image and consistency of argument are hallmarks of effective advertising, these ads suggest a Coalition win. But Trent and Friedenberg's analysis also helps to explain their effectiveness. First, they suggest challengers such as Labor face a double hurdle: the need to persuade voters of the need for change, while also

⁶ This treatment is reminiscent of the Coalition's 2004 attack on then Labor Leader Mark Latham as inexperienced; his name was featured with a learner driver's L-plate.

demonstrating that they are capable of bringing it about. Labor may have cleared the first hurdle, but it fell at the second, thanks to Shorten's longstanding unpopularity and the ruthless way this was exploited by the incumbent. At the same time, Trent and Friedenber (2004: 101) warn challengers that 'the more detailed [they] become in offering solutions, the more material they provide to be attacked themselves'. Labor's policy-rich package indeed offered abundant material for the Coalition's attack. The Coalition's simple, consistent, focused, negative communications proved more effective than the cluttered policy-heavy messages from the Opposition. Morrison, a former Liberal campaign director in New South Wales and tourism advertising executive, proved a capable marketer. By the time of the federal Budget, Labor's spending initiatives had lost much of their original rationale—as a solution to Liberal cuts—and, during the course of the campaign, had been transformed by negative attacks into an extravagant, unaffordable risk.

Liberal attacks were strengthened by the party's active social media campaign (further discussed in Chapters 14 and 22, this volume). The Liberal digital team appears to have been given creative license to post shareable 'boomer memes' on Facebook around *Game of Thrones* episodes (Bourke 2019), and to provide rapid response to campaign events, such as a tweet mocking Bill Shorten's ride on a merry-go-round (Liberal Party of Australia 2019a). The Liberals also produced effective US-style 'snackable' ads (The Halo Group 2019)—for example, a six-second ad that simply used one cycle of the piggy bank being smashed. By contrast, Labor's attack ad could not be similarly cut down; its ironic praise of Morrison might inadvertently impress an inattentive listener who does not wait for the litany of unpopular decisions that follows.

Alessandro Nai defines negative campaigning as 'competing candidates and parties ... attack[ing] their rivals' ideas, policy proposals, past record and character flaws' (Nai 2018: 1). The Coalition's ads certainly fit that definition. Yet in their reductive simplicity, these ads are more than merely negative. They sit firmly in an increasingly acrimonious and tendentious Australian electoral tradition of 'scare campaigns', designed to incite fear through exaggerated claims about opponents' policies. Was labelling the abolition of a cash rebate on franking credits a 'retiree tax' merely robust electoral critique or was it factually inaccurate—a lie? The difficulty of answering that question underlines the challenge facing post-election calls for tighter trade practices—style regulation of misleading and deceptive

claims in election campaigns. Yet there is surely a need for a broader critical vocabulary that covers the spectrum of attack, from acceptable negative critique and exaggeration to questionable incivility and misrepresentation and fearmongering and to outright falsehood and lying.

Labor, of course, could have done more to immunise itself against what it must have expected as inevitable attacks on any campaign promise to change revenues or taxes. Yet this seems to have been a strategic blind spot. Its efforts to do this on negative gearing, for example—such as a 15 May Facebook post, ‘Attention Property Investors’, and a website, www.negativegearing.org.au, to ‘explain the facts on negative gearing’—were too little and too late. Some of the attacks, however—notoriously, the shadowy digital scare campaign for a non-existent ‘death tax’ (Murphy et al. 2019; Koslowski 2019)—were more difficult to deter or refute, as to do so served only to draw attention to the falsehood.

Tactical executions: Direct voter contact (DVC)

While most tactical executions are channelled through some form of mass media, parties and campaign organisations, especially on the progressive side, have over the past decade invested significant effort in a form of unmediated campaigning, DVC. In this form of ‘micro-targeting’ (Issenberg 2012) or ‘personalised political communications’ (Nielsen 2012), voters are identified through party databases for individual contact by campaign volunteers, who seek to engage them in persuasive conversations in their homes, either face-to-face or by phone.

