

# Yes We Can: how the lessons from America should change British politics

by Will Straw and Nick Anstead

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November 2008

Will Straw and  
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should change British  
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## Yes We Can: how the lessons from America should change British politics

The historic candidacies of Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton have played a huge role in galvanising progressive forces in the US. Spurred on by eight years of George W Bush in the White House, Democrats are offering a powerful and optimistic message of 'hope' and 'change.'

But what lessons can British parties - especially a Labour Party more than a decade into government and lagging in the polls - learn from the American election?

This two-part Freethinking paper is based on detailed study and personal experiences of the current US presidential campaign, with a further Fabian pamphlet to be published next year. We argue that the modern campaigning tools and techniques deployed by the American candidates and parties – whether to raise money, mobilise and organise activists, or to reach out to voters – can offer important lessons for Britain.

Specifically, we believe that Labour needs to:

- Learn to let go. Labour must follow Barack Obama's lead by trusting the so-called 'YouTube generation' to take control of their own role in the campaign.
- Reduce its reliance on large donations from individuals and organisations, and harness the power of the grassroots to emulate Obama's 'small dollar democracy'.
- Make activism more personalised, by adapting the latest US campaign innovations like 'The Donkey' database – which identifies and mobilises the most dedicated volunteers – and using donations to give individuals a real stake in the campaign, via schemes like the 'Obama Organising Fellowship'.
- Involve more young people by collecting email addresses and mobile phone numbers from anyone attending events, rather than just members, and contacting them regularly with updates and events.
- Allow individuals to phone canvass from home or at 'bring-your-own-phone' parties and use the latest technology to automatically connect them to the most persuadable voters.

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## Evidence from America

By Will Straw

The US presidential election has been the most participative in history. Over the course of 56 primaries and caucuses, more than 60 million people made the effort to put a cross or punch a hole against the name of a candidate. Many expect turnout in this presidential election to hit its highest level since the 1960s. Much of this is down to the nature of the contest: this is the first time since the Great Depression that neither the incumbent President nor Vice President has sought the nomination. The historic candidacies of the first viable female and black candidates have added to the excitement. A narrative of 'hope' and 'change' has engaged many who had never considered voting before.

The message, however, has needed a medium. During this long campaign, innovative software designers have harnessed modern technology to raise more money, contact more voters, and better utilise volunteers' time than ever before. This has been phenomenally successful for Democratic candidates because their campaigns have let go of traditional top-down, machine-politics. Obama beat Clinton in the primaries because he was willing to allow individuals and local teams to take control of their own role in the campaign while providing the necessary resources and tools. When Clinton learnt to let go after her mini-revival in March, she had the better of the remaining contests. That combination of technology and trust has so far proved to be a winning one.

Obama beat Clinton in the primaries because he was willing to allow individuals and local teams to take control of their own role in the campaign

### Fundraising

Many people find the combination of money and politics unsavoury. From allegations of peerages for sale to the preservation of favourable legislation, political donations are often seen as a form of bribery. This has gone so far in the UK that political parties are seriously debating the introduction of European-style state funding. Since the traditional method in the US has been to collect donations from wealthy backers (often in exchange for access or favours), it would seem at first glance that America offers few lessons. However, all this changed in 2004 when Howard Dean's groundbreaking primary campaign married the power of the Internet with the burgeoning progressive model of collecting small donations.<sup>1</sup> Dean raised over \$50 million, double the sum raised by any candidate except John Kerry. Exponential progress in this year's election has witnessed the explosion of 'small dollar democracy'.

