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THE TORIES AND  
TELEVISION,  
1951-1964

Broadcasting an Elite

Anthony  
Ridge-Newman



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Anthony Ridge-Newman

# The Tories and Television, 1951–1964

Broadcasting an Elite

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*To my dearest grandparents Barry and Barbara Ridge  
Your fond recollections of the 1950s and 1960s partly inspired this book.  
In loving memory of Tracy, Dennis, Peter, Katie, Edward and Diana*

## PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Recently, someone said to me that the 1950s and 1960s could not be viewed as history, because it only feels like yesterday. This illustrated for me how, when human perception is involved, all things are relative. For many, we perceive the world, and our place in it, based on unique combinations of personalized variables. Temporal and geographical factors are two of the most significant. Being someone whose most formative years were the 1990s, I grew up in a world that seemed to be technologically mature and alive with vibrant technicolour. My early understandings of the 1950s were informed by black and white news snippets, films, documentaries, family stories and fading photographs. As a child, this seemingly distant world appeared dowdy, starched, formal and fuzzy. So much so that I found it hard to visualize the 1950s world as anything other than shades of grey. That said, through my rich conversations with my grandparents, I have it on good authority that, even while post-war Britain was rebuilding, the grass was green and the skies were blue (well, at least some of the time in the latter case).

The advent of television in Britain predates my birth by many decades. As a child, when I imagined a time before television, the world seemed almost prehistoric. I found it difficult to imagine life before the domesticity of 'the small screen'. I can now liken this to my observations of my young nephew and niece, who think that the Internet has always existed. They are often at a loss without their iPad in hand. When I tell people I have written about new media and, then, elaborate that, in this case, it is about the role of television as a new medium in the Conservative Party, they often look at me in a bemused manner. There has been so much talk

about ‘new media’ in recent times that general perception has latched itself onto the term and it has become synonymous with technologies like Facebook and Twitter. But, as this book will hopefully illustrate to the reader, television was very much a new medium in the 1950s. Not only that, there were similar debates, discourses, suspicions and anxieties surrounding television’s infiltration into people’s daily lives as there are today about the Internet and smart phones. Moreover, in an age of smart TVs and *Netflix*, Internet and television have now converged to some extent. This is perhaps a technological legacy that few could have envisioned in the 1950s.

Interestingly, in conducting the research on which this book is based, I discovered that the 1950s period most notably came to life for me, in richer colours, when I engaged with materials from the Conservative Party Archive (CPA). It was a privilege to spend the large part of 2011 accessing the CPA. I was fortunate to enjoy many hours amid the historic grandeur of the Duke Humphrey Reading Room at the Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. I would like to thank both the Conservative Party and the CPA, particularly Jeremy McIlwaine, for assisting my extensive access to Conservative Party files that have given me a new found technicolour perspective of life inside the Conservative Party from Churchill to Douglas-Home. My thanks also go to my friend Matthew Powell, a fellow Worcestershire-man, whose company I enjoyed at lunches and debates, while in Oxford. I am grateful to him and his colleagues for my membership to the Middle Common Room at Hertford College, which greatly improved my research experience at Oxford University.

I am particularly grateful to Dr Alex Windscheffel, Royal Holloway, University of London. He helped inspire this work, and his support and guidance have continued to impact on this book and beyond. Similarly, Professor Tim Bale, Queen Mary, University of London, and Dr Alexander Smith, University of Warwick, have been inspirational academics whose input and mentoring have contributed significantly. I would also like to thank and acknowledge my friends and colleagues in Scotland for all their support, help and guidance. Special thanks go to my colleagues at Glasgow University, especially Professor Lauren McLaren, Professor Christopher Carman, Professor Sarah Birch, Dr Kelly Kollman, Dr Karen Wright, Dr Mo Hume, Dr Myrto Tsakatika and Dr Evgeny Postnikov. I thank Dr Alan Convery, Edinburgh University, and Professor David Hutchinson, Glasgow Caledonian University, for simulating debates in our shared interest areas.

Thanks also to my friends at Strathclyde University for keeping me intellectually stimulated and well fed on Tuesday evenings over on 'The Southside'.

There are all those family and friends to whom I owe a hug and personal thanks for their ongoing and, in some cases, ceaseless support. These include my brother and family Ian, Pamela, Harvey and Darcey; grandparents Barry and Barbara; uncle Nigel and aunt Donna; cousins Rachel and Karl; cousins Thomas and Kirsty; cousins Christopher and Stephanie; aunt Maureen and family; cousins Emma and Richard; cousin Heather and uncle Lesley; and my dear friends Alex; Christopher and Victoria; David; Dawn; Kerry and Ryan; and Sandra, Simon and Christopher. Edward, the Third Baron Montagu of Beaulieu, 1926-2015, is himself a significant part of British history, especially in the 1950s. He is one of a number of close friends and family to whom I have said a final goodbye in recent years. That said, his legacy partly continues with this book, because, through him, from a young age, I gained privileged access to the life of a hereditary peer, which most certainly inspired my interest in Conservative politics and the 1950s period. My late mother Regina was born in 1957, the year Prime Minister Anthony Eden departed Number 10. As ever, my final thought turns to her. Mum, you are greatly loved and missed.

*Bransford, Worcestershire, and the West End of Glasgow*

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# ABBREVIATIONS

## ACRONYMS

BBC	British Broadcasting Company/Corporation
CCO	Conservative Central Office
CPA	Conservative Party Archive
CRD	Conservative Research Department
IPU(s)	Indoor Projector Units(s)
ITA	Independent Television Authority
ITV	Independent Television
MP(s)	Member(s) of Parliament
TV	Television
UK	United Kingdom
US(A)	United States (of America)
YC(s)	Young Conservative(s)

## CONTRACTIONS AND POLITICAL PARTIES

Conservative Party	
Conservatives	
Tory Party	Conservative and Unionist Party (UK)
Tories	
The party	
National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations	Nation Union
Labour	Labour Party (UK)
Liberals	Liberal Party (UK)

## Tories and Television 1951–64

**Abstract** This introductory chapter explores the book’s research focus, which examines the role of television in driving change in the Conservative Party, 1951–64. Amid wider social and cultural changes, the advent of television is argued to have acted as a catalyst for change, the impact of which intensified as the omnipotence of the medium grew in political campaigning. The chapter outlines the book’s key components including definitions, questions, aims, approaches, sources and themes. Key sections include television as a new medium, and mapping Conservative Party change. The chapter summarizes the book’s main sources, with a focus on those examined at the Conservative Party Archive, Oxford. The chapter ends with an overview of the book, its key arguments and a brief outline of subsequent chapters.

