

The Path to the Aras

**(The role of political communications in
the election of Mary McAleese as the
eighth President of Ireland)**

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I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Masters is entirely my own work and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged in the text of my work.

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ABSTRACT

Suzanne Collins

The Path to the Aras (The role of political communications in the election of Mary McAleese as the eighth President of Ireland)

This thesis will attempt to explore aspects of political communications in Ireland. The political communications strategy of Fianna Fail will be focused upon, through an examination of the electoral campaign of Mary McAleese in her bid, in 1997, to become the eighth President of Ireland. The various components of the election campaign will be assessed and appraised as they came together to result in a victory for Fianna Fail. McAleese's campaign will be examined in two phases. Firstly, her successful campaign to gain a nomination from Fianna Fail, when she was not a member of the party, and secondly her campaign to convince the electorate to vote for her. In an examination of both phases of the campaign McAleese's target audience, core message and the role of the Fianna Fail party will be discussed. The second phase of McAleese's campaign will examine her use of non-mediated and mediated political communication and the role of political communication in her success.

Introduction

Mary McAleese's successful attempt to become the eighth President of Ireland in 1997 proved to be a triumph of communications. From the initial stages when her old friend, Harry Casey, suggested that she seek a nomination from the Fianna Fail party, to the final celebrated election victory, all forms and modes of communication were employed by McAleese and by Fianna Fail on her behalf. Casey had long been aware of McAleese's potential as he acted as her election agent in early 1997 when she contested a Dail seat for Fianna Fail in the constituency of Dublin South East. (McCarthy 1999:83) She failed to win on this occasion, but Casey was sure that she could win the Presidency.

There are two distinct phases of McAleese's communication strategy in her bid to secure the Presidency. The first phase of communications operated before McAleese was nominated, when she had to pursue a very specific communications strategy targeting the Fianna Fail party. After McAleese was selected her communications strategy had to target the electorate necessitating a wider and more comprehensive strategy. Both phases of McAleese's communication strategy will be examined.

There are three elements in both phases of McAleese's campaign. These elements include the target audience, the core message, and the role of the Fianna Fail party. Before McAleese was selected by the Fianna Fail party to become their candidate, she had to canvass support. This support came in the form of friends and former colleagues who approached Fianna Fail on her behalf. These included Harry Casey, and Patricia Casey who had worked with McAleese on the anti-abortion campaign in the early 1980's. McAleese canvassed the Fianna Fail party personally by standing by

the gates of the Dail and approaching TDB and they entered and left. She also wrote letters to all members of the parliamentary party seeking support.

During the first phase of McAleese's campaign McAleese's target audience was Fianna Fail. Her core message to the party was one that attempted to raise her profile and familiarise the parliamentary party with her background, her family, and her working life. McAleese had to convince the party that she would be a suitable representative for the party, who could win the Presidential election for the party. The role of the party in this instance was to select McAleese.

This initial successful use of intra-party political communications by McAleese displayed her potential to win the Presidency. At this early stage McAleese had to devise and implement her own political communication strategy showing that she was a strong candidate with a very keen understanding of political communications.

As soon as the Fianna Fail party selected McAleese to contest the Presidency on their behalf, McAleese entered phase two of her communications strategy. Following her selection, McAleese underwent an image change designed to make her more acceptable to the voters. Her campaign relied heavily on her personal canvass and advertising to increase voter awareness of her candidacy. During this phase, McAleese's target audience changed. This target audience can be identified as the voters who would have the power to elect McAleese. Yet, this audience did vary depending on where McAleese was, and what audience she was addressing. The main target audiences during phase two can be identified as rural, urban, students, Fianna Fail grass roots, and supporters of other parties. McAleese's core message to this

target audience also varied. In this Presidential race as in others, electoral communication tactics had to extend themselves to cover the whole country. It was this large geographical area that was to present a significant challenge for all of the candidates. In such cases the political message has to be more 'catch-all' as the candidate attempts to become all things to all people (or to all voters at least).

As with her core message to Fianna Fail, McAleese also needed to raise her profile with this target audience. In this phase, McAleese also had to communicate her policy and aspirations for the Presidency and plans for the office.

The role of the party in this phase was vital to McAleese's campaign. The party organised and ran McAleese's campaign. When considering the role of the party, a division can be made between the party hierarchy and the grass roots. The party hierarchy effectively ran McAleese's campaign. They had vast experience in running elections and winning seats. The June 1997 general election had brought Fianna Fail back into government so the party had many of the structures in place to contest another election. The hierarchy also had contacts with the advertising agency and the public relations agency that had worked with them in the general election campaign. These contacts proved to be very fruitful for McAleese. The party hierarchy also took the role of public relations and a news management. The grass roots of the party were vital when McAleese travelled around the country. After an initial reluctance, ordinary party members and local organisations were available to support McAleese and campaign for her.

The electoral campaign began with the official launch on the 25th September. The campaign took two forms, mediated and non-mediated. The non-mediated aspects of the campaign, where the candidate communicated directly with the electorate, controlling the message totally, took the form of personal canvassing and advertising. The mediated aspects of the campaign consisted of McAleese communicating with the electorate through the media, on television, radio and newspapers. The candidate did not have editorial control in these aspects of the campaign. Yet, the media formed a vital part of the campaign as the candidate received exposure that would reach more potential voters than she could meet personally.

As the 1990 Presidential election was the first for seventeen years, it did set some precedents for the election in 1997. Mary Robinson was the first female candidate to contest the Presidency, and one unexpected turn in 1997 was the all-female ballot, until the late entry of former Garda Derek Nally who ran as an Independent. Fianna Fail TD Brian Lenihan has speculated that if it was not for Robinson there would not have been four women contesting the 1997 Presidential election (Lenihan:1999).

It was an election of firsts, with two independent candidates, Dana Rosemary Scallon and Derek Nally, two candidates from the North, McAleese and Scallon, and four of the five candidates having never held any public office, Fine Gael's candidate Mary Banotti being the exception. While the previous Presidential election in 1990 may have in some part set the agenda in relation to the candidates that were chosen to contest the race in 1997, it was the general election of June 1997 that influenced the kind of campaign that Fianna Fail ran for Mary McAleese. Just as the leader of Fianna

Fail, Bertie Ahern, had travelled the country to meet and greet the voters in June of 1997, McAleese did the same often, following the same route taken by Ahern.

The number of candidates contesting the election changed the nature of the Presidential campaign as each candidate attempted to forge their own way and raise their profile. In the case of Mary McAleese, she had many divergent issues to deal with that extended beyond her bid for the Presidency. The issue of an individual born in the North of Ireland running for office while not without precedent (Fine Gael's 1990 Presidential candidate, Austin Currie, was born in the North and is a former member of the SDLP) became a significant issue during the campaign. Many commentators pointed to McAleese's nationalism and her perceived Catholic conservatism, both of which were deemed by the mainstream press to be a severe disadvantage. The proliferation of candidates resulted in an increased demand on media space and a need to have the each candidate's issues clearly defined as they each tried to differentiate themselves and create a separate and definite individual image. Mary McAleese's campaign encountered it's own specific difficulties. Yet, it is how the campaign was run, and how the candidate dealt with the difficulties that led to McAleese becoming the eighth President of Ireland.

Chapter One: Methodology

The principal methodology utilised in this thesis is ‘triangulation theory.’ This presupposes that by using three or more methods of research that the bias in one method will be highlighted by the other methods. Interviews with people involved in the McAleese election campaign were combined with a review of literature and a review of the media. Considering the predisposition of these Fianna Fail interviewees, it was necessary to engage in a methodological triangulation to attempt to neutralise this bias. The review of the media involved reviewing newspaper articles; news broadcasts, on both television and radio, as well as programmes covering the Presidential election. Each method of research complemented each other as each was used as a point of comparison with the other.

A significant portion of the research on McAleese’s Presidential campaign was derived from interviews with participants in that campaign. This information has a natural and inherent bias in favour of McAleese, as she was Fianna Fail’s candidate. The research was of course, conducted within a context. This context was McAleese’s victory over the other four Presidential candidates. It is often commented that the victors write history. It could be argued that the views of those Fianna Fail members and supporters involved in the campaign would be different if McAleese had lost the election.

In order to secure interviews on the McAleese campaign, a letter was written to ask the interviewees to participate in the research. Key individuals in the McAleese campaign were identified. It was essential to interview a cross section of those involved in the campaign so a comprehensive view of the campaign could be formulated. The only individual approached who did not consent to an interview was

the current general secretary of Fianna Fail Martin Mackin. Mackin was McAleese's press officer during the campaign. Repeated attempts to contact Mackin failed. A private source did indicate that Mackin, in general, was unwilling to participate in being interviewed due to his former work as a journalist.

There was a concern that some of the Fianna Fail interviewees might have a problem with the interviews be taped given the fact that Brian Lenihan Sr.'s attempt to secure the Presidency in 1990 was foiled in part due to an interview given to a post-graduate student. With this in mind, a decision was made to approach his son Deputy Brian Lenihan first in the hope that if he agreed to a taped interview then others in the Fianna Fail organisation would also agree.

Given the sensitivities in interviewing Brian Lenihan, I first approached Ivor Callely, TD for Dublin North Central. Callely approached Lenihan and vouched for me, following my letter to Lenihan. Callely also reassured Lenihan on the day of the interview when I requested that the interview be taped. I asked Lenihan at the end of the interview who I should talk to in relation to my thesis and he recommended several people. When I did write the letters to the other interviewees, I could legitimately say to them that Lenihan suggested I speak with them. I felt this really made a difference in the case of Pat Farrell.

Callely set up the meeting for me, vouched Brian Lenihan T.D. was interviewed on the 30th of June 1999 at the Leinster House. Lenihan served as McAleese's election agent but did not support her bid to become the Presidential nominee of the Fianna Fail party. Lenihan instead backed the candidacy for former Minister Michael O'Kennedy. While not involved in the running of the campaign Lenihan was able to

provide a valuable insight into the selection process that led to McAleese's candidacy. As Lenihan's father had contested the Presidential election, and had been very involved in the election campaign of Erskine Childers, Lenihan had seen the previous two Presidential elections at very close quarters and had a special interest in the contest.

Following a letter to Gerry Nagle, Head of Arcs Advertising, my supervisor Professor John Horgan approach him on my behalf to secure an interview. After verifying with Fianna Fail that he could discuss the Presidency, Nagle was interviewed on the 11th of November 1999 at his offices on Harcourt Street, Dublin 2. Nagle who had worked with Fianna Fail during the 1997 general election was also responsible for the advertising for the Mary McAleese campaign. Nagle detailed the transformation of McAleese and the decisions behind her advertising campaign. Nagle also formed part of the strategy team that managed McAleese's Presidential campaign.

Terry Prone, Director of Carr Communications was interviewed in her offices at Carr Communications, Booterstown, on the 8th of June 2000. As head of a company that was set up principally to train politicians to be better communicators, Prone was able to outline very clearly, why and how political actors fail to get their message across. She also pointed to what makes an effective interview and how politicians should present themselves for television and radio appearances.

David Miller was interviewed in Clontarf on the 15th of June 2000. Miller is a long time aide of Fianna Fail Dublin North Central T.D. Ivor Callely, and a leading member of the party's Dublin North Central constituency organisation. Miller was

provide vital background information able on the changing nature of campaigns, what makes a good campaign, and how to create interest in a candidate.

Pat Farrell, now Marketing Director of the EBS, was General Secretary of Fianna Fail at the time of the 1997 Presidential election was interviewed on 18th of June 2000 in his offices in the EBS, Dublin 2. Farrell took on the role of Deputy Director of elections. He travelled with McAleese during the campaign and was able to provide an account of the actual campaign as waged by the candidate. Farrell was initially reluctant to be interviewed because he had left public life. It was felt that his contribution would be incredibly valuable given that during his ten years as General Secretary of Fianna Fail he had run many election campaigns and had a good point of reference when discussing the McAleese campaign.

After attending a meeting at which Fianna Fail Minister Noel Dempsey spoke, I wrote to him the following day requesting an interview. Dempsey was interviewed at Leinster House on the 20th of June 2000. Dempsey served as Mary McAleese's director of elections. He co-ordinated the campaign at the McAleese campaign headquarters in Mount Street. He was based mainly in Dublin for the course of the campaign but did on occasion join the campaign on the road. Following that interview Dempsey telephoned Wally Young and told him give me an interview.

The head of Young Communications, Wally Young, was interviewed in his offices on the 21st of June 2000. Young who had worked with Fianna Fail during the 1997 general election was dealt with McAleese's public relations during the campaign.

Like Pat Farrell, Young travelled the country with McAleese. Young provided a more

objective view of events during the campaign. Unlike some members of the Fianna Fail party who were interviewed, he was more circumspect on the nature of media relations.

As the campaign is relatively recent, memories of the campaign were quite clear. A list of questions was prepared for each interview all of which included general questions on the candidate, the selection contest and the campaign. All of the questions were 'open' questions in that they did not restrict the replies of the respondent by giving them options for answers. This in some instances did lead to very long answers for very short questions. It also led to differing views of events during the campaigns being expressed. A.A. Oppenheim argues that

The chief advantage of the open question is the freedom it gives to the respondents. Once they have understood the intent of the question, they can let their thoughts roam freely unencumbered by a prepared set of replies' (Oppenheim 1992:112-113).

Each interview was then tailored to concentrate on the role of the individual being interviewed. All interviews were taped face to face and then transcribed literally to include all intonations of speech ('um', 'ahh', 'er') etc. Only information recorded on tape was used in this thesis. While several interviewees spoke while not being recorded this 'off the record' information was not deemed to be usable as it would not be possible to identify the individuals making the comments and observations. Only one interviewee, Brian Lenihan, was reluctant to be recorded. Lenihan did relent to being taped but stopped the tape on several occasions and would not allow any notes

to be taken during the interview. Transcripts of the interviews were offered to all interviewees. Only two interviewees, Lenihan, and Gerry Nagle requested copies.

Newspaper coverage of the election campaigns was intensive for the six-week campaign that ended on the 31st of October 1997. The prospects of electing a new President was cause for speculation from March of 1997 when President Mary Robinson announced that she would not be seeking a second term. The newspaper coverage fell into two categories. The daily newspapers covered the day-to-day campaign, where the candidates visited and the reception they received. The Sunday papers tended to give a round up of the week and explore in dept different aspects of the campaign as a whole.

A similar approach was taken with radio and television. There was daily coverage of the campaigns in news bulletins. Then shows, such as the Pat Kenny Show on RTE radio, interviewed all the candidates at length and fielded questions from the public. Similarly all of the candidates appeared on RTE television produced Questions and Answers, a show where panellists answer questions from the audience. In addition to this, candidates also appeared individually on the RTE television produced current affairs programme, Prime Time. All of the television shows, Questions and Answers, two editions of Prime Time and the Late Late show were viewed to assess Mary McAleese's performance. The questions posed to McAleese were also reviewed, especially as Fianna Fail had felt they had reason to make a formal complaint to RTE on one occasion, regarding the station's treatment of McAleese. This complaint highlights the inherent problem of using the media as a method of research. The

media gives a mediated or filtered view of events subject to editorial controls, possible bias of journalists or news organisations, and time constraints.

All the methods of research used came together to form a clear and comprehensive picture of the 1997 Presidential campaign of Mary McAleese. No one method of research would have provided these rounded viewpoints and while each method of research has its own limitations and restrictions, it was possible to collate them and present an analysis of the campaign.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

There is very serious deficit of literature on Irish electoral campaigns. What literature there is tends to focus on individual elections and how the electorate voted. There is generally some discussion on factors that may have influenced the outcome of the election, but very little written on how the politicians might have influenced the voters or how the voters communicated with the politicians through exercising their franchise. For example, much was written regarding the Labour party's defeat in the 1997 general election. Yet, most of this discussion focused on the fact that the Labour party lost so many seats, where seats were lost, and what former ministers had been disposed. Very few column inches, radio and television time, was given to why the electorate may have sent this message to the Labour party, or indeed, on the incredible power of the voters to reverse the fortunes of a party that had believed that it was on an upward surge.

It cannot be claimed that political communication has been a recent phenomenon within Irish political life. Since the advent of elections, there have been politicians anxious to communicate effectively with the electorate in an attempt to secure votes. The methods of this communication may have changed over time, with the increasing prevalence of the media and the rise in differing methods of communication, but the goal has remained the same.

Political communication constitutes any form of communication within the political arena or any outward communication to those outside that arena by so-called political actors. The components of political communication are many-fold. Firstly and perhaps, the most important element is the relationship between the political actor and potential voters. At election time, this relationship is of paramount importance. The

political actor can communicate with the public in a mediated or a non-mediated way (McNair 1999:29).

In reviewing the literature on the subject of political communications, it becomes clear that much of it concerns Britain and the United States. When considering the US and British electoral systems, it can be seen that it is the British model that is closer to the Irish model than the US. There are several factors influencing this, the most significant being population and laws regarding political advertising. In Britain and Ireland the constituencies (both in terms of population and geography) allow for far more face-to-face contact between the politician and the voter. The instances of human contact are often staged for the media, particularly if it involves a party leader. Yet, in Ireland at least, the house to house canvass, along with canvasses of shopping centres or DART stations, conducted by the politician, their family and party workers and supporters, remains an important element of any election campaign.

In the US, political advertising is restricted only by how much money candidates can spend and a proliferation of television advertisements have become increasingly negative. In Ireland and the U.K. the laws regarding political advertising are considerably more restrictive. Press advertising and postering is permitted, but advertising on radio and television is not. The only permissible form of advertising on television and radio takes the form of the Party Political Broadcast and is restricted to the state owned station, RTE. The time given to parties for the Party Political Broadcasts is allocated in proportion to electoral support in the previous election.

The literature on political communications can be divided into different sections, personal accounts, specific elections, the theory of political communications, practical guides to what works and what does not, as well as literature concerning individual aspects of communications e.g. aspects of the media, advertising, broadcasting etc.

Personal accounts generally take the form of books written by former members of government, advisors or political consultants. In the Irish context, Sean Duignan's, 'One Spin on the Merry go Round' (1994), and Fergus Finlay's 'Snakes and Ladders' (1998) provide a very informative, if somewhat biased accounts of their periods spent in the inner circle of Irish government. Duignan recounts his time as Government Press Secretary to Albert Reynolds through two governments, while Finlay writes of his time as advisor to Labour Party leader Dick Spring while in and out of government. Both of these books provide a valuable insight into the internal workings of major political parties and how they behave when under pressure.

An American example of a similar type comes from husband and wife, James Carville and Mary Matlin who, before their marriage, took opposing places on the central strategy teams for the Bush/Clinton Presidential contest in 1992. 'All's Fair (Love War and Running for President)' (1994) is perhaps one of the most informative insider accounts of what really occurs on a Presidential campaign and just how opposing teams of political communicators and strategists view each other. This text also provides insight into the relationship between the media and the campaign, media management and how opponents are viewed. The Clinton campaign in particular had to deal with significant negative stories in the media, and how Clinton handled these

stories certainly contributed to his success. Parallels can be drawn in this regard to the McAleese campaign, as she too had to contend with negative media.

Journalists have also contributed greatly to political communications literature, most notably British journalist Nicholas Jones, who wrote of his time as a lobby journalist in the House of Commons and his relationships with several government press secretaries in 'Soundbites and Spindoctors' (1995). In his more recent book, 'Sultans of Spin (1999),' Jones focuses on the spin-doctoring around Tony Blair and his government. Jones provides a view of government from the perspective of journalists and from his texts it is possible to discern a certain journalistic agenda that proves useful in reviewing the media coverage of McAleese. Howard Kurtz, an American journalist, also wrote a very detailed account of the relationship between the press and the Clinton administration during his second term in 'Spin Cycle (Inside the Clinton Propaganda Machine)' (1998).

While all of these books are informative, and often amusing, they are in general highly personalised accounts of events with all incumbent political prejudices. The accounts of Nick Jones and Howard Kurtz might be judged to be more impartial when it comes to the 'spin' different Press Secretaries attempted to ply them with, they were still liable to have a certain prejudices because as journalists they had a very definite agenda. The prejudices of the writers of these books are most evident in the Carville/Matlin case, as they give widely differing accounts of the same incident. We can see this again with Finlay and Duignan, particularly when it comes to the breakdown of the Labour/Fianna Fail coalition in November 1994.

While political communications has always existed in one form or another, since the existence of elections, the theory surrounding political communications is generally judged to be a relatively new field. Political communications theorists can be divided into two sections, those who concentrate research on elections and how to win them, and those who concentrate on how such political communication develops how it is sustained. Such theorists generally believe that political communications has little to do with electoral campaigning and more to do with the everyday communicative activity. Again, the literature for the most part concerns Britain and the US as opposed to Ireland. Those focusing on elections and how to win them include, Brian McNair, Denis Kavanagh, Bob Franklin, Duncan Watts and Margaret Scammell, all of whom have concerned themselves with political communication in Britain.

McNair's 'An Introduction to Political Communication' (1999) is a comprehensive guide to all aspects of political communication focusing on electoral communication utilising examples from British elections and relations between British governments and the media. In his book 'Political Communication Today' (1997), Watts focuses on the media, governmental manipulation, selling politicians, how politicians sell themselves, as well as the role of the media in the process. Franklin in 'Packaging Politics' (1994), Scammell in 'Designer Politics' (1995) and Kavanagh in 'Election Campaigning (The New Marketing of Politics)' (1995) detail the relationship between the media and the political actor in their attempts to influence public support. In common with McNair, Franklin, Scammell and Kavanagh draw attention to examples in British political life. While the aforementioned deal with electoral politics they also concern themselves with the wider relationship between the media, political actors and the voter.

McNair points out that the media now significantly mediates the political message. The media, in reporting and commenting on political activity, effectively changes the original message (McNair 1999:29). Yet, how exactly the message is altered, and how the public receives this message is still a cause for some controversy. Historically the 'hypodermic needle' or 'billiard ball' where the receiver accepted the information unconditionally and unquestioningly was the accepted model. US and European sociologists believed that this model provided an explanation for the rise of Nazism. However, by the 1950s, this approach had been discounted when sociologists accepted that cultural and social situations could affect the reception of the message (McNair 1999:29).

Stuart Hall defines potential voters as having different 'decoding positions'. A 'dominant' position is where a supporter of a particular position is likely to agree with their party of choice because that position reinforces their views. A 'negotiated' position is where the viewer may be in two minds and accept some of the message and reject other parts of it. The 'oppositional' position is where an individual will oppose the messenger and therefore reject the message (McNair 1999:30). A Fianna Fail supporter is more likely to be in a dominant position regarding the policies and politics of that party, and likely to be oppositional when considering the policies and politics of Fine Gael or The Labour Party. A floating voter is someone who is likely to have a negotiated position.

McNair clearly defines political communication as any form of communication regarding or pertaining to political activity.

All forms of communication undertaken by politicians and other political actors for the purpose of achieving specific objectives. Communication addressed *to* these actors by non-politicians such as voters and newspaper columnists. Communication *about* these actors and their activities as contained in news reports, editorials, and other forms of media discussion of politics (McNair 1999:4).

Richard Perloff offers an alternative definition of political communication. He argues that political communication is,

the process by which a nation's leadership, media and citizenry exchange and confer the meaning upon messages that relate to the conduct of public policy (Perloff 1998:8).

Perloff points out that there are three aspects of political communication. Firstly, the process of political communication does not occur automatically (Perloff 1998:8). All the main political parties have press offices for example, to liaise with the media. Secondly, there is a 'golden triangle' of political communication formed by the three main actors, leaders, the media and the public who 'clamour for space in the public stage' (Perloff 1998:9). Any political activity includes the three corners of this triangle, especially at election time. An electoral candidate cannot hope to reach all potential voters through personal contact alone and will therefore rely on the media to relay the message. Finally, Perloff argues, while political communication is all about exchange and interpretation of messages which are concerned broadly with

governance, or the conduct of public policy, these messages are interpreted differently by different actors (Perloff 1998:9-10).

While instances of political communication generally become most evident during election campaigns, Perloff points out that while it is commonly believed that political communication is concerned only with elections, this is not actually the case.

Politics, broadly defined, concerns the process by which society reaches consensus on policy issues. Thus political communication occurs when citizens, media and leader 'dialogue' about issues of broad concern to elites or the public (Perloff 1998:10).

During an election campaign, time is at a premium. The political actors will endeavour to utilise every possible opportunity to communicate with the electorate, thus making it seem like the bulk of political communication takes place in the run up to an election. Often the most memorable instances of political communication occur during an election campaign when political actors are desperate to seek publicity. This form of communication may more accurately be described as electoral communication.

Perloff draws a distinction between electoral and non-electoral communications saying that

It is commonly believed that political communication is concerned only with elections, but this is not so. Politics, broadly defined,

concerns the process by which society reaches consensus on policy issues. Thus political communication occurs when citizens, media and leader 'dialogue' about issues of broad concern to elite's or the public (Perfloff 1998:10).

Kavanagh deals more directly with political communications during an election campaign. Aspects of the 1997 Presidential election can be applied to the factors that Denis Kavanagh identifies as hindering an electoral campaign. These factors include timing; conflict between electoral and other goals; lack of sure knowledge; disagreement on campaign strategy and tactics; shortcomings of actors; distrust between key campaigners; problems of co-ordination; overload (Kavanagh 1998:233-241).

Denis Kavanagh comments that timing is crucial in an election campaign as in all communications campaigns. Consequently, governments will try to implement unpopular policies early in the term of government. However, much as they would like to, governments cannot always control timing of an election (Kavanagh 1998:223-4). The timing of the 1997 Presidential election should have been set for seven years from the election of Mary Robinson. Robinson, however, resigned seven months before the end of her term to take up a job with the United Nations. The government decided not to change the polling date, giving all parties an equal advantage in preparing for the Presidential election.

Conflict between electoral and other goals arises, Kavanagh argues, when party purists emerge who are committed to the advancement of certain policies and values

regardless of the electoral support or opinion polls (Kavanagh 1998:234). In the instance of the Presidential election, this conflict was minimised because the only goal the parties had was to win the office of the President.

Kavanagh points out that, as there is a lack of sure knowledge surrounding political communications, there is no scientific way to ensure or avoid defeat.

Surveys may inform a party of its strengths and weaknesses, but they cannot prescribe how the weaknesses can be remedied... There is usually an element of personal judgement, intuition and hunch in the decisions politicians take (Kavanagh 1998:236).

During the Presidential election of 1997, the unpredictability of the contest was exacerbated by the fact that there had been so few elections preceding this one for the office of the President. The election was also contested by an unprecedented number of candidates. The five candidates differed widely in their backgrounds and personalities making the progress of the election incredibly unpredictable. There was no doubt that the vote would be badly split, but there was less knowledge of how the crucial transfers would fall. The voting system of PRSTV can result in the candidate who has gained the most first preference votes not actually going on to win the election, if the transfers do not fall in their favour.

While Kavanagh rates disagreement on campaign strategy and tactics as a factor influencing the outcome of elections, this did not appear to be a significant element in the McAleese campaign. The campaign was ostensibly a low-issue one with very little

politically at stake, that is to say there could be no effect in public policy resulting from the outcome and the careers of members of the Dail, or the government party were not at stake. The strategy was principally to get the candidate around the country on the local radio and maximise her exposure (Young:2000).