More than three million voters have been moved to donate to Barack Obama's campaign. He has raised over half a billion dollars since the campaign began, with close to half coming from small donations. For the Republicans, the candidacies of Ron Paul and Mike Huckabee were the most innovative. Despite regularly coming fourth or fifth in primaries, Paul raised nearly \$22

November 2008

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lessons from America  
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million in small donations, more than any other Republican candidate except eventual nominee John McCain. Huckabee was able to exploit the Southern evangelical church network to raise a total of \$16 million. The process has involved collecting email addresses, asking often for contributions and allowing some control over where the funds go.<sup>2</sup>

Voters can, of course, provide their email addresses online but an aggressive strategy to collect contact details has also been used. At every Obama rally (often pulling crowds in excess of 50,000) voters were encouraged to provide their personal information. Last summer, volunteers for Hillary Clinton took to the streets of Miami, New York and Washington D.C. to sell bumper stickers or badges for a dollar. Every donor was asked to provide an email address. Once a database was created, supporters were bombarded with emails making appeals for cash, sometimes once a day. The messages were tailored so that previous donations were acknowledged in subsequent emails; incentives were used, such as Obama having an 'intimate' dinner with new and existing donors chosen at random; appeals were linked to specific goals such as buying a particular number of adverts; and timing was crucial so that Obama got one of his biggest hauls the night that he lost New Hampshire to Clinton, while money came pouring in for Hillary after she announced that she had lent her own campaign \$5 million.

Donors can often specify the purpose of their money. In the run up to the Pennsylvania primary, Clinton allowed contributors to choose to pay for yard signs, vans to take voters to the polls, or adverts. There are numerous stories of hard-up supporters foregoing nights out to make a \$25 donation once a month. Sometimes, campaigns launched appeals to fund specific activities. One of the best ideas to emerge from the primary season was the Obama Organising Fellowship scheme. The campaign sent out emails asking for money specifically to select and train young organisers, who were sent into communities for the election. These organisers then received a wage for their efforts, and donors knew precisely where their money was going. The strategy gave many people a literal stake in the election.

One of the best ideas to emerge from the primary season was the Obama Organising Fellowship scheme. The campaign sent out emails asking for money specifically to select and train young organisers, who were sent into communities for the election

As the contest moved into the general election phase, two very different models of fundraising were employed. Obama, whilst still aggressively pursuing big-ticket donors, essentially extended his successful model from the primary stage with spectacular results. Amid some controversy, in June he became the first candidate not to accept state funding, which is worth \$84.1 million. Nonetheless, funding continues to pour in, with August's record-breaking \$68 million haul dwarfed by the incredible \$150 million raised in September. That this figure was achieved with an average donation, according to Obama's campaign manager David Plouffe, of \$86 makes it even more significant. All this leaves him in a position to spend significantly more than John McCain in the crucial final weeks of the campaign.

John McCain stuck with the traditional route and has been using state funding since the start of September. Nonetheless, he was able to use the summer months to build up his kitty. He raised \$53m in August, nearly double his total for July, much of which poured in after he announced his Evangelical running

mate, Sarah Palin. This again indicates how a charismatic politician with a singular message can help bring cash into a campaign if the technological infrastructure is in place.

## Canvassing and voter ID

Voter contact is the meat and potatoes of any political campaign. Strategists need to know where their support lies in order to 'get out the vote' on election day. The traditional method has been canvassers ploughing through the electoral register, knocking on doors or making phone calls and recording how people intend to vote. Those who declare themselves undecided are sent literature (and maybe even a visit by the candidate). On polling day, those who are favourable are contacted again and encouraged to vote. The problem is its inefficiency: answering machines, door slams and opposition supporters wasting canvassers' time.

In recent years, American campaigns have used sophisticated techniques, known as 'micro-targeting,' to minimise these problems. They used powerful databases, constructed from a number of layers. To start, there is legacy party data relying on information gathered in previous election cycles, as well as information collected during the ongoing contest. Next is information which is freely available through government records, including the party registration of individual voters and whether they cast a ballot in the recent elections. Parties then add in a third layer of modelled data. This draws on purchased information, for example from credit card companies.