**Keywords** BBC · Conservative Party Archive · Conservative Party · New media · Political history · Television

### INTRODUCTION

The British Broadcasting Company/Corporation (BBC) was founded in 1922. Since then the organization and campaign practices of the Conservative and Unionist Party, known as the *Conservative Party*,

*Conservatives, Tories and Tory Party*, and the Labour Party, also referred to as *Labour*, have responded to developments in broadcasting in order to successfully capitalize on new developments in political communication.<sup>1</sup> However, it is important to note that there are significant historical differences, especially in terms of organizational characteristics, between the Conservatives and Labour. While being linked through the competition of the democratic process, the two parties are separate institutions.<sup>2</sup> They have distinct genealogies and do not necessarily steer their internal responses to developments in new political communications at the same stages in history.<sup>3</sup>

Generally, major political parties in a democracy share the central goal of winning elections. However, people, democratic processes and political organizations are connected in space and time via complex relationships that sometimes follow puzzling trajectories for historians. Rooted in idiosyncratic characteristics and priorities, the parties engage with and monitor each other's initiatives. However, it would seem that parties sometimes capitalize on the broader changes in society independently of the other's actions. Party change, therefore, is manifested through internal changes that are often unique to each party's organization.<sup>4</sup> As the historiography tends to testify, this phenomenon seems to intensify the further back in time the studies go. In contrast to the highly professionalized environment of political communication and trend in the centralization<sup>5</sup> of political parties in more contemporary times, this book takes a step back to the Conservative Party of 1951–64, with the aim of analysing the party's response to the advent of television as a tool for political communication.

This introductory chapter aims to outline the scope of the book and explore the role of the new medium of television in driving change in the Conservative Party. The chapter ends with a brief overview of subsequent chapters. Additionally, the chapter attempts to unpack some of the book's key features, including definitions, questions, aims, approaches, sources and themes. It indicates briefly to some of the theoretical, methodological, historical and contextual considerations, which are developed in more detail in [Chapter 2](#).

## KEY COMPONENTS OF THIS BOOK

The Conservative Party has a long history and genealogy that stretches over more than 350 years. Throughout that time, in order to remain electorally competitive, the Conservatives, and other political parties, have adapted in line with some of the wider cultural developments in

society.<sup>6</sup> In the last 100 years, British political history has become intertwined with the history of British television. And, yet, perhaps surprisingly, there is only a thin body of scholarly work that explores the role of television, as a new medium, in Conservative Party change. So, then, what impact did the new political medium of television have in driving change in the Conservative Party?

The book explores this central question by taking a historical approach to mapping change in the party's organization 1951 to 1964. Evidenced through archival research at the Conservative Party Archive (CPA), the book is rooted in an interdisciplinary analysis influenced by approaches, concepts and theory in cultural history and political science. These are presented briefly below and in greater detail in [Chapter 2](#). The year 1951 is a poignant starting point for the empirical chapters. This year marks the first party political broadcasts in Britain<sup>7</sup> and the beginning of 13 years of continuous Conservative governance. Conservative electoral successes in 1951, 1955 and 1959 were preceded by notable failure during the period 1945–50. Laura Beers argues that Labour fine-tuned its propaganda machine in the interwar period helping it win elections, whereas the Tories fell behind and lost to their more professionalized opponent.<sup>8</sup> So what changed for the Tories in the 1950s?

Focusing on the Conservative Party as a case study, this book aims to offer an account of developments in the party's approaches to political broadcasting, in particular television, during the period. Using comparative culturalist interpretations of CPA evidence, the book aims to develop thematic party characteristics set within rich contexts. It attempts to do this by tracing the evolving responses of the elites within the Tory Party, like its organizational elites; political leaders at top of the party hierarchy; and, to some extent, certain Conservative Members of Parliament (MPs), senior party volunteers and Conservative Central Office (CCO) staff. Hierarchically, these elites are in contrast to those participants at the party's grassroots, like, for example, Conservative candidates, administrative staff and party agents, association officers, members, supporters and voters. The book features many of these actors in order to explore the complex intraparty dynamics of the relationships between the emergence of political television and the party organization, especially in terms of the party's initiatives and considerations that drove its response.

In taking a historical approach, the book endeavours to track, somewhat holistically, the Tories' organization and propaganda responses through analyses of CPA documents, during the period 1951–64, like party

committee papers, campaign documents, publications, memos, letters and ephemera. Cultural histories tend to differ from other related disciplines insofar that they are inclined to provide a more holistic representation, which often include analyses of the dynamics between broad ranges of variables. By contrast, other disciplines, like political science, tend to fragment the analysis into smaller units of study. Peter Burke argues that politics is an understudied area of cultural history; and deeper studies of the relationships between media and politics are ripe for analysis.<sup>9</sup>

Ralph Negrine's work on party change and political communication<sup>10</sup> takes a historical approach and, thus, has influenced this book. His work brings together some key units of analysis, like 'political parties', 'communication technologies', 'change' and 'actors', and helpfully develops definitions of concepts like 'professionalization' and 'transformation'. Professionalization can refer to the continuous improvement and rationalization of bureaucracies, the trajectory of which can be dependent on the wider 'modernization' and social structures of a particular culture.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, transformation can be described as an observation of 'marked' and tangible change.<sup>12</sup> In the democratic sphere, some actors, like party leaders and political factions, can act as agents of change and thus contribute to transformations in the nature of political parties. In this sense, less tangible phenomena can also act as agents, catalysts or drivers of change, like, for example, the advent of television. Ergo, this book considers television as an actor that to some extent drove change in the twentieth century. Like Negrine's work, this is placed in the context of 'how' parties have adapted to trends in new political communication over time and against the backdrop of the complexities of wider historical change.<sup>13</sup>

### TELEVISION AS A NEW MEDIUM

BBC television was first launched in 1936. Heightened security concerns during World War II, 1939–45, meant that the early advances made throughout the interwar period in British television were placed on ice for a decade until 1946.<sup>14</sup> The war interrupted the development of television and resulted in hangovers, stretching into the 1950s, which impacted on the interrelations between the broadcasting and British politics. For example, until 1957, the '14 Day Rule' restricted the BBC from broadcasting any matter debated in Parliament in the previous fortnight.<sup>15</sup> The post-war thawing of Britain's approach to television provided some

momentum for the advent, or emergence, of political television by the early 1950s. ‘Television’, or ‘TV’, in the late 1940s and early 1950s was a new audiovisual broadcasting medium that entered the homes of ordinary people in the form of entertainment and factual programming, via the BBC.<sup>16</sup> Although, at times, in the contemporary context, ‘television’ and ‘broadcasting’ have become somewhat synonymous terms, prior to the early 1950s, the latter largely referred to sound/radio. During the 1950s, the term began to refer to both radio and television, sometimes with little distinction made between the two media. This study uses these terms in a context-dependent fashion. Their use is generally dependent on the norms of the period being discussed at any given point.