Kavanagh recognises the shortcomings of actors involved in a campaign as a factor that may result in its failure (Kavanagh 1998:237). This would not appear to have been a problem during the McAleese campaign. McAleese was a confident media performer and the campaign was well planned and well staffed by individuals who were similarly involved with the General Election the previous June that resulted in a return to government for Fianna Fail. This must have given those involved a certain amount of confidence. As Fianna Fail had only one candidate in the field there could be little public disagreement on her merits or demerits if she was to win the election. If McAleese had lost, the election story might have been very different. Her success led the party to claim that she had indeed been the best person they could have selected and that everyone involved in the campaign did the best job possible.

Kavanagh identifies distrust between key campaigners as another significant factor (Kavanagh 1998:238). Individuals involved with the campaign may have different agendas and everyone wants to protect their own patch. A candidate's entourage may have a different view of the election than that of party headquarters as their careers may be bound up with that of that candidate. In general, superficially at least, the McAleese campaign seems to have been without these sorts of tensions. Again, the differences between this campaign and general elections are apparent in that the goal

was the Presidency and everyone's efforts were rapped up in one individual. More importantly, very few careers depended on McAleese securing the Presidency.

Problems of co-ordination will often affect the result of a campaign. Kavanagh points out that the more elements in a campaign that need to be co-ordinated the higher the risk will be of failure (Kavanagh 1998:240). The Presidential election was significantly easier to co-ordinate than a general election as the party had only one candidate. The comparatively layered structure, consisting of Comhairle Dail Ceantar (constituency organisation) and Cummans (branches) of Fianna Fail meant that the campaign could be organised quite well. Local cummans were on hand to give the campaign momentum in small towns, at meetings and rallies. While all the aspects of the media, both national and local had to be co-ordinated, it was relatively easy to stay 'on-message' with only one candidate, one objective, and very few policy issues.

The final factor identified by Kavanagh is 'overload'. He quite accurately points out that there are many pressures on the candidate and those involved in the campaign, including the pressures of round the clock media coverage, pressure for new stories and different angles. There are also physical pressures on the candidate with having to give speeches, meet and greet the voters, give radio interviews etc, often following quite a punishing schedule. For a candidate in a Dail constituency this process is difficult enough but for the Presidential candidates there was the added pressure of having to tour the entire country. In addition, they still had return to Dublin, to the RTE studios, for key television programmes, such as the Late Late Show and Questions and Answers. Kavanagh contends that,

So many participants live near the edge – a reason surely for the feverish interest in and over-reaction to opinion polls, ‘gaffes’, media coverage and other events’ (Kavanagh 1998:241).

Former British Labour Party politician, Richard Crossman disagrees with Kavanagh regarding the importance of a campaign in the election of a candidate. In Harrop and Miller’s text, ‘Elections and Voters (A comparative introduction)’ Crossman puts forth the view that ‘the election is the end of a long process.’ Crossman argues that despite electoral volatility, voters are swayed not so much by the ‘frenetic electioneering of the campaign as by the overall record of the governing party’ (Harrop and Miller 1987:227). This indicates that the political actor needs to maintain communication with the voter at all times. Crossman points out that the distinction between the ‘campaign’ and the ‘pre-campaign’ is not significant. While certain legal restrictions become active once an election has been called regarding advertising and how much money can be spent, in reality election campaigns begin as soon as the last one has finished the momentum building until the next campaign formally begins (Harrop and Miller 1987:228). This may be true of general elections, but as Fianna Fail only selected their candidate six weeks before polling day, McAleese’s election campaign was crucial to her success.

Literature on non-electoral aspects of political communication includes texts by J.G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch, D.L. Paletz and Atkin Rice. In ‘The Crisis of Political Communication’ (1995) J.G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch examine the links between the mass media and politics, politicians and the press, comparisons

between the US and Britain, news coverage and issues and setting of agendas, not solely at election time. Similarly D.L. Paletz's 'Political Communication Research' (1987) concentrates less on elections and 'spin', and more on approaches to research of political communication examining, amongst other topics, media and policy, the influence of camera angles, and the publicity of state subjects. They also examine the limits of news media, the role of private television stations in Italian elections, journalism versus public relations in the FDR, election communications and the democratic political system, and media agenda setting. Atkin Rice in 'Public Communications Campaigns' (1989) examines state sponsored warnings and information campaigns, such as the use of television in the promotion of the use safety belt on television, as well as campaigns regarding sexual health and family planning, crime prevention, anti-smoking etc. Rice also focuses on the foundations of campaigns, how they are developed, and the audiences at which they are targeted.

Theoretical approaches tend to concentrate less on cause and effect and more on the process of political communication itself. The effects of the instance of a political actor engaging with the media are examined. The effect of the message considered, how it is received and decoded, transmitted to the public, and how all the components come together to result in the process of communication. L.W. Pye edited one of the earlier texts 'Communications and Political Development' (1963) and detailed the mass media and the politicians, emergence of professional communicators and the development of political communication processes. Lucian W. Pye refers to these individuals as articulators of the collective identity and champions of specific interests (Pye 1963:56).

‘Politics; Communication and Culture’ (1997) edited by A. Gonzalez and D.V. Tanno discusses the effect of political communication on culture and the opposite effect of culture on political communication. Perspectives in politics and culture are also considered, as are cultural influences in political communications, political identity and national myth, politics and its cultural bases and politics in intercultural training programmes. ‘Political Communication (Issues and Strategies for Research)’ (1975) edited by S.H. Chaffee is an earlier text which deals with the diffusion of political information, political campaigns and mass communication research, as well as methods of political communication research. In this text, Garrett J. O’Keefe points out that voters who decide early on in a campaign how they are going to vote are very definite about their choices and are not easily dissuaded (Chaffee 1975:137). While so called floating voters,

report disproportionately low political interest, moderate attention to the campaign exposure, high anticipation of media influence prior to the campaign, and high actual media influence on their vote decisions throughout the campaign (Chaffee 1975:137), making it necessary for the political actor to work all the harder to secure those votes.

There are aspects of literature that prove to be useful in the technical terms of the ‘how’ of political communications. These would include books on advertising such as N.A. Hart’s ‘The Practice of Advertising’ (1993) and T. Meeaghan and P. O’Sullivan’s ‘Marketing Communications in Ireland’ (1995), both of which give an indication of how political figures market themselves. Media how-to, issues and

concerns, are dealt with in Shirley Biagi's 'Media Reader' (1996) and the public consumption of the media is the focus of M.J Kelly and Barbara O'Connor's 'Media Audiences in Ireland (1997).'

As similarities between British and American election campaigns increase there has been an increase of the amount of comparative research done in this area. The scale of the campaigns may be different, as is the law governing political advertising yet the usage of the media and tactics and strategy surrounding this area is very similar. A recent publication, 'The Formation of Campaign Agendas: A Comparative Analysis of Party and Media Roles in Recent American and British Elections' (1998) edited by H.A. Semetko et al. provides an analysis of recently emerging trends. The aforementioned 'The Crisis of Political Communication' (1995) by J.G. Blumler and Michael Gurevitch also draws comparisons between the U.S. and Britain. Other texts on political communications and relationships with the media focusing on the US include R.E. Denton's, 'Political Communication in America' and R.M. Perloff's, 'Political Communication: Politics, Press and Public in America' (1998). These two texts, while concentrating solely on the U.S. experience may provide an indication as to future trends.

Journals provide an up-to-date source of research and information regarding political communications. One journal, 'Political Communication' deals specifically with the issues but several other journals can also prove to be useful. The 'European Journal of Communications', 'Journal of Communications' and 'Journalism and Mass Communication' often deal with issues surrounding or directly concerning political

communications. 'Irish Political Studies' deals specifically with Irish issues that are often missed in the other journals.

David Farrell has detailed the emergence of marketing in Irish politics in two articles discussing the marketing strategy of Fine Gael. In an article titled 'The strategy to market Fine Gael in 1981' Farrell details how Fine Gael modernised their electoral techniques after suffering a defeat at the polls in 1977. Farrell points out that Fine Gael began to market the party as a product. Farrell draws a useful distinction between direct and indirect communication. Direct communication is posters, election literature, press advertisements, party political broadcasts, jingles, t-shirts and badges. Indirect communication is defined as 'trying to present the product to the media in the best possible light, maximising positive coverage by using public relations and sales promotion techniques' (IPS Vol 1:1986). Farrell In an article titled, 'Political Strategies in the Electoral Market: Political Marketing in West Germany, Britain and Ireland' in the 'European Journal of Communications' Farrell argues that political marketing is the 'application of promotional activities to direct an exchange with the voters' (EJPR Vol 15:1987).

In 'Politics' Patrick Butler and Neil Collins discuss the impact of Mary Robinson's victory in 1990. They point out that Robinson gave the 'largely ceremonial office' a higher profile, that the change of leadership in Fine Gael was partly due to their loss, and that the left-wing of politics in Ireland was greatly encouraged by Robinson's victory. In common with Farrell, Butler and Collins also emphasis the role of marketing and defining the party as a product (Politics 13(1): 1993). In 'Irish Political Studies', Eoin O'Sullivan outlines the details of the 1990 Presidential election (IPS

Vol 6:1991), that proves to be a comparison point for the 1997 election. In the same journal, John Doyle provides an overview of the 1997 Presidential election (IPS Vol 13:1997).

In 'Political Communication' Mancini draws attention to the growing field of political professionalism. These political professionals can have a considerable effect on electoral campaigns. Mancini points to several factors including the 'definition of strategies and organisation of the campaign, polling and media production, and interaction' (Mancini 1999:231-245). While 'definition of strategies' regarding the formation of strategies and organisation of an electoral campaign may have always existed, there has been a marked increase in the advent of polling and media production around electoral campaigns, even within the last twenty years.

There is an argument that advent of these professionals in the political arena creates a distance between the political actor and the public, that somehow a situation is created where style dominates substance. Terri Prone, one of the founders of Carr Communications concurs with this belief. She argues that in politics style is 'increasingly important and shouldn't have any validity at all' (Prone:2000). Paolo Mancini outlines some of the characteristics of these political professionals, including the fact that politics is not their only area of expertise, and they do not necessarily have an exclusive relationship with any one party. They are 'part of the new labour market' (Mancini 1999:231-245).

As Mary McAleese is only in her fourth year of a seven year term there has only been one biography written on the President. Journalist, Justine McCarthy, did not receive

co-operation from McAleese for the biography 'Mary McAleese (The Outsider)' (1999) yet it attempts to cover all of McAleese's life from her beginnings in Belfast to her bid to become President of Ireland. However, two books on Mary Robinson prove to be a useful reference point for McAleese's campaign and how the conditions existed for her to secure a nomination from Fianna Fail. Emily O'Reilly's book 'Candidate (The Truth behind the Presidential Campaign)' (1991) details the Robinson campaign, and John Horgan's book 'Mary Robinson (An Independent Voice)' (1997) gives a more detailed account of Robinson's life and career as well as her Presidency.

Politicians and other political communicators are facing an increasing battle to keep the voters interested in their message. In, 'Irish Voters Decide' (1994), Richard Sinnott outlines how apathy is on the increase amongst voters, with fewer people exercising their franchise. Voter turnout reached a peak in Ireland in the 1930s. In the 1933 general election turnout reached an unprecedented and never yet repeated 80.4%. Turnout has declined since then but excepting a low of 68.5% in 1944 it remained over the 70% limit until 1989 when it again reached the low of 68.5%. It has been in decline ever since (Sinnott 1995:Appendix 2). Political actors find this especially worrying as they generally seem to be convinced that it is their supporters who are not making an effort to vote. This leads to incredibly cautious language in the few days preceding an election. The political actor may want to encourage supporters and activists by saying that a win is likely yet if the political actor appears to be too confident it may lead to supporters not voting as they think that the seat is won

The 'How Ireland Voted' series of books are useful in analysing the results of elections. For this study, 'How Ireland Voted 1997' (1999) edited by Michael Marsh and Paul Mitchell was especially as it analyses the general election held 5 months before the Presidential election and provides information of the mood of the electorate. Michael Marsh also comments on the President election in a chapter titled 'The Making of the Eighth President' (Marsh and Mitchell 1999:215-242).

There are many and varied aspects which may effect the electorate and influence their voting patterns, or indeed their decision not to exercise their franchise at all. A proportion of the vote in an election campaign is always pre-determined. Party loyalty, on the decline in recent years, is still a factor in elections, one which candidates will do all they can to maximise. For example, since its inception in 1932, Fianna Fail has usually maintained a first preference vote share of over 40% reaching a height of 50.6% in 1977. In 1992, the party received an all time low of 39.1% first preference vote when Albert Reynolds was forced out of coalition with the Progressive Democrats. Reynolds insisted on calling Progressive Democrat leader Dessie O'Malley a 'liar' in relation to evidence both men had given to the Beef Tribunal. Yet, Fianna Fail managed to secure 68 Dail seats, one more than in 1948 when they received 41.8% of the vote, due largely to vote transfers (Sinnott 1995: Appendix 2).

Ultimately, the effectiveness of electoral communication is defined in terms of winners and losers. The entire point of an electoral campaign is to attempt to influence the electorate. Attempts to persuade the voters to choose a certain candidate and party, or indeed vote at all, relies on one assumption, that voters can be persuaded. Political

parties and individual candidates obviously believe that there is a battle to be won and lost at every election, otherwise they would not, collectively and individually, spend so much time and money attempting to influence the outcome. Yet, as voter participation decreases, specifically in areas of economic deprivation and among younger voters it appears that the political actors are fighting a losing battle for the so called 'hearts and minds' of the electorate. It is even more vital then for parties to ensure those party members and supporters exercise their franchise.

Chapter Three: The Presidency

The Fianna Fail government, led by Eamon de Valera, proposed a new Constitution in 1937 to replace the one agreed in 1922. This revised Constitution allowed for the first President of Ireland. J.M. Kelly notes that the government opposition, of the time were apprehensive that the Presidency could evolve into a dictatorship (Kelly 1994:83). This however, should not have been a concern as de Valera intended the President to become a figurehead. Kelly argues that the powers of the President are 'few and insignificant' (Kelly 1994:83). It was envisioned that the President would form the third wing of the executive after the government and the judiciary, but essentially the role is a symbolic one. The principle powers held by the President and the obligations of the office are outlined in the constitution, in articles 12 to 14. Presidential elections are by universal suffrage and proportional representation (Article 12.2.1 and 12.2.2).

The President holds office for seven years and may be re-elected for one further term (Article 12.3.1 and 12.3.2). An election must be held within sixty days of a President retiring or resigning (Article 12.3.3) Candidates for the office must be thirty-five years old (Article 12.4.1), or have completed their thirty-fifth year, according to the Irish version of the text (Whelan 1999:65). If candidates are not former or retiring Presidents, they must be nominated for election by at least twenty members of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Article 12.4.i), or by four county councils (Article 12.4.ii). Members of the Councils can only nominate one person per election (Article 12.4.3) When Eamon de Valera contested the Presidency for the second time in 1966, he did not nominate himself however, he opted to seek and received the nomination of twenty members of the Oireachtas (Kelly 1999:85). Patrick Hillery nominated himself for a second term in 1983. If only one candidate nominated for the Presidency then it

is not necessary to have an election (Article 12.4.5). This was the case in 1937, 1952, 1974, 1976, and 1983.

The constitution ensures that the President is solely committed to the office once elected. If a member of the Oireachtas is elected as President, they must then give up their seat in the Oireachtas (Article 12.6.1, 12.6.2). The President is prohibited from holding any other office while President (Article 12.6.3)

The constitution also outlines the timeframe under which the President should take up their post following an election (Article 12.7). It also outlines the oath the President must swear upon inauguration before the members of both Houses of the Oireachtas, Judges of the Supreme and High courts and 'other public personages' (Article 12.8)

The oath states that;

In the presence of Almighty God I do solemnly and sincerely promise and declare that I will maintain the constitution of Ireland and uphold its laws, that I will fulfil my duties faithfully and conscientiously in accordance with the law, and that I will dedicate my abilities to the service and welfare of the people of Ireland. May God direct and sustain me (Article 12.8).

The President cannot leave the state without the permission of the government (Article 12.9)

While the President is head of state, conditions do exist under which the President can be 'impeached for stated misbehaviour' (Article 12.10) This function of impeachment

is very restricted. Article 10 subsections 1 to 7 concerns impeachment and dismissal of the President, should the President be found by the Oireachtas to have acted improperly.

The President is guaranteed a residence 'in or near the City of Dublin' (Article 12.11.1) and a salary that will not be diminished during the term of office (Article 12.11.2, Article 12.11.3)

The President has several functions in relation to the government, almost all of which are constrained by the government. On the recommendation of the Dail, the President appoints the Taoiseach (Article 13.1.1) and on the nomination of the Taoiseach appoints the other members of the government (Article 13.1.2). The President must also, on the advice of the Taoiseach, accept the resignation of any member of the government, or must terminate their appointment (Article 13.1.3). The Dail may also be summoned and dissolved on the recommendation of the Taoiseach (Article 13.2.1) but the President may use his or her discretion and refuse to dissolve the Dail on the advice of the Taoiseach who had lost the support of the majority in the Dail (Article 13.2.3). The President does not need permission from the government to convene a meeting of either or both of the Houses of the Oireachtas but must consult with the Council of State (Article 13.2.3).

The President cannot speak out on any policy issue, cannot institute bills, or give public support to any specific political party during an election, or have a role in the running of the country. The President can address the joint houses of the Oireachtas (article 13.7.1); a privilege utilised by only two Presidents on two occasions each,

Eamon de Valera, and Mary Robinson. Following a consultation with the Council of State, the President may also address the Nation (Article 13.7.2). Any such speeches must be approved by the government of the day (Article 13.7.3).

The reasoning behind the restrictions placed on the President speaking publicly appeared to be an issue of authority. When the draft of the constitution was first debated in the Dail it was put to de Valera that a President should be able to explain their reasoning behind a refusal to dissolve the Dail or why a bill was being referred to the High Court. De Valera rejected these arguments saying that this would result in a public clash between the President and the Government and 'you would immediately have two authorities, and you cannot have that' (Kelly 1999:95).

The President, as head of state, is the supreme commander of the Defence Forces (Article 5.1). It was envisioned that this role would be a nominal one. De Valera commented during a Dail debate on the 1937 constitution that any powers the President might exercise in relation to the Defence Forces would be through the Constitution. According to the constitution, any actions by the President requires the direct advice of the government (Article 13.11) (Kelly 1994:91).

The President's judicial function is less restrictive and is less dependent on the will of the government. The President signs bills into law after both houses of the Oireachtas, the Dail and the Seanad have passed them (Article 13.1.3). The President can also refer bills to the Supreme Court, if the bill is considered by them to be contrary to the constitution, following a consultation with the Council of State (Article 26.1.1). If the

Supreme Court agrees with President that the bill is unconstitutional, then the President can refuse to sign the bill (Article 26.1.3).

The principal differences between Presidential and general elections are candidates, timeframe, and issues. When a party contests a general election, they will field a varying number of candidates. The bigger parties such as Fine Gael and Fianna Fail will generally attempt to contest the election in all constituencies. Whereas smaller parties such as the Progressive Democrats or Sinn Fein, due to a lower membership base and more limited resources, will often choose to run candidates in select constituencies where they may have a chance of winning a seat. In a Presidential election, each party has only ever fielded one candidate, as there is only one seat to be secured. Consequently, all the resources of the party can be put behind one individual. The effort of the entire party can be consolidated.

The timeframe of a Presidential election is not the same as the timeframe of a general election. The duration of the Presidency is provided for in the constitution and a new President is selected or elected every seven years. While this timeframe has had exceptions (both O Dalaigh and Robinson resigned before their terms of office were complete) it does provide some structure. General elections are to be held every five years according to the constitution but the stability of a government is contingent upon a number of factors that are not always in the control of the government. When contesting a Presidential election it is likely that candidates will only begin to contest the election once they have been selected. In contrast, TDs or local politicians will often begin to contest the next election twenty-four hours after polling day. The issue of policy also points to a significant difference between Presidential and general

elections. Policy forms a significant part of the platform upon which parties contesting general elections will canvass the electorate. Issues such as the economy, healthcare, crime, provision of childcare, and housing will often be prominent. These issues matter, because within the confines of the Dail, TDs may have the opportunity to create and affect policy. Presidents, however, because they do not have such powers will not be concerned with issues that affect the daily lives of the voters. Policy statements, during a Presidential campaign, have to be mainly aspirational. There may be questions of style regarding where a potential President may travel, or what groups would be invited to the official residence, Aras an Uachtarain.

The degree to which the Presidency has been politicised has varied throughout its history. The first person to hold the post of the Presidency was Douglas Hyde who was an agreed candidate in 1938. As the Presidency was supposed to be above politics Hyde, a Protestant and a Gaelic scholar appeared to be the ideal choice for the first President of Ireland. While there was an intention for the Presidency to remain above politics, the nomination process requires support from politicians. When the parties manage to agree a candidate, the process can remain above politics but when parties contest the Presidential election, the process becomes politicised. This process favours party political candidates and the two biggest parties in the Dail, Fianna Fail and Fine Gael have always participated in Presidential elections.

DATE	CANDIDATE(S) winner of election*	ELECTION
1937	Hyde	No
1945	O Kelly*/ McEoin/McCartan	Yes
1952	O Kelly	No
1959	de Valera*/McEoin	Yes
1966	de Valera*/O Higgins	Yes
1973	Childers*/O Higgins	Yes
1974	O Dalaigh	No
1976	Hillery	No
1983	Hillery	No
1990	Lenihan/Currie/Robinson*	Yes
1997	McAleese*/Banotti/Roche/Scallon/Nally	Yes

The first Presidential election was held in 1945. There were three candidates Fianna Fail's Sean T. O Kelly, Sean MacEoin for Fine Gael, and an independent candidate Patrick McCartan who was supported by Labour, Clann na Talmhain and people who subsequently formed Clann na Poblachta. It was a Fianna Fail victory, with O Kelly securing 49.5% of the vote and 13% of McCartan's transfers. O Kelly went on to serve two terms in office being returned unopposed for his second term. The second Presidential election was held in 1959 and was a contest between Fine Gael's Sean McEoin, running for the second time, and former leader of Fianna Fail, Eamon de Valera. The election was held on the same day as a referendum to change the voting system to PRSTV and much attention was focused on this matter. De Valera went on to win the election by a 12% margin.

In 1966 when de Valera was 84 years of age, it was expected that he would be asked to complete a second term of office but Fine Gael announced that Thomas F. O'Higgins (nephew of Kevin O'Higgins) would be contesting the election. Sean Lemass, then leader of Fianna Fail persuaded de Valera to run but de Valera did not play any active part in the campaign. O'Higgins was half de Valera's age and in an apparent reference to de Valera's part in the Civil War, he argued for a move 'away

from a traditional and inward looking nationalism to a more open and pluralist concept of Irish society' (Fitzgerald 1991:76). However, despite O'Higgins best effort de Valera held on to the office by a majority of 10,717 votes, a narrow margin but a win none the less.

In 1973, at the end of de Valera's second term, O'Higgins ran again this time against Fianna Fail's Erskine Childers who won the election with a four- percent margin. Childers died suddenly the following year, and the former Chief Justice, Cearbhall O Dalaigh, whose nomination went unopposed, replaced him in 1974. O'Dalaigh only served two years of his seven-year term. The Fine Gael coalition government of the day, in response to the killing of the British Ambassador to Ireland by the IRA on 23rd of July 1976, introduced an Emergency Powers Bill in an attempt to increase the powers of the security forces. President O'Dalaigh referred the Bill to the Supreme Court as was permissible under Article 28.3.3 of the constitution, but in doing so was questioning the constitutionality of it. Minister of Defence, Patrick Donegan, referred to the President as a 'thundering disgrace', which led O'Dalaigh to offer his resignation. The Taoiseach, Fine Gael's Liam Cosgrave, refused his resignation suggesting that an apology would suffice. O'Dalaigh then resigned in order to 'protect the dignity and independence of the presidency as an institution' (O'Sullivan IPS:87).

Dr. Patrick Hillery, the EEC Commissioner whose term in the EEC was coming to an end, was put forward as an agreed candidate in 1976 and was returned unopposed in 1983. When President Hillery's second term ended in 1990, the Labour Party Leader Dick Spring insisted that there be an election to determine his successor.

Consequently, there was a Presidential election for the first time since 1973

(O'Sullivan IPS:1991). The Presidency, which for so long had remained above politics, became embroiled in the political process again as all the main parties in the Dail put forward candidates. A traditional contest between Fianna Fail and Fine Gael might have been expected, but for the first time since 1945, an Independent candidate participated in the race.

The Labour Party after much deliberation selected a constitutional lawyer and former Labour Senator, Mary Robinson, to be their candidate. Robinson had resigned from the Labour Party in 1994 in response to the party's support for the Anglo-Irish Agreement. She felt the agreement compromised the rights of unionists in the North of Ireland (Horgan 1997:114). As Robinson refused to re-join the Labour Party, she contested the election as an Independent candidate. Fine Gael nominated Dublin West TD, Austin Currie, to contest the election. Currie, originally from Coalisland Co. Tyrone was a founding member of the SDLP. He had accepted an invitation to join Fine Gael in 1989. Fianna Fail, who had never lost an electoral contest for the Presidency nominated Tainaiste Brian Lenihan. Lenihan had been a TD since 1961 and was popular enough to be re-elected to the Dail in 1989, despite being out of the country at the time. He was undergoing a life saving liver transplant in the United States (O'Sullivan IPS:1991).

Initially, the 1990 election campaign was lacklustre and was described as 'banal' (O'Sullivan IPS:1991). That changed when emerged that Lenihan had lied several times during the campaign about whether he had phoned President Hillery, in January 1982, to urge him to dissolve the Dail following a vote of no-confidence in the Fine Gael government (O'Sullivan IPS:1991). In denying that he had made the telephone

calls, Lenihan had neglected to remember telling UCD student Jim Duffy that he had done so in an interview for Duffy's thesis. Duffy then produced the audio tapes at an Irish Times press conference on the 25th of October. That evening on the RTE evening news Lenihan continued to deny making the calls, 'on mature recollection.' Charles Haughey, then the Fianna Fail leader and Taoiseach, asked for Lenihan's resignation. When Lenihan refused to resign, Haughey fired him.

The effect on Lenihan's campaign was devastating. In a Sunday Press/Lansdowne poll taken between the 10th and 20th of October Lenihan at 45% led by nine points to Robinson's 36% and Currie's 19%. After Lenihan's appearance on the RTE news, on the 25th of October, a poll was taken by the Sunday Independent that indicated that the amount of voters willing to give Lenihan a first preference vote had dropped to 32%. Robinson appeared to be the principle beneficiary as her rating rose to 51% and as Currie dropped two points to 17% (O'Sullivan IPS:1991). While the incident surrounding Lenihan may not have been the sole reason Robinson won the Presidency in 1990 it certainly aided her victory. In her seven-year term Robinson was successful in changing how the public viewed the office. Brian Lenihan TD, whose father Brian Lenihan contested the 1990 Presidential election as the Fianna Fail candidate, reflected that,

(Robinson) exercised great imagination...it was a changing Ireland
and she managed to use symbolism to reflect those changes'
(Lenihan:1999).