This wealth of data allows campaigns to do two things. First, they can track individual voters. In 2004, Karl Rove, George Bush's campaign manager, boasted that his information was so powerful that he knew if someone had a put yard sign up for Eisenhower in the 1950s. Second, microtargetting allows campaigns to model likely political behaviour, based on an individual's characteristics. For instance, in 2004 the Bush campaign team were able to rank cars based on the likelihood of them being owned by Democratic or Republican voters (the most Democratic-leaning car they identified was a Honda).<sup>3</sup> By combining these datasets, campaign managers are able to engage in very precise targeting of voters and tailor their message towards them.

Research by Professors Donald Green and Alan Gerber at Yale University shows that door-knocking can help increase turnout by 5 to 10 percentage points.<sup>4</sup> That said, since it can be time consuming, software firms have invented new Internet-based telephone systems that allow volunteers to make calls any time, anywhere. For example, both Clinton and Obama used a computer system that connected supporters to voter after voter in a specific region. The surrogates dialled a central number and instead of hanging up after a call, typed a number into the phone (e.g. '1' for Clinton supporter; '2' for Obama; '3' for Republican, '4' for no answer, '5' for refusal or hang up). The system filtered voicemail messages so that callers were continually connected to voters. To make it more fun, evening and weekend 'call parties' were organised with people meeting in a friend's house or a campaign office and

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To tackle the particularly tricky problem of locating young people who are rarely at home, Obama's army of volunteers have been targeting campuses, coffee shops and bars, rather than knocking on doors in residential areas

using the free minutes on their phones. Meanwhile, those who preferred to make calls at home were also able to help the cause.

The information gathered from these efforts enabled campaign strategists to make better decisions. Because the data collection and input was less time consuming, more voters were contacted in the run up to the primaries. This contributed to the dramatic increase in turnout. It also gave strategists an easy way to monitor local performance and promote staffers who did well. And because the caller was provided with the latest campaign script, every volunteer everywhere was automatically part of the rapid rebuttal effort.

Obama's campaign has also taken the view that there is a huge capacity to engage those who have not voted previously or are not even registered to vote. In particular, they are targeting 18-25 year olds, African-Americans, and Hispanics. A huge operation is currently underway in key swing states to register vast numbers of these people. In Virginia, for example, Obama's team set and vastly exceeded a target of 300,000 new registrations with 41 offices and over 10,000 volunteers to assist them with this effort. The campaign also identified 100,000 unregistered Hispanic voters in Colorado and double that number in New Mexico (a state which George W. Bush only won by 6,000 in 2004).

To tackle the particularly tricky problem of locating young people who are rarely at home, Obama's army of volunteers have been targeting campuses, coffee shops and bars, rather than knocking on doors in residential areas. They used the excitement in the weeks ahead of the Vice Presidential nomination as a clever ruse to get mobile phone numbers. An email from the campaign outlined that if you sent a text message to "Obama" (62262) you would be notified of his choice before the media. This appealed to the instant gratification generation who signed up in their droves. In the end the news leaked, but Obama had gathered even more information to add to his database. He recently texted voters advising them how to register and no doubt his campaign will use this tactic again on Election Day. A study by the University of Michigan and Princeton University found that when a prospective voter is contacted via SMS text messaging on election day, the likelihood of voting increases by 4.2 per cent.<sup>5</sup>

## Volunteer management

Both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton used a single database to manage their volunteers in the presidential primary. The system is called The Donkey (a reference to the Democratic party's symbolic animal and also a nod to the nature of campaigning work) and has cost the two campaigns the modest sum of around \$3,500 per month (about £ 2,150). The returns have been exponential. For example, when the Obama campaign arrived in Texas before the March primary, they already had the names of 125,000 volunteers who had signed up online.

This database is separate from those devoted to voter ID and fundraising. It allows the campaign team to record the efforts of every regional coordinator, field director and individual volunteer. The database can record the particular campaigning likes and dislikes of volunteers and their availability. So if someone does not feel confident canvassing, but has a number of wealthy friends, they can be used to help fundraise. Using The Donkey over time provides a complete record of who did what, how often and with what results.

