



For Immediate Release
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527s HAD A SUBSTANTIAL IMPACT ON THE GROUND AND AIR WARS IN 2004, WILL RETURN SWIFT BOAT VETERANS 527 PLAYED HISTORIC ROLE

*The Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University
Releases Preliminary Analysis from Groundbreaking 2004 Research Project*

WASHINGTON, DC – 527 organizations had a substantial impact on the 2004 campaign ground and air wars and can be expected to return in force in 2006, according to a new study released today at the National Press Club by the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University (<http://csed.byu.edu>).

“The activity of 527s in 2004 teaches us that we can anticipate contest specific 527s in 2006 in key Senate and House races,” said David Magleby, a senior research fellow at the Center for the Study of Elections and Democracy at Brigham Young University and the dean of BYU’s College of Family, Home, and Social Sciences. “As we learned in 2004, it only takes a few individuals willing to part with millions of dollars to fund groups like ACT and Progress for America. These groups can surge onto the scene in the future. We saw a proliferation of 527 organizations this year, and we’ll see them again next cycle.”

“527s do not require a lot of infrastructure like candidates and parties do, especially if their primary mode of electioneering is the air war,” said Dr. Magleby, a distinguished professor of political science at Brigham Young University. “But the ground war is expensive. Even though donors were willing to invest in both party and 527 ground efforts, I doubt that these non-candidate groups can sustain the level of spending they had in 2004. However, I think they will treat 2006 as an opportunity to refine their techniques in key U.S. Senate races. In this sense they will be expanding on the Rove/Melman experiments of the GOP side in 2001, 2002 and 2003.”

The Impact of 527s on the Air War

Republicans hoped to do to Kerry what Clinton did to Dole in 1996; catch him with little money after an expensive and contested nomination battle. Kerry, in fact, emerged from the primaries with little money, but The Media Fund, AFL-CIO, and MoveOn countered the Bush media blitz in March. When their expenditures are combined with Kerry, the Democratic team matched or outspent Bush in the March through July/August period. At a minimum the Democratic 527s kept the race close and denied Bush a knock-out punch.

Republican 527s were much slower to organize, but when they did they also made a substantial difference in the air war. Both Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and Progress for America helped reinforce key Bush messages and effectively raised serious doubts about a centerpiece of the Kerry message, his war record.

“The Swift Boat Veterans attack was masterful,” said Magleby. “This group delivered a message that the Bush campaign and the RNC could not, and Bush got the best of both worlds because he could decry 527s and benefit from their activities at the same time.”

With an attack that quickly followed the Democratic convention, the Swift Boat Veterans took advantage of timing to deliver a powerful punch to the Kerry image. During this news window, the media were looking to explore Kerry from a more critical perspective than the standard convention coverage.

Progress for America came even later in the cycle and was funded in rapid order, in a sense following up on the success of the Swift Boat Veterans ad campaign. Its air war salvo in the battleground states was an ad that focused on Bush as a compassionate and caring leader through the eyes of a young woman who had lost her mother in the September 11, 2001 attacks.

In a survey of 1523 voters conducted by CSED between September 12 and 30, 2004, interviewers asked voters what they knew about the Bush and Kerry military service through open-ended questions. Evidence of the fact that Swift Boat Veterans ads had an impact is found in the responses expressed by voters in their own words. When asked what they had heard recently about Kerry’s military service, 76 percent of respondents referred to issues or concerns advanced by the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth. In addition, 33 percent of respondents mentioned the controversy surrounding Kerry’s metals while 19 percent made reference to his participation in Vietnam War protests, two themes that figured prominently into the Swift Boat Veterans’ advertising campaign. While 30 percent of respondents mentioned the swift boat veterans criticizing Kerry, only 5 percent mentioned the swift boat veterans who came to Kerry’s defense, showing both the salience of the Swift Boat Veterans’ attack mechanisms and the shortcomings of the Democrats’ defense tactics.

The Impact of 527s on the Ground War

The big story of 2004, in addition to the tremendous ground strategy run by the Republican National Committee, was the ground work of the liberal America Votes coalition. This group, comprised largely of 527s, was a disciplined, focused and well funded voter mobilization effort. Its most important participant was America Coming Together (ACT) but other groups were involved including the Sierra Club, League of Conservation Voters, Planned Parenthood, and NARAL Pro-Choice America, to name a few.

For example, the Sierra Club 527 contributed to this effort by reaching out to over 400,000 targeted voters in nine key states. The Sierra Club 527 targeted these voters with from 8 to 12 contacts (phone, mail, and door-to-door) between August 1 and the close of polls on Election Day.

ACT and the America Votes coalition relied primarily on paid canvassers. In post-election hindsight, some concerns have been raised about the paid canvassing efforts. For example, Wes Boyd, the co-founder of MoveOn.org, received some negative feedback from MoveOn volunteers that worked in the ACT canvassing efforts and felt that the energy of the ACT paid canvassing effort was going in the wrong direction. As a result, MoveOn.org invested in a voter mobilization effort independent of America Votes called “Leave No Voter Behind” that included 70,000 people in 10,000 precincts working on a

volunteer neighbor-to-neighbor effort that was similar to volunteer-based efforts of the Republican National Committee's 72 Hour Task Force.

What Was Different in 2004?

- 1.) There was a proliferation of 527 organizations in the 2004 Election.
- 2.) 527s placed a greater emphasis on the ground war. Issue advocacy in the past had been more about persuasion than about voter registration and mobilization. Mail was important to issue advocacy and remained important here.
- 3.) 527s heavily concentrated on the presidential race, instead of participating in congressional races as many of them normally do.
- 4.) Groups in some states used every means available to them to try and persuade voters.

What Did Not Change from 2000?

- 1.) The most active Section 527 organizations, like issue advocacy groups in past cycles, were run by professionals and in many respects resembled candidate campaigns.
- 2.) They relied heavily on polling, focus groups, media consultants, grass-roots experts, etc.
- 3.) Section 527 organizations continued to spend a large portion of their funds on television and radio ads.
- 4.) Labor unions remained an important part of 527 funding.

About the 2004 Research Project and Methodology

CSED had more than thirty academic field research directors systematically monitoring the 2004 general election in five presidential battleground states, six U.S. Senate races and nine U.S. House contests.

The CSED team interviewed many of the most active Section 527 groups at their headquarters in Washington and in the states and districts in which they campaigned.

CSED also conducted a national voter log survey, asking voters to forward to us their political mail, email, but also report campaign telephone calls and personal contacts related the election during the three weeks before Election Day. In partnership with the Wisconsin Advertising Project (WiscAds) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, CSED conducted a national panel survey interviewing voters in late June and early July, re-interviewing them in mid-September, and then interviewing them a third time after the election.

CSED's research this cycle has been supported by the Pew Charitable Trusts, the Smith Richardson Foundation, the Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Joyce Foundation.

Coming Soon!

Participants in the CSED project continue to code mail, analyze data and conduct additional interviews. **The complete summary of the CSED 2004 research project and an online archive of campaign literature from 2004 will be released during CSED's major biennial event in Washington, DC in February:**

Monday, February 7, 2005

9:00 am to 3:00 pm

National Press Club – Holeman Lounge/First Amendment Room