A significant change in during Robinson's term in office was the funding allocated to the office. When de Valera was President he refused to allow the Presidential allowance to be increased feeling that he should use his own money for entertainment purposes (Lenihan:1999). This set a precedent that proved to be difficult for subsequent Presidents to alter. Perhaps, as Mary Robinson had received the backing of the public through electoral support, the then Taoiseach, Charles Haughey did not feel he was in a position to refuse additional funding for the office so she could carry out the mandate she had been elected upon. Haughey did say that the new President would travel more than her predecessors had and increased her travel allowance substantially to enable her to do so (Horgan 1997:167).

Mary Robinson, despite her success, opted not to run for the Presidency for a second term, instead opting to accept a position as Human Rights Commissioner for the United Nations. It seems likely given the reactions of their leaders that the political parties had not considered the possibility of having to nominate candidates for a Presidential election in 1997. The Fine Gael leader John Bruton said Robinson's decision was 'unexpected.' Dick Spring, leader of the Labour party who first suggested that Robinson run for the office in 1990 was reportedly 'shocked' (IN:14th May 1997).

Consequently, there was much speculation in the media as to who would prove to be a suitable candidate. The Irish News produced an exhaustive list, that included business man Tony O'Reilly, Progressive Democrat leader Mary Hearnay, Rock star Sinead O'Connor, and television and radio presenter Gay Byrne, among others (IN:14th March 1997). Historian and journalist Conor Cruise O'Brien argued the case for poet

Seamus Heaney suggesting that Fianna Fail must not secure the Presidency as the party's 'monopoly of that office quietly symbolised Fianna Fail's claim to *be* the nation' (II:15th March 1997).

There was little discussion whether there should be an agreed candidate for the Presidency as there had been in 1973, 1976 and 1983, thus preventing the need for an election. John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, was the only person mentioned as a possibility. Certainly, he had an impeccable record. Hume, who founded the SDLP in the North of Ireland, had been a pivotal figure in the Civil Rights movement there in the 1960s. He also had an intrinsic part of most if not all moves for peace over the previous thirty years. This made him a strong potential candidate. The Labour Party, however, refused to acquiesce to an agreed candidate. There was some question that Hume might seek the nomination from one of the parties but eventually Hume declined. He justified his decision by saying,

My whole adult life, together with my colleagues in the SDLP, has been devoted to resolving the crisis here in the North. That's now at a critical stage and I believe therefore, that it's my duty to stay here and use all our energies to achieve the lasting peace and lasting settlement all sections of our people want
(McCarthy 1999:168).

From the initial stages of the selection processes all of the larger parties in the Dail, Fianna Fail, Fine Gael as well as the Labour Party seemed to understand the importance of picking a candidate who could win. The Labour party had two

significant motivating factors in their quest to pick a winning candidate. In addition to wanting to prove that that they were capable to choosing a successful candidate for a second time, the Labour Party had been badly demoralised by big losses in the June 1997 General Election when sixteen of the thirty-three Labour deputies lost their seats. The party needed the boost of an electoral win. Fine Gael, beaten to third place in the 1990 Presidential election appeared determined that they would not suffer a similar fate this time.

Five candidates contested the 1997 Presidential election. Fianna Fail, Fine Gael and The Labour Party all put forward candidates for the Presidency and they were joined by two Independent candidates both of whom had to run country-wide election campaigns without the support of a large political party. Fianna Fail selected party outsider and Northern academic, Mary McAleese, to be their candidate. Fianna Fail's coalition partners the Progressive Democrats also supported McAleese's nomination. While the PD endorsement may have had symbolic value for the government as they supported the same candidate, McAleese's election agent, Deputy Brian Lenihan, did not consider that the PD support was vital.

The PD core vote is very small and I would have thought that their voters would have made up their own minds anyway...I'm not sure that it was of huge value electorally (Lenihan:1999).

McAleese was born in Belfast in 1951 and grew up in a majority Protestant area near the Ardoyne (Doyle IPS:1998). While she had many Protestant friends who defended her against sectarian slurs, her family suffered at the hands of loyalists. Her house was

machine-gunned and her deaf brother was beaten and left for dead. McAleese credits her parents and their 'prayerful' nature for the family's survival in the face of adversity (Liveline:1997). McAleese went on to attend Queen's University to study law.

In 1975, McAleese succeeded Mary Robinson as Reid Professor of Criminal Law in Trinity College Dublin. In 1979 McAleese joined RTE to work in their current affairs department (Doyle IPS:1998). She frequently clashed with her bosses in RTE. She felt that there was a Workers Party consensus in the organisation and that she was viewed as a republican sympathiser (McCarthy 1999:56). McAleese left RTE and returned to Trinity College in 1981 where she remained on the teaching staff until 1987.

McAleese did return to RTE on a freelance basis, presenting a programme on Europe and doing some radio broadcasting. During this time, McAleese's profile rose, both through her academic work and her involvement with the Catholic Church. McAleese became involved in campaigns for prisoner's rights, gay rights, and the ordination of women as Catholic priests (Doyle IPS:1998). In February 1984, she accompanied the Catholic Bishops to the New Ireland Forum. It was reported that McAleese's broadcasting colleagues were 'stunned' by her involvement with the Bishops (McCarthy 1999:65).

A few weeks later at a special meeting of the National Union of Journalists, held in RTE, McAleese's membership of the NUJ was suspended. The official reason given was that the Union had decided to pursue a policy of eradicating double jobbing. A decision was made to form a committee to examine the instances of journalists who also held jobs outside the profession. That committee never met (McCarthy 1999:65).

As McAleese was the only journalist mentioned at the special meeting, she believed that the reason for the suspension, and eventual termination, of her membership of the NUJ was her public involvement with the Catholic Bishops (McCarthy 1999:66).

McAleese continued work at Trinity and in 1985, she joined the Fianna Fail party. Two years later McAleese contested a Dail seat for Fianna Fail in Dublin South East. She lost the election and shortly afterwards McAleese moved back to Belfast where she joined the staff of Queen's University in Belfast as director of the university's Institute of Professional and Legal Studies. In 1994 McAleese was appointed Pro-Vice Chancellor of the university and became the first female Catholic to hold the position (Doyle IPS:85).

When Fianna Fail first nominated McAleese some commentators drew comparisons between the candidate and Mary Robinson, the out-going President (IT: 13th September 1997). Both women were constitutional lawyers and had held the same job in Trinity College, but the similarities ended there. McAleese's career had followed an academic and administration path, with some work in the field of journalism, whereas Robinson had followed a legal career. While both women had championed causes, coming to the assistance of the marginalised in society, their focus was very different. McAleese was involved in several issues around the Church, whereas McAleese focused on liberal issues. They took opposite sides in the debates on abortion and divorce in the early 1980s.

Fine Gael nominated their Dublin MEP Mary Banotti, sister of the deputy party leader Nora Owen, in July. Banotti had considerable political experience, a factor that set her

aside from the other candidates. She had failed to be elected to the Seanad 1982-3 and did not secure a seat when she contested the general election in Dublin Central in 1983. She was, however, elected to the European Parliament in 1984, in Dublin, and has held the seat since then. Banotti is a former nurse, and she has used her time in the European Parliament to advocate women's issues and the problem of transnationally abducted children. Fine Gael were the first to select their candidate and believed that this would give Banotti an advantage as she would be established by the time the election was called (Doyle IPS:1998). This tactic backfired as the Fine Gael parliamentary party were unhappy at the short notice given to them, and the selection contest had to be postponed until the 16th of September when Banotti won by a narrow margin beating former junior minister Avril Doyle (Doyle IPS:1998).

Labour chose party outsider and charity worker Adi Roche. Roche is the founder of the Chernobyl Children's Project. The Project aims to positively affect the lives of the children who live in the Chernobyl area who live with the aftermath of a serious nuclear accident. Roche was approached by two Labour party workers Pat Magner and Fergus Finlay and persuaded to run. She was revealed to be the Labour nominee the week before Fianna Fail selected McAleese (Finlay 1999:321). While Labour had nominated Roche, like Robinson before her, Roche did not join the Labour Party. Other left-wing parties, including the Green Party supported her candidacy. The presence of the Green Party, in particular their MEP for Dublin Patricia McKenna proved to be 'more of a nuisance than a help' according to Finlay (Finlay 1998:322).

Former Eurovision Song Contest winner Dana Rosemary Scallon was approached by the Christian Community Centre based in Dublin, who asked her to consider running

for the Presidency. At the time Scallon was based in Alabama, where she hosted a religious television programme a Catholic cable channel. Scallon sought and received her nomination from the county councils, only the second time this had occurred in the history of the Presidency. Scallon needed the endorsement of four county councils but in the end received the nomination from six, Donegal, Longford, Kerry, Tipperary (North Riding), Wicklow and Kildare (Marsh and Mitchell 1999:217). Once nominated Scallon distanced herself from the Christian Community Centre and relied upon her own family to conduct her countrywide canvass (Doyle IPS:1998).

Following Scallon's success, former Garda, and founder of Victim Support, Derek Nally also sought a nomination from the councils and became the fifth candidate to contest the election. He secured nominations Wexford, Carlow, Kildare and Dun-Laoghaire-Rathdown (Marsh and Mitchell 1999:221). Nally is a former Garda and secretary of the Association of Garda Sergeants and Inspectors. He is one of the founders of the Irish Association for Victim Support (Doyle IPS:1998).

The sheer volume of candidates contesting the election affected the kind of campaign each candidate had to run. In the 1990 Presidential contest the fact that there were three candidates allowed for a so-called 'two horse race' to develop. Brian Lenihan TD, whose father contested that election, comments that, in hindsight, it might have been a good idea to allow independent councillor and former Lord Mayor of Dublin Carmencita Hederman. Lenihan argues that the inclusion of Hederman on the ticket would have neutralised the impact of Robinson on the electorate and may have split Robinson's vote, in his father's favour (Lenihan:1999).

Fianna Fail benefited from this hindsight when they did not attempt to prevent their counsellors from endorsing Scallon's candidacy. Although the situation differed, they saw the advantage of widening the field. It was felt that Scallon's well documented conservative catholicism would detract from McAleese's (Lenihan:1999). It was envisioned that Scallon would be seen as 'the right-wing fundamentalist, and Mary McAleese (as)...more moderate' (Dempsey:1999). Michael Marsh also suggested that it was thought that Scallon would attract voters who would not voter otherwise, and that these voters were likely to transfer their votes to Mary McAleese. Marsh and Mitchell 1999:219) Derek Nally could provide no such benefits to the party if he contested the election, so the party Whip was imposed and Fianna Fail counsellors were not in a position to support Nally's candidacy.

The presence of four women in the Presidential contest received substantial commentary in the media. Columnist Kevin Myers questioned whether the Presidential race was becoming,

a morality contest, with a publicly visible Ability to Care the prime requisite for our prime citizen (IT:18th September 1997)

Former Taoiseach Gareth Fitzgerald echoed this sentiment commenting that,

there is a danger that this understandable desire for a caring President could lead to an underestimation of the political aspect of the President's role (IT:20th September 1997).

The significance of the candidates was not viewed to be a political advance for women in general, or a triumph for the cause of feminism. Nuala O'Faolain commented that the real significance would be if the four women had been selected by political parties led by women (IT:22nd September 1997).

There was a difficulty for the four female candidates to set themselves apart from each other. Each woman had a history of campaigning for the marginalised, and from the outset appeared to be intelligent and capable. What set McAleese apart, her nationalism and her involvement in the peace process, may not have been intended to form such a large part of her campaign but it certainly created a distinct identity for her.

If the 1990 Presidential election set the precedent for the 1997 contest then it can be seen that the 1997 election campaign broke all the moulds. Now that the door has been opened to independent and non-party candidates, it will be up to the parties to see if a potential President really lies in their ranks, or if party outsiders and independent candidates are the only future for the Presidency.

**Chapter Four:
McAleese Selected
(The Nomination)**

In her attempts to secure a nomination from Fianna Fail to contest the Presidential election in 1997, Mary McAleese had to employ several methods of political communication. Securing the Fianna Fail nomination was the first phase of McAleese's political communication strategy. This phase highlighted the importance of intra-party political communications. It also displayed McAleese's capabilities as a candidate and her potential to secure the Presidency. When McAleese attempted to secure a nomination from the Fianna Fail party, she had to consider three main elements, the target audience, the core message, and the role of the party. This three-pronged approach also extended into her election campaign. McAleese's target audience during this phase was the Fianna Fail party, her core message was to raise her profile and convince the target audience of her electability. The role of the party in this instance was to select McAleese. For this phase of her campaign, all of the methods of political communication she engaged in with the Fianna Fail party were non-mediated.

Target Audience

McAleese's target audience in this initial stage was the membership of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party who had the power to nominate her. This group includes TDs, Senators and MEPs all of whom have a vote in the selection process. McAleese's approach to the party took place on two levels. She had a different strategy to approach the party leadership and the other backbench members of the parliamentary party. Supporters first wrote to members of the parliamentary party on her behalf. McAleese then contacted them, and met with the members of the parliamentary party before meeting with the party leadership. After this meeting her concerted personal canvass of the parliamentary party began.

McAleese was aware of the concerns of her target audience. The factors that were considered by Fianna Fail when deciding on a Presidential nominee were numerous. The most important factor was, of course, selecting a candidate who could win the Presidential election. In addition to this, the party also had to consider the stability of the government and the maintenance of electoral momentum, after what Fianna Fail considered a highly successful election campaign in June 1997 (Farrell:2000). The general election had resulted in a minority coalition government for Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats, one that was supported by independent TDs. If a Fianna Fail deputy was to run for the Presidency and win, this delicate balance could be disrupted because there was a risk that Fianna Fail may fail to retain the seat in the subsequent by-election (Lenihan:1999). However, several factors were desirable in a Presidential candidate. According to the then Fianna Fail General Secretary Pat Farrell the nominee needed to

have the broadest possible appeal...who would be able to capture the middle ground...who will represent Ireland well and our people on the national stage and internationally. And therefore...they have to be articulate...have an international dimension to their c.v....and (be) capable of articulating and communicating very well (Farrell:2000).

Fianna Fail deputy Brian Lenihan, whose father unsuccessfully contested the Presidential election in 1990 asserts that a President needs to 'reflect the Ireland of their particular generation' (Lenihan:1999).

All contacts made with the members of the Parliamentary Party who could secure her nomination were made directly, initially by her supporters. Among McAleese's principal supporters at this early stage was her old friend, Harry Casey. Casey had been McAleese's election agent when she unsuccessfully contested a Dail seat in Dublin South East in early 1987. Patricia Casey (no relation to Harry) the head of the Medical Council's Fitness to Practice committee was also an early supporter.

Both Harry and Patricia Casey wrote to the members of the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party to recommend that McAleese be selected to contest the election as Fianna Fail's candidate and to outline her personal history and achievements (McCarthy 1999:167). McAleese's own canvass of Fianna Fail was conducted on two levels. There was a mail canvass where McAleese wrote to all the deputies, senators and TDs and MEPs seeking support. There was also a personal canvass where she telephoned each member of the Parliamentary Party and called to see them (Lenihan:1999). She then contacted the Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern for his consent to proceed with her canvass of the Parliamentary Party (McCarthy 1999:170).

It is evident from the meticulous way in which McAleese began her campaign that her former colleagues from a myriad of past careers and campaigns would figure heavily in her success. Both Harry Casey and Dr. Patricia Casey, had worked with her on the Pro-Life campaign in the early 1980s. When she contacted the Deputy leader of Fianna Fail, Mary O'Rourke, she could rely on a previous acquaintance with her from shared time in Fianna Fail Women's Group during the early 1980s. One of the first people McAleese approached within Fianna Fail early in July 1997, seeking support for her bid to run for President, was her former student and subsequent colleague at

Trinity, Deputy Brian Lenihan. Lenihan was surprised at her approach as he was a backbencher and would have little influence in such matters. When he expressed this sentiment to McAleese she merely asked that he convey her interest to others (Lenihan:1999). Perhaps McAleese was thinking especially of Lenihan's aunt and deputy party leader Mary O'Rourke. Lenihan's reluctance to give McAleese his support was based on the fact that he did not favour the nomination of a non-party member for the Presidency ahead of a colleague and,

because I knew her already my impression of her prospects of securing the Fianna Fail nomination were that they would not be very high and that it was a somewhat audacious claim that she was staking for herself (Lenihan:1999).

Seen as the rank outsider in attempting to secure the Fianna Fail parliamentary party's nomination, McAleese was not considered a strong enough candidate to beat former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds into second place. In fact, Fianna Fail did not appear to have any lack of suggestions regarding potential Presidential candidates, former Minister for Finance Ray MacSharry, Foreign Affairs Minister David Andrews and former government Minister Maire-Geoghan Quinn were all suggested. Former Taoiseach Albert Reynolds made his strong interest in contesting the election known (II:15th March 1997) soon after President Robinson indicated she would not seek a second term in March of 1997, in favour of taking up a job as United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. In early August Reynolds's supporters were reported to be Munster MEP Brian Crowley and TDs Denis Foley and Batt O'Keefe. Despite the fact that the SDLP leader John Hume had not yet ruled himself out of the

race, and was receiving the backing of Foreign Affairs Minister David Andrews, Reynolds had begun his canvassing in earnest. He had already written to his party colleagues seeking their support and was reported as saying

It would be a great honour for me to be the party standard bearer in this election and ultimately to apply by accumulated experience to the office of President of Ireland (CE:13th August 1997).

While to many, Mary McAleese appeared to come from nowhere to secure the Fianna Fail nomination the truth was that she carefully and meticulously canvassed the party for the longest possible time before the nomination. Harry Casey, initially contacted her about the possibility of running for the Aras just hours after Mary Robinson had announced her intention not to seek a second term as President (McCarthy:1999:152).

While McAleese was busy preparing for the selection contest in the background, Patricia Casey approached McAleese's target audience on her behalf and wrote a letter to members of the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party. This letter included a c.v. that outlined McAleese's desire to become Fianna Fail's Presidential candidate (McCarthy:1999:162). McAleese also approached the party hierarchy, when she wrote to Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern to outline her desire to contest the Presidency. (McCarthy:1999:162) Yet, she chose to wait until September when John Hume, leader of the SDLP, finally announced that he would not run, to publicly declare her intention to seek the Fianna Fail nomination (IT:11th September 1997) and to make her first formal contact with the party leadership.

She claimed that she had written to Hume, earlier that summer urging him to put himself forward for selection (SBP:14th September 1997). McAleese may have been prepared to step aside for John Hume but while she is said to 'like Reynolds and admire what he did for peace' (McCarthy:1999:162) she was not willing to stand aside and allow him seek the Fianna Fail nomination for the Presidency uncontested. Hume's hesitancy in declaring his lack of interest in the Presidency presented McAleese with a serious problem. She now had only eight days to formally canvass the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party.

The day after John Hume declined to contest Presidency, Bertie Ahern, leader of Fianna Fail agreed to see McAleese in response to a letter from McAleese and Harry Casey. As Ahern had already met with Rosemary Scallon who went on to contest the election as an Independent, he concurred with the advice of his Chief Whip Seamus Brennan who recommended a meeting with McAleese (McCarthy:1999:169). Present at that meeting with Ahern were Seamus Brennan and Fianna Fail's Head of Research, Martin Mansergh. Reportedly, McAleese had fifteen minutes to persuade the three men that she would make a viable candidate for the Presidency. The acquiescence of the party hierarchy was essential if McAleese was to succeed in her canvass of the parliamentary party.

Following her meeting with Ahern McAleese began her canvass of the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party all of whom had a vote in the selection process to choose the party's Presidential candidate. McAleese, in an unprecedented move, the week before the selection convention, stood at the gates of Leinster House and approached Fianna Fail deputies as they entered and exited the Dail (Lenihan:1999). She approached

Brian Lenihan again to look for his support now that she was officially seeking the party's nomination. Lenihan explained to her that he had decided to support the candidacy of Michael O'Kennedy. O'Kennedy was a family friend of the Lenihan's and a former colleague of Lenihan's in the legal profession.

Core Message

McAleese's core message to her target audience in this phase of the campaign was a simple one, to raise her profile and to convince the party that her selection would result in Fianna Fail securing the Presidency. To convince the members of the parliamentary party that she was a viable candidate McAleese to introduce herself, provide details of her background, personality, and career to date. It was a difficult task due to her low recognition rate among many members of the parliamentary party. McAleese had the added difficulty of being a party outsider. Brian Lenihan notes the culture of Fianna Fail is to support one of their own first and feels that many members of the parliamentary party would have been disinclined to support an outside candidate (Lenihan:1999).

In the first letter sent to members of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party, Patricia Casey introduced Mary McAleese and provided a short biography (McCarthy 1999:162). In a second letter to the parliamentary party, sent just before McAleese met formally with the party leadership, Harry Casey introduced himself and Mary McAleese. The core message in this letter was that McAleese had the potential to win the Presidency. Casey drew attention to McAleese's 'intelligence and warmth...insight and vision (and) her capacity to inspire trust and reconciliation' (McCarthy 1999:172). Casey also stated his belief that McAleese had the 'qualities of

ambassadorship and leadership which the Presidency calls for' (McCarthy 1999:172).

In addition to listing the qualities that he believed McAleese possessed, Casey also included an extensive biography with the letter to provide all the relevant details (McCarthy 1999:171).

McAleese attempted to call to see or speak on the telephone with all Fianna Fail parliamentary party members. It was reported that members of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party also were subject to a letter writing campaign in which the correspondents expounded upon the virtues of McAleese and recommended her candidacy for President. In the same article, McAleese denied that such a letter writing campaign was 'orchestrated' (SBP:14th September 1997). If indeed it was not orchestrated, it should have been. Even days before the selection convention McAleese was still not considered a contender. The Sunday Business Post commented that 'Reynolds is still well ahead in bid for the Presidency', (SBP:14th September 1997) and the Irish Times declared that 'Reynolds still the likely choice' (IT:17th September 1997).

When McAleese met with the party leadership her core message was again that she was a viable candidate who could secure the Presidency for the Fianna Fail party. She spoke of her up bringing in North Belfast, her qualifications and career and her behind the scenes work for peace in the North. McAleese claimed that her candidacy would be a signal for peace. She denied that the fact that she was from the North would present a problem for electorate and that the view of her as a conservative catholic ignored her liberal credentials (McCarthy:1999:170).

For McAleese, the fact that Fianna Fail would possibly not want to select a candidate from outside their ranks, should have been a weakness. McAleese, however, turned this weakness into a strength. She continually drew attention in media interviews to the 'mire of allegations Fianna Fail still have to cope with' (IT:11th September 1997). At this point questions were surfacing about the relationship between Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ray Burke, and certain construction companies and how much money he received in election donations. Former Taoiseach Charles J. Haughey was also in the media spotlight as attention his receipt of political donations was also under question. In addition to this, there was a distinct possibility that Reynolds own past difficulties could be accentuated in the press if he ran for President. It is possible that this outsider as a positive was one of the arguments that McAleese would have made to Ahern upon meeting him to try to persuade him to allow her to seek a nomination from Fianna Fail.

Relying on the outsider as a positive was a highly risky strategy. By emphasising the fact that certain members of Fianna Fail had questions to answer McAleese risked alienating members of the party completely. It was entirely likely that members of the parliamentary party would not appreciate a party outsider criticising party members and it was possible that McAleese could have appeared to be lecturing or moralising. The fact that this tactic did not backfire boded well for McAleese's future. It displayed an astute political instinct and knowledge of how far she could pursue a risky strategy.

There were indications, however, that McAleese's core message was not being as effective as she might have liked. The week before the selection convention was due

to take place a profile of Mary McAleese appeared in the Irish Times, which was less than flattering. It highlighted the potential nominee's catholicism as if it were a seriously negative factor.

Too Catholic, according to a Northern academic, himself a Catholic. Too Catholic, according to a Southern political commentator, herself a Catholic (IT:13th September 1997).

In the same article, it was opined that Professor McAleese had

few of the diplomatic skills of the woman she aspires to succeed. The perception that she is the candidate of Fianna Fail's pro-life wing will limit her appeal (IT:13th September 1997).

Echoing the views of Brian Lenihan, journalist Andy Pollack concluded that,

Ultimately, the party does not see her as one of their own, and that is enough to ensure that she has little chance of gaining its nomination (IT:13th September 1997).

Others within the party organisation concurred with this view. Pat Farrell, who was General Secretary of Fianna Fail in 1997, opined that,

(W)hen her name was first mentioned that her prospect wasn't very good because...there was no track record of anybody being selected to be a Fianna Fail candidate for the Presidential election unless they had a very very strong track record as a public representative within the party.

(G)iven that history was against her.... it didn't seem like something that was going to come to fruition (Farrell:2000).

On the 17th of September, the day of the selection convention each candidate was invited to address the Parliamentary Party with a three-minute speech. As the candidates spoke in alphabetical order McAleese was invited to go first. This was McAleese's opportunity to communicate directly with the members of the Parliamentary Party as a group. The effectiveness of this piece of political communication was vital to her success. Her options were limited in that she could only rely on a short speech. It was essential that this speech would not only introduce her to the party, but that it would also convince them that she was a suitable candidate. While the content of the speech was important as it repeated her core message, so was her delivery. It was crucial that McAleese, despite her nervousness, conveyed the poise and confidence necessary to be a President. This was the non-verbal aspect of McAleese's core message. It as vital as the words she would speak.

The speech, while aimed at the whole party, did have a specific target audience. This target audience was made up of new backbenchers who, having no particular loyalty to Reynolds, might be convinced to vote for a party outsider. McAleese was the only candidate reported to have brought a prepared speech, from which she departed

frequently. She spoke of her vision for the eight Presidency of Ireland a dream that she hoped Fianna Fail would 'recognise as its own' (IT:18th September 1997).

McAleese envisioned the role of the President recognising both the limitations and the potential of the office asserting that,

(t)he Constitution sets a clear agenda for the Presidency but ultimately the role wraps itself around the person and the signs of the times . . . It will be the figurehead of a dynamic Ireland growing more complex by the day, an Ireland in which the prospect of lasting peace based on consensus looks tantalisingly close (IT:18th September 1997).

While speaking about her background, she made sure to draw attention to the achievements of Fianna Fail,

which more than any other (party) has kept faith with the hopes of the Irish people for a nation of peace . . . the party which more than any other has been a bridge between rich and poor, town and country, conservative and liberal, North and South, tradition and change (IT:18th September 1997).

McAleese also attempted to forge links between her and the Fianna Fail party by expressing the hope that her dream of the Presidency would be one that could also be recognised by party (IT: 18th September 1997). It was vital that McAleese identified herself with the Fianna Fail party in this way so the party members would feel less

like they were voting for an outsider and more like they were voting for one of their own.

Gerry Nagle of Arks Advertising who was at the selection contest and who was to go on to be responsible for the advertising during the campaign remembers that,

McAleese stood up and blew the room away....She was just phenomenal (Nagle:1999).

Role of the Party

The role of the party at this stage of McAleese's campaign was to select a candidate to contest the Presidential election on their behalf. However, some members of the parliamentary party took a more active role at this early stage. Certain TDs backed McAleese's bid from the initial stages and other more senior members of the party assisted her in a discrete way. The party leadership did not publicly back any candidate. This may have indicated that they were not against McAleese's candidacy, leaving her open to canvass the parliamentary party.