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Yes We Can: how the  
lessons from America  
should change British  
politics

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'The Donkey' provides a complete record of who did what, how often and with what results. This has proved extremely effective in identifying and mobilising the most dedicated volunteers

This has proved extremely effective in identifying and mobilising the most dedicated volunteers. For example, if someone constantly brings friends to voter ID sessions, they can be rewarded with added responsibility such as becoming a field director in a particular swing state.

## Digital media

Volunteers in British politics are sometimes downtrodden by older hands. No effort is ever good enough. For any cold wet Saturday morning spent knocking on doors, there is always the question of 'where were you last weekend?' By contrast, Obama – in particular – has been effective at encouraging people (many with no previous experience or affiliation to the Democratic party) to do as much or as little as they like. His supporters have access to a service called [my.barackobama.com](http://my.barackobama.com), or MyBO as it has become known. This acts as a campaign Facebook, which is unsurprising since one of the social networking site's founders Chris Hughes is a senior advisor to Obama. Once a login is created, a member can contact supporters with similar interests or locality, start their own fundraising effort and blog comments and suggestions. As with Facebook, you can invite your friends to join, so the recruitment process for the campaign proliferates at the local level.

The announcement of Palin's candidacy has also led to a jump in the number of people signing up to volunteer for the Republicans. According to a Wall Street Journal / NBC poll, enthusiasm for McCain's candidacy among Republican voters rose from 12 per cent to 34 per cent after Palin was picked as his running mate. The numbers of people at McCain-Palin rallies have not quite matched crowds to hear Obama but the self-described "pit-bull with lipstick" has created her own grassroots movement.

## Conclusion

Obama's messages of 'hope' and 'change' have been the galvanising force of this electoral cycle. During the primaries, Clinton adopted these phrases when she realised that 'experience' was not resonating. McCain has done the same thing during the general election. But the reason that voters appear to take Obama at face value, and distrust Clinton and McCain, is that his campaign offers something genuinely new.

Barack Obama's main insight has been that he can raise money from a huge number of people and get them to volunteer if he first asks and then lets them take control of their own role in the campaign. The technologies – whether direct emails, microtargeting models, telephone systems, or social networking tools – have been secondary to this principle. Hillary Clinton lost the primary election largely because her campaign only started listening to its voters and developing small dollar democracy in response to Obama's success. By then it was too late.

The best political operatives throughout history have known that organisation is the key to power. For Obama, victory in a 21st century democracy requires technology and trust: only by letting go will the Democrats achieve lasting success.



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lessons from America  
should change British  
politics

<http://fabians.org.uk/publications/freethinking-papers/yes-we-can>

## Lessons for the UK

By Nick Anstead

*Evidence from America* highlights some ideas and strategies that could prove central to the future of political organisation in the UK. British political parties are struggling to fulfil their functions in a changing society, and so the uniquely innovative campaign that has so captured the zeitgeist across the Atlantic offers some appealing solutions.

But, before we get too excited, an important caveat is required. What is frequently referred to as the 'Americanization' of British politics - the use of television, the influence of 24 hour rolling news, the increased role of political professionals, or the impact of personalities - is in fact better understood as 'modernisation': political change driven by social, economic and technological development. But while modernisation theory suggests a single path of development occurring in a variety of national settings, the tactics of American election campaigning cannot be replicated precisely in the UK, now or in the future - not least because British culture and political institutions differ vastly from those of the US. Thus practitioners must look for British applications of US experience and not attempt pure emulation, which will invariably disappoint.