The practice was pioneered by the campaigns of Barack Obama in the United States in 2008 and 2012 (McKenna and Han 2014) and has been adopted in Australia by Labor. DVC contributed to Labor wins in Victorian State elections in 2014 and 2018, Queensland State elections in 2015 and 2017, in New South Wales in the 2016 federal election and in the June 2018 ‘Super Saturday’ by-elections—notably, in the seat of Longman. Organisationally, Labor’s DVC effort is managed by State branches, with the database, data analysis and organising software principally federal responsibilities.

Table 23.2 Direct voter contact: ALP

	2019	2016
Phone calls	1,100,000	536,497
Doorknocking	1,000,000	1,083,000
Total voter contacts	2,100,000	1,619,497
Numbers of volunteers	25,000+	16,200

Source: Data provided by ALP.

Labor's DVC effort in 2019 was significantly larger than in 2016 (Table 23.2). Labor's federal head office had proclaimed the 2016 campaign would be 'the biggest grassroots effort in Australia's history', with volunteers conducting 'one million conversations' (Erickson 2016). But in 2019, more than 25,000 volunteers organised 10,000 events at which they conducted around 2.1 million voter conversations in more than 15 key seats.

The ACTU, the Greens, online activist group GetUp! and several Independent candidates also invested effort in DVC in previous elections, and all did so again in 2019. The ACTU's experience in fieldwork dates back to its successful 'Your Rights at Work' campaign in 2007. In 2019, the ACTU mounted a substantial fieldwork effort under the banner of its 'Change the Government, Change the Rules' campaign, using predictive modelling based on surveys of 120,000 union members nationwide to identify and target persuadable voters for volunteer conversations (Workplace Express 2019). ACTU volunteers conducted doorknocking and phone banks in 16 target electorates. In a parallel effort, Victorian union organisers targeted seven seats.

Yet, as Table 23.3 shows, these efforts were largely unsuccessful. Of the 10 electorates in which Labor mounted its largest DVC efforts, measured by the raw number of phone calls and doorknocks, only one (Gilmore, ranked 10th) changed hands from Coalition to Labor. Two others (Bass and Braddon) shifted the other way. The ACTU's efforts succeeded in only three electorates, two of which (Dunkley and Corangamite) had already been redistributed to become notionally Labor. The Victorian unionists' effort failed in every seat (Karp 2019a, 2019b).

Table 23.3 Electorates targeted for direct voter contact, 2019

ALP (top 10)	ACTU (by State)	Victorian Trades Hall Council
Pearce (WA) Dickson (Qld) <i>Bass</i> (Tas.) Forde (Qld) Bonner (Qld) <i>Braddon</i> (Tas.) Reid (NSW) Chisholm (Vic.) Petrie (Qld) <u>Gilmore</u> (NSW)	Qld: Forde, Capricornia, Flynn, Petrie, Leichhardt, <i>Herbert</i> NSW: Banks, <u>Gilmore</u> , Reid, Robertson Vic.: <u>Dunkley</u> , <u>Corangamite</u> WA: Swan, Pearce Tas.: <i>Bass</i> SA: Boothby	Kooyong, Higgins, Flinders, Menzies, Deakin, La Trobe, Chisholm

Note: Seats underlined won; seats italicised lost.

Source: Column one: Data provided by ALP; Columns two and three: Data provided by Karp (2019b).

GetUp! also substantially lifted its DVC effort compared with 2016 (Vromen 2018) but was successful in only one of its seven targeted seats, Warringah (further discussed in Chapter 21, this volume). The two successful volunteer-based campaigns by Independent candidates—Zali Steggall's in Warringah and Helen Haines's in Indi—are also dealt with elsewhere (see Chapter 18, this volume).

There are several possible explanations for Labor's DVC failures. Organisationally, Labor had lost a key figure with the retirement in February of Victorian Assistant State Secretary Stephen Donnelly. Over seven years, Donnelly had been the driving force in Victoria behind the creation of the 'Community Action Network', which was modelled on his experience as a union organiser and then an Obama volunteer in 2012. Perhaps in part due to his departure, Labor's massive electoral win in the Victorian 2018 State elections did not carry over into the federal results.