One of the first TDs to back McAleese was the Wicklow backbench TD Dick Roche. Patricia Casey had canvassed for Roche in the past and at her prompting Roche approached party leader Bertie Ahern and asked him to consider McAleese as a potential nominee (McCarthy 1999:163). McAleese also contacted Fianna Fail's deputy leader Mary O'Rourke, who she had worked with on the Fianna Fail Women's Committee in the 1980s. McAleese then met with O'Rourke in her home in Athlone,

on the 12th of July, where O'Rourke pledged to assist her campaign (McCarthy 1999:164)

Soon afterwards, McAleese met with the party leadership of Bertie Ahern, Martin Mansergh and Seamus Brennan. After that meeting, McAleese was taken to Seamus Brennan's office where he handed over a list of Fianna Fail deputies, Senators and MEPs. He advised her to contact those she knew within the Parliamentary Party and begin her canvass. McCarthy claims that within the fifteen minutes that McAleese spent in the meeting she made an excellent impression. Mansergh is reported as saying

Her quarter of an hour monologue on her vision of the Presidency was a tour de force...very persuasive, flowing and articulate. All three of us were hugely impressed (McCarthy1997:171).

Following that meeting McAleese was left with the impression that the issue of who would be selected to run for Fianna Fail was 'still open' (IT:11th September 1997). It was reported that Fianna Fail were still putting pressure on the former European Union Commissioner and former Fianna Fail Minister for Finance Ray McSharry to contest the election. It was reported that Foreign Affairs Minister David Andrews had declined to seek a nomination, as there was a risk that Fianna Fail would not retain his Dun Laoghaire seat following the by-election to fill Andrews's seat. In fact such was the risk that it was reported that Andrews was 'ordered off the pitch' by Bertie Ahern (IT:13th September 1997).

Consequently, one week before the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party were due to select a candidate to represent them in the Presidential election, three interested candidates, McAleese, Reynolds and Michael O’Kennedy remained. O’Kennedy was a Fianna Fail backbencher, and former Minister for Foreign Affairs. By early September O’Kennedy was working hard within the party to secure the nomination highlighting his legal expertise and international experience (IT:13th September 1997).

The leadership communicated their disapproval subtly, Lenihan argued, as stories had appeared in the media during the summer suggesting alternative names. John Hume, Former Fianna Fail Minister Ray McSharry, who was now no longer a political representative, and Fianna Fail’s Foreign Affairs Minister, David Andrews, had all been speculated to be potential candidates. At no time did Bertie Ahern refute this speculation and he did not formally declare his support for Reynolds (Lenihan:1999).

According to Brian Lenihan when McAleese conducted her personal canvass of the Parliamentary Party, she was not ‘guided or guarded’ by any particular member of the parliamentary party (Lenihan:1999). Lenihan did not hold out much hope of success for her commenting that ‘you don’t canvass your way through a group of seasoned politicians like the Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party to success’ (Lenihan:1999).

During this direct canvass, McAleese had discussions with certain ministers, including Dermot Ahern and Mary O’Rourke. These two ministers appeared to be her primary supporters within the party (Lenihan:1999).

The consensus was strong. Albert Reynolds had a record within the party that could not be argued with. His profile on the domestic and international stage and his work in

securing the initial stages of the peace process made him the seemingly obvious choice. So his supporters thought. His detractors had much evidence to point to his unsuitability for the job. Reynolds was not always to be relied upon for diplomacy and measured speech. His gaffes were legendary; phrases such as ‘crap total crap’, and ‘that’s women for you’ would be fresh in the minds of the voters. Former scandals were considerable factors that had to be taken into account if the press were to draw attention to them during the campaign. There were scandals such as the break-up of the Labour Fianna Fail coalition in 1994, when the Labour party accused Reynolds of misleading the Dail. There was also Reynolds’s role in the Beef Tribunal where he was obliged to give evidence as a former Finance Minister and denied knowing about illicit dealings in the beef industry. It was reported in the Irish Times that some opposition TDs were encouraging their Fianna Fail colleagues to vote for Reynolds in the hope that Reynolds would secure the nomination so they could

throw the kitchen sink at him and thereby embarrass Bertie

(Ahern, Taoiseach and leader of Fianna Fail) (IT:13th September 1997).

It was reported that while Reynolds was likely to win the selection contest, there were growing moves within Fianna Fail to ensure that he would not succeed. While Minister for Finance Charlie McCreevey and Health Minister Brian Cowen and eventually David Andrews, had publicly declared for Reynolds many others were unwilling to do so publicly. The fact that McAleese was being allowed such access to the party without being dismissed immediately should have given Reynolds some cause for concern. Bertie Ahern was staying clear of any controversy surrounding the selection process, but it was reported that ‘those close to him’ were worried about a

Reynolds's candidacy (SBP:14th September 1997). Yet, it was reported that Reynolds felt that he had calculated his support accurately and would be the clear winner on the first vote (IT:17th September 1997).

Perhaps the most significant factor that turned the tide against Reynolds and in favour of McAleese, was one that was outside the party and his influence. As the Labour Party was the first to reveal their nomination to contest the Presidential election, Adi Roche, thanks to some door step journalism from RTE's chief political correspondent Charlie Bird, the other parties then had to produce a candidate who could beat her. The nomination by the Labour Party, Roche, young, female, and dynamic had possibly become a deciding factor for those wavering Fianna Fail Parliamentary Party members. Roche, was the founder of the Chernobyl Children's Project that shipped aid to Chernobyl, as well as bringing children affected by the nuclear leak to Ireland for holidays that helped to extend their life expectancy. She was also an active member of the anti-nuclear group CND and a friend of U2's lead singer, Bono. Maol Muire Tynan speculated in the Irish Times that the nomination of Adi Roche would put pressure on Fianna Fail to provide a candidate of a similar calibre (IT:14th September 1997). Fergus Finlay, then advisor Labour Party leader Dick Spring, believed that,

Adi Roche could light a spark of idealism throughout Ireland
if she was ever given the chance to do so (Finlay:1998:321).

It would appear that there was a serious failure of political communications from within the Roche Presidential campaign when Roche's name was leaked to the media.

Obviously the Labour Party had understood the importance of keeping her selection concealed as there was no formal announcement in the media following Roche's agreement to run for Labour. While whoever leaked Roche's name to the media may have believed that it would give her an advantage, as she would be in the public eye before any other candidate, the leak backfired badly. Instead of building momentum around Roche, the leaking of her candidacy built momentum around McAleese and her attempts to secure the nomination from Fianna Fail. The government party now knew whom they had to beat.

Roche certainly had the cross party appeal to win the Presidential election. Fianna Fail and Fine Gael had approached her on previous occasions to contest Dail and European Parliament seats. According to the then Chief Political Correspondent of the Irish Times, Roche's nomination had 'injected an element of panic' into Fianna Fail's selection process (IT:16th September 1997). In that state of panic, McAleese's profile within Fianna Fail began to rise. It was reported that Adi Roche's entry into the contest 'intensified the belief among some in Fianna Fail that Prof. McAleese would be in a stronger position to win the election' (IT:17th September 1997).

It was reported in the media that Mary O'Rourke was one of the prime supporters of Mary McAleese's selection aspirations within the cabinet (IT:18th September 1997), a fact confirmed by Brian Lenihan (Lenihan:1997). O'Rourke's antipathy towards Reynolds was no secret as she had formerly shared a constituency with him and was a victim of his successful leadership challenge in 1991, and lost her ministry. Days before the parliamentary party meeting it was reported that at least three Ministers were involved in making phone calls to fellow deputies urging their support for Mary

McAleese (IT:18th September 1997). The fact that Ministers were supporting McAleese was possibly a way for the leadership to communicate support for McAleese. At the very least the involvement of Ministers, gave McAleese's canvass of the party a certain legitimacy. The 35 new members of the parliamentary party were heavily targeted (Lenihan:1999), and it would appear that few were willing to lend support to Reynolds in defiance of the deputy leader of the party. The canvassing gained momentum up until the meeting of the Parliamentary Party to select a candidate.

The rumours surrounding the Fianna Fail selection convention on the 17th of September were widespread. It was reported that Michael O'Kennedy was considering withdrawing from the race, believing that the leadership of the party was backing McAleese's campaign and thus making it unlikely that he would win (IT:17th September 1997). McAleese's supporters within the party had yet to publicly identify themselves and she was refusing to say who they were.

In the days preceding the selection convention Lenihan had problems getting any Ministers in the party to agree to propose and second O'Kennedy at the meeting (Lenihan:1999). Reportedly, O'Kennedy received a telephone call from the party chairman Rory O'Hanlon who sought his consent for a new procedure at the parliamentary party meeting the following day. Instead of the candidates being nominated, seconded and then a vote, as would be the norm in all Fianna Fail selection conventions, O'Hanlon suggested that they forego the nomination process (McCarthy1999:177). Essentially this tactic concealed McAleese's backers. Should she lose, the parliamentary party members would be no wiser as to who had

supported her nomination in the first instance. O’Kennedy agreed but Brian Lenihan, who was co-ordinating O’Kennedy’s campaign, was suspicious regarding O’Hanlon’s request.

That move was initiated by the chairman of the party, and to my mind, that clearly suggested that the leader was supporting McAleese. At that moment any residual doubt I had in my mind disappeared’ (Lenihan:1999).

The evening before the selection convention was due to occur there was a meeting of Fianna Fail Ministers at party headquarters in Mount Street in Dublin. Ostensibly the meeting was held to discuss policy and ‘Fianna Fail stuff’ (IT:17th September 1997) but it was speculated that it was the selection of a Presidential candidate was the main topic under consideration. Justine McCarthy claims that this meeting ‘had all the makings of a crisis summit, specifically brought forward to discuss the impending party meeting on the presidency. For Albert Reynolds, it was the night of the long knives’ (McCarthy 1999:178).

Reportedly party leader Bertie Ahern stopped short of openly endorsing McAleese. He is alleged to have counselled his Ministers that they must face up to present electoral realities (that they were a minority government and could not afford to lose any more Dail seats). Ahern claimed that it would be ideal if a candidate could be chosen from within the party but that this might not be possible. Ahern reportedly urged those present to vote for the best candidate. (McCarthy 1999:178)

On day of the selection convention, Albert Reynolds was confident of victory.

It may have been the case that Reynolds was so confident of his success that he had failed to communicate effectively with the party members in the run up to the selection contest, and was unaware of the increasing momentum behind Mary McAleese. It certainly appeared that Reynolds's supporters were attempting to protect him from anything causing him to doubt his potential success, as they rebuked Brian Lenihan who told Reynolds that he would not be voting for him as he was managing the campaign of O'Kennedy (Lenihan:1999).

There are indications that Fianna Fail leadership was confident of McAleese's victory. Gerry Nagle, of Arks Advertising, who had provided advertising during the General Election the previous June, had been contacted by Fianna Fail headquarters to provide preliminary advertising for all three potential Fianna Fail candidates, Reynolds, O'Kennedy and McAleese. However, headquarters had contacted Wally Young before the selection contest with a very specific request. Young, the head of Young Communications and a public relations expert, who had previously worked for Fianna Fail during the 1997 General Election was asked to represent McAleese and advise her on the approach to the Fianna Fail selection process. Young knew little about McAleese but his preliminary enquiries indicated that most people he spoke to refused to rule McAleese out. He only had the opportunity to meet McAleese briefly before the selection convention and Young felt that she had 'a very fine stature, very earnest' (Young:2000).

Michael O'Kennedy spoke after McAleese and according to Brian Lenihan '(was not) outstanding but he's a lawyer and he made a competent speech' (Lenihan:1999).

Albert Reynolds gave the final speech, which was a regurgitation of his campaign letter that had been sent to the Parliamentary Party. Nagle felt that Reynolds's speech was not positive, as he focused on the Beef Tribunals and the Sunday Times litigation.

he said "don't worry about this, don't worry about that"....

negative in my response' (Nagle:1999).

Brian Lenihan also recalls that Reynolds's speech let him down at the crucial moment saying that in his opinion Reynolds knew he was losing as he 'babbled on too much' (Lenihan:1999).

It was then time for the first vote to take place. Essentially, it was a first past the post system of voting. The candidate with the lowest number of votes was eliminated and then a second vote between the two remaining candidates produced a winner. In total, there was one hundred and twelve members of the Parliamentary Party took part in the vote. Minister Noel Dempsey who was in Canada at the time and did not to vote.

In the first vote Reynolds led with a narrow margin of forty-nine votes to McAleese's forty-two. O'Kennedy was eliminated with his twenty-one votes then being transferred between McAleese and Reynolds. It was apparent that Reynolds had been badly let down by his party. Bertie Ahern showed his ballot paper with his vote for Reynolds to the former Taoiseach. It was reported that Reynolds knew at this point that he would not win the second round vote if Ahern had been so confident of McAleese's victory that he had not voted for her (McCarthy 1999:184). Reynolds's fears were well founded. He must have been aware that as a party outsider McAleese,

in reality, should not have been able to command such a high first vote. Especially not at the expense of another Fianna Fail member, Michael O’Kennedy.

In the second vote McAleese emerged as the winner with sixty-two votes to Reynolds forty-two votes. There was two fewer votes cast in the second vote because of O’Kennedy’s elimination and Senator McGowan, a supporter of Reynolds had to leave for a medical appointment after the first vote. It appeared as if all of those who had voted for O’Kennedy transferred their votes in the second round to McAleese. Brian Lenihan doubts that this was the case. It is his view that the newer deputies, who would have been supportive of the Bertie Ahern leadership having never served under Reynolds, either voted for O’Kennedy or McAleese. In addition, those who did vote for O’Kennedy would have transferred back to McAleese. However, Lenihan did have discussions after the vote with several deputies who did transfer their votes to Reynolds after O’Kennedy was eliminated. This led Lenihan to conclude that there were a number of deputies who voted for Reynolds on the first vote and then,

who felt, if you like, that they had discharged their obligation to Albert...switched the full way and voted for Mary McAleese on the second’ (Lenihan:1999).

Despite being the clear winner, McAleese’s victory reportedly caused considerable surprise among the Parliamentary Party (IT:18th September 1997). Albert Reynolds commented to Bertie Ahern that he would not want to be the Presidential candidate if the party was so divided (IT:18th September 1997). In a speech to those assembled after the vote, Reynolds expressed his disappointment at his loss but stressed that they

must all leave the room united, and pledged his support for McAleese in her bid to secure the Presidency (IT:18th September 1997).

Commentators remarked on the 'double rebuff' for Reynolds and Michael O'Kennedy of not only being rejected by the party, but being rejected for someone who was not even a party member '(a)nd the jury had been their colleagues in Leinster House' (IT:18th September 1997). As Bertie Ahern expressed 'some surprise' at the size of Mary McAleese's vote he also moved quickly to quash any suggestion that he had sought to influence the outcome. The then chief political correspondent for the Irish Times, Denis Coghlan, suggested that,

It's like money at election time: no favours are asked and none are promised. The party leader does not become personally involved in the selection process. But he invariably decides who the candidate will be. It's just that, when the axe swings, the leader doesn't have to wield it (IT:18th September 1997).

Brian Lenihan was not surprised at Reynolds's loss. In his opinion while the party leadership was unwilling to publicly support McAleese she did have the tacit approval of the party leadership because her selection was in the party leadership's interest. As well as avoiding a potentially risky by-election Lenihan contended that Ahern wanted to communicate a different image to the voters.

The party leader was endeavouring to establish a new image for himself apart from previous leaders and was I think concerned about the effect that the evocation of this particular previous leader would have on the electorate generally (Lenihan:1999).

Fianna Fail formed a campaign team for McAleese immediately, comprising of Fianna Fail members and outside experts. Now that the party had fulfilled their role in selecting a candidate, they had to now devise and run a campaign for McAleese. This phase of the party's involvement with McAleese operated on two levels. The party leadership led the campaign but the grass roots of Fianna Fail drove it forward.

From the moment she was selected McAleese moved into phase two of her campaign. She had convinced the parliamentary party of Fianna Fail that she was a viable candidate, now she had to convince the voters. McAleese's meticulous canvass of the party had displayed a high level of political awareness and ability. Her core message obviously resonated with the party. Yet, the fact remains that Fianna Fail needed Mary McAleese as much as she needed them. The risk of Reynolds losing the Presidential election was seconded by the risk to the stability of the government should he win. At this early stage Labour's candidate Adi Roche was considered to be significant threat to Fianna Fail regaining control of the Presidency. By choosing an outsider, Fianna Fail could legitimately claim, if they lost, that it was not the party who lost the Presidency but McAleese, who was not even a party member. It was a win win situation for the party.

Chapter Five:
McAleese Unedited
(The Non-Mediated Campaign)

Arguably the potentially most effective form of electoral campaigning is non-mediated. This ensures that the candidate has complete control over the message they are communicating to the voter. Within an Irish context, there are two principal means of non-mediated campaigning, the personal canvass, and advertising. In this way, it was possible for McAleese to communicate directly with her base of potential support (members of Fianna Fail) and other members of the public.

McAleese conducted an extensive personal canvass over almost the whole country. The advertising campaign consisted of posters displayed in every constituency and leaflets. In this second phase of her campaign, McAleese's target audience changed. Her new target audience became the electorate. McAleese's core message in this non-mediated part of her campaign was designed to raise her profile amongst the voters. The role of the party in this instance was to facilitate McAleese in achieving this goal.

Target Audience

Public relations expert Terry Prone points out, there is no such thing as the 'general public' (Prone:2000). A key audience must be established and appealed to, and if that audience is catered for then the message will have broader appeal (Prone:2000).

McAleese displayed her political abilities repeatedly during the campaign by speaking directly to certain audiences but also maintaining a wider appeal. In various phases of her personal canvass, McAleese met with several different groups including farmers, when she visited the National Ploughing Championships and students when she visited several universities. The McAleese election team also appeared to consider the natural supporters of other candidates when structuring her campaign. Derek Nally, a former Garda, may have had a natural support base within the organisation, so

McAleese visited the Garda training centre at Templemore, and recalled her time as a guest lecturer there. Rosemary Scallon may have had a support base amongst more religious voters so McAleese visited the Columban Father's Open Day.

McAleese had an additional problem of having to appeal directly to the grass roots of Fianna Fail whose support was vital for the type of campaign the party was going to run for her. McAleese attended several Fianna Fail rallies to meet with members of the party. She also appeared with the party leadership and other members of the party at the annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration at Bodenstown. This had the effect of identifying her with the party and lessening her outsider status.

When considering the question of whom McAleese was trying to reach with the advertising campaign it appears obvious that the advertising had to appeal to all of the electorate, no matter how diverse. It was for this reason that the ambiguity of the slogan 'Building Bridges' that was used on all advertising was especially important. It did not exclude any group of voters. The methods of reaching the voters are limited in terms of advertising but all available formats were utilised. The advertising campaign attempted to highlight McAleese's personality and achievements. Nagle felt that McAleese's professional life was 'well flagged.' He wanted to draw attention to McAleese's intellect and integrity and her potential to represent Ireland and 'make Irish people proud of her' (Nagle:1999). Of course now matter how good the candidate is, advertising will only take them so far. There must be substance behind the style. A fact recognised by U.S. President Bill Clinton's advisor Dick Morris when he pointed out that,

If the public won't buy your basic premise, it doesn't matter how much you spend or how well your ads are produced; they won't work (McNair 1999:31).

As with the personal canvass, McAleese had a particular target audience in the Fianna Fail grass roots. It was a difficult balance to strike when it came to advertising.

McAleese had to have the broadest possible appeal, so no mention was made of the Fianna Fail party on the posters. The party was not mentioned during the PPB either, but there were sufficient images of the candidate with party leader Bertie Ahern and other senior members of the government to attach her to the party.

Core Message

McAleese core message in this phase of the campaign to raise her profile through 'direct communication' (Farrell IPS:1987), in this case through canvassing and advertising. McAleese also had convince the voters was that she was a potential President. She did this through 'indirect communication' (Farrell IPS:1987) by attempting to appear Presidential throughout the campaign, exuding warmth and making a connection with the voters. Her core message to the grass roots of the Fianna Fail party was that she was also the best Fianna Fail candidate.

The Personal Canvass

The personal canvass takes different forms. For the purposes of a general or local election candidates generally conducts a personal canvass on the doorsteps with local party members and other supporters. A personal canvass the voters is a vital part of any election campaign. Arguably, people are more likely to remember a candidate if they have had a conversation with them or shaken hands with them. However given

time constraints and the vastness of most constituencies, it is not always possible for a candidate to meet every potential voter and it generally falls to party workers to do the canvass. During the Presidential campaign, all of the candidates canvassed voters very intensively. Personal canvasses rely heavily on the ability of the candidate to communicate effectively with those they meet, a high level of personal stamina as well as charisma and personality.

As the constituency for the Presidential election constituted the entire state, Mary McAleese's personal canvass had to take a different form. While other politicians and potential politicians may knock at doors to canvass voters, given the fact that the Presidential candidates had a countrywide constituency time restrictions did not allow for this. The candidate had to canvass two different groups. As she was not a member of the Fianna Fail party, she needed to canvass party members so they would support her campaign and canvass on her behalf. She did this primarily at organised rallies. McAleese also needed to canvass the other voters, regardless of their party affiliation, if any. The candidate visited shopping centres, town centres, and universities, the National Ploughing Championships, and bingo halls were amongst other venues.

Public relations expert and member of McAleese's strategy team, Wally Young, commented that McAleese was an ideal campaigner as she was,

very impressive with...her interpersonal skills. She used very simple language and very acceptable kind of language (Young:2000).

This simple language made McAleese accessible and approachable while canvassing. McAleese was often criticised for the kind of language she used during the campaign. One of her principle critics was rival Fine Gael candidate Mary Banotti who ridiculed the 'psychobabble' of the other female candidates at the launch of her campaign (IT: 6th October 1997). McAleese retaliated that she was 'appalled when people run away from words like love'. She asserted that her Presidency would be about 'captivating and holding in its embrace the large, colourful family that is the Irish people' (IT: 7th October 1997).

McAleese's behaviour and demeanour during the campaign was an integral part of the indirect core message. Her verbal message was important but so was her ability to connect with the people she was meeting. The voters McAleese canvassed had to believe that McAleese was a potential President, someone who the voters could feel proud to have representing them, so the candidate had to appear to be full of energy and warmth at all times, despite a punishing schedule.

Wally Young was concerned initially about how McAleese would cope with meeting people and canvassing but his fears were unfounded. It was observed that McAleese displayed a Haughey-like way of connecting herself with any area in which she canvassed. Just as former Taoiseach Charles Haughey had an ability to appear as if he was from everywhere and related somehow to everyone, McAleese had uncanny connections with every area she visited (IT: 16th October 1997). Pat Farrell who travelled with the campaign recalled,

Martin (McAleese, her husband) played hurling with a guy who is now a dentist in Longford, or...a guy who shared a flat with Martin is a teacher in the local school...her father is from Roscommon so there was Roscommon connection (Farrell:2000).

The first day of the canvass in Louth and Meath was a reported success. Frank McNally writing in the Irish Times described McAleese's canvassing style as 'a cross between Bertie Ahern and the Holy Spirit' as she 'shook hands, slapped backs and...embraced everything she met.' McNally went on to comment that McAleese was 'a natural campaigner. A starch free Mary Robinson, equally at ease chatting with young women at the hair dressers, or with oul' fellas in the pub' (IT:27th September 1997). On several occasions a 'snatch squad' was sent to get McAleese out of shop or office and in Dundalk RTC as those she canvassed were so eager to speak with her (IT:27th September 1997). Student Union President Colin McAnee commented that 'I thought she was very down to earth. I expected more airs and graces' (II:27th September 1997).

The first day of the campaign finished in Dunshaughlin, where McAleese had lived with her family for some time. A crowd of hundreds turned out to greet the candidate and a banner hung across the street with the wording 'Welcome Home Mary'. Pat Farrell, McAleese's deputy director of elections, who travelled with the candidate, was anxious that first day to see how their candidate would perform but any potential fears were overcome. 'I said to myself that day, this woman has what it takes' (Farrell:2000).

On the 28th of September McAleese spent the day in Croke Park attending the football match between Cork and Kerry. The candidate was pictured wearing both the team's hats (II:29th September 1997). The following day McAleese launched her Dublin campaign in the Berkley Court Hotel. The launch was likened to a mini-Ard Fheis by some commentators as McAleese received three 'warm-up' speeches and four standing ovations. The candidate responded to criticism of her use of the words 'enrich', 'love', and 'hope' claiming that these 'were the words Ireland needed' (II:30th September 1997). On the 30th of September McAleese moved her campaign to rural Ireland, and the Ploughing Championships (II:1st October 1997).

On the 2nd of October McAleese had spent the day canvassing in Waterford where she visited three shopping centres. Again, several people she met appeared to have some connection with the candidate. One woman had studied legal studies at the University of Ulster and another woman's father was from the Fall's Road in Belfast. As in all other locations McAleese was guided and guarded by members of the local Fianna Fail organisation, in this instance Treasa Honan, former Cathaoirleach of the Seanad (IT:3rd October:1997). She also visited Waterford RTC to canvass the student vote. On the same day McAleese also visited Millstreet Show-jumping and concert arena where she told those she met that as President she would 'encourage those I meet to tap into and learn from our experiences as a country' (II:3rd October 1997).

McAleese attended the Enterprise Ireland show in the RDS on Saturday the 4th of October where she was accompanied by the then Minister for Defence David Andrews and Progressive Democrat Junior Minister Liz O'Donnell. McAleese told one journalist that she was receiving a great welcome on the campaign trail.

McAleese attended the International Horse Show in Ballinasloe on Sunday the 5th of October. Again, McAleese's personal campaigning ability was noted. Irish Times journalist Catherine Cleary noted that,

You are led to her and she takes you by the hand and locks
you her gaze. "Howya doin'?" God bless. Lovely to meet you,"
she smiles straight into your eyes. And in that moment you are
the only person in her universe (IT:6th October 2000).

In Carrick-on-Shannon McAleese spoke of the town land three miles away where her father was brought up. She spoke of childhood memories and the 'aching hearts of mothers and fathers' whose children were forced to emigrate. McAleese's father Paddy Leneghan attended the rally and said that it would be 'powerful' to see his daughter win the Presidency (IT:7th October 1997). The candidate again took an opportunity to defend her language saying that 'its not a mushy word, "love" but a hard word which insists you show respect even when you are angry or provoked.' It was reported that McAleese received 'rapturous applause' from the 'strong Fianna Fail turnout' at the Bush Hotel. Sligo Leitrim TD John Ellis, Longford Roscommon TD Sean Doherty and Senator Pascal Mooney were there to lead the cheers (II:7th October).

McAleese was very comfortable with those that she met out on the campaign. Young recalls McAleese canvassing in Roscommon where she was approached by some relatives and she spoke to them as if she was 'just out for a day's shopping.' Young claims that a significant amount of people saw this interaction and he felt that it

registered with them and it benefited McAleese's campaign (Young:2000). On the same day McAleese visited Cavan with the Minister for the Environment Noel Dempsey, her director of elections, where the Urban and City Council hosted a civic reception in the courthouse. She told her hosts that they 'embrace[d] the spirit of the nation beautifully' because they had held receptions for all of the Presidential candidates. McAleese spoke in Cavan of being an 'antidote to cynics' and a 'shop window for Ireland and the personification of Ireland abroad.' The response from the approximately eighty people gathered was reported to be enthusiastic as they all stood from their seats and applauded loudly (IT: 7th October 1997).