### Fundraising

Fundraising has probably been the big game changer in the 2008 election cycle. We should not make the mistake of thinking this is about candidates raising more money. It is far more important than that; it is a systemic change, giving the left a financial advantage that has previously been the preserve of the right. For the vast majority of the 2000 election period, Al Gore was outspent by George Bush \$2 for every \$1. In 2004, John Kerry, although a very successful fundraiser by historic standards, still had to endure a hideous five week period in which he could spend virtually nothing in order to preserve his financial resources.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast, Barack Obama is unquestionably the most successful fundraiser ever from either major party. His success in harnessing the power of grassroots mobilisation, small dollar donors and the Internet, points to a future where Democrats will be able to out-fundraise their Republican opponents and reverse their historical disadvantage.

Given Labour's very weak financial position currently, this talk of new sources of revenue might seem very attractive. While it is worth remembering that there are vast institutional and cultural differences between political fundraising in the US and the UK,<sup>7</sup> the success of Obama's fundraising team does point to certain key lessons for Labour.

Firstly, narrative is essential. As in the UK, the American public has deep misgivings about political campaign funding. Obama's team skilfully mobilised his base by pushing the idea that small dollar donations were the

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November 2008

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Yes We Can: how the  
lessons from America  
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A donation and the information that comes with it can be used as the first step to involving someone in campaigning and activism if the relationship is orchestrated skillfully

antithesis of his opponents' funds – both Republican and Democrat – which was associated with the 'old way' of doing politics. For Labour an equivalent strategy would be to encourage grassroots donations by contrasting them with the Tories' large donors, especially Lord Ashcroft's attempt to parachute resources into key marginals. An even more radical break from the past would involve Labour renouncing its own reliance on large donors, be they individuals or organisations. While this may seem drastic, there is a direct parallel in the US, where the Obama campaign has ended relationships with political action committees and shadowy 527 groups,<sup>8</sup> which were previously significant players in Democratic party politics.

Secondly, donations need to establish a relationship with individuals. There is a long-standing row among political scientists about the purpose of donations. Some claim that they are a form of activism. Others argue that they are the opposite of activism, because people give them in lieu of other forms of political participation, be it attending meetings, door knocking or delivering leaflets. The experience of Labour in the mid-to-late-90s would seem to suggest the latter. Plenty of people joined the party, especially online, gave their subs and then disappeared, without partaking in any other activities (most of them, of course, soon left the party). However, this US election cycle seems to suggest that there is no hard and fast rule. A donation and the information that comes with it can be used as the first step to involving someone in campaigning and activism if the relationship is orchestrated skillfully.

Thirdly, choice is important. A 'one size fits all' donation drive is unlikely to be successful. Parties can do very simple things, such as targeting emails to the interests of the people receiving them. But even more profoundly, institutions can be remodelled to offer donors some control over where money goes. Think, for example, of the Obama Organising Fellowship scheme, described above. Imagine that idea transferred to the Labour Party. It certainly seems that such an appeal might be attractive to the party's supporters. Money given isn't just going into a big general pot marked 'expenses', but will instead have a tangible impact – in the short term, it will put more activists on the ground in important constituencies; in the long term, it will offer training and experience to a generation of progressives, who can go on to work for the party, pressure groups and trade unions. It would also offer a paid position to individuals who might struggle to get a first step on the political ladder, a career typically commenced with an unpaid internship, thus vastly disadvantaging the less privileged.

## Canvassing and voter ID

*Evidence from America* outlines the three essential elements of canvassing and voter ID – information gathering, information modelling and, only then, utilisation. All aspects must be synchronised for a system to work well. This is a great challenge when we are dealing with databases as large and as complex as those used by modern political parties. Three important points need to be made about this kind of activity and possible applications in the UK.