A further possible factor may lie in the changing mix of phone calls and doorknocking. US experience suggests a doorknock conversation with a persuadable voter is more effective than a phone call. Yet, as Table 23.2 shows, Labor doorknocking declined relative to phone calls, from two-thirds of the total output in 2016 to less than half in 2019. This may have been driven by the vagaries of the electoral calendars: doorknocking tends to occur on weekends, and the 2016 double-dissolution campaign ran over seven whole weekends, while the 2019 campaign ran over five, one of which was Easter, when most campaigning was suspended. Further, telephones are becoming more congested with political messaging during

elections, with marginal-seat voters already anecdotally unhappy with robocalls and robopolls; volunteer-led persuasion calls may be unable to compete for attention.

The most likely explanation, however, is that the electoral effectiveness of DVC is highly dependent on the prevailing political context. When voters are already dissatisfied with a leader or party, DVC conversations will encounter greater barriers. This appears to have been the case with the big but unsuccessful DVC efforts mounted by the British Labour Party's 'Four Million Conversations' campaign on behalf of Ed Miliband in 2015 (LabourList 2015) and by Hillary Clinton's US presidential bid in 2016 (Allen and Parnes 2017). Like Miliband and Clinton, Shorten's campaign struggled to counter negative campaigns and to articulate its agenda persuasively. In these circumstances, the personalised messaging of DVC apparently could not be heard against a louder or more urgent national message.

The Liberals, for whom DVC has never been a major campaign focus, attempted a larger effort in 2019. Labor has its traditions of community and union organising and its energetic volunteer base of Young Labor activists; GetUp! has mobilised its own digitally savvy support base. But with an older membership, the Coalition has typically preferred a more mediated campaign style of advertising, direct mail and social media. Despite possessing a formidable database, Liberal DVC efforts have also been fragmented among State divisions, some of which remain unready to devote resources to the effort. Yet Labor's effective management of its data and volunteers has been noted by conservative campaigners with some envy (Murphy 2016), and Liberals acknowledge the need to compete in some way in every form of campaigning. Previous DVC efforts have seen organised phone banking and flying squads of volunteers arriving in target seats. Among Liberal DVC efforts in 2019, a volunteer phone bank was set up in the Liberal Party's Canberra headquarters, R.G. Menzies House.

In summary, Labor entered the 2019 election campaign with a stable and united leadership, a credible and extensive policy platform, solid polls and great expectations. Its unexpected defeat can be attributed in part to a failure to recalibrate its campaign strategy after the advent of Morrison and the delivery of the pre-campaign federal Budget. Shorten struggled to articulate a vision behind the policy platform and a rationale for change and to prosecute Labor's claim to govern; he never overcame his deep-seated unpopularity. Labor could not overcome the determined negativity of a more strongly motivated incumbent.

These particular shortcomings—serious enough in themselves—point to a more generalised failure of strategy. In previous elections, campaign directors of both major parties have made it their personal and distinctive responsibility to formulate and execute a campaign strategy, defining the path towards electoral success and centrally focusing all the party's resources on achieving that goal. Strong and successful campaign directors have made it their business to harness the party leadership in a joint effort of disciplined coordination (Mills 2014: 179, 258). In 2019, Labor's campaign strategy appears not to have followed that proven path. As noted at the outset of this chapter, strategic failures can only be inferred from tactical communications executions, but in the case of Labor's 2019 campaign, they seem abundantly clear. Indeed, they have been subsequently confirmed by its election campaign post-mortem, which found there was no documented strategy, no body responsible for strategic deliberation and decision, no unifying campaign narrative and no identified pathway to victory (ALP 2019a). While the Liberals have not seen it necessary to publish a similar review of their campaign, one would likely have applauded its documented campaign strategy, its narrow but identified path to victory, its unifying narrative and its leader working in disciplined harness with the party's campaign team.

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