McAleese spent the 7th of October in Donegal, visiting Donegal town, Ballybofey and Letterkenny (IT:8th October 1997). She delivered a speech in Donegal town about her 'cool head and warm heart' and had a walkabout in Ballybofey accompanied by Fianna Fail Senator Paddy McGowan. In Letterkenny she also delivered a speech in which she appealed directly to Fianna Fail party workers saying that she could 'accomplish absolutely nothing without your help' (IT:8th October 1997) In common with other locations McAleese had canvassed she met people with whom she had a previous connection. In Ballybofey she recounted stories of her stay at the Irish college in nearby Fintown. In Donegal she met her former Maths teacher who greeted his former pupil very fondly (IT: 8th October 1997).

On the 8th of October that McAleese attended a question and answer session at University College, Dublin. This constituted a different form of a personal canvass. The audience was mainly composed of students who would form a significant constituency for all of the Presidential candidates. While such a forum may not

provide the most optimal conditions for a candidate as some of the questions may by their nature be adversarial, it does allow the candidate to communicate directly with a potentially wider audience. The questions posed to McAleese were varied and included, what qualities she would bring to the Aras, whether she was worried by the entrance of Independent candidate Rosemary Scallon into the Presidential contest, whether as a resident of Northern Ireland she should be contesting an election in the Republic. It was reported that some of the students who had expected McAleese to be 'stuffy and conservative' said after watching her performance that they were pleasantly surprised (IT:9th October 1997).

On a visit to the University College Cork on the 9th of October McAleese participated in similar event. It was reported that McAleese had a successful day of campaigning. The Irish Times reported that the 'scent of victory' was strong. The campaign certainly appeared to have considerable momentum. A police escort was provided for McAleese to ease her journey between shopping centres in Cork. Irish Times journalist Kathy Sheridan commented on McAleese's campaigning style.

The style is to charge forward hand out, and leave them laughing.

There are handshakes, touches, a pat on the back, a word for everyone, their situation assessed in seconds and suitably commented upon (IT: 10th October 1997).

McAleese visited Kerry on the 10th of October. Following an interview with Fianna Fail Senator, Dan Kiely, on Radio Kerry that morning party members turned to welcome the candidate. As in other locations McAleese found a personal connection

pointing out that despite her husband working for Aer Lingus at the time and a variety of locations available to them they chose to go to Kerry for their honeymoon (IT:11th October 1997). In common with other locations McAleese also visited the local third level institution, Tralee RTC to canvass the student vote (II:11th October 1997).

On the 12th of October, McAleese visited the Columban Fathers' Open Day in Navan and toured the multicultural exhibit displaying the work of the order. According to Wally Young, McAleese wanted to attend as she had worked with the Columban Fathers previously (Young:2000). The decision was a shrewd one as the visit provided to a significant opportunity to canvass the other visitors to the Open Day. It was reported in the Irish Times that a high proportion of the two thousand visitors shook hands with McAleese (IT:13th October 1997).

On the 15th of the month, McAleese continued her canvass in Tipperary. She visited the Garda Siochana training college in Templemore, where she had been a guest lecturer on criminal law in the 1980s. She dined with the recruits and reportedly 'left an impressed little gang in her wake' (IT:16th October 1997). From there, McAleese travelled to Hayes Hotel in Thurles, where supporters were gathered outside to greet her. Her connection to Thurles came in the guise of Father Martin Hayes, the family friend she had visited in Thurles for many holidays (IT:16th October 1997). On the 18th of the month McAleese travelled to Galway where she addressed a rally of supporters. It was in Galway where McAleese had a difficult time with the media, as will be discussed in greater detail in the case study, yet her personal campaign appeared to be unaffected. She noted that that she had received a 'warm response' in Galway (IT:20th October 1997). She attended a joint Fianna Fail/Progressive

Democrat rally in the ballroom of the Great Southern Hotel, where the PD TD Bobby Molloy made a speech in support of McAleese who watched a display of Irish dancing.

McAleese attended the annual Wolf Tone Commemoration in Bodenstown cemetery in Co. Kildare on the 19th of October. As this commemoration is principally a Fianna Fail event it gave McAleese the opportunity to garner support from Fianna Fail members and supporters (IT:20th October 1997). The Labour Party leader Dick Spring was critical of McAleese's attendance at the commemoration however, saying that,

as a self-professed bridge-builder in the context of Northern Ireland she was unwise and foolish to have attended Fianna Fail's commemoration' (IT:21st October 1997).

The following day McAleese was back in Galway touring the Aran Islands where she met residents and spoke to journalists. In common with other locations she also participated in a debate in the University College Galway, this time with Adi Roche the Labour nominated candidate, Mary Banotti the Fine Gael candidate and the Independent Derek Nally (IT:21st October 1997).

On the 21st of October McAleese visited Limerick where she addressed a gathering of Fianna Fail supporters at the Ennis Hotel. She visited a family centre accompanied by Fianna Fail MEP, Gerry Collins, and then canvassed the city's main street, O'Connell Street with Fianna Fail TDs Eddie Wade and Willie O'Dea (IT:22nd October 1997). McAleese spent the following day in Dublin, where she canvassed shoppers in the

city centre, spoke to members of the National Association for the Mentally Handicapped in the Mansion House and toured the National Youth Council exhibition at Buswells Hotel (IT:23rd October 1997). She also visited a fundraising reception in the RDS for the Children to Lapland Appeal held to raise money to send ill children to Lapland to visit Santa Claus (II:23rd October 1997).

That night McAleese gave what was described as a 'major' speech at the All Hallows College in Drumcondra in Dublin. She addressed the Peace and Justice Group at the former seminary. In this speech McAleese repeated formerly expressed sentiments and expanded on her vision for the Presidency. She reiterated her desire to 'build bridges' to all sectors of the community including the unionists in the North.

McAleese vowed that as President she would 'welcome members of the unionist community and listen to their point of view' (IT:23rd September 1997) She defended her ability to be this 'bridge-builder' despite the fact she was a catholic and a nationalist.

The notion that one has to abandon one's own beliefs to make peace with unionism or that to be a nationalist or a Catholic is by definition to be divisive is a philosophy I cannot accept (IT:23rd October 1997).

On the 23rd of October McAleese had spent the day in Athlone and Tullamore. She spoke to a crowded hall of students in Athlone RTC where she promised to make one of their peer group an appointee to the Council of State. Willie Dillion writing in the Irish Independent commented that McAleese 'effortlessly won over an audience of

several hundred students with a display of charm, wit and informality' (II:24th October 1997). The students responded with a prolonged standing ovation. McAleese then visited the Bridge Shopping centre in Tullamore where the crowds were described as 'dense'. She then attended a rally in Bridge House where Fianna Fail T.D. Brian Cowen introduced her to the assembled crowd (Irish Times:24th October 1997). On the 24th of the month, McAleese canvassed in Cork. There was a reception for the candidate in the Blaney Park Hotel where Paddy Cole and his jazz band played (II:25th October 1997).

On the 26th of October McAleese continued her canvass in Dublin, addressing members of Fianna Fail in a Dublin pub. She went on to the launch of Concern's Christmas fast at the Irish Film Centre. She went from there to the Golden Bowl pub in Kilternan, where she met and was photographed with runners who were competing in the Dublin City Marathon for Cerebral Palsy (IT:27th October 1997). On the 27th of October McAleese visited the Irish centre in Manchester with the message that the twenty-first century would be 'the age of the Irish' (II:28th October 1997). Jerome O'Reilly, writing in the Irish Independent, argued that the fact that she accepted the Centre's invitation displayed a confidence that she was going to win the race for the Presidency. He went on to comment that McAleese played the centre 'like a professional' (II:28th October 1997). The speech McAleese made that night was an important one according to her event's manager Wally Young. He felt that because McAleese was highlighting the achievements of the Irish abroad, it 'counteracted the sentiment of previous President Mary Robinson with her candle in the window' (Young:2000).

On the 28th of October McAleese was did some last minute canvassing in Dublin with the Taoiseach, Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern. Amongst other places they canvassed the city centre and Malahide. The campaign team was reportedly in and out of Balbriggan in what appeared to be ten minutes (II:29th October 1997).

McAleese left what could have potentially been the most difficult area to canvass until the last possible moment. The day before polling she visited Longford, the constituency of Albert Reynolds, the former Taoiseach who had failed to receive his party's nomination for the Presidency. Reynolds was on holidays when McAleese arrived but reportedly the first people that came out to greet her were Reynolds brother Jim and his son Philip (II:30th October 1997). In doing this the Reynolds family was signifying to the rest of the country and the party that they did not hold a grudge and that they supported McAleese.

McAleese's delivery of her core message was a success, in the most part, because McAleese was such a confidant and consummate campaigner. Her ability to connect with the voters was invaluable. Not only did she raise her profile, but also she managed to convince the voters that she had the potential to be the next President. McAleese's popularity with the voters also provided an insulator against negative media coverage of her campaign. Young notes that while the 'Dublin media' may have been critical of McAleese the 'national criticism of her was having no impact with the people that she was meeting' (Young:2000). Certainly, the backing of the Fianna Fail party would have helped when they turned out to support her and provide momentum around her personal canvass. Yet, McAleese had the skills and sheer personality to effect a successful personal canvass. Miriam Lord, writing in the Irish

Independent noted that 'Mary's style of empathy politics is proving very popular on the ground' (II:23rd October).

Advertising

The other vital aspect of non-mediated political communication in the McAleese campaign was advertising. Advertising allowed the candidate to construct a public image of herself without the interference of the media.

Brian McNair defines political advertising as,

the purchase and use of advertising space, paid for at commercial rates, in order to transmit political messages to a mass audience (McNair 1999:94).

Certainly in the case of the Arks Advertising who were principally responsible for the advertising in the Mary McAleese Presidential campaign, there is no difference between a commercial and a political client. The rates do not vary for politicians because they 'get our thinking' (Nagle:1999).

Political advertising was pioneered in the United States where advertising executive Rosser Reeves developed the theory that politicians could be sold to the public as easily as any product (McNair 1999:98). Gerry Nagle, of Arks Advertising, concurs with this view arguing that there is no difference between marketing a person and a product (Nagle:1999). The most obvious difference between the US and British and Irish electoral campaigns has to be use of political advertising. In Britain and Ireland,

unlike in the US the law does not permit political advertisements on television and radio. In the US thirty-second ads or 'spots' are the dominant part of any campaign and have in most cases led to a proliferation of negative advertising and negative attacks against opposing candidates.

When using advertising to McAleese impart her core message, McAleese had two options, posters and a Party Political Broadcast (PPB). Both were produced by Arks Advertising. The posters provided vital name and face recognition, as did the PPB. In the PPB, however, voters saw an animated version of McAleese and this allowed her to reach the voters she did not meet on her personal canvass.

Brian McNair points out that political advertising has two functions; to inform and to persuade. This view is reinforced by Gerry Nagle, head of Arks Advertising, the company who took charge of Mary McAleese's advertising campaign.

You are there to create a demand for a product and you're there to motivate a purchase or trial of that product. That's what advertising is for. It's an investment. And if you take a political candidate, you want the vote. That's the purchase (Nagle:1999).

In fulfilling these two functions, McNair argues advertising has clear advantages for the politician. The primary advantage is that editorial control of the advertisement lies with the politician and not with the media. It allows the politician to highlight their strengths and their opponent's weaknesses and to replace the journalist's agenda with their own. (McNair 1999:94)

One of Richard Nixon's speech writers claimed in 1968 that the voter's approval of a candidate was not based on reality but,

is a product of the particular candidate between the voter and the image of the candidate. We have to be clear on this point: the response is to the image not to the man' (Kavanagh 1995:14).

Constructing the optimum image for Mary McAleese was to prove challenging. Her high profile in both her professional life and her work within the Catholic Church made alternative constructions of her core message difficult. Before an advertising campaign could be designed for McAleese, her personal image had to be refined. As with when McAleese was conducting her personal canvass, indirect communication would be a vital party of her core message, in this phase of her campaign.

The day after the selection process McAleese underwent a transformation. The McAleese campaign was the only one that hired a full time stylist, Helen Cody. An undisclosed clothing budget was mostly split between the Powerscourt Design Centre, Brown Thomas and Diffusion in Clontarf. The colours of the clothing chosen were mostly traditional autumn colours with deep reds and blacks. Trouser suits dominated the wardrobe. All of the clothes were by Irish designers, principally Deborah Veale and Miriam Mone. Accessories by Vivienne Walsh were selected and were mainly made of metal and stone.

McAleese had a new hairstyle and colour done by Reds salon in Dublin. Her hair was trimmed every two weeks during the campaign. The new hairstyle was described by

Cody as 'Chic, but definitely not austere... We wanted to portray a friendly image' (SBP:28th September 1997). In Nagle's words McAleese was changed from a 'frumpy professor into a superb modern stateswoman.' He claims that neither himself nor McAleese's husband Martin recognised her (Nagle:1999). Justine McCarthy, author of 'The Outsider' a biography on McAleese noted that the candidate had a,

new streamlined appearance. Gone was the scatty professor with the familiar make-do hairstyle and safe string of pearls. This was a planned glossy package designed for six weeks of intensive media exposure....a modern attractive woman capable of projecting a positive image for the country (McCarthy 1999:190).

Communications expert, Terry Prone claims that factors such as dress, make-up and hairstyle are becoming 'increasingly important and they shouldn't have any validity at all. The reality is that some of the greatest politicians in historic times could not now get elected' (Prone:2000). Prone is of the opinion that women face an extra effort with image as people have a tendency to view men neutrally and women negatively. It appears prudent then, that the campaign went to so much effort to alter their McAleese's appearance (Prone:2000).

Posters

Restrictions do not apply to print advertising so political parties have a tendency to capitalise on this. Again, there is not always a great deal of ingenuity or originality when it comes to this form of advertising. The most often used format is that of a headshot of the candidate, the name of the party and a slogan. Some variations do

emerge. During the 1997 General Election, a picture of Progressive Democrat leader Mary Harney appeared on the posters along side the headshot of the PD candidate. Fine Gael's poster campaign, during the same election, was often noted for the lack of a picture of their leader John Bruton, their principle image being one of a baby looking over the shoulder of a parent.

Denis Kavanagh outlines three elements that must be considered by political advertisers. What are we trying to say; whom are we trying to reach; how should we reach them (Kavanagh 1997:15). For the McAleese campaign, the principle problem in the initial stages of the campaign, as previously stated, was to make the candidate known to the public. Posters would, it was hoped, give a certain level of name and face recognition for the candidate.

The main slogan of the campaign appearing on all advertising, was 'Building Bridges.' It was initially planned that different endings would be added to this slogan as the campaign progressed specifying what exactly bridges would be built to. However, after much discussion, and on the recommendation of the Director of Elections Noel Dempsey, it was decided to allow the electorate to draw their own conclusions (Dempsey:2000). The slogan that had also been used by U.S. President Bill Clinton in his 1996 re-election campaign, 'Building Bridges to the twenty-first century' took on a new resonance for McAleese. Her core message was one of building bridges to the marginalised in society, it was a message about tolerance and healing past hurts. The slogan was supposed to apply to all sectors of society. However, throughout the campaign the focus turned on the unionist community in the

North of Ireland and how bridges could be built from the South of Ireland, and whether a Northern nationalist as President was equipped to fulfil this role.

Tony Higgins took the photographs that were used for the campaign. It was reportedly a very quick and easy photo shoot as McAleese had previous experience presenting television programmes, and was very aware of camera angles and her appearance on film (Nagle:1999). A decision was made to use a blue as the background colour on the posters. It was an unusual decision as blue is traditionally a background colour used by Fine Gael. The colours generally used by Fianna Fail in the background of posters are black, or the tri-colour of green, white, and gold. However, it was decided that as blue is the Presidential colour it would be the most suitable. In addition to this, Nagle felt that the choice of colour would 'disarm Fine Gael' (Nagle:1999).

Photographs were also taken of McAleese with her husband Martin and their three children in the back garden of the Common's restaurant in Dublin. The McAleese children were not involved in the campaign, as they continued to attend school in Rostrevor for the duration, but the photographs were made available for publication.

The photographs were used in three elements of the election campaign. Firstly, there was the large poster sites, then the smaller posters that were attached to lampposts, and thirdly the pictures were used for general campaign literature that was delivered to voters. This literature introduced McAleese and contained a message from the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern endorsing her. Arks purchased media space in the national press to publish the advertisements and rented large poster sites. Only McAleese and the Labour candidate Adi Roche used posters for lampposts. McAleese's director of

elections, Minister Noel Dempsey, saw the value of postering for McAleese saying that,

With Mary McAleese we did need to get the face known and to get the name known....particularly when a candidate is coming into an area if the posters are up for a while before hand so the people will be “oh yeah, that’s the person on the posters” (Dempsey:2000).

Conor Quinn, managing director of the QMP advertisement agency, concurs with Dempsey’s viewpoint arguing that posters ‘create visibility for candidates’ and allows them to establish an identity and brings them closer to the electorate (SBP:28th September 1997).

The McAleese campaign also produced a leaflet that was sent to everyone on the electoral register. This ensured that the voters, who did not meet McAleese, did have some direct communication from her. On the addressed side of the glossy leaflet there was a headshot of a smiling McAleese and the slogan ‘Building Bridges. The names of her supporting parties, Fianna Fail and the Progressive Democrats were printed in small, as was the campaign email address. On the reverse side of the leaflet, there was a picture of McAleese in between Bertie Ahern and PD leader, Mary Hearnery. The signed message was a summary of the core speech that McAleese gave while canvassing. The message spoke of McAleese’s ‘dream for the eighth Presidency of Ireland’, and the cool head with which she would protect the constitution and the

warm heart she would extend to the citizens of Ireland. She also expressed a wish that 'you and I can meet in the future.'

The Party Political Broadcast

While Irish political advertisement is permitted in the press and on poster sites advertising is more restricted on television and radio. The only option for candidates to advertise on television or radio is the party political broadcast. Party political broadcasts (PPBs) can be classified as political advertising according to McNair as 'the source controls the message' (McNair 1999:108). The national broadcaster (RTE) allocates time to parties based on electoral strength. For the most part these broadcasts have followed the form of the candidate sitting in front of the camera extolling his or her virtues against the backdrop of a party logo. In some cases, footage of the party leader at work, meeting foreign dignitaries or the voters will accompany the voice over. Radio PPBs tend to be an audio version of the television PPB.

As with the posters and the leaflet, McAleese's core message was to raise her profile and provide the voters with a potential President. The PPB also served to extend McAleese's core message as she spoke of her aspirations for the Presidency. She was deliberately vague during the PPB but it set the stage for when she would speak at length in the media about her plans for the Presidency (as discussed in the following chapter).

The images of McAleese that were shown in the PPB were put together to form a story about the candidate, and to show that she was qualified to be President of Ireland. Deacon et. al. describe this formation of a story saying that,

In film and television, shots are combined to form scenes showing action taking place... These in turn are assembled to produce sequences which form a self-contained segment, like a chapter in a book. Finally the sequences are put together to tell an overall story (Deacon et. al. 1999:205)

The PPB provided McAleese with the opportunity to tell her story, in a way that would benefit her and her campaign. The image that was conveyed in the PPB was an image of a capable, poised and popular woman, equally at ease with the public and at formal occasions.

The Party Political Broadcast opened with McAleese being interviewed. Books and soft light surrounded her. She was mid sentence, describing her children and what wonderful company they were, and how she was the person, they needed most. There was a shot of McAleese and her husband with their children laughing. McAleese outlined her previous career in politics, emphasising the notion of service, her career in RTE where she 'got inside aspects of Irish life' and her 'range of unique insights.' For the rest of the three minutes the PPB alternated between pictures of McAleese canvassing flanked at varying times by the Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, her director of elections, Noel Dempsey, the Tainiste and PD leader Mary Hearnery and junior PD Minister Liz O'Donnell and her husband Martin. These images conveyed support for McAleese from the highest ranks of the government parties. These pictures were accompanied with a voice-over, provided by McAleese. Deacon et. al. argue that

These voice-overs may either reproduce the role of a lecturer...offering a voice-of-god commentary that seeks to direct the audience...or offer a more personalised testimony (Deacon et. al. 1999:207)

It is evident, that in the case of this PPB, McAleese was attempting to present a picture of herself to the viewer. The viewer could get to know McAleese as she spoke directly to them with a 'personalised testimony' (Deacon et. al. 1999:207). The voice over served to re-enforce the pictorial images, as McAleese outlined her view of the Presidency and her reasons for contesting the election.

As McAleese spoke of the role of the Presidency, constitutional, ceremonial and ambassadorial, images of her appeared with a mobile phone to each ear, signing autographs, and greeting the voters in universities, supermarkets, shopping centres, at GAA matches and out in the street. These images presented a busy, in demand candidate, who was at ease meeting the public, indicating that she would indeed be a good ambassador for the country.

When speaking about the constitutional and ceremonial role pictures were shown of McAleese speaking at a podium. She claimed that she knew this country and its people well and that she felt that she had to 'give back. Not just for yourself and your own children but for future generations.' McAleese concluded by saying that one of the reasons that there was no better job than to 'represent and symbolise those things that make up now this extraordinary nation.' There was a final close up and slow motion of a smiling McAleese. The title read 'Mary McAleese, Presidential

candidate.’ There was no mention of any political party. The fact that she was not associated formally with a political party reinforced the fact that the Presidency is above politics. The impression given by the PPB was that McAleese was very popular with the voters and a woman of stature and grace who would represent Ireland very well. The whole PPB was set to soft Celtic music.

Role of the Party

The role of the Fianna Fail party during McAleese’s non-mediated campaign was an organisational one as they were to design, co-ordinate and implement the campaign. The party had an administrative role as they co-ordinated supporters to turn out for McAleese and put up posters. McAleese’s tour around the country was based on Taoiseach Bertie Ahern’s similar tour during the 1997 general election campaign. The McAleese campaign could not cover the same amount of territory due to time restrictions. McAleese did, however, go to every county and almost all of the constituencies (Farrell:2000). The party also had the necessary outside contacts that gave McAleese access to an advertising company that was familiar with Fianna Fail, the party image, and culture.

Brian Lenihan became McAleese’s election agent. As election agent, it was Lenihan’s responsibility to deal with the legal aspects of the campaign, primarily to ensure that McAleese’s nomination was formally lodged. Lenihan offered himself for this position for two reasons. Firstly, he was the person that McAleese would have known the longest within the party and while he felt ‘no guilt’ (Lenihan:1999) for supporting the candidacy of O’Kennedy he was also anxious to

mend fences if I could and help her in any way I could.

I also felt with the division between Michael and Albert and herself that at least I could help to heal part of that division coming from Michael's side seen to support her (Lenihan:1999).

Lenihan felt that his endorsement could be helpful considering that he had not backed McAleese in the first instance. He felt that in addition to these factors, as his father had contested the Presidential election in 1990 he had a general interest in the campaign itself (Lenihan:1999). Another TD who was also used to heal divisions within the party was Minister for the Environment, Noel Dempsey. Dempsey was approached to be McAleese's director of elections by Pat Farrell, then the General Secretary of Fianna Fail. As Director of Elections, Dempsey was responsible for the overall running of McAleese's campaign, including the planning of the route, strategy, dealing with the media and expenditure. While Dempsey had been in Canada at the time of the selection convention and had failed to register his vote, it was suspected that he would have supported Reynolds as Dempsey had received preferment under Reynolds's leadership. It was commented that 'roping in a high-profile loyalist would act as ointment on the sores of the vanquished camp' (McCarthy 1999:189).

Fianna Fail conducted the Presidential election campaign in 1997 along the same lines that had returned them to office the previous June. It made sense to stick to the formula as those who had been involved in the June 1997 election felt that they had conducted the best organised campaign ever and that the 'corner-stone of this success'

(Farrell:2000) was the party leaders campaign. Fianna Fail leader, Bertie Ahern, in an unprecedented move, toured every constituency in the country to canvass the voters in what was described as a 'Presidential style' campaign, as it echoed the presidential elections in the United States. Pat Farrell, then General Secretary of Fianna Fail and deputy director of elections for Mary McAleese, argues that the ability of Fianna Fail to mobilise support was a very important factor.

(O)ur ability...to bring out people in large numbers created a huge momentum and a rolling momentum that...ran across the country, projected the Fianna Fail campaign in a very dynamic positive way' (Farrell:2000).

Presidential election headquarters was set up in Mount Street, close to Fianna Fail headquarters. The strategy team met every morning to review the media and plan the campaign. Out of the early morning meetings, all the essential elements of the campaign emerged including the poster, the slogan, and the route the candidate should take and where she should visit (Nagle:1999).

The people on the strategy team were the same as those involved in the June election. Martin Mackin then the Press Secretary of Fianna Fail, Maurice O'Donohue, former army officer and logistics expert, who planned Bertie Ahern's trip around the country and who would go on to plan the route that McAleese would take. Noel Whelan assisted O'Donohue in this. Then there were the 'kings of spin' (Nagle:1999), P.J. Mara, who had been director of elections in June 1997, Gerry Hickey from the Department of an Taoiseach and Martin Mansergh, head of research in Fianna Fail.

As the Progressive Democrats, Fianna Fail's coalition partners, had endorsed McAleese's campaign they were also involved in the strategy team. Their input included Junior Minister and former student of McAleese Liz O'Donnell, PD National Organiser Garvan McGinley and the head of the Government Information Service, John Murray. The initial planning for the Presidential campaign began in early September, before any candidate had been selected. A temporary headquarters was set up and provisional plans were made regarding the country-wide canvass and the poster (SBP:2nd November 1997).

The fact that people turned out to meet the Fianna Fail candidate was no accident. McAleese's canvass was planned with literally military precision by the strategy team, the success of which depended very heavily on the local party organisers. An advance party led by Maurice O'Donoghue went into an area a day or two preceding McAleese's arrival. O'Donoghue is a former army commandant and logistics expert who was involved in planning Bertie Ahern's country-wide canvass during the June 1997 General Election. O'Donoghue's team checked the location, the venue, were alerted to any potential problems, and ensured local party members and activists were available to attend (Young:2000).

Nothing was taken for granted and this meticulous planning meant that the campaign had the flexibility to deal with any problems that emerged. Local activists were also contacted by telephone by the campaign headquarters in Dublin to inform them of the upcoming itinerary (Young:2000). Pat Farrell, the then General Secretary of Fianna Fail, noted that one lesson that he learned from the 1992 General Election was that writing to people in the hope that they will turn out for the campaign is not effective.

Direct communication is necessary to ensure results. A bank of people were based in the campaign headquarters with the sole purpose of making these phone calls to urge party members to come out in support of McAleese when she was due to visit their area (Farrell:2000). The strategy was highly successful with the Irish Times reporting,

The organised love-ins could not have run more smoothly
with the well oiled party machine working like a dream
(IT:7th October 1997).

In common with the general election in the same year, Fianna Fail provided transport for journalists to follow their Presidential candidate. This ensured that not a moment of the campaign was missed and journalists were at times able to conduct on-the-hoof interviews with the candidate. This new aspect to election campaigns in Ireland has been practised in the United States for many years. During the Presidential campaigns in the US journalists must pay for the privilege of travelling on the bus with the candidate and perhaps getting to conduct a short one to one interview.

Arks Advertising had worked with Fianna Fail since November 1996, first conducting a campaign against the Rainbow Coalition (the government that comprised of Fine Gael, the Labour Party, and Democratic Left) sponsored bill on property tax.

Consequently the property tax was abandoned and Arks went on to work with Fianna Fail during the General Election of June 1997. The partnership between Arks and Fianna Fail proved to be a fruitful one. One of the most renowned pieces of political advertising emerged during the campaign, the now famed 'Prince of Darkness' poster which showed Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern sitting writing at a desk with a light

causing a shadow to fall across his face. The accompanying slogan read 'People before Politics.'

Nagle was contacted by Fianna Fail before the selection convention and asked to provide mock advertisements for Albert Reynolds and Michael O'Kennedy, the Fianna Fail TDs who were seeking the party's nomination to contest the Presidential election. Mary McAleese was not mentioned as a possible candidate. Nagle attended the Fianna Fail selection convention and saw McAleese win the party's Presidential nomination. He was very impressed with McAleese and her performance describing her as 'phenomenal' (Nagle:1999).

The impact of the involvement of the Fianna Fail party in McAleese's non-mediated campaign is difficult to assess but the party certainly facilitated and assisted her campaign. The strength of the party on the ground assisted McAleese's personal canvass.

Independent candidates Rosemary Scallon and Derek Nally had no such benefits. Scallon only had her own family to canvass for her as she decided to distance herself from the conservative Christian group that suggested that she run (Doyle IPS:1999). Nally also only had a small group of what one commentator called 'political amateurs' to assist him (McCarthy 1999:196). Labour's candidate Adi Roche did have the backing of a significantly large party but as her campaign was also supported by the Democratic Left and the Green Party, inter-party conflict often led to a confused canvass and did not benefit the candidate (Finlay 1999:322). Mary Banotti, like Mary McAleese had the support on the ground from a large political party, but the fact

remains that Fianna Fail is the largest party and they did provide real momentum during the McAleese's personal canvass.

The only two candidates to have a poster campaign were McAleese and Roche. Banotti may have felt that she did not need a poster campaign because her name was relatively well known. It led one commentator to question whether Banotti's lack of posters was a 'serious error of strategy?' (Doyle IPS:1999). It is unlikely that Scallon and Nally could have afforded the expense of posters.

A significant element of the campaign was McAleese herself. Her warmth and her force of personality and her own communication abilities were crucial to the success of this part of the campaign. The success of her mediated campaign was reliant upon her having made a real connection with the voters before the media began to edit her campaign.

Chapter Six:
McAleese Packaged
(The Mediated Campaign)

During her election campaign Mary McAleese utilised all forms of available media. She did several interviews on local radio (most of which were conducted over the telephone from campaign headquarters), as well as interviews on national radio and television. Coverage of the election was extensive in the print media also, but here, as well as with the other forms of media, McAleese had to compete for space with the other four candidates. McAleese's target audience during the mediated aspect of her campaign did vary, although she attempted to keep her core message of policy and her aspirations for the Presidency broad and vague, so it would appeal to the maximum number of voters. The role of the party was primarily one of news management, as they set up interviews for McAleese and attempted to control coverage of their candidate.

According to Terry Prone, one of the founders of Carr Communications, to be a good media performer, on radio or television, a person has to be three things; interesting, understandable and memorable. Carr Communications, based in Dublin is one of the leading organisations for media training in the country and they have coached many members of Dail Eireann (Prone:2000). Prone argues that politicians are in the business of changing attitudes or behaviours, or reinforcing them, depending on what party they belong to. To achieve this, the politician must consider to whom they are directing their message, because there is no such thing as the general public. The 'key audience' must be established, because if the key audience is reached, other audiences will also be served (Prone:2000). The problem with the Presidential campaign was that every audience was a key audience. Every time McAleese conducted an interview for television or radio, her target audience was everyone listening. This meant that the message she attempted to convey had to appeal to everyone.

There are several recommendations Terry Prone makes to individuals about to conduct a television or radio interview. The first is to establish who else, if anyone will be taking part, then to establish what issues will be discussed before or after the interview. Interviewers will often ask questions based on other 'segments' of the show. Most importantly, individuals should not agree to appear or speak on a programme if they have not been given sufficient notice. Preparation is necessary before every interview. Prone recommends that given the choice between a live or a taped programme it is wiser to participate in the live programme. A taped programme allows editorial slants, and the individual being interviewed has less control over the process. (Prone:2000).

The factors that hindered successful communication with the voters were many-fold in McAleese's campaign. Firstly, members of Fianna Fail party perceived a bias in the media against a McAleese, a Catholic Nationalist who left her job in the Worker's Party dominated RTE under a cloud of recrimination and was subsequently expelled from the National Union of Journalists (Dempsey:2000). Another factor that hindered McAleese, was the lack of issues. The restrictions of the office of the President meant that discussions on Presidential policies concerned matters of style rather than substance. Despite the fact that it was a relatively short campaign, only about six weeks in all, there was very little to discuss. This vacuum was filled with questions about McAleese's fitness for office, her nationalism, and personal attacks on the candidate by a number of media sources (as discussed in detail in the case study below).

Within the framework of political communications, the media forms an intrinsic part of the process. The days of the public rally are in the past, where all the inhabitants of one town would turn out to hear opposing political figures debate and speak for hours at a time. Any public rallies held today are more likely to be staged for maximum televisual effect, populated with loyal party members who will cheer and clap on cue. The media has now become one of the primary means that political figures have of communicating with their electorate. As such communication is vital for their election or re-election it is not surprising that, politicians will utilise every means possible to exploit media access.

Professor Joe Lee points out that the public now absorb more information from the media than from politicians (Kiberd 1997:18). This is certainly true when it is considered that most of the contact voters have with their politicians is through the media. Yet, the media provides a substantial filter. Except for Oireachtas Report where there is a retelling of who said what in the Dail and the Seanad most programmes with a political content have some kind of slant, however subtle. Programmes will generally for the sake of fairness attempt to have opposing representative viewpoints. This is especially true of current affairs programmes on RTE television and radio (Prone:2000). Yet how much of the public will watch and listen to political programming with a critical ear, willing to discern what is fact and what has the slant of a presenter or programme maker? Joe Lee suggests that an adjustment in how people are educated must take place to facilitate the new pervasive role the media has in society (Kiberd 1997:18).

It could be argued that the electorate are not totally blind to the agenda of the media. When the foreign affairs memos were selectively leaked during the campaign and most journalists used the information contained in them to brand McAleese as an 'IRA fellow-traveller' (as will be discussed in detail in the case study). The public was obviously discerning enough to realise that this was not necessarily the case. It could be seen that McAleese was commenting on the electoral success of Sinn Fein not saying she believed in the principle of an armed struggle.

The First Press Conference and the Launch of the Campaign

This first press conference was crucial. It was the first time McAleese would speak publicly as a serious Presidential contender. There was little publicised confidence in her potential success, a fact reflected in the manner in which Reynolds had organised his post selection press conference in a sizeable room in Buswell's Hotel where he planned to celebrate his success surrounded by his family (McCarthy 1999:180). This left McAleese with a considerably smaller room in Buswells, a factor which Young felt was in her favour. The room was very crowded with media and cameras. The limited space meant that several of the photographs appearing the media that evening and the next day were of others photographers and television cameras capturing the event and in Young's view this created 'a real frisson and buzz, there was a tremendous sense of excitement' (Young:2000).

Mary McAleese's campaign was officially launched in Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin on the 25th of September 1997. The launch provided McAleese to set the agenda for her campaign, a vital part of any electoral communications strategy. A political actor must attempt to control not only their own message and how that it being received, but

peripheral issues. When issues that the candidate does not want discussed, dominate the media, a candidate can lose control of communicating their message effectively.

Target Audience

McAleese's target audience during her first press conference was the Fianna Fail party, especially the grass roots members. Their support was vital to McAleese's campaign and she would have known that without their backing, she was unlikely to secure the Presidency. Ordinary Fianna Fail members and supporters were unlikely to have been privy to the inner workings of the parliamentary party in the previous weeks were, no doubt, surprised that a party outsider secured the party's nomination. McAleese had to reassure the grass roots that she was a suitable candidate, despite the fact that she was not a party member. McAleese used her the opportunity of her first press conference to address the grass roots through the media.

The target audience during the launch of McAleese's campaign was the electorate. As this was McAleese's first opportunity to define her platform and raise her profile McAleese had to appeal to as wide an audience as possible.

Core Message

In her first speech to the media, McAleese had to closely associate herself with the Fianna Fail party who had just nominated her. In a speech that McAleese used throughout her campaign, she told the assembled media that she had a dream and a vision of the Presidency to Fianna Fail. She now believed the party shared that dream and vision. While McAleese had not been involved with party politics, and more specifically Fianna Fail, for ten years she did state that she was

very proud to 'carry the banner' for the party she considered to be her 'natural homeland' (IT:18th September 1997).

While McAleese expressed admiration for former President Robinson, she denied feeling daunted at the prospect of taking over the job. McAleese admitted that if she did become President and if at the end of her tenure people looked back on her with the same fondness as they did President Robinson that she would be 'very satisfied indeed' (IT:18th September 1997).

McAleese's core message at the launch of her campaign was all encompassing, as she had to appeal to the whole electorate. At different times in the mediated campaign, her core message was narrower as she attempted to appeal to certain target audiences. At the launch McAleese attempted to raise her profile and outline her policy for the Presidency. In this mediated part of her campaign, her potential policy became the predominant core message. At this stage, McAleese attempted to keep her core message vague so it could have a wider appeal.

'Bridge Building' emerged as the central core message of the Mary McAleese electoral campaign. It was reminiscent of US President Bill Clinton's election campaign the previous year. While Clinton aspired to building bridges to the twenty-first century McAleese's bridge building had a wider interpretation. Bridges were to be built between nationalists and unionists, the poor and the better off and the disenfranchised. There was much focus on the unionists in the North of Ireland at this point and McAleese maintained that unionists would value the 'hand of friendship' that she could extend as President. She claimed to have received

(L)iterally a mountain of correspondence and phone calls from right across the unionist spectrum...telling me how delighted they are and wishing me well in this candidacy (IT:26th September 1997).

McAleese spoke of the emotional reach of the Presidency being much greater than its constitutional reach. McAleese also outlined personal details explaining that she was a Northerner who had lived through troubled times, had roots in Roscommon and had made her first married home in Dublin. She had chosen to rear her children in Meath, taught law in Trinity College where she was Reid Professor, and had come to know every area of Ireland as a journalist in RTE. She described herself as someone who would

(B)ring a cool head to protecting the Constitution and a warm heart to each person whom the Constitution exists to defend' (IT:26th September 1997).

There were early indications that McAleese was going to have problems communicating her core message. The image that McAleese was attempting to construct for herself was not widely accepted by the media. Denis Coghlan, then the chief political correspondent for the Irish Times did not believe the sentiments of emotional outreach, embracing, presenter, a director of Channel 4 and the Pro-Vice Chancellor of Queen's University and reassurance that McAleese expressed. In his view, McAleese could not have achieved as much as she had done in her professional life, becoming an RTE in Belfast by being a 'dewy-eyed do-gooder or by turning the

other cheek...You don't become an imposed Fianna Fail candidate if you lack ambition' (IT:26th September 1997).

Coghlan did not doubt McAleese's political acumen as she managed to deal with potentially difficult questions such as whether some unionists may view her a divisive force. She denied this claim saying that unionist had always responded to her attempts to her 'efforts to strip away the baggage she had carried.' It may have made for great televisions argued Coghlan, but it was 'too cloying for cynical reporters' (IT:26th September 1997). Miriam Lord writing in the Irish Independent agreed. Lord complained that those attending the launch had to

endure (McAleese's) particular brand of Robo speak which really couldn't be further removed from the language of our former President (II:26th September 1997).

Lord particularly found fault with McAleese's 'huggy-wuggy factor' which she like Coghlan found to be insincere. (II:26th September 1997) It was a sentiment echoed by Stephen Collins writing in the Sunday Tribune. Collins felt that McAleese risked alienating the voters with her language of 'loving and embracing' but he also felt that McAleese handled her first press conference after the launch very well (ST:28th September 1997). This early harsh criticism of McAleese was an indication of her problematic relationship with the media that was to emerge during the course of the campaign. The media scepticism surrounding the launch of her campaign must have worried to McAleese campaign team. As McAleese did not have a high public profile, the success of the campaign would be dependent, in part, to McAleese's ability to

secure positive media coverage. If the media did not consider that McAleese's core message was credible then that doubt would be expressed to the voters. It was feasible that the electorate would also then question McAleese's suitability for the Presidency.

Role of the Party

The role of the party during the first press conference was to introduce their candidate to the assembled media. The Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, took to the stage with McAleese to signify that the party was giving its full backing to the new candidate. Ahern had to explain to the grass roots why a party outsider had been chosen. Ahern also had to contend with accusations that he had somehow interfered with that selection process. Ahern stated that,

It is hard to determine these matters. I could not have called it in the last few days nor did I try to go out and influence it in the last few weeks (IT:18th September 1997).

It is evident that Ahern used far more subtle means to communicate his wishes to his party. Ahern also opined that any of the three candidates competing for the Fianna Fail candidacy would have proved to be excellent candidate for the Presidency (IT:18th September 1997).

The party was also responsible for appointing McAleese with a publicity officer. They chose Wally Young who had worked with the party during previous elections. By the time of the launch, McAleese's campaign team had formed and was advising her.

McAleese's newly appointed director of elections, Minister for the Environment Noel

Dempsey, was surprised at how well McAleese performed at the launch. He had lunch with her the previous day to discuss the campaign and he was very impressed with what he heard. In Dempsey's view, McAleese was a very clear thinker who had very definite ideas of what she wanted to do, with the campaign and the Presidency. Yet she was also willing to take advice from Dempsey concerning the political dimension of the campaign (Dempsey:2000). It was at the launch that he began to have some confidence that they might win the election.

It is not easy to impress politicians that around for twenty years as I am....But the hair literally stood on the back of my neck when she spoke' (Dempsey:2000).

As the candidate of the largest political party in the state, Mary McAleese had the advantage of extensive exposure and support but the disadvantage of being associated with any negative publicity surrounding the party. This was evident when, as McAleese launched her campaign, a scandal broke regarding then Minister for Foreign Affairs, Fianna Fail deputy, Ray Burke. It was alleged that Burke was in receipt of large undeclared political donations from building companies. The implication was that this money was donated in order to attempt to affect the planning process. Although McAleese was neither a member of the parliamentary party, nor a colleague of Burke's, she was questioned about the breaking news.

On the 26th of September a large photograph of McAleese appeared on the front page of the Irish Independent with the headline 'Revealed: how land was rezoned.' The headline referred to Burke but as the photograph of McAleese could have appeared

below it appeared to link her to the story at first glance. McAleese's response was to defer to the 'collective wisdom' of the two government parties in dealing with the controversy, (II:26th September 1997) as she attempted to regain control of her own agenda.

McAleese's first press conference and the launch of her campaign provided her first instances of media exposure as the Fianna Fail candidate for the Presidency. Both events signalled events to come. McAleese's direct appeal to the Fianna Fail grass roots was essential as she needed them to support her to run the kind of campaign Fianna Fail had designed for her. The fact that McAleese's core message had not been well received by the majority of the media also indicated future difficulties with the media. McAleese did however have the backing of the Fianna Fail party, and this proved crucial during her campaign. McAleese's victory in the selection contest may have been a surprise to many yet there was one person who was not at all shocked. Just before the press conference to announce her victory Charlie Bird, political correspondent for RTE, approached Wally Young. What he said to him amused Young as McAleese had not even formally addressed the media yet.

I think she will win the election....big campaign coming up
and I think that you are going to win (Young:2000).

Radio and Television Interviews

Radio proved to be a vital part of the McAleese election campaign. The campaign particularly pursued the option of local radio. Radio, while a mediated form of communication, did allow McAleese to reach a significantly large audience. As it was impossible to travel to as many places as Ahern had in his canvass, due to time restrictions, Noel Dempsey decided that local radio would play a crucial part in introducing McAleese to the voters (Lenihan:1999).

Kraus argues that when politicians appear on television there is one target audience that is of special importance. Younger voters, according to Kraus, have been 'raised with television,' and expect to see candidates perform adequately on television. (Kraus 2000:20). The target audience McAleese wished to address with her television appearances differed based on the programme she appeared on.

The television shows McAleese appeared on were Questions and Answers, Prime Time twice and the Late Late Show. Questions and Answers and Prime Time are both current affairs programmes that might expect to have an audience with a special interest in news and current affairs stories. The first Prime Time programme was an interview with McAleese and the second was a studio debate with the other candidates. During the Prime Time interview, it could be argued that McAleese's target audience was the grass roots of the Fianna Fail party as McAleese established her nationalist credentials and her role in the peace process. The Late Late Show, because it is primarily an entertainment programme, has a more diverse audience.

McAleese was in less control of the output but her message would potentially reach more voters. McAleese's target audience was the electorate and her core message focused more on her policy for the Presidency. The role of the party in this instance was organisational.

Target Audience

Defining target audiences when using a mediated form to communicate a core message can be problematic. The message needs to be broad to have mass appeal, making it difficult to communicate directly with smaller target audiences. The McAleese campaign strategy for dealing with this problem was to approach local radio stations. Each station has a listenership concentrated in an identifiable area allowing McAleese to tailor her message for each interview. This strategy also addressed the problem of McAleese's low rate of recognition. In terms of political communication this is one of the biggest problems for candidates. It was a strategy that paid off. According to Wally Young all of the radio stations gave McAleese long interviews which made all the difference to the virtually unknown candidate (Young:2000).

The majority of the interviews for local radio were conducted over the telephone in the McAleese campaign headquarters in Mount Street in Dublin. This meant that McAleese could gain exposure around the country without time consuming travel. Pat Farrell, McAleese's deputy director of election also realised the importance of utilising local radio.

Fifty percent of the population don't listen to anything other than local radio...I think if you are prepared to recognise the importance (of it) and the fact that (local radio has) a very very powerful influence in terms of the listening audience...you get a very ready reception (Farrell:2000).

The interviews had a significant impact when McAleese conducted her canvass of the country because according to Young 'already people felt that they knew her' (Young:2000).

McAleese conducted two major interviews on RTE radio. These interviews would potentially reach the entire electorate, so the performance of the candidate was very important. The first interview on the 16th of October, was conducted Marian Finucane's show, Liveline, an afternoon phone-in show, now hosted by Joe Duffy. The topics for discussion on this programme are usually based around current affairs or items in the news, but also include human-interest stories and consumer affairs, as suggested by the listeners. Studio guests are not usual but exceptions are made. The Liveline programme allowed the target audience the right of reply, as listeners telephoned the studio to question McAleese and comment on her campaign.

McAleese appeared on the Pat Kenny radio show on RTE twice, on the 2nd of October for an interview, and on the 27th of October for a studio debate with the other candidates.

Core Message

Radio Interviews

The core message differed slightly on the radio interviews on Liveline and Today with Pat Kenny. The core message on the Liveline programme was one of raising McAleese's profile. The interview was wide-ranging but did focus on McAleese's family and background.

Today with Pat Kenny (2nd of October 1997)

Pat Kenny's first interview with McAleese allowed for a shift in McAleese's core message as she discussed the policies that she intended to pursue as President.

Kenny's questioning quite challenging but McAleese maintained her composure throughout displaying an ability to remain conciliatory under pressure. This was also important for her indirect core message, as she displayed Presidential qualities.

Kenny asked how long McAleese had Presidential ambitions and how she felt 'taking the nomination away from Albert Reynolds' (Today with Pat Kenny:1997). Kenny attempted to establish how McAleese had secured Fianna Fail's Presidential nomination and whether her being selected was a 'set-up.' He also questioned the fact that according to opinion polls McAleese was only in receipt of 51% of Fianna Fail support. Kenny challenged McAleese on how she could, as a Nationalist, reach out to unionists in the North and how soon she would visit the North (Today with Pat Kenny:1997).

In relation to McAleese's oft commented on religiosity Kenny questioned the candidate on a video tape regarding IVF treatment, on which McAleese appeared, the

question of Rome Rule and the issue of divorce. Kenny also questioned McAleese on her aspirations for the job regarding her role within the Presidency, her dream of Ireland, and why she would want the job (Today with Pat Kenny:1997)

Liveline with Marian Finucane (16th October 1997)

The potential problem with a live call in radio show is that McAleese not only had to conduct an effective interview with Finucane, but she also had to answer questions from the public. There was a potential here for supporters of opposing candidates to pose difficult questions for McAleese. The converse of this was that supporters of McAleese were also given the opportunity to voice this support publicly.

The interview focused mainly on McAleese as a person, her background, growing up in Belfast, her education, and her family. McAleese grew up in a Protestant area of Belfast, the Ardoyne, and claimed to be unaware of sectarian divisions as a small child. She received protection from her Protestant friends when they would play together in the Woodvale Park. When someone called her a 'Fenian', when she was nine years of age, McAleese had to ask her parents what the word meant. She spoke of her parents and their 'very prayerful' nature and of how they had a 'gospel of love' and 'showed it very keenly' (Liveline:1997).

The callers to the show had a diverse number of questions and comments for McAleese. These calls can be divided into three categories, supportive, challenging and enquiring. One supportive caller commented that as a nationalist he had been convinced to support McAleese when she came under attack from Derek Nally. Challenging comments varied from one caller accusing McAleese of 'backtracking'

regarding her 'conservative Catholicism,' and another caller claiming that she appeared to 'have a ready answer for everything.' (Liveline:1997) One caller questioned McAleese's role on the board of Channel Four Television, and whether she condoned the broadcasting of what the caller viewed to be pornography. Another asked whether McAleese was merely using the election as a career move. The enquiring questions had a more neutral tone. Callers asked about the role McAleese saw for the Irish language in her Presidency, whether she thought the role of the President was too restrictive and how the Presidency would impact on her children and husband and her 'role as a mother' (Liveline:1997).

Today with Pat Kenny (27th of October 1997)

McAleese's second appearance on the Pat Kenny radio show was very different. This time, the government candidate took part in a studio debate with the other four candidates contesting the election. A live studio audience was compiled that comprised of supporters of each candidate. Questions and comments were taken from this audience and from listeners who telephoned in. Kenny asked the candidates for their reactions to their standing in the opinion polls. For the most part questions from supporters in the audience tended to target the other candidates. McAleese supporters asked questions such as, why there were no 'slurs' directed against Fine Gael's candidate, Mary Banotti, during the campaign and accused Banotti of letting her party leader John Bruton '(throw) punches for you' (Today with Pat Kenny:1997).

Supporters of other candidates questioned McAleese. A Banotti supporter asked McAleese why McAleese had ever moved back to the North. A supporter of the Labour nominated candidate, Adi Roche, questioned the fact that McAleese in her

role as government candidate had not attempted to use her influence to get the government to change the polling day to Friday to facilitate students who needed to travel home to vote. There were some more neutral enquiring questions. One caller, who claimed not to be a supporter of any of the candidates, asked how many of the candidates would do the job of the Presidency for 'no salary and no pension.' Another caller asked if the campaign was long enough (Today with Pat Kenny:1997).

The debate did not provide much new information about the candidates, mainly due to a hostile environment and a rowdy studio audience, but it did provide an indication as to how the candidates could perform under pressure. McAleese maintained her composure throughout and did not appear to allow any significant gains to be made by the other candidates at her expense, a vital aspect of effective political communications.

Television Interviews

Television is a vital means of conveying and communicating image. It is becoming more important in terms of winning elections, but every candidate is not afforded the same coverage. It is therefore possible for parties to place their most televisual friendly members to the fore. In the case of a Presidential election, there is no element of choice regarding television coverage – it has to be the party's single candidate. In such circumstances, it is essential that the candidate does not in any way fall short in their communication skills. Hansen emphasises the importance television coverage for a candidate arguing that

Television news now enjoys enhanced credibility over the press,
in part because of its increased use of 'authenticating' visuals
(Hansen 1998:193)

There were many opportunities for Mary McAleese to display her talent on television during the Presidential campaign. As a former television presenter, McAleese had a certain advantage. She was aware of how to appear on television, and how to conduct interview, even if she was now the interviewee. Her communication skills were such that, when she did secure the Fianna Fail nomination for the Presidency, the party felt that she did not need to undergo any additional media training (Young:2000).

Despite McAleese's skills, she was still subjected to the mediated nature of the television. Hansen warns that,

Camera angle, selectivity, and omissions are unavoidably
a part of news visual production (Hansen 1998:196).

During the course of the campaign, McAleese appeared on several RTE television programmes. She appeared on the current affairs programmes, Questions and Answers, Prime Time, and the entertainment programme, the Late Late Show. The format of these programmes differed. In all of her television appearances, McAleese's core message was her policy and vision for the Presidency. In only one instance was McAleese prevented from imparting this core message during her Prime Time interview.

Questions and Answers (13th October 1997)

Questions and Answers, on which McAleese appeared on the 13th of October, is a studio based current affairs programme presented by John Bowman. The studio audience asks the questions of a pre-selected panel. The panel of four will generally include politicians, journalists, commentators, academics, trade union officials, and heads of organisations. The questions generally include the political issue of the day. Tickets for the show are allocated on a first come first served basis with a certain number being reserved for political parties or members of the organisations represented on the panel. The programme was a potentially important one for McAleese as it was the first time she had ever appeared with any opposing candidates and she had to field questions from the public.

McAleese appeared on the programme with fellow candidate, independent Derek Nally, independent politician Sean Dublin Bay Rockall Loftus, who represented Dana, and Irish Times political correspondent, Geraldine Kennedy. The previous day, the Sunday Business Post had leaked the first foreign affairs memo that questioned her support for, and relationship with, Sinn Fein. The first question from the audience was regarding the Minister for Foreign Affairs Ray Burke and whether, following his resignation, he was hounded out of office. McAleese answered saying that Burke was 'not entirely' driven out of office by the media. She argued, perhaps thinking of the controversy in the media surrounding her candidacy, that there was a point where allegations cannot be proven by journalists to be right or wrong. 'There is a point at which journalists want to proceed without evidence', she commented, warning about the danger of innuendo (Questions and Answers:1997).

The second question concerned McAleese directly. The questioner asked whether the panel 'would like to comment on the Sunday Business Post article questioning Mary McAleese's links with Sinn Fein.' McAleese answered first saying that the article in the paper concerned 'alleged conversations' that bore no similarities to any conversations she remembered having. She clarified her role within the Redemptorist Peace Ministry (as will be detailed in the case study). McAleese denied ever meeting Sinn Fein on her own, saying that she 'only ever met them in the context of the Peace Ministry,' because the party was a 'very important player.' (Questions and Answers:1997) She emphasised that she never met with the IRA. McAleese claimed that she was a long time supporter of the SDLP, but her role as the Pro-vice Chancellor of Queens, it was not appropriate for her to be active within party politics (Questions and Answers:1997).

McAleese went on to deny that she said that she would not run for office in the absence of an electoral pact between Sinn Fein and the SDLP. Derek Nally challenged her on this point, but presenter John Bowman came to her defence saying that, 'Mary could better remember what she said' (Questions and Answers:1997). In response to Bowman's query about whether the leak was 'mischievous' McAleese replied that she would leave that to the audience to decide but did concede that she found it 'bizarre' (Questions and Answers:1997)

The third question related to the need for the Presidential candidates to be up front about their lives. McAleese concurred with this sentiment saying that it was very important that candidates should 'unpack their lives,' and if their previously stated views had changed then they should say so. In response to John Bowman's comment

that TD Proncias de Rossa had claimed that McAleese had 'made a desperate attempt to reinvent' herself, McAleese rolled her eyes and said that Derek Nally was lucky that he was absolved from being compared to Mary Robinson. She did not answer the question, instead went back to the issue of 'unpacking' the lives of the candidate's family (Questions and Answers:1997).

The fourth question from the audience enquired whether there was too much input in the Presidential campaign by marketing people, who covered up the real views of the candidates. In response, McAleese pointed out that questions had not been asked of her regarding the ambassadorial, management and administrative role of the Presidency, qualities she believed she had demonstrated throughout her working life. When one member of the audience asked whether it was wise to elect a Northern Nationalist as such a juncture in the peace process. McAleese replied with a question of her own, namely what the difference was between a Northern Nationalist and a Southern Nationalist. She claimed to have a 'unique perspective' because she had lived in both parts of Ireland (Questions and Answers:1997)

As with the other elements of her campaign, McAleese's indirect core message was that she had the ability to behave in a Presidential manner. Throughout the show McAleese despite the potentially difficult questions, retained her composure. She spoke in a measured and even tone throughout, smiling frequently, in contrast to Derek Nally who raised his voice slightly on several occasions. She deferred to her fellow panellists continually. In response to the continual questions from Derek Nally in relation to her alleged links with Sinn Fein McAleese pointed to the fact that she had worked with Nally within the Victim Support organisation, and knowing him,

took his views' 'seriously.' When speaking about journalists pursuing stories about the candidates' family members McAleese was careful to point out that journalist Geraldine Kennedy 'would not go down that path' (Questions and Answers:1997).

The Late Late Show (17th October 1997)

All of the candidates appeared on the Late Late Show, the popular and long running chat show, hosted by Gay Byrne, on the 17th of October 1997. They were all gave a short two minute introduction about themselves and then answered questions from Gay Byrne and the audience. Byrne pointed out in his introduction that there were no ground rules established about questions or what the candidates could speak about.

In her two minute address McAleese stressed that the Presidency was the most important job she would ever apply for and this was the 'most curious' application process. She spoke about her background, her family, education, her time working in Trinity, RTE and Queens. She emphasised her cool head and warm heart and said that she could not give up until everyone in Ireland had access to the same level of success (Late Late Show:1997).

Similar issues were raised during the show as during Questions and Answers.

McAleese answered questions on the role of the Presidency, Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, saying he would vote for her, her unionist support, her nationalism, and whether the job only appealed to her because of the financial reward. There were easier questions also, such as how many languages she spoke, and who would be first on her guest list to the Aras. She emphasised her experience, her acceptance of the

restraints of the office, and the development of a dynamic Ireland, and how she would reflect that change (Late Late Show:1997).

On this programme, McAleese, while appearing relaxed and at ease, was more assertive in answering questions. She did not defer to her fellow candidates to the same degree as she had during the Questions and Answers programme. Fine Gael's candidate, Mary Banotti, was the focus of many of her comments. It had emerged that the Fine Gael leader, John Bruton, had lunch with Eoghan Harris the previous week, the day before the Foreign Affairs memo was leaked. Harris, who had advised the Independent candidate Derek Nally on his campaign, led an attack against McAleese. McAleese questioned Bruton's reasons for lunching with Harris three times during the debate, despite Banotti's protests that she herself had never met Harris, that it was not crime to have lunch with someone, and that Harris had 'total antipathy' towards Banotti and her sister (Fine Gael TD, Nora Owen). McAleese was careful always to shield her attack on Banotti by saying that Bruton was the one who had to answer questions. When Banotti argued that she could not be held responsible for whom Eoghan Harris had lunch with, McAleese was seen nodding in agreement. McAleese avoided speaking about the contents of the leaked memo, instead turning the focus onto Fine Gael (Late Late Show:1997). Like all good political communicators, McAleese managed to set her own agenda and make others keep to it.

Prime Time (21st October 1997)

Prime Time is another RTE produced current affairs show with a studio-based format, although outside broadcasts often form part of the programme. McAleese appeared on two episodes of Prime Time. The first episode of Prime Time on which she appeared

aired on the 21st of October 1997. In this episode on of the hosts of Prime Time, Eamon Lawlor, interviewed McAleese. The second episode aired on the 28th of October and took the form of a studio debate involving all of the Presidential candidates.

The first Prime Time programme during which McAleese was interviewed, included interviews with journalists Suzanne Breen of the Irish Times and Chris Glennon of the Irish Independent. The programme opened with host Miriam O'Callaghan saying that McAleese's candidacy had become the dominant issue in the Presidential campaign after she had received 'the seal of approval' from Gerry Adams. O'Callaghan described McAleese's relationship with the media as a 'running battle' as she 'appeared reluctant to answer questions' on the North. 'The controversy', commented O'Callaghan, 'will either make her or break her' (Prime Time:1997).

There was a report shown where Martin McGuinness, addressing a rally in Tyrone, spoke of certain parties in the South, who were attempting to keep 'northern nationalists as second class nationalists,' during the Presidential campaign (Prime Time:1997). Footage of events in Galway, was then shown, where journalists crowded around McAleese, following the leak of the second Foreign Affairs memo, as she attempted to enter a hotel. (As will be detailed in the Case Study). It was noted that, in Galway, McAleese said fifteen times that she had given a comprehensive reply to the allegations contained in the memo (Prime Time:1997).

An interview followed this report with Suzanne Breen in which Breen appeared to defend comments made by McAleese. When McAleese had claimed that many

nationalists like her were countenancing voting for Sinn Fein in the general election, Breen noted that this was the case. She had covered the election for the Irish Times, and saw that many nationalists, who had previously voted for the SDLP, believed that by voting Sinn Fein they would be taking 'a swipe at the British Government', while also 'encouraging Sinn Fein along the constitutional path' (Prime Time:1997). Breen argued that McAleese should have been more 'up front' about her role in the Peace Mission, and should not have attempted to claim that she had unionist support, Breen concluded the interview by saying that McAleese would have 'served herself better had she been more honest' (Prime Time:1997). These comments would appear to suggest that Breen believed McAleese was lying, and had not received any unionist support. O'Callaghan did not challenge this point with Breen (Prime Time:1997).

Eamon Lawlor conducted the interview with McAleese in Newcastlewest. McAleese was seated at a table opposite Lawlor and the camera was close up on McAleese did not leave her face for the duration of the interview. This, according to Noel Dempsey, was very unflattering for McAleese (Dempsey:2000). Deacon et al. concur with this view saying that close up shots are often an indication of intimacy and trust but that, 'close-ups can also activate strong negative connotations' (Deacon et. al. 1999:191).

Lawlor's first question to McAleese concerned her worries in the past that she would be branded a 'Provo fellow-traveller' i.e. a supporter of the Provisional IRA. Lawlor asked whether these fears were now confirmed. McAleese said that she was shocked at the lengths that people had gone to, in attempting to degrade the Department of Foreign Affairs and to leak confidential documents. She tried to point out that the information in the previous report on the programme was not up to date as it did not

include comments from John Hume and Brid Rodgers. Hume, the leader of the SDLP, and Rodgers, a SDLP councillor who had been quoted in the second Foreign Affairs memo, had released statements confirming that McAleese was committed to the peace process and a supporter of the SDLP (IT:22nd October 1997). Lawlor interrupted McAleese to point out that ‘all of that was covered on the news bulletin’ (Prime Time:1997).

McAleese went on to reiterate her role within the Redemptorist Peace Mission, and pointed out that she was invited to join by the head of the order, Brendan Callaghan, a fact that was not mentioned in the memos. She went on to defend herself against Suzanne Breen’s accusations of being dishonest regarding her work with the Peace Mission by saying that her role was ‘tiny’ and that

If I had mentioned it at all, journalists would have said

‘she’s claiming ownership of the peace process’

(Prime Time:1997).

Lawlor replied saying that

People running for President don’t hide their light under

a bushel (Prime Time:1997).

McAleese attempted to explain her failure to publicise her role in the Peace Mission. She claimed that she had a belief that public service is not self-service, and that her involvement in the peace process should not have been about self-promotion. The role

she argued, was tiny, humble, and modest. Lawlor interrupted McAleese to say that 'it doesn't look modest now' (Prime Time:1997)

The rest of the interview focused on McAleese's contacts with Sinn Fein. Lawlor questioned McAleese repeatedly her relationship with Sinn Fein. He tried to imply that because Gerry Adams had told McAleese that there was no prospect of a new IRA ceasefire that she was closer to the Sinn Fein leadership than she was implying. At one point, Lawlor stated, 'you were intimate with him (Adams).' At this point McAleese sounded very offended and became flushed when replying 'I beg your pardon, I was not intimate with him.' McAleese explained that Lord Alderdice (then leader of the Alliance party) was sitting down with Gerry Adams now in a similar formal setting and asked Lawlor if he was suggesting that

every time some one sits down with Sinn Fein they come
away with some kind of Sinn Fein contamination (Prime Time:1997).

The camera closed up on McAleese's face as Lawlor asked her if as a result of Gerry Adams's 'support' (he said on a radio show McAleese would get his first preference vote) that Sinn Fein could claim a part of McAleese's victory if she won. McAleese pointed out that in a democracy it would be wrong to inhibit free speech and that Adams who did not have a vote in the South, had a right to his opinion. Lawlor did not allow the matter to pass, however, and asked if Adams's stated support for McAleese might be something that people would take into account when voting. McAleese objected claiming that assertion was unfair, and was told by Lawlor that this was how the unionists would see it. McAleese replied saying that she had never claimed

widespread unionist support, but had received a 'huge pile' of letters faxes and emails from unionists.

Lawlor asked how McAleese could possibly build bridges to the unionist community when Lord Alderdice, leader of the Alliance Party, was calling for her to withdraw from the race. McAleese pointed out that when the four churches in the North of Ireland wanted to investigate sectarianism that they turned to her to chair the commission.

Following the interview Miriam O'Callaghan interviewed Chris Glennon in the studio. Glennon claimed that the interview with McAleese did not clarify any issues for him, and noted that, in politics, if you are defending you are losing. Glennon was unconvinced by McAleese's assertions that she had no opinion on Gerry Adam's comments regarding his hypothetical voting intentions. The McAleese he knew, was never short of opinions, and he went on to claim that McAleese should have shown herself for what she was (Prime Time:1997).

Prime Time Debate (28th of October 1997)

The second Prime Time programme McAleese appeared on aired on the 28th of October 1997. It was a studio debate with the other four candidates. The programme was divided into three sections, the issues raised during the campaign, constitutional issues, and why the candidates deserved votes. The candidates were given one minute each at the beginning and end to make a statement. As with the Late Late Show debate, because there were five candidates and the time was divided evenly amongst them, no one candidate had a substantial amount of time. For Noel Dempsey, the most

important thing was that McAleese was not outshone during the debate because there could not be any clear winner.

In many cases, it is just a case of just holding your own and...

(make) sure that you don't put yourself to any disadvantage

whatever about any advantage you might gain

(Dempsey:2000).

In her opening address, McAleese expressed her hopes that the voters had come to know her over the previous six weeks of campaigning. She talked about the voters meeting her and seeing her on television and hearing her on the radio. She concluded by saying that she hoped that the voters saw in her,

a person who will embody the Irish nation, a nation now

in its stride (Prime Time:1997).

Similar issues were covered as had been covered in the previous Prime Time programme and on the Late Late Show debate. Again throughout McAleese appeared relaxed and spoke in an even and calm voice. When concluding she urged people to come out and vote and thanked the other candidates for their kindness during the campaign (Prime Time:1997).

Role of the Party

The role of the party in the mediated part of McAleese's campaign was primarily a news management function. The interviews with the local radio stations were conducted from the headquarters in Dublin. Wally Young sat in on many of these interviews to provide support and backing for McAleese (Young:2000). Young notes, however, that McAleese was a confident media performer in her own right (Young:2000). Members of the party also accompanied McAleese to the RTE studios when she was doing interviews on radio and television. Her election agent Brian Lenihan had accompanied her to the Late Late Show and remembers that she was particularly nervous that evening (Lenihan:1999).

After the Prime Time interview, the party took on a new role, as defenders of Mary McAleese. The party made a formal complaint to RTE, allowing McAleese to remain above the fray. This Prime Time programme infuriated the McAleese campaign. Pat Farrell, McAleese deputy director of elections, noted that while he had always respected Eamon Lawlor he was furious at his treatment of McAleese.

(Lawlor) asked me what I thought of the interview afterwards, and I told him in no uncertain terms...I just felt that the interview was very aggressive, extremely aggressive (Farrell:2000).

Farrell was especially annoyed at Lawlor's suggestion that McAleese was 'intimate' with Sinn Fein leader Gerry Adams which Farrell 'took in a certain way' although he knew that it was unlikely that Lawlor had meant it (Farrell:2000). Minister Noel Dempsey, McAleese's director of elections, felt that the Prime Time interview was

‘one of the toughest political interviews that I have ever seen in my life’

(Dempsey:2000).

In Dempsey’s opinion, the programme Prime Time produced on McAleese did not, compare favourably with the one Prime Time produced on the Fine Gael candidate, Mary Banotti. Dempsey had arrived home early one evening, and saw what he thought was a party political broadcast for Banotti. It went on for so long that Dempsey asked his daughter whether it was indeed a party political, and she replied that it was an episode of Prime Time. When Dempsey compared this programme the one with Mary McAleese, he felt compelled to complain formally to RTE. He discovered to his absolute disbelief that of the six ‘top RTE people’ (Dempsey:2000) who met with him all claimed not to have seen the McAleese Prime Time programme. The McAleese campaign eventually received an admission that the programmes concerning McAleese and Banotti ‘were not the same type, but that was as far as Joe Mullholland (head of programming) would go’ (Dempsey:2000).

While the members of the campaign team felt that McAleese had not been treated fairly by the media during the course of the campaign, (Dempsey:2000) this was the only time they lodged a formal complaint with a news organisation. It could be speculated that the Prime Time interview was indeed so obviously bruising for McAleese that the campaign team had no choice but to complain. The truth is that the team, and especially her events manager Wally Young, had an acceptance of her harsh treatment by the media and it was a factor they were prepared to work with, given McAleese’s incredible reaction from the voters, during her personal canvass (Young:2000). Besides, most forms of media may have been harsh on McAleese but

there remained some balance. Young notes that while several articles written in the Irish Times were not favourable to McAleese, the photographs they published 'were excellent', and a real plus for the campaign (Young:2000). With the Prime Time programme no effort appeared to be made at establishing such a balance. McAleese was the only person speaking in support of her campaign.

Ironically, what was a difficult interview for McAleese turned out to be a plus for her and her campaign. Farrell felt that it was a 'watershed' (Farrell:2000), and despite the aggressive nature of the interview, because McAleese handled herself so well, her treatment 'probably invoked a lot of public sympathy' (Farrell:2000). McAleese had demonstrated how effective political communication could positively affect a potentially difficult situation. She had managed to remain calm, and get her points across and her ability to do so had made all the difference.

Dempsey argues that,

(The Prime Time interview was) very very important in establishing her as a very serious candidate, a very capable candidate..a very intelligent candidate and a very articulate (candidate) and able to hold her ground with anybody (Dempsey:2000).

Regardless of how prepared McAleese was for her radio and television interviews, a huge factor in her success was her own communication abilities. She always remained calm and collected during the interviews even when under pressure. The presence of the other candidates did not deter McAleese from delivering her core message. While

candidates in any election have to rely on mediated communication during the duration of their campaign, the Presidential candidates were even more dependent on the media given limited timeframe in which they had to campaign.

Chapter Eight:
The Case Study
McAleese Under Pressure
(Media Attitudes and the Northern Factor)

The single biggest issue that emerged for the McAleese campaign was the leaking of a series of Department of Foreign Affairs memos. This was also the biggest test for the McAleese and her campaign, as she risked losing control of media strategy and her core message. Several issues emerged as a result of the leaks. There were questions about McAleese's political affiliations, specifically as to whether she supported Sinn Fein, and if she did, whether this made her unsuitable to contest the Presidency. These issues broadened into a wider debate about whether any person from the North of Ireland should be contesting an election in the South.

The leaking of the memos was an act of political communication. The person who leaked the memos wished to convey a negative image of McAleese. This piece of political communication was one that the McAleese campaign team, and the candidate herself, had to counteract during the remainder of the campaign. While initially it may have appeared to be a negative for the McAleese campaign, it kept McAleese in the media and raised her profile actually reinforcing her core message of a candidate who could keep calm under pressure. It was up to the campaign to turn around the negative political communication, and turn it into a positive for McAleese, as they attempted to keep to their own agenda.

The memos were published in the Sunday Business Post on the 12th of October and in that paper and the Sunday Tribune on the 19th of October. Written by civil servant Dymphna Hayes, the first memo was a summary of conversations McAleese had with Hayes in January and in May 1997. The second memo contained comments by Brid Rodgers, a leading member of the nationalist SDLP, some of which focused on McAleese.

The leaked memos also affected the campaigns of the Fine Gael candidate Mary Banotti and Independent candidate Derek Nally. Fine Gael leader, John Bruton, raised questions about McAleese and was criticised in the media, and by Fianna Fail for his lack of understanding of the North. Nally's campaign was affected as he confronted McAleese over her relationship with Sinn Fein, and appeared to be in disagreement with his campaign director, John Caden, over the validity of her responses. McAleese was called to account in the media for the opinions she expressed in the first memo and to explain the comments Rodgers made about her in the second memo. McAleese also faced criticism, in what Fianna Fail perceived to be an already hostile media (Dempsey:2000), for how she dealt with the controversy.

The memos were included in the so-called Green Book compiled by the Department of Foreign Affairs containing views and opinions of several business and community leaders living in the North. The contents of the Green Book are mainly based on informal contact civil servants or others may have with the North and the book is used to give a more complete picture of events and of the pertaining political climate.

While the government condemned the person who leaked the memos for threatening the peace process at such a critical juncture (IT:16th October 1997), all media reported on their content. The controversy over the fact that the memos were leaked was soon over-taken by the controversy about their content.

Target Audience

McAleese's initial target audience during the leaks was the electorate. She attempted to explain away her involvement with Sinn Fein (as the party had very low electoral support in the South). Increasingly, when her role in the peace process became evident, McAleese's target audience became the grass roots of Fianna Fail as she established her nationalist credentials.

The initial leak, seemingly, could not have come at a worse time. McAleese's personal canvass was proving very successful, but there were continuous questions in the media about her the fact that she was from the North of Ireland. She replied by saying that she saw herself as an Irish woman who just happened to be from Belfast (IT:26th September 1997). However, some commentators were unwilling to accept this response. Emily O'Reilly, writing in the Sunday Business Post, argued that McAleese's 'northern accent and origins will turn some people off not matter how often she chides people in the South for their partitionist mentality' (SBP:5th October 1997). In the same newspaper, Damien Kiberd did note that it was likely that McAleese's background in North Belfast would make her an obvious target for some media commentators, 'who seem to suspect everyone north of Balbriggan' (SBP:21st September 1997).

Core Message

The core message McAleese tried to convey during this element of her campaign was her nationalist credentials and her role as a peacemaker. It was the first time that McAleese's core message of her vision for the Presidency had really been challenged.

McAleese had attempted to establish herself as a bridge builder, especially to the unionists in the North of Ireland. This image was not compatible with a Sinn Fein supporter. After a second memo was leaked, McAleese also attempted to impart the core message of a nationalist being an acceptable President. The content of the memos did not just confront McAleese's policies, it confronted McAleese herself, and her suitability for the Presidency. The image that McAleese had sought to build for herself throughout the campaign was one of a potential President. The fact that she could be a viable President was a vital part of her indirect core message. The emergence of the memos in the media challenged that.

The first leak was published in the Sunday Business Post on the 12th of October. It was reported that Hayes believed that McAleese was a source of thinking for the nationalist community in the North of Ireland (SBP:12th October 1997). McAleese was quoted as saying that she was very impressed with Sinn Fein's recent performance in the general election. According to the memo, McAleese expected the Sinn Fein to capitalise on their success in the next local elections, and she suggested that Mick Murphy, the Sinn Fein candidate in Rostrevor, should secure a seat. She also was reported to have said to Hayes that she would not be interested in running for office in the North of Ireland before the republican Sinn Fein and the nationalist SDLP engaged in some form of voting pact (SBP:12th October 1997). In the leaked memo McAleese was also reported to have said that Sinn Fein's vote share would rise in the upcoming general election because many middle class nationalists would now feel able to vote for them in the light of the party's involvement in the peace process (SBP:12th October 1997).

McAleese claimed that she did not recognise the comments made in the memos (Irish Times:14th October 1997). McAleese denied on RTE's current affairs programme Questions and Answers on the 13th of October that she was a Sinn Fein supporter, or had ever voted for the party. She claimed that her comments about Sinn Fein's potential electoral success was borne out of conversations she had with people when canvassing for the SDLP's Eddie McGrady. McAleese also noted that Hayes did not take any notes while conversing with McAleese, nor did she inform her that the conversations were being noted for inclusion the Green Book (IT:14th October 1997).

The leaked memo was not the only factor that put the McAleese campaign off track and hindered her core message. The reaction of one of the other candidates, Derek Nally, drew attention away from her core message and focus more on the memo. Nally released a statement to the media before his appearance on the Questions and Answers with McAleese. In it, he stated that Sinn Fein posed moral and political problems for people, and he, like most Irish people, would never vote for the party regardless of the peace process. McAleese Nally argued 'seems to work on a different set of moral assumptions' (IT:14th October 1997). Nally argued that even had he not been in the race for the Presidency and he had read these comments, he would have considered that McAleese was not 'a proper person to be President of the Irish Republic.' Nally concluded his statement saying that if McAleese did support Sinn Fein, as the memo indicated, that she did not 'understand this country' (IT:14th October 1997).

McAleese defended herself on Questions and Answers, saying that she had been misrepresented in the text of the memos. She claimed that she had never voted for

Sinn Fein, and had in fact, supported the local SDLP candidate Eddie McGrady in the general election. McAleese also took that opportunity to clarify her role in the Redemptorist peace mission. The Redemptorist priest, Fr. Alex Reid, had brought together the SDLP and Sinn Fein to have exploratory talks in 1988. Reid went on to attempt to bring different sections of the community in the North together in Clonard Monastery to attempt to broker some degree of understanding between the opposing groups. Fr. Reid asked McAleese to be part of this process. Her involvement was something that McAleese wanted to keep confidential. She had told her director of elections Noel Dempsey about it when they first met, but specified that it be kept out of the campaign as she did not want to capitalise on her involvement in the peace process (McCarthy 1999:189). By allying herself with the moderate nationalist party the SDLP, and with a religious order McAleese was attempting to identify herself restrained version of nationalism, a version that would be more acceptable to the voters. Part of her core message was that she would represent every Irish citizen, she would be unable to fulfil this function if the voters felt that she was overly sympathetic with one marginalised group.

On the night following their exchange on Questions and Answers, McAleese and Nally met again at a debate in Trinity College. Nally again questioned McAleese regarding her support of Sinn Fein. On this occasion, Nally eventually acquiesced and accepted McAleese's repeated denials that she supported Sinn Fein. The argument between the two candidates might have ended there had it not been for John Caden and Eoghan Harris. Caden and Harris had worked in RTE together, and had taken an interest in Nally and his campaign for the Presidency. Caden, who became Nally's director of publicity, had approached Harris to compile a blueprint for the campaign.

Harris had worked on Mary Robinson's successful Presidential campaign seven years previously. The same day as the Trinity debate Caden had been approached by the Irish Times to write an article in response to the leaks, and the information contained in them about McAleese. Caden agreed, just hours before Nally accepted McAleese's denials that she was a Sinn Fein supporter or voter. After the Trinity debate it was reported that McAleese approached Caden and Nally asking them to withdraw the article in the Irish Times that again questioned her political affiliations. Her request was denied (McCarthy 1999:1990).

In his article Caden admonished McAleese, saying that 'drawing moral boundaries is not an afterthought but the very substance of the campaign' (IT:15th October 1997) Caden explained that the possibility that McAleese might be 'soft on Sinn Fein' had prompted Nally's repeated questioning of her political affiliations. Caden highlighted the line in the memo that 'McAleese seems sympathetic to Sinn Fein' (IT:15th October 1997). Caden argued that Nally believed that the document was leaked by a public minded individual, who believed that the voters had a right to know that McAleese supported Sinn Fein, at a time when the IRA was not maintaining a cease-fire. He repeated that Nally did not accept McAleese's denials. Caden concluded by encouraging McAleese to sue if she wanted to clear her name (IT:15th October 1997).

The issue of McAleese's political preferences may have then dissipated had it not been for an interview with Gerry Adams on Pat Kenny's radio show on RTE the following Thursday 16th October. Adams was promoting his book, 'An Irish Voice: The Quest for Peace,' when at the end of the interview Pat Kenny asked Adams who he would vote for in the up-coming Presidential election in the Republic. Adams

replied that he did not have a vote, but if he did, he would give McAleese his first preference, followed by Roche, Banotti, Scallon, and 'no vote for the token man (Nally)' (Today with Pat Kenny:15th October 1997). Adam's comments caused McAleese's name to be linked again with Sinn Fein. According to McAleese's Director of Elections, Noel Dempsey 'it wasn't the most helpful statement of the campaign' (Dempsey:2000).

That evening in Belfast, Adams clarified his comments saying that McAleese had never been involved in Sinn Fein. She would receive his vote because 'of her stature, because of her vision and because of her experience and skills, is best-suited for that responsibility as President of the people of this island' (IT:17th October 1997).

McAleese was quick to distance herself from Adams and responded that she had 'no view one way or the other' about his comments, but the damage was already done.

With Adam's comment, as with the leaking of the memos, the McAleese campaign were again confronted with a difficulty in keeping their campaign on message and fulfilling their own agenda. Both instances are examples of the unpredictability of election campaigns, and of how much of the political communication strategy has to be reactive.

The following Sunday, the 19th of October, the Sunday Business Post and the Sunday Tribune printed another leaked Foreign Affairs memo. This second memo damaged McAleese's core message even further. It was again written by civil servant Dymphna Hayes and concerned McAleese. The contents of the memo re-ignited the debate about McAleese's political allegiances. In this memo the views of Brid Rodgers,

SDLP councillor for Upper Bann and former Chair of the party were reported. The first memo from which extracts were published the previous week was also published in full. In the newly published memo, Rodgers in conversation with Hayes on the 3rd of April 1997 was reported to complain that the SDLP were receiving poor coverage from the Irish News. Rodgers blamed the editor in chief Jim Fitzpatrick who she said had formed an 'unofficial alliance' with Father Alex Reid and Mary McAleese (SBP:19th October 1997). The objective of this alliance, Rodgers speculated, was to promote a new nationalist consensus that 'owed more to Sinn Fein than the SDLP' (ST:19th October 1997). Rodgers was reported to have told Hayes that Reid, Fitzpatrick and McAleese were all in regular contact with Sinn Fein and were 'pushing' a Sinn Fein agenda (SBP:19th October 1997).

While the rest of memo concerned Rodgers's views on the electoral potential of the SDLP, the coverage of the Irish News of the SDLP and the recent SDLP 'Women in Politics' conference, the two sentences in which Rodgers linked McAleese with Sinn Fein proved the most damaging. Commenting on the memos, the Sunday Tribune's political correspondent, Stephen Collins, wrote that the leaked memos which were also posted to the Tribune's offices bore a Dublin postmark. A covering note was enclosed which read, 'surely the electorate in the South should be told how Mary McAleese is viewed by moderate nationalists in the North' (ST:19th October 1997). Yet, the memos only revealed the reported opinion of one moderate nationalist in the North, namely Brid Rodgers. Geraldine Kennedy writing in the Irish Times opined that McAleese now had a 'serious problem' in her bid for the Presidency.

It demands nothing less than the frankest explanation of her views on Northern Ireland policy, the SDLP, Sinn Fein and the peace process for confidence in her ability to be a truly representative head of state to be restored (IT:20th October 1997).

Kennedy like others appeared to have completely missed the point that the President is above politics. The President cannot travel to the North to visit anyone or any group without the express permission of the government. The President certainly does not have any impact or influence on any policy matter that may influence the peace process. The Labour Party nominated candidate Adi Roche echoed this view when she urged the candidates not to let the issue of Northern Ireland dominate the campaign. Roche argued that the parties in the Dail had always had a consensus approach to the North and it should remain that way. (IT:20th October 1997).

The day of the second leak, McAleese attended the annual Wolfe Tone Commemoration in Bodenstown and then went on to Galway that evening. The controversy was further fuelled by events in Galway. Journalists had no chance to get a comment from McAleese regarding the newly leaked memo at Bodenstown. They hoped that McAleese would give her reactions to the developments in Galway.

McAleese was due to speak to journalists before going to a rally in the Great Southern Hotel, but the press conference was cancelled. Jim Fahey, RTE's Western Correspondent, like the other assembled journalists, decided to attempt to get some kind of comment from McAleese as she went into the rally in the hotel. When McAleese did eventually arrive, late due to heavy traffic, a sizeable crowd had

gathered. She was due to be greeted by Fianna Fail TDs Noel Tracey, Eamon O’Cuiv and Progressive Democrat TD Bobby Molloy, but the crowd was so big that she had to be escorted from her car. The journalists saw this as a tactic to keep the candidate away from the press. Jim Fahey is reported to have said that he asked McAleese for her reaction to the leaks three or four times only to be ‘pushed aside’ with his camera man (McCarthy 1999:206). The scenes were described as a ‘melee,’ as journalists ‘lunged towards the candidate shouting questions’ (SBP:26th October 1997).

When McAleese entered the hotel, journalists pursued her up the stairs, and it was here that Fahey claimed that he felt someone pulling his jacket preventing him from going forward. He later discovered that it had been Noel Dempsey. Dempsey for his part, claimed that he was forced off the kerb in the crush and that Fahey had made a ‘mad dash’ after McAleese and Dempsey held on to the back of his jacket to ‘slow him down’ (SBP:26th October 1997). However, according to Dempsey, McAleese was surrounded for her own protection and was ‘visibly shaken’ when she finally got inside the hotel (McCarthy 1999:207).

The pictures of the scene were shown on RTE news, and according to one commentator ‘it looked at best undignified, at worst chaotic and threatening’ (IT:20th October). After the rally with the Fianna Fail and Progressive Democrat supporters in the hotel, McAleese spoke to journalists briefly. Taking Dempsey’s advice, McAleese insisted that she had no comment on the memos. Furthermore, she refused to comment about the ‘scuffles’ outside the hotel (IT:20th October 1997). The incident was described as an ‘disaster for the McAleese campaign’ (McCarthy 1999:207).

These scene could have potentially destroyed McAleese’s indirect core message, as

she could hardly have appeared to be less Presidential. Ironically, the events resulted in almost blanket coverage in the media, heightening McAleese's profile significantly. McAleese did address the media the following day. The press conference was organised on Inis Mor. This is the largest of the three Aran Islands. The choice of the Inis Mor was probably deliberate as it is an area of high Fianna Fail support and is officially Irish speaking. At the press conference, McAleese attempted to redefine her core message and establish herself as a peacemaker and a moderate nationalist. While McAleese denied 'pushing a Sinn Fein agenda' she did elaborate on her role within the Redemptorist Peace Mission for the first time (IT;21st October 1997).

McAleese described the work of the Redemptorist Peace mission as 'very formal meetings' where she met with members of the SDLP and Sinn Fein. She denied that she was a member of Sinn Fein or a supporter of the party, was not a friend of Adams, as she had only ever met him in this context. McAleese also denied knowing Brid Rodgers, of the SDLP, very well, saying that the first time she had met Rodgers was in the context of the Peace Mission. McAleese doubted the accuracy of what Rodgers had said in the memo in any case. She felt that, if people in the North really did suspect that she had Sinn Fein sympathies, then she would not have been appointed to the Board of Channel Four Television or the Northern Ireland Electricity Board. McAleese also informed journalists that she had lunch with the Queen of England, the previous year, along with Sir Rupert Smith, the officer in command of the troops in Northern Ireland, where she spoke to the Queen about Northern Ireland. She would not have been invited to do this argued McAleese if she had the republican credentials that some people were attempting to ascribe to her (IT:21st October 1997).

The principle advantage of the events in Galway, was perhaps an unpredictable one. Barry White writing in the Irish Independent predicted that ‘the vehemence of the reaction to the Sinn Fein President may prove counter productive and increase her standing in the polls’ (II:17th October 1997). The sight of McAleese being ‘attacked’ by the media, according to Wally Young, was to the candidate’s advantage. These images of McAleese under pressure from the media consolidated Fianna Fail support for her. It gave the party members an excuse to rally behind McAleese. Young also notes that this healed the split in the party members caused by her victory over Reynolds.

It created so much buzz that it galvanised a lot of people behind her...it was a fairytale.(Young:2000).

According to Young, the controversy also had a dual effect as it also ‘established her republican credentials and her love for her country’ (Young:2000).

Young felt, that in hindsight, he would have handled the evening differently in Galway. He speculated that McAleese’s ability to speak to the media would have been to her advantage if she had been able to take time to speak to them on the way into the hotel. If she had done so, it may not have resulted in people being ‘trampled’ according to Young (Young:2000). The McAleese campaign team viewed the resulting press conference to be a resounding success. They considered that they had managed to turn the negative into a positive as McAleese dealt with journalist’s questions effectively (Dempsey:2000). Yet, opinion was divided amongst journalists. Catherine Cleary of the Irish Times commented that the Fianna Fail supporters, in the

room where the press conference was being held, were very hostile. Cleary described the interview as

the most bruising interview I ever did. (McAleese) frequently challenged you on your research. She was flushed and angry (IT:21st October 1997).

RTE's West of Ireland correspondent, Jim Fahey, was remembered the press conference differently. He commented that McAleese was very

calm cool and collected...she was under a lot of pressure and she held unflinchingly to the line (McCarthy 1999:209).

The negative publicity could have seriously threatened McAleese's bid for the Presidency had she not handled the situation effectively. When Labour's candidate, Adi Roche, was targeted by former employees, who referred to her management style as dictatorial and 'Stalinist', Roche and her campaign failed to deal with the crisis effectively. This failure led to a serious decline in Roche's support. While, it could not be argued that this controversy led to her losing the Presidential election it certainly prompted the down turn in her support according to the opinion polls (Doyle IPS:Vol 13).

Catherine Cleary, writing in the Irish Times, noted that McAleese's language altered over time when describing the leaks. During the press conference on Inis Mor she described them as 'mischievous', the following day while canvassing in Ennis as

'malignant and malicious.' (IT: 22nd October 1997) Gerry Nagle of Arks Advertising argued that, 'nobody objected (to the controversy because) you couldn't buy the publicity' (Nagle:1999). John Doyle argues that Fianna Fail was compelled to move from a campaign of 'image and safe packaging' and towards a 'more assertive and positive campaigning style,' in which she made a virtue of her involvement in the peace process (Doyle IPS:Vol 13).

One of the primary challenges to McAleese's core message throughout the campaign was the media. McAleese was reliant on the media to communicate with the voters, but this proved to be difficult as the media coverage of her campaign was viewed by Fianna Fail to be less than favourable (Dempsey:2000). It could be argued that the events outside the Great Southern Hotel served to exacerbate this negative relationship between McAleese and the media. Noel Dempsey believes that 'there were daggers drawn' from McAleese's first press conference and that McAleese's harsh treatment in the media was 'one of the big issues we had to deal with.' Dempsey speculates that McAleese's intelligence 'got backs up' as well as the fact that she 'wasn't going to let them push her around' (Dempsey:2000). An editorial in the Sunday Business Post concurred with this view claiming that

What annoys (journalists) is that McAleese is clearly a more able person than any other candidate (SBP:26th October 1997).

Dempsey's views would appear to be substantiated by commentary from Emily O'Reilly, who wrote that, McAleese is 'intelligent enough to avoid questions' and that,

Those (journalists) covering her campaign was reported to dislike her and to feel intimidated by her....McAleese treats reporters like dirt because that is what she thinks they are (SBP:26th October 1997).

Brian Lenihan argues that McAleese's former work as a journalist in RTE 'left permanent scars in relation with her relationship with the media' (Lenihan:1999).

At various times during the campaign McAleese was described as 'positively poisonous when it comes to the press' (II:23rd October 1997). Miriam Lord, writing in the Irish Independent, claimed that McAleese was also described journalists covering the campaign as 'arrogant' and 'cold' (II:23rd October 1997).

The main problem certain journalists appeared to have with McAleese was the disparity they perceived between her treatment of them, and her treatment of the public.

McAleese was clever enough to show one face to the media and a radically different face to the voting public that she met on the campaign. To the latter she exhibited tremendous people skills (SBP:26th October 1997).

One of the main areas that journalists challenged McAleese was on her political affiliations and beliefs. Throughout the campaign McAleese had attempted to establish her connection with places and people in the Republic of Ireland, when she was canvassing and being interviewed. It could be argued that by doing this, she was,

in effect minimising her northern origins in attempt to make a real connection with the people who had the power to elect her. The leaked memos, however, resulted in the issue of a Northerner contesting an election in the Republic of Ireland coming to the fore, along with the attitudes of Southerners towards Northern Catholics. Writing in the Irish Times, columnist Nuala O'Faolain, noted that when people from the North of Ireland expose themselves to Southern scrutiny constantly find themselves to be misunderstood, as happened to Mary McAleese. This lack of understanding would cause people from the South to 'run a mile' from the words Sinn Fein, and not understand how a religious order could speak to the party when no cease-fire was in operation (IT:20th October 1997). Writing in the same paper Sean McConnell, concurred with O'Faolain's views and sympathised with Mary McAleese's plight. As a Northern Catholic living in the South, O'Connell claimed that he had been exposed to

what Southerners really feel about Northerners, and particularly Northern Republicans. I gather that we are unmanageable, different, ignorant, savage, greedy, as-bad-as-the-Orangemen, and we will never be satisfied (IT:18th October 1997).

Sunday Business Post columnist, Breda O'Brien, commented that the main slogan of the 1997 Presidential election might be 'no nationalists need apply' (SBP:19th October 1997).

The controversy, surrounding the leaked memos increased the pressure on McAleese from the media and led to further questions about McAleese's unionist support. At the launch of her campaign, McAleese had claimed that she had received 'literally a mountain' of support from the unionist community but declined to name specific supporters (IT:26th September 1997). Her claim of unionist support was undoubtedly an attempt to reinforce her core message of 'building bridges.' Barry White, writing in the Irish Independent now claimed that McAleese's claim of Protestant support was an 'unprovable assertion' (IT:17th October 1997) The Irish Times Northern Editor echoed these questions pointing out that the youth wing of the Ulster Unionist Party had issued a statement denying that they supported McAleese's candidacy. Claims to the contrary were 'an obvious attempt to smear the organisation,' according to the young unionists (IT:17th October 1997).

McAleese was challenged directly regarding her unionist support when the Irish Times asked the government candidate to name six unionists who had pledged support for her. McAleese named one, Colonel Harvey Bicker from Ballynahinch, Co. Down who had already supported her in an RTE radio interview. A representative from the McAleese campaign said that it was unreasonable to expect McAleese to name other supporters who had written to her and who had marked their correspondence confidential. The number of letters could not be counted, McAleese claimed, saying that she would not name names to satisfy public curiosity. McAleese also clarified that she had not stated that she would be representing the unionist community, only that some people of the 'unionist persuasion' supported her candidacy (IT:18th October 1997).

McAleese's election agent, Fianna Fail TD Brian Lenihan, argued that it was obvious to him that McAleese's unionist support was support from unionists with a small 'u'. By this, Lenihan meant that McAleese's support came from ordinary people not unionists who were involved in politics or members of the official unionist party (Lenihan:1999). The fact that unionists like Alderdice and the youth wing of the Ulster Unionist Party spoke out against McAleese was also to her advantage according to her deputy director of elections, Pat Farrell. He argued that Irish voters did not like to be advised by people outside of the state. Farrell reinforced McAleese's claims to have received letters of support from unionists. It may not have been 'practical' for those writing the letter to declare their support publicly, according to Farrell, but it did provide a source of significant moral support for McAleese (Farrell:2000).

Paul Cullen, writing in the Irish Times, argued that with two candidates from the North of Ireland contesting the Presidential election that it was predictable that issue of the North of Ireland was going to figure highly in the general debate. Cullen argued that the question that was now being asked was whether Mary McAleese, as a Northerner and a nationalist, a suitable person to be President of Ireland (IT:18th October 1997). Cullen did not draw attention to the fact that 'she was running for President of a Republic,' as Gerry Nagle pointed out (Nagle:1999), so her nationalism should not have been an issue.

The harsh treatment of McAleese by the media was a difficulty for the campaign but McAleese reinforced her indirect core message by retaining her composure throughout. Writing in the Sunday Business Post, Mark O'Connell noted that,

McAleese deported herself very well – particularly when under pressure (SDP:26th October).

Her composure was vital, it allowed the grass roots of Fianna Fail to rally to support what they saw as a capable and able candidate. Pat Farrell argues that the leaking of the Foreign Affairs memos, while having a considerable impact on the campaign, forced the electorate to face up to the ambivalence regarding the North of Ireland.

I think in a way Mary McAleese's candidacy was our moment of truth...and a coming of age (when) she was elected (Farrell:2000).

Role of the Party

The role of the party in the aftermath of the leaking of the Foreign Affairs memo was to defend McAleese and advise her on media strategy. By defending McAleese against criticism from journalists and Fine Gael leader John Bruton, McAleese could remain above party politics, and not have to engage in negative campaigning.

When the first Department of Foreign Affairs memo was leaked, the government was angered by the leak, speculating that it was designed to harm their candidate.

Government sources blamed the previous administration made up of the Labour Party, the Democratic Left and Fine Gael for leaking the memo (IT:14th October 1997). A government spokesman was reported to have challenged Bruton to give categorical assurances that neither he, nor any of his staff, passed any memos from the

Department of Foreign Affairs to newspapers. In a statement, Bruton denied that either he or any of his staff had leaked the documents (IT:17th October 1997).

When Sinn Fein President, Gerry Adams, said that he would give McAleese his first preference vote, John Bruton challenged Fianna Fail leader, Taoiseach Bertie Ahern, to confirm whether the Fianna Fail and Progressive Democrat supporters would be happy to have a Sinn Fein endorsed candidate as President. Bruton claimed that Adams's comments were a 'disturbing development' and that if McAleese was elected with the support of Sinn Fein then it would,

render impotent the role of the Presidency as a symbol of reconciliation between the unionist and nationalist communities which was so effectively developed by Mary Robinson (II:17th October 1997).

Bertie Ahern replied saying that Adams's expression of a voting preference 'is not by any means an endorsement' (IT:17th October 1997).

Fine Gael insisted on making McAleese's nationalism an issue. When she appeared on RTE television's current affairs programme Questions and Answers the Fine Gael candidate Mary Banotti questioned Fianna Fail's need 'to go to the North' to find a candidate. In conjunction with Bruton's comments on McAleese and the fact that the Fine Gael leader was seen having lunch with Eoghan Harris, advisor to Derek Nally's campaign, led some in Fianna Fail to believe that Harris was now an advisor to the Fine Gael campaign. Harris later denied that he and Bruton had discussed the

campaign (IT:18th October 1997). Both Harris and Bruton had good reason for casting aspersions on the candidacy of Mary McAleese, namely that they were both supporting different candidates. The manner in which they chose to attack McAleese and the means they used of doing it, using the fact that she was from the north and may or may not have been supportive of Sinn Fein backfired in a manner that they could not have considered possible.

Gerry Nagle argues that Bruton's actions during the campaign damaged his candidate Mary Banotti's opportunities. (Nagle:1999) Noel Dempsey concurs saying that Bruton's public lunch with Harris damaged Banotti's campaign because Harris was seen to be 'double-jobbing.' 'It was wonderful to have Eoghan Harris on the opposite side' (Dempsey:2000).

It was speculated that a vote for Banotti could be seen as endorsing John Bruton's attacks on McAleese. At the very least, argued John Doyle, the controversy surrounding McAleese resulted in Banotti making a very limited impact with her own issues (John Doyle IPS:Vol 13). In fact, the controversy that might have damaged the McAleese campaign beyond repair resulted in virtually blanket coverage of the candidate. While all the news may not have been good for McAleese, it did point to weaknesses in other candidates and their campaigns, principally Banotti, who did not succeed in setting her own agenda, and Nally who's campaign team imploded with the resignation of Caden.

Paul Cullen writing in the Irish Times speculated that Bruton was worried about the reported 20% of Fine Gale voters who were intending to vote for Mary McAleese. It

was reported that Bruton intended that his criticism of McAleese would bring these voters back to Fine Gael. This piece of political communication failed badly. Cullen warned that 'it is a high-risk strategy that could backfire' (IT:18th October 1997). The day that the second leak was published, McAleese visited the Wolf Tone commemoration in Bodenstown with the Fianna Fail party and then went on to Galway. At Bodenstown, the Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, publicly defended McAleese and endorsed her candidacy. Ahern condemned the leaks of the Foreign Affairs memo describing the leaking as a 'dirty tricks' campaign designed to undermine McAleese (IT:20th October 1997). Ahern was critical of those who refused to 'have the honesty to fight (the election) by political means' (IT:20th October 1997). He defended McAleese, and rejected the charge that she was linked with Sinn Fein, questioning whether McAleese had ever spoken for Sinn Fein, attended a rally, or been a joint signatory to a Sinn Fein statement. Ahern argued that McAleese had done nothing in her political life other than be member of Fianna Fail, and the SDLP. He recommended McAleese for the Presidency saying that she was 'extraordinarily well-qualified for the job' (IT:20th October 1997). Ahern was reported to have said that McAleese reflected 'our original ideas as a party' and that he knew that 'Mary McAleese will do us proud' (II:20th October 1997).

McAleese's presence at Bodenstown not only allowed her canvass many members of the party, it was also important for the unified front the Fianna Fail party and the campaign communicated to the electorate and grass roots members of the party. The following day pictures appeared in the press of McAleese flanked by the Taoiseach and other high profile members of Fianna Fail, indicating their support for her and her candidacy and her links to the party.

The party had a significant role in the events in Galway on the evening of the Bodenstown commemoration. A press conference had been scheduled in the Skeffington Arms Hotel before a rally in the Great Southern Hotel. However, that Sunday, McAleese met her director of elections, Noel Dempsey, Eileen Gleeson and Martin Mackin for breakfast to discuss the leaks. McAleese, along with Gleeson and Mackin wanted to comment on the leaks and clarify issues with the media. Dempsey disagreed, arguing that there was no way of knowing if there was more information to follow. He felt that it would be better if McAleese let the story build, and then answer all questions in one press conference at the end of the week (Dempsey:2000).

This meant that the planned press conference had to be cancelled. Wally Young was left to put up notices in the hotel informing the journalists. Naturally, the assembled media was disappointed not to have an opportunity to question McAleese. It was reported that RTE's Western Correspondent, Jim Fahey, was 'annoyed at the change' (SBP:26th October 1997), as he wanted to file a report for the nine o'clock news. Noel Dempsey claimed that he was more concerned with the six hundred supporters in the Great Southern, because the campaign was not 'there to organise a rally for RTE' (SBP:26th October 1997).

The day after the events in Galway Dempsey, who had returned to Dublin, received a telephone call from a Fianna Fail backbencher Eoin Ryan, who had contested the 1987 general election in Dublin South East with McAleese. Ryan told Dempsey that McAleese's refusal to answer reporters' questions in Galway had resulted in her being perceived as 'arrogant'. Based on this information, Dempsey contacted Wally Young, who was still in Galway and told him what had been said. He instructed Young to

hold a press conference, and for McAleese to explain her role in the Redemptorist Peace Mission (Dempsey:2000). Dempsey admitted publicly that he had advised McAleese to refrain from commenting on the controversy and that his advice 'was wrong' (IT:21st October 1997). Fianna Fail leader Bertie Ahern was also reported as saying that McAleese should have spoken to reporters commenting that, 'we do not want to offend journalists who are doing their job' (II:21st October 1997). By publicly taking the blame for events in Galway Fianna Fail moved the negativity surrounding the campaign away from McAleese, and on to the party.

When faced with possibly the biggest challenge of her campaign, Mary McAleese rose to that challenge. The leaking of the Foreign Affairs memos indicated the unpredictability of electoral campaigns but the McAleese campaign dealt with consequent difficulties effectively. This phase of the campaign that resulted in a change of target audience and core message for McAleese. Increasingly throughout the controversy McAleese's target audience became the grass roots of Fianna Fail as her direct core message became more about her nationalism and her role in the peace process. The role of the party also expanded as they defended McAleese, engaging in negative politics on her behalf so she could remain above the political process.

Conclusion

In order to secure the Presidency, political outsider Mary McAleese had to engage not only in the political process, but also in the process of political communication. There were two distinct phases for McAleese, in her bid to secure the office. She first had to secure the Fianna Fail nomination, and then she had to contest the election itself. In both cases, she engaged in non-mediated and mediated political communication.

When seeking the Fianna Fail nomination all of the methods of political communication McAleese engaged in were non-mediated. She identified her target audience as members of the Fianna Fail parliamentary party and built a provisional campaign team, comprising of Harry and Patricia Casey who contact members of the Fianna Fail party, writing to them recommending McAleese for President. McAleese, after receiving permission from Fianna Fail leader, Bertie Ahern, canvassed the members of the Parliamentary Party directly, through letters, telephone calls and face to face meetings. McAleese's core message in this phase of her campaign was to raise her profile and convince the parliamentary party that she could secure the Presidency for them. One crucial element of McAleese's non-mediated campaign was the speech she gave to the Parliamentary Party on the day of the selection convention in which she made a successful last minute appeal to the party. The role of the party in this phase was to select a candidate.

After she was selected, McAleese's target audience expanded to encompass the electorate. When addressed or met with different groups she selected specific target audiences to appeal to. She also had to target the grass roots of Fianna Fail and convince them that not only was she was the best candidate for the Presidency, but that she was the best Fianna Fail candidate who could have contested the election.

McAleese's core message differed depending on the form of political communication she was utilising. McAleese communicated the electorate using a non-mediated and a mediated strategy. McAleese's non-mediated campaign consisted of a personal canvass and advertising. Her non-mediated core message had two forms direct and indirect. Her direct core message was to raise her profile and attempt to make a connection with the voters. McAleese's indirect core message was to always appear like a potential President. This necessitated always being warm and friendly and appearing to be very energetic despite a punishing schedule. Where ever she travelled McAleese had to impart her message, not only to the public, but also to the Fianna Fail party members who were turning out to support her. McAleese did this by emphasising her former links with the party and attempting to identify with the party's wider objectives.

McAleese's campaigning ability was noted by the members of the campaign team, and by the media. She continually surprised people with her warmth and sense of humour. This personal canvass was a vital aspect of the campaign, and McAleese's ability a crucial element. No matter how well planned the campaign, if McAleese had failed to make a connection to those she met this aspect of the campaign would have failed. McAleese had to maintain a punishing schedule as she travelled around the country for the six weeks of the campaign. A personal canvass requires not only a significant level of support on the ground from party workers but also a high level of stamina on the part of the candidate. McAleese had to ensure that she was communicating effectively with the electorate at all times, whether that was in a shopping centre or a university debate.

In order to make the candidate more marketable, McAleese underwent a change of image between her selection and the launch of her campaign. The campaign employed a full-time stylist to ensure that the candidate had regular haircuts during the campaign. McAleese's image needed to communicate an indirect core message that she was a capable, yet approachable woman who had the potential to represent the country.

The role of the party during the non-mediated campaign was to devise, organise and co-ordinate McAleese's campaign. They planned the route for her canvass and party activists were contacted to turn out and support her. They also organised and implemented her advertising campaign.

During the non-mediated part of her campaign, McAleese's target audience was the electorate, although she did attempt to modify her message slightly for the audience she was addressing. McAleese's core message was to expand on her aspirations and policies for the Presidency.

McAleese also had to rely on media to canvass the country. This mediated political communication decreases control of the candidate over the message they are attempting to impart. McAleese's campaign was covered in the news, on television and radio, but she also gave several major interviews. The mediated and non-mediated aspects of the McAleese campaign were intrinsically linked. For example, McAleese's non-mediated personal canvass was aided by the mediated interviews she had conducted for local radio around the country. Due to the high listener-ship figures

for local radio, many of those she canvassed had some knowledge of who she was.

The use of posters around the country had a similar effect.

Within the confines of the mediated aspects of her campaign, McAleese encountered some significant difficulties. Her strained relationship with the media intensified throughout the campaign, reaching a peak when two memos written by an official in the Department of Foreign affairs were leaked. McAleese's campaign director, Fianna Fail Minister Noel Dempsey, felt that the media had been unduly harsh on McAleese, yet her campaign did not appear to suffer because of it. A significant factor in this was McAleese herself. No matter how aggressive the questioning, or how harsh the media coverage of her campaign was, she never lost her composure. She rarely appeared to be under any strain. She reiterated her replies to repeated questions about her links to Sinn Fein, her political allegiances, and her nationalism. McAleese managed adapt her core message and establish herself as a peace maker and moderate nationalist, turning a potential disaster for the campaign to her advantage.

Mary McAleese's Presidential campaign showed that, no matter how well prepared and planned a campaign is, and no matter what the level of expertise within the campaign is, there are always unexpected events that can potentially shake the campaign to its core. It is the proof of an effective political communications strategy, if the campaign can recover from these events and stay on track and in some instances, as has been indicated in the present analysis, turn perceived communications failures into political assets. A significant element of this success is reliant on the abilities of the candidate themselves. McAleese rose to that challenge to become the eighth President of Ireland.

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