First, compared to the US, British parties suffer from a huge legal-institutional

November 2008

Will Straw and  
Nick Anstead

Yes We Can: how the  
lessons from America  
should change British  
politics

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<http://fabians.org.uk/publications/freethinking-papers/yes-we-can>

disadvantage when attempting this approach. In America, far more information about voters is in the public domain, most notably their party registration (used so they can vote in primaries) and whether they voted in previous elections. Second, database driven politics is far from the technological quick fix that politicians frequently seem to yearn for. The reality is quite the reverse: it is expensive and time-consuming, the benefits sometimes reaped decades after the endeavour. Third, and perhaps most importantly, its effective practice will require a cultural change within the Labour party. Data management-style politics is sometimes seen as the antithesis of the door-to-door, community-based campaigning the party prides itself on. This isn't the case. The single most important element of any database is the most recent information. This can only be gathered by local activism and direct contact with voters. One of the great achievements of the Obama and Clinton campaigns was to find a way to smoothly integrate the data gathered by activists into their existing datasets. Good databases make local campaigning more, not less, important.

## Volunteer management

The vast armies of supporters mobilised by the two major Democratic candidates are in themselves a logistical problem: how can a campaign manage so many people and ensure they are working effectively? Doubtless, British campaigners, struggling with declining party membership, would be only too happy to have this difficulty. Yet ultimately, while their circumstances may be different, US and UK volunteer managers actually face a similar challenge – namely, how to use the resources they have effectively. This is true, regardless of whether those resources are legion or scarce. Technology is frequently assumed to de-personalise politics. But the real lesson from the US is that volunteer databases can be used to make the experience of activism more individualised, allowing people to utilise their talents and enjoy what they are doing. This, in turn, encourages them to progress further up the ladder of the campaign's infrastructure.

The 2008 election points to what is potentially an important shift in campaign organisation. We might be witnessing the end of the segregated campaign and a move to a more holistic approach. Previously, elections could easily be divided – national and local, air and ground war. These spheres of campaigning were frequently thought of as being isolated from each other. In contrast, the Obama campaign has resembled a single entity, not dissimilar to a living organism. Activists on the street acted as a nervous system, constantly feeding information back into the campaign's central brain. In return, the brain sent signals back to activists, instructing and advising them. For example, ground workers received daily emails on key talking points and how to react to important issues being discussed in the news. Thus, there was a tremendous level of synergy between the lines taken by the campaign spokesperson on CNN and the volunteer on the ground. It is not going too far to argue that Democratic activists in the 2008 election were the most effectively briefed in the history of electoral politics anywhere.

## Digital media

The 2008 US election has been seen as the Internet version of the 1960 ‘TV’ election when JFK trounced a pallid-looking Richard Nixon in the first televised debate. Certainly, John Edwards is on record as saying that, without the Internet, Barack Obama would not be the Democratic nominee.<sup>9</sup> This is almost certainly true, but, at this point, it is worth defining the term that has been thrown around so much in discussions of the topic: web 2.0. This differs from the first, largely text-based incarnation of the Internet that allowed users to surf following hyperlinks and was for the most part filled with content created by large companies or organisations.

In contrast, web 2.0 is multimedia, encompassing pictures, audio, video and animation. Crucially, content is both user-generated and user-organised. Amazon is an archetypal web 2.0 platform. Customers’ book reviews provide user-generated content, and anyone can rate those reviews in terms of helpfulness and accuracy. The work of top-rated reviewers is flagged and their recommendations highly prized. This is user organisation. The most obvious electoral manifestation of this approach is MyBO – the social networking element of Barack Obama’s campaign website.<sup>10</sup>

With such an approach, the campaign’s main function becomes giving supporters the tools to self-organise. This has been hugely successful. However, it also has an obvious downside: it requires the central management of the campaign to cede a huge amount of control to its supporters. This danger became evident in July, when a group of Obama supporters used his website to organise a highly effective campaign against the Senator’s position on the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act.<sup>11</sup> In a few days, the group they created became the most successful on the whole site. For many in the Labour Party, still scarred by the experiences of the 1980s, this must seem like a horrendous prospect. Perhaps this is why all the social networking elements of Labour’s current website are hidden behind a password locked, members-only wall.

But what we must learn is that this downside is not a downside at all.

The Obama team took discussion in its stride, trusting supporters to engage with each other responsibly and respectfully. In turn, supporters were able to talk about an issue where they genuinely felt let down by Obama, but also went on to note all the ways in which they agreed with him. It was, from all sides, an admirable display of political maturity, and it benefited the campaign.