American politics has a history of quicker adaptation to television than in Britain. In 1939, Franklin D. Roosevelt became the first US president to make a television appearance.<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the freer and more diverse commercial approach to broadcasting in the US, the attitude of the British political class towards the development of commercial television was to remain wary until the 1950s. By the mid-1950s, there was mounting support for policies in favour of commercial television. However, unlike the American approach, the British way was to enact it amid cautious regulations.<sup>18</sup> It eventually led to the formation of the Independent Television Authority (ITA), via the Television Act 1954, which oversaw developments in Independent Television (ITV). The spectre of this challenge to the BBC’s long held monopoly on broadcasting was a historic change in broadcasting policy at the time. However, the introduction of ITV did not provide the same system of full competition like in America. It was more of a quasi-system or ‘dual system, part free, part controlled’.<sup>19</sup>

Another important historic event was the BBC’s controversial approach to broadcasting the domestic politics associated with the ‘Suez crisis’, which is one of Britain’s most momentous international embarrassments that is said to symbolize the finality of Britain’s reign as one of the world’s greatest imperial powers.<sup>20</sup> The breaking of the BBC’s monopoly and the Suez crisis are two major events which, together, represent some of the most salient themes in relation to political television in the 1950s period. In the case of this book, ‘political television’ is a loose holistic term that relates to the daily culture of political parties and broadcasters in the pursuit of engaging with the medium of television as a method for communicating with mass audiences. The dynamics contributing to this culture include the

ideas, discussions, procedures, bureaucracies, reactions, interactions, broadcasts and technological factors involved in the planning, process, organization and execution of party political broadcasts and/or political news/factual programming.

### MAPPING CONSERVATIVE PARTY CHANGE

Unlike the formation of the Liberal Party, at the Willis Room in 1859, and the founding of Labour Party in 1900, which united the socialists and trade unions, the Conservative Party has ‘no such neat historical occasion . . . as a point of entry for the student of conservatism.’<sup>21</sup> The Tory Party formed within Parliament from groupings of the British elite over hundreds of years. Under Robert Peel, prime minister during the periods 1834–35 and 1841–46, Whigs and Tories came together in more of a formalized party organization that became rebranded as the Conservative Party. In contrast, Labour was constituted by a large collective of individuals and groups outside of Parliament, at the grassroots of British politics. The birth of British broadcasting and the organization of the Labour Party occurred at similar points in British history. The mass medium of broadcasting came along at a time when the masses themselves had begun to challenge the role of the British elite in governing the UK and its Empire. By that time, the Conservative Party had already a firm tradition of organization in which its constituent parts deferred power and responsibility to a social elite at the top of the party.<sup>22</sup>

The characteristic differences between the Conservative and Labour parties are documented in distinct bodies of academic literature which often address the Conservative and Labour parties as singular studies. Comparing the Conservative and Labour parties’ genealogies and their different responses to phenomena is indeed interesting. However, it is beyond the scope and aims of this book. For contextual purposes, this book does make references to other parties, including the Labour and Liberal parties, but its approach stems from the established tradition of scholarship in Conservative Party studies.<sup>23</sup> It is influenced by the strand of Conservative Party organization studies interested in analysing the drivers of party change. Work by Tim Bale<sup>24</sup> is particularly relevant. His book longitudinally analyses the drivers of Conservative Party change and evidences it using archival data that represents a period stretching from 1945 to the late twentieth century. Similarly, this book aims to examine the Conservative Party as a single party case, with a focus on the new

medium of television as a driver of change between 1951 and 1964. It attempts to do this through presenting a chronological narrative which maps change. The narrative is divided into a number of distinct case studies that represent the Conservative Party during the period of interest. As Kay Lawson suggests, ‘the advantages of the case study approach is its ability to reveal the true dynamism of the interaction of political variables, and the relative strength of each in different contexts, at different times.’<sup>25</sup> In exploring the dynamism between variables across the case studies, key themes are developed for comparison in order to form a comparative history.

### SOURCES AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY ARCHIVE

This history of the Conservatives’ organizational response to television from 1951–64 is informed by archival research at the CPA, Bodleian Library, University of Oxford. Before conducting the primary research at the archive in 2011, the CPA’s Online Catalogue was consulted in order to assess the full scope of available materials.<sup>26</sup> The archive holds extensive collections of CCO organization files, which include a comprehensive range of sources including newspaper clippings, private papers, transcriptions of speeches, press releases, party publicity ephemera, CCO discourses, transcriptions of speeches and once ‘secret’ government documents.<sup>27</sup> The CPA covers the three main areas of organization in the Conservative Party during the period 1951–64. These include, firstly, the 1922 Committee, the Shadow Cabinet, and the Chief Whip’s Office, which together constitute the party’s political arm; secondly, the National Union of Conservative and Unionist Associations (National Union), constituting the party’s voluntary arm; and, thirdly, the Conservative Research Department (CRD), and CCO, which constitute the party’s professionalized arm.<sup>28</sup> Given the comprehensiveness and the appropriateness of the CPA materials to answering the research questions, it was not deemed necessary to access additional sources or archives.

Files containing materials relating to Conservative Party organization, publicity, activism and management, between the period of 1950 and 1965, were identified. Over 130 files<sup>29</sup> were accessed, which included files on Conservative Party: publicity and propaganda, broadcasting, television, radio, film, press matters, gramophone records, procedures, area organization, constituency organization, membership, campaigning,

elections, leadership, MPs, marginal seats, intelligence and correspondence. The manuscripts available for analysis consisted mostly of political memoranda, which can be valuable resources for historical research because they offer insights into intraparty ‘decision making processes and the motives and rationale behind certain principles’.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, accessing internal Conservative Party memoranda provided this research with a rich body of evidence of the party’s own perceptions of the new medium of television.

The sources of the materials contained within the files were represented most frequently by textual discourse exchange between Conservative Party participants. These include Conservative Party members and supporters, CCO officials, leaders, MPs, candidates, professionals and employed staff, local and area agents and publicity officers, voters, activists and Young Conservatives (YCs). This wide range of sources has provided this research with diverse insider perspectives. However, other sources from outside the party include broadcasters like the BBC, broadcasting authorities like ITA, other political parties like the Labour and Liberal parties at interparty meetings on broadcasting, letters from non-Conservatives and press articles.<sup>31</sup> Contextually, these sources offer useful insights into wider perspectives outside of the Conservative Party.

Each substantive chapter is presented as an individual case study, which aims to provide rich information and evidence relating to the actual steps taken by CCO, the Conservative Parliamentary Party and Downing Street under the leaderships of four Conservative Party prime ministers. The 13 years of Conservative Party continuity between 1951 and 1964 was amid a backdrop of significant wider social and political change. Notably, this was symbolized by Britain’s imperial retreat.<sup>32</sup> During this time, the party was characterized by the premierships of Winston Churchill, 1951–55; Anthony Eden, 1955–57; Harold Macmillan, 1957–63 and Alec Douglas-Home, 1963–64. The Tory leaders’ names are used to provide individual labels to what are treated as separate Conservative Party case studies. For the purpose of short hand, the Conservative Party under the post-war leadership of Winston Churchill is referred to as ‘Churchill’s Conservatives’. ‘Macmillan’s Conservatives’ refers to the Conservative Party under the leadership of Harold Macmillan, and so on. This is in keeping with the related analysis of ‘Cameron’s Conservatives and the Internet’.<sup>33</sup> The case studies on which this book is based are divided into the above periods with the exception of Macmillan’s premiership,

which forms two separate case-study chapters. These are outlined in the overview below.

## BOOK OVERVIEW

In exploring the role of television in the transformation of Conservative Party organization from Churchill to Douglas-Home, this book argues that the medium was one of a range of factors that acted to drive change in intraparty dynamics between Tory elites and the grassroots membership. Amid wider social and cultural changes, the advent of television is argued to have acted as a catalyst for change, the impact of which intensified as the omnipotence of the medium grew in political campaigning. Ultimately, it appears that 1951–64 was a period in which the party experienced a progressive tightening of party hierarchy, which was exhibited through both incremental and punctuated changes. It seems this was largely driven by significant external developments in wider culture and political television; and the choices made by elite decision makers in the party.

[Chapter 2](#) presents a range of histories and perspectives in media and politics. It argues that examining the impact of drivers of change in party organization, across a significant period of time, can help fill gaps in the historiography. [Chapter 3](#) examines the role of television in Churchill's Conservatives, 1951–64. It argues that television was a growing but minor factor in the party. [Chapter 4](#) explores the relationship between television and Eden's Conservatives, 1955–64. It suggests that, in contrast to Churchill's Conservatives, Eden's party engaged in centralizing initiatives, which tightened their control, particularly, of propaganda. [Chapter 5](#) is set in the context of television's dominance arriving at the door of the Conservative Party, while Macmillan was resident in Number 10. The chapter argues that rather than significant marked changes, characteristics established under Eden's premiership intensified.

[Chapter 6](#) focuses on analysing marked changes in Macmillan's Conservatives before and after the 1959 election. The chapter argues that Macmillan's Conservatives 1959–63 underwent rapid organizational changes resulting in a more professionalized and television centric party. [Chapter 7](#) explores the impact of transformation on the Conservative Party. It argues the party changed from being characterized by its mass party culture to a centralized structure in which an elite and professionalized party centre developed a television centric operation. Finally, [Chapter 8](#) offers a comparative history. It argues that developments in television

paved the way for a culture in which the active role of the grassroots membership became notably reduced and CCO priorities turned significantly towards broadcasting the party elite.

Seeing as very few aspects of life offer absolute certainty, this book is argued on the basis that it offers a perspective rooted in the author's own understanding of politics and media in the mid-twentieth century *vis-à-vis* contemporary times, ideas and theories, like those presented in the next chapter. Given that most CPA sources are largely associated with their strong associations with the Conservative Party, it seems plausible to suggest that this book offers somewhat of an insider perspective 1951–64, albeit analysed against more contemporary notions and contextual understandings.

## NOTES

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  22. See, for example, Bob Jessop, *Traditionalism, Conservatism and British Political Culture* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974) (Jessop 1974); and Dennis Kavanagh, ‘The Deferential English: A Comparative Critique’, in Richard Rose (ed.) *Studies in British Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1976), pp. 58–83 (Kavanagh 1976).
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  28. *Ibid.*, p. 1 (CPA *Guide to the Conservative Party Archive* 2009).
  29. See, the Bibliography for a list of CPA files used.
  30. Kristina Spohr Readman, ‘Memoranda’, in Miriam Dobson and Benjamin Ziemann (eds.) *Reading Primary Resources: The Interpretation of Texts from Nineteenth and Twentieth Century History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009), p.126 (Readman 2009).
  31. See, Negrine, *Television* (Negrine 1998), for British television primary sources, 1945–98.
  32. Stephen Brooke, ‘The Conservative Party, Immigration and National Identity, 1948–1968’, in Martin Francis and Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska

(eds.) *The Conservatives and British Society: 1880–1990* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996), pp. 147–70 (Brooke 1996).

33. Anthony Ridge-Newman, *Cameron's Conservatives and the Internet: Change, Culture and Cyber Toryism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) (Ridge-Newman 2014).

## Histories and Perspectives in Media and Politics

**Abstract** Chapter 2 outlines some of the relevant literatures and historiography associated with the study of politics and media. The chapter aims to present key theoretical and historical perspectives which can help further an understanding of the role of television, as a new medium, in the Conservative Party, during the period 1951–64. Key chapter themes include Britain’s changing social class, movements and structures, developments in democracy, enfranchisement, political parties and media, relationships between party leaders and new media throughout the ages, tensions between broadcasting regulation and freedom, micro and macro cultural contexts, drivers of party change, party models and party organization theories. The chapter concludes that examining the impact of technocultural drivers of change in political organization, across a significant period of time, can help join some of the dots in the historiography.

**Keywords** History · Media · Party organization · Political communication · Politics · Social change

Histories of the Conservative Party often provide valuable panoramic views of the most salient aspects in the political narrative.<sup>1</sup> However, they tend to focus on the upper echelons of party dynamics. Research in political science is often rooted in a more narrowcast approach that neglects much of the rich contextual fabric that is usually a characteristic

of the more historical studies. Political science is a multi-theoretical discipline that is divergent in the ways in which political parties are investigated. The two approaches of political communications and party organization are most commonly used to elucidate an understanding of how political parties behave. However, these strands of party analysis are assumed to be ‘in highly different contexts’.<sup>2</sup> The outcome of these sometimes divergent approaches to the study of the relationships between media and politics has meant that the historiography is fragmented in places. Consequently, some latent political phenomena can be neglected in the literature, which provides researchers with opportunities to contribute to filling some gaps in our knowledge and understanding. This book attempts to integrate perspectives and approaches in history and political science in order to take a more holistic cultural approach.<sup>3</sup> This chapter provides an introduction to some of the relevant literatures in the current historiography which influence and relate to this study of the Tories and television during 1951–64.

## POLITICAL COMMUNICATION HISTORIES

### *Transitions in Media, Democracy and Politics*

Jon Lawrence provides a valuable history of change in British political campaigning during the period 1758–2006.<sup>4</sup> He depicts the period in the run-up to 1900 as being symbolized by the use of the political ‘platform’ and the rise of the Labour movement. It was a time in which the indoor election meeting moved outside and the rise of the tabloid newspaper was in its infancy.<sup>5</sup> These were often attended by large, sometimes boisterous, crowds. At this time of transition towards the democratization of the mass population, it provided a platform for politicians to deliver their message. For some politicians, like Winston Churchill, this method was not favourable until outdoor speech became assisted by electronic amplification, around the mid-1920s.

Political leaflets were used significantly at the beginning of the twentieth century. However, there is some evidence to suggest that hearing a politician speak was thought to be a more persuasive method of winning over political audiences.<sup>6</sup> Ultimately, this was a precursor for political radio. But prior to radio becoming prominent, election posters had their day. By 1910, the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, and a wide range of pressure groups in loose association with them, began to distribute posters and

leaflets in millions, which required large numbers of political activists to coordinate en masse. Those posters thought to be most effective were often characterized by coarse populism, which signals to a crescendo in the propaganda wars between the parties.<sup>7</sup>

Women were yet to be granted the vote. However, their role in activism was growing. Furthermore, wives were thought to have some influence over their husbands. These factors meant that their engagement in political activities increased and they became new targets for political communicators. The increasing importance of women was accompanied by social change that led to the diversification of political candidature. Politics shifted from being the preserve of the rich to one more accessible to a less affluent class.<sup>8</sup> The interwar period saw two of the major increases in voting enfranchisement in 1918 and 1928. This was accompanied by the Labour Party gaining electoral momentum and developments in the use of cinema and radio in political communications.

### *Party Leaders and New Media*

Ultimately, new electioneering methods were used in order to reach out to a larger voting pool. A notable example of this is Stanley Baldwin, prime minister periodically between 1923 and 1937, who used film and radio to communicate the new Conservative ideas of the time.<sup>9</sup> Andrew Taylor suggests that the Tories benefitted because the expansion in voter franchise came at a time when new mass-media tools were available to politicians like Baldwin. Baldwin's Conservatives were based on more of an elite organizational structure. In contrast, the nature of Labour meant that it could have somewhat circumvented a reliance on mass media because of its large resource of active participants at the grassroots. In that sense, the Conservatives were at a comparable disadvantage without the advent of radio at that time. Moreover, Taylor makes the key point that Baldwin himself recognized the importance of mastering the medium and aimed to do so with commitment and enthusiasm.<sup>10</sup>

This is a somewhat recurrent theme in the Conservative Party, albeit at selective points and under specific leaders of the party. In the post-war years, the new method of political communication was television. The first election broadcasts were transmitted in 1951.<sup>11</sup> In 1953, an interview with Harold Macmillan was the first political broadcast outside of an election. Tim Bale suggests that Macmillan's appeal as prime minister was enhanced later by his 'increasingly confident use of television'.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Richard Cockett claims that Macmillan ‘was one of the first politicians to recognize the importance of mastering the art of television, and his polished performances helped him considerably in his career.’<sup>13</sup> By contrast, two less electorally successful political leaders, Hugh Gaitskell, Macmillan’s Labour rival, and Alec Douglas-Home, Macmillan’s heir to the Conservative throne, were generally considered by the public to be uninspiring television personalities. It was Harold Wilson, Labour prime minister (1964–70 and 1974–76), who continued the Macmillan approach to adapting to and mastering television.<sup>14</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure’s analysis of prime ministerial relationships with the media<sup>15</sup> argues that Eden, as Churchill’s successor, was the first prime minister to take initiative in the process of managing media relations, ‘because of his awareness for the potentials of television’.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, he suggests that Macmillan furthered this approach with the continuation of a ‘strategic review of broadcasting and politics’.<sup>17</sup> By the late 1950s, television was becoming increasingly important to politicians and perhaps owing to an increasing awareness that it could potentially strengthen or weaken a leader’s electoral chances.

This theme of party leaders attempting to master a new medium extends into more contemporary times. Following the e-campaign success of the US President, Barack Obama, in 2008, David Cameron, the current Conservative prime minister, used *WebCameron*, a Web 2.0 technology developed by the Conservatives for the 2010 General Election campaign, in an attempt to be the first British political leader to conquer the Internet for electoral gain.<sup>18</sup> In the academic context, scholars have tended to use these types of examples in order to analyse the party leader’s ability to adapt to the new medium. In contrast, this book focuses rather more on developing an understanding of how television impacted on the ways in which the party went about organizing itself. Party leaders are considered to be one of a number of important factors in the complex dynamics of the party’s relationship with new political media like television in the first half of the twentieth century.

### *Rise and Decline of New Media*

Political parties first began using propaganda films in the 1930s.<sup>19</sup> By then, the parties were starting to think more strategically about how they could reach out to the electorate through more nuanced communications. Martin Moore argues that it was after World War II, 1945–51

specifically, that the Labour Party, while in government, shifted from idealized propaganda towards pragmatic approaches that manipulated the message for electoral gain.<sup>20</sup> He describes how the Atlee government experimented with a more persuasive style of film that went beyond merely informing the voter.<sup>21</sup> That said, T. J. Hollins argues that film was used to educate already converted voters and that it had little impact on winning new votes when compared to the political media which came after it.<sup>22</sup> Moore's argument is rooted in a notion in which the political class transitioned 'from a vision of an informed electorate to a worldly acceptance of the manipulation of communications to engineer consent—what has now come to be known as modern spin.'<sup>23</sup>

Sir William Haley, the BBC's first post-war director general, believed 'the intimacy and immediacy' of television made it different to the cinema experience.<sup>24</sup> Examining the transition from film to television, Richard Cockett introduces some additional themes with a focus on how the transition impacted on the Conservative organization, including its broadcasting style, declining use of film and increasing use of television, electoral motivations and relationships between broadcasters and publicity professionals.<sup>25</sup> A number of other scholars have examined the Conservative Party's relationship with the new medium of film.<sup>26</sup> Michael Kandiah's paper about broadcasting and Conservative Central Office (CCO), during the period 1945–55,<sup>27</sup> is probably the closest link in the current historiography to the themes addressed in this book. In contrast to Cockett's case for the decline of film, the Kandiah study focuses on the decline of radio and rise of television. Kandiah argues that the BBC and Conservative Party formed a mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationship that impacted on CCO's 'broadcasting strategies'<sup>28</sup> and developments in the 'politicisation of television'.<sup>29</sup> This book attempts to build on these findings. To some extent, it presents further evidence to support both authors' arguments insofar that this book argues how both radio and film declined as political television rose to prominence. This research aims to widen the scope of the Cockett and Kandiah studies. In this sense, their insights have provided a valuable foundation on which this book can build, with the aim of providing a broader analysis of the role of political television in the Conservative Party during the period 1951–64.

Mark Jarvis's analysis of television and the Conservative Party during the period 1955–64,<sup>30</sup> addresses the impact of the advent of debates about commercial television. However, rather than significantly relating this to

party organization, Jarvis explores the wider symbolism of television in relation to the Conservative Party Government. He focuses on the case of the Pilkington Committee, which was assembled to address developments in British broadcasting; and what the outcomes of the Pilkington Report, which ultimately led to an increase in pirate radio, can tell us about morality in Britain's social history. Jarvis concludes that 'Television and radio were defining elements of the affluent society.'<sup>31</sup>

### *Classic Studies of British Broadcasting*

The scholarly literature representing British broadcasting history across the 1951–64 period is diverse. The classic works include Lord Asa Briggs' five volume tome on the 'History of British Broadcasting'<sup>32</sup> and Burton Paulu's comprehensive historical review of the development of British television from 1920–80.<sup>33</sup> Briggs, recently departed, was one of Britain's most notable media historians. His seminal works have influenced the contextual fabric of this book, and the work of many others. He maps twentieth-century mass media and its relationship with changes in culture, society and politics. 'Volume IV' offers a general elucidation of the relations between the broadcasters and political parties, during the period 1945–55, especially in terms of inter-party discussions on the development of political broadcasting. The fifth volume provides a chronology of events in British broadcasting, from 1955–74, and a detailed analysis of the relationships between politics, government and broadcasting. This is probably best exemplified in Briggs' account of the BBC's role in the Suez crisis. The case highlights tensions in the BBC's reporting of the crisis in a tug-of-war between regulations versus freedom.

Both Briggs and Paulu examine in detail some key themes from the period, including the BBC's broadcasting monopoly; the introduction of the ITA; and wider developments relating to political television, which provide the contextual backdrop for the subsequent chapters of this book. That said, their studies do not provide extensive analyses of television's impact on the organizational developments in British political parties, and certainly not to the extent that Cockett and Kandiah do in the Tory-specific context. This book aims to dig even deeper in that direction. Similar to Cockett and Kandiah, Paulu analyses the impact of television on film and radio, albeit in the much broader context. He also provides a useful account of developments in political broadcasting legislation, which, notably, impacted on both broadcasters and political parties in the early-to mid-twentieth century.

H. H. Wilson delivers an insightful early study<sup>34</sup> in which he argues that members of the Conservative parliamentary party and, to some extent, the party professionals at CCO acted like a ‘pressure group’ in an intraparty coalition. He claims the group was influential in challenging resistance at the top of the party for the introduction of the commercial television, which ultimately created the political passage for the Independent Television Act 1954. The author presents this as a significant and symbolic marker that highlights shifting power relations and attitudes within the party. Connecting it to wider changes in British society, he suggests that it represents a ‘decline of aristocratic values and the substitution of commercial standards.’<sup>35</sup>

UK business contributed to this change with an increasing demand for their adverts to be viewed by larger audiences. In turn, programming with mass appeal was thought to have eroded broadcasting quality, thus realizing the initial fear of commercial television’s early detractors.<sup>36</sup> This is perhaps best depicted in Bernard Sendall’s analysis of the 1960s critiques of commercial television, which were framed around notions ‘disquiet’ and ‘dissatisfaction’ in the 1962 report of the Pilkington Committee on Broadcasting.<sup>37</sup> Sendall’s four volume work is probably the most notable contribution to the historiography of British commercial television to date.

### *Media, Culture and Social Change*

Since the creation of the printing press in the fifteenth century there has been a chain of successive new media that have in their own ways revolutionized the manner in which British society has communicated with the masses. The development of mass communications has evolved in line with wider social and technology changes.<sup>38</sup> The BBC itself evolved as an organization over time. Paulu describes the genesis of the BBC, which started out as Britain’s sole broadcaster, as a collection of 1920s radio manufacturers.<sup>39</sup> As a public service broadcaster, it was, and still is, publically funded through the Licence Fee. On 1 January 1927, the BBC’s constitutional position was sealed under Royal Charter. It has been reviewed periodically ever since. This unique marriage between the BBC and the British state has meant it has held a distinct relationship with the UK Parliament, governments and politicians throughout its history. The BBC held a monopoly over Britain’s broadcasting until the first commercial broadcast, 22 September 1955.

Sound radio remained the dominant political medium and preferred method of the prominent political elites in the early post-war years.<sup>40</sup> From 1932, the BBC Empire Service transmitted British radio programming around the world and linked Britain audibly to its Empire. By 1945, British imperial interests had begun to recede; the Empire Service had been rebranded as the BBC Overseas Service; and the Labour movement and party had made significant progress in challenging Britain's predominant elite culture.<sup>41</sup> These international and domestic developments signal to a period of significant and substantive social change in Britain.

### *Institutionalization of British High Culture*

The British people, still recovering from war, remained largely deferential to the established constitutional institutions of monarchy, aristocracy, parliament, and other official bodies of state. This was also characteristic of the relationship between Conservative Party elite and its deferential membership.<sup>42</sup> A hegemonic political and social culture of 'high politics' pervaded, which remained heavily influenced by paternalistic and hierarchical democratic structures. And yet, as demonstrated by the rise of Labour and their political success in 1945, politicians had begun exploring new ways to communicate elite messages in new ways that connected with a mass electorate.<sup>43</sup>

The BBC itself had an institutional image centred on elite British constitutional figures like royalty, the Archbishop of Canterbury and those who were part of the BBC's institutional fabric, like journalist Richard Dimbleby.<sup>44</sup> The Corporation also has a preference for non-working class regional accents.<sup>45</sup> Commercial broadcasters were less comfortable with this sort of culture, which was evident in their programming.<sup>46</sup> Given the opposing economic models/ideals of the BBC and commercial television—and the Labour and Conservative parties respectively—one might expect traditional Labour audiences to favour the BBC and, likewise, the Conservatives commercial TV. However, perhaps counterintuitively, it was quite often the reverse, given the aforementioned historical quirks of the British institutionalized class being wrapped up rather more in the BBC's characteristics than that of commercial television.

Amid Britain's largely conventional culture of the 1950s, television was a symbol of prosperity, emancipation, modernity and the beginning of a new technological age in an era that had been recovering from the austerity of

war.<sup>47</sup> This is in contrast to the more naturalized place of television in contemporary Britain. Today, the domestic nature of the medium means it is a common feature of almost every British home.<sup>48</sup> The stark contrast between the two periods highlights how the same medium can represent different symbolic references at different points in history. Moreover, it provokes the question about what roles media have played over time.

### *Media History and Cultural Theory*

The main theory of British liberal media history states that developments in mass media, since the early 1900s, have helped strengthen democratic advances in Britain.<sup>49</sup> Historic advances in the right to vote from 1832 to 1928 were during periods of change in mass communications. For example, the arguable emancipation of the press in the 1800s and expansion of wireless sound and moving pictures in the 1900s. However, these developments occurred prior to Britain's universal suffrage in 1928. Therefore, because the advent of television occurred at a historic peak in enfranchisement, this book is based on the assumption that television acted as a driver of change that strengthened general democratic and political activity. Furthermore, since the medium's maturation in the late 1950s, television's omnipotence in democratic culture went largely unrivalled until the expansion of the Internet in the early twenty-first century.<sup>50</sup>

In recent times, the study of media seems to have become synonymous with cultural studies.<sup>51</sup> Historically, the term 'culture' has been applied to times of human tension in order to represent the clashing of two or more ideas or groups. One example is the 'struggle for culture' (kulturkampf) between church and state in Germany, during the 1870s, which later became known as the 'culture wars'.<sup>52</sup> In this sense, cultures become most salient when the status quo of one culture is challenged by some form of cultural change. The same principle can be applied to the political arena. Pierre Bourdieu, for example, described political parties as being agents that play the most significant part in a parliamentary democracy because they interact 'in a sublimated form of civil war'.<sup>53</sup> So, then, it seems plausible to posit that observable tensions can form in political parties when, firstly, competition between opponents develops; and secondly, external cultural pressures, which perform the role of an actor, drive the parties to change. This book views the advent of television as one such actor, or agent, which holds the potential to drive change in political parties, largely because of its wider cultural significance. In the Bourdian

sense, it is, therefore, a tool over which the parties compete during their engagement in political battles.

In an attempt to consolidate some of the main themes from the above sections, this book leans towards two further assumptions. Firstly, the manner in which change is manifested in each political party at the micro level, in other words, how its organizational culture responds to drivers of change, is likely to be an expression of change that is historically unique to that party.<sup>54</sup> This is insofar that it exhibits an imprint of the party's individual characteristics on the manner in which it practically manifests certain changes in its organization. However, secondly, at the macro level, in terms of party system change, political parties can indeed adapt in a manner in which similar characteristics can be mirrored across other parties and political systems.<sup>55</sup>

Therefore, this book develops and compares findings at both the micro and macro levels of Conservative Party history and aims to place them in the relevant micro and macro historical contexts. The milestones in broadcasting history provide the most salient markers of change in the dynamics between politics and media from the 1930s into the 1960s. While these markers are important to the macro context, this book is also interested in the Tory-specific micro context, which provides opportunities to unearth perhaps latent and hidden phenomena in the Conservative Party, which are yet to be documented elsewhere in the historiography.

## PERSPECTIVES IN PARTY POLITICS

### *Conservative Party Studies*

Until the 1970s, twentieth-century Conservative Party history had been neglected for many years and consisted mostly of political biographies.<sup>56</sup> The first substantial analysis of local and national Conservative Party organization was work by John Ramsden covering the period 1902–40,<sup>57</sup> which he developed from earlier doctoral research.<sup>58</sup> Following Ramsden, there have been a number of subsequent notable scholars who have made significant contributions to the academic tradition of studying British Conservatism and the Conservative Party. These historians and students of political parties include Stuart Ball,<sup>59</sup> Bale,<sup>60</sup> Andrew Gamble,<sup>61</sup> Timothy Heppell,<sup>62</sup> Philip Norton<sup>63</sup> and Anthony Seldon.<sup>64</sup>

There is a significant historiography that deals with Churchill's leadership,<sup>65</sup> especially his role as Prime Minister during the wartime coalition.

Many of these works depict the party's respective 'collapse' and 'revival' either side of Clement Atlee's premiership.<sup>66</sup> As Stuart Ball notes, much of the work on Churchill has addressed the war period in a 'pattern of neglect of the post-war decade which is apparent in many other works on Churchill'.<sup>67</sup> Biographical accounts of Anthony Eden have been largely focused on Britain's international relations and reveal little about his relationship with Conservative Party organization.<sup>68</sup> A similar approach has been taken to the prominent biographies on Harold Macmillan. D. R. Thorpe focuses his biography<sup>69</sup> on analysis of the major themes of Macmillan's premiership like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Profumo Affair. Alistair Horne takes a critical stance towards the premier, arguing that Macmillan's demise, as Tory leader, was because he became distracted by foreign matters and subsequently mishandled British affairs.<sup>70</sup>

While biographical approaches contribute significantly to Conservative Party historiography, their sharp focus on the narratives of individuals, especially party leaders, means that some of the more mundane aspects of changes to the day-to-day life of party-culture are overlooked. This book aims to narrow the gap in the knowledge of the Tory Party's everyday culture, during the period 1951–64. Elite themes are placed in the context of the party's mundane bureaucratic and grassroots activities and its inter-relationships between various actors at all levels of the party. The analysis of the role of television in Conservative Party change is set within this context.

### *Party Change*

Political parties are important actors in a democracy. Understanding how parties change overtime is integral to understanding the ways in which democracy is done. Furthermore, media play significant roles in both the democratic process and the relationships that parties and governments have with the public and voters. Over its long history, the Conservative Party has demonstrated a particular ability to develop its party's organization in order to maximize its electoral chances. John Ramsden's authoritative representation of the Conservatives during 1940–75<sup>71</sup> suggests that the party's organization as a 'social organism' that adapts and changes, or evolves, over time. Moreover, Cockett likens the party to a 'Darwinian organism' and suggests that the party's strongest asset is its 'ability to adapt and survive.'<sup>72</sup>

These characteristic strengths of the Conservative Party have led to it being one of the oldest and most successful extant parties in western democratic history. Evans and Taylor suggest that, throughout its history,

the Conservative Party has exhibited the recurring characteristics of both continuity and change.<sup>73</sup> Given the backdrop of the wider social, political and cultural changes it seems quite a feat for a single British party to hold claim to Downing Street for such a significant period. But, as this book will attempt to demonstrate, below the thin surface of Conservative continuity, between 1951 and 1964 it was a party undergoing constant and significant change in line with wider factors in its external environment.

Indeed, students of party change recognize that the complex interplay between wider dynamics, including the ‘environmental’ and ‘contextual’ and intraparty dynamics, for example, ‘leadership’ and ‘dominant factions’, hold the potential to drive changes in political parties.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, when analysing change, it is important to avoid a narrowcast approach. If this book were to study the role of television in isolation, it is likely its argument would sit uncomfortably out of context and provide skewed findings. Therefore, an attempt is made to minimize such limitations through taking a holistic approach that aims to provide a rich and contextual analysis of the narrative and themes. This mirrors the approach taken by Bale,<sup>75</sup> whose work draws attention to some key theoretical points that, like those identified in Ralph Negrine’s work in [Chapter 1](#), are useful for analysing party change.

Firstly, Bale recognizes that drivers of change, like leadership, for example, can drive change to varying degrees at different points in time. Therefore, the extent to which one variable might drive change is not necessarily consistent. The intensity of a driver to impact on change might vary significantly over time and in different contexts. Therefore, secondly, in the assessment of the extent to which a driver, like television, plays a role in changing the party, its analysis ought to be tempered by connecting the driver to its key contextual and historical factors. Thirdly, understanding the complex dynamics between variables is somewhat contingent on identifying the nature, or the unique characteristics, of the relationships between multiple variables. Therefore, this book aims to examine the impact of television in its context as a driver of wider environmental and cultural change, with a focus on what role the advent of this wider change played in the developments of the Conservative Party between 1951 and 1964.

### *Party Models*

Maurice Duverger argues that party centralization is an inevitable result of the institutionalization process. His hypothesis suggests that parties that develop outside parliament like Labour will more likely be centralized than

parties like the Tories, which naturally evolved within Parliament.<sup>76</sup> Samuel Huntington<sup>77</sup> considers ‘social forces’ as playing a significant role in the development of political parties. Although his work is theoretically similar to that of Duverger, Huntington’s model relates to multiple parties within political systems, which in turn provides a broader view of party development. However, both approaches are limited because they over simplify the complexity, uniqueness and specific nature of an individual political party’s existence. Therefore, it is important not homogenize political parties, but rather address the nature of each political party based on its individuality.

Mark Low claims that in order to regain its electability, the post-Major Conservative Party organization underwent a process of ‘evolution’ which resulted in a shift of power from the local associations to the party’s new managerial centre, but with ‘room for further development’.<sup>78</sup> Conservative adaptations have meant that the party has survived to be one of the oldest and most successful extant political parties in western democratic history. Some scholars suggest that the Conservative Party has exhibited throughout its history the recurring characteristics of both continuity and change.<sup>79</sup> This book understands observed changes in Conservative Party evolution as being both incremental changes over a longer period of time and rapid changes after periods of slight or no change; in other words, periods of continuity.

Other approaches to explaining party behaviour include the study of party development and models. Duverger first identified what he argued to be the structural differences of cadre and mass parties.<sup>80</sup> The ‘cadre’, or ‘caucus’, party is based on the assumption that elite political activists dominate the selection of favoured candidates on the party’s behalf. The emphasis is placed on the quality of the selector activists rather than their quantity.<sup>81</sup> The ‘mass’ party model unites a large membership of participants who are organized in regional branches and subscribe to one national party identity. The prominent British parties of the 1951–64 period could be argued to have exhibited some mass party characteristics.

Otto Kirchheimer’s ‘catch-all’ model<sup>82</sup> describes a system in which the party leadership is strengthened and party membership plays a more peripheral role. Angelo Panebianco’s ‘electoral professional’ model emphasizes the importance of party leadership being supported by a team of professionals rather than a mass of amateur volunteers.<sup>83</sup> Richard Katz and Peter Mair’s ‘cartel party’<sup>84</sup> is argued to be a model in which parties respond to the decline in political participation by colluding with rival parties for the

use of state funded electoral provisions. However, Mair states that, unlike what he claims to have observed elsewhere in Western Europe, Britain is the exception to the cartel party trend.<sup>85</sup>

Students of political parties hold a consensus that there has been a general decline in party membership since the 1960s.<sup>86</sup> Some believe that this has led to changes in the traditional mass-based party system in Britain.<sup>87</sup> Leon Epstein, who grounded his ideas in the ‘oligarchic’ party model,<sup>88</sup> claims that complex parties, like the Conservative Party, are controlled from the top and that ‘strong counter organizational tendencies represented by new campaign techniques involving mass media, professional skills and large financial contributions’ challenge the mass party mode of organization.

### *Party Organization and Hierarchy*

The traditional approach to twentieth-century Conservative Party organization has focused on the structure of the party. This has been represented significantly in the Conservative Party historiography.<sup>89</sup> According to A. Potter,<sup>90</sup> the Conservative Party in the run-up to the 1951 General Election was characterized by a nineteenth century tradition of party wide discipline that was maintained through the party’s deferential structure in which the party leader was respected as the authority figure. Robert McKenzie claimed that ‘it would be difficult to envisage a more tightknit system of oligarchic control of the affairs of a political party’.<sup>91</sup> These ideas influenced the traditional view of the party’s hierarchy as being ‘monarchical’ in which the party leader at the top held significant power over the lower levels of party organization. However, it should be noted that both McKenzie and Potter were reflecting on the party at a time of Conservative domination. Furthermore, the ‘oligarchic’ model<sup>92</sup> of directly interconnected groups within the party has been disputed in favour of the ‘baronial’ model, which describes a more fragmented organization and distribution of power among diverse levels and collectives.<sup>93</sup>

Taylor argues that, historically, the party leaders have held ‘the right to pronounce authoritatively what constitutes as Conservatism in any given period’.<sup>94</sup> This would suggest that the ideological leanings of specific leaders can influence the party’s culture at points in its history. Moreover, it would perhaps explain why the party’s ideology is thought to constitute a diverse broad church of ideas that have ‘long been a blend of paternalist and libertarian traditions’,<sup>95</sup> the emphasis of which has shifted throughout the course of its history. Some scholars believe that

the party holds the ability to put aside its ideological leanings in order to take a pragmatic approach to managing change with the aim of winning elections.<sup>96</sup> ‘Because of this, all Conservative leaders have faced charges of opportunism and betrayal; and historians generally judge them by their success in adapting to change.’<sup>97</sup> The source of the Conservative Party’s ability to adapt and change has been argued to be as a result of its so called pragmatic characteristics. For example, Norton and Aughey argue that the party ‘has its roots in a tradition of practice, a belief in the superiority of enlightened pragmatism which is taken to be the genius not only of Conservative but also of British political practice.’<sup>98</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Comparative culturalist approaches and interpretative historical traditions of mapping change have influenced this chapter. Drawing on these, this book aims to holistically analyse the nature of the Conservative Party’s response to developments in television and politics during 1951–64. Transitions in media, democracy and politics have been both subject to and, themselves, drivers of social change. As actors in society and culture, they forge sometimes strong and usually complex relationships with other actors, variables and phenomena. Making sense of these relationships sometimes requires research to go beyond fragmented and narrow views of the puzzle. Examining the impact of technocultural drivers of change in political organization, across a significant period of time, can help join some of the dots in the historiography. A highly contextual and historical study, as this one attempts to be, can help fill some of the gaps and develop richer understandings of the interrelational dynamics between new media, like television in the 1950s, and political parties, like the Conservative Party.

## NOTES

1. See, for example, Stuart Ball, *The Conservative Party since 1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998) (Ball 1998); Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon (eds.), *Recovering Power: The Conservatives in Opposition since 1867* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005) (Ball and Seldon 2005); and John Charmley, *A History of Conservative Politics since 1830* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) (Charmley 2008).

2. Chrysa Lamprinakou, 'The Party Evolution Model: An Integrated Approach to Party Organization and Political Communication', *Politics*, 28(2) (2008): 103–111, 103 (Lamprinakou 2008).
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## Churchill's Conservatives and Television 1951–55

**Abstract** Chapter 3 examines the impact of television in Churchill's Conservatives, 1951–55. It seeks to understand how Tory attitudes were changing towards the media; and what implications this had in driving change in party organization. The chapter explores the BBC's relationship with politicians and the public, at this time of elite dominance and high politics. The chapter outlines the historical context in the run-up to 1951 and beyond, placing television and its relationship with Churchill's Conservatives under the microscope. Television was a growing, but minor, factor in the party. Party organization was balanced between a strong Central Office and robust grassroots. Major themes include the Conservative's suspicion of BBC bias, approach to understanding television, education agenda, converging uses of film and television, membership drives and strengthening of mass party culture, amid flashes of centralization.

**Keywords** BBC · Churchill's Conservatives · Conservative Party · Mass party · Television · Winston Churchill

### INTRODUCTION

Between 1945 and 1955, Britain underwent a remarkable transformation. It shook-off post-war austerity, improved the economy and reached higher levels of employment. That said, rationing remained in place until 1954.

*The Glasgow Herald* wrote that people would rather have tobacco than greater investment in television.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, many Labour politicians saw television as a ‘luxury’ for the wealthy.<sup>2</sup> Amid this social and economic backdrop, there were significant developments in broadcasting. The Beveridge Report, an inquiry into the future of broadcasting, conducted during 1949–50 was released in January 1951. However, Asa Briggs deems the report’s impact on broadcasting to be insignificant compared with that of wider social changes.<sup>3</sup> The attitudes and circumstances relating to television at the beginning of the decade were in sharp contrast to those at its end. Briggs argues that the Conservatives’ win at General Election 1951 ‘completely changed the political context within which broadcasting policies were evolved’.<sup>4</sup> One of the major themes of the time was, as Briggs puts it, the end/breakup of the BBC’s monopoly on broadcasting.<sup>5</sup> The introduction of competition and commercial broadcasting had been discussed in 1922, but not again until 23 years later in 1945. If not for the interruption of World War II, the BBC’s monopoly may have been viably challenged sooner. That said, wartime technological innovations contributed to advances in broadcasting technology.<sup>6</sup> After 1945, the question of breaking the BBC’s monopoly grew increasingly persistent.<sup>7</sup>

The Corporation’s identity was rooted in three normative characteristics supported by a general consensus. It was thought that the BBC ought to be, firstly, ‘a public service’; secondly, subject to parliamentary supervision and thirdly, free from politicians interfering in the daily matters of its organization.<sup>8</sup> In February 1945, *The Times* reported there was public support for a BBC based on such a model.<sup>9</sup> In British broadcasting, the BBC was the status quo and changing it held significant resistance in elite political circles.<sup>10</sup> So, then, in terms of Tory attitudes towards television, what