One thing is certain. The web 2.0 model of information creation and organisation is going to become more, not less, ubiquitous. It will be something citizens in the UK will encounter every day and cannot be ignored. Disregarding it will create a strangely incongruous situation where a site like Amazon empowers people more than political parties. The day when a bookshop gives citizens more scope for free expression than a political party is surely the day when political parties have failed in their function.

The Obama team took discussion in its stride, trusting supporters to engage with each other responsibly and respectfully

# Freethinking

## Conclusion

The Obama campaign will be studied by parties around the world, but these campaigning techniques present a particular opportunity for progressives. The lessons from America in 2008 speak to the roots of progressive politics - which brought new social forces into democracy rather than arising from the old political elites – and there is now the opportunity to mobilise these new political movements in the UK. But success will depend on doing something more than graft some of the lessons of the 'new politics' onto the structures and cultures of the old politics: we will need to rethink more profoundly the way in which we do politics and what we believe that our political parties are for.

We must resist the temptation to see what is happening in the US as a quick fix for Labour's current difficulties, a 'to do' list for the next election. This approach can only end in disappointment. Attempts to emulate the web-based campaigning or fundraising networks will have a limited impact without recognising that these are examples of a different, more pluralist and less controlled culture of political organisation. And the new mobilising techniques will not prove a magic bullet unless there is an inspiring political mission and message.

The US election challenges Labour to change dramatically – altering the way the party is organised, how it interacts with its supporters and communicates with the electorate. The reward of learning the lesson, however, is potentially huge; reawakening Labour as a movement and making the party fit for purpose as a campaigning force in the twenty-first century.

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1. A small donation is normally defined as being less than \$200, which is the minimum amount required for a contributor's details to be recorded and published by the Federal Election Commission
2. All information on donations taken from <http://www.fec.gov/> (accessed 24th October, 2008).
3. Michael Turk, Keynote Address to Web 2.0 Conference. Royal Holloway College, University of London, 2008.
4. Donald P. Green and Alan S. Gerber, *Get Out the Vote!: How to Increase Voter Turnout*, Brookings Institution Press, 2004.
5. Cited in J.D. Lasica, *Civic Engagement on the Move: How Mobile Media can Serve the Public Good*, Aspen Institute, 2008.
6. Michael J. Malbin (ed.), *The Election After Reform: Money Politics and the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act*, Rowman Littlefield, 2006.
7. Nick Anstead, *The Internet and Campaign Finance in the U.S. and the U.K.: An Institutional Comparison*, *Journal of Information Technology Politics*, forthcoming.
8. Named after the clause in the US tax code that regulates them, 527 groups are political organisations which are "semi-detached" from official campaigns. This allows them to circumnavigate campaign finance rules and accept unlimited donations from individuals, sometimes running into millions of dollars. Although the most infamous example is the Republican Swift Boat Veterans for Truth, it was Democrats who created the first 527s. They have benefited far more than their Republican opponents from such organisations in recent election cycles, especially 2004. For further details see: *Open Secrets, Top 50 Federally Focused Organizations*, Center for Responsive Politics, 2004. Available at: <http://www.opensecrets.org/527s/527cmtes.php?level=C&cycle=2004> (accessed 13th October 2008).
9. John Edwards, Elizabeth Edwards's Address to Personal Democracy Forum. New York / South Carolina, 2008.
10. For the original definition of web 2.0 see Tim O'Reilly, *What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*, O'Reilly Media, 2005. For a discussion of its application in politics, see the Introduction to Andrew Chadwick and Philip N. Howard, *The Handbook of Internet Politics*, Routledge, 2008. See also: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6gmP4nk0EOE) (accessed 6th October, 2008).
11. James Risen, *Obama Voters Protest His Switch on Telecom Immunity*, *New York Times*, 2nd July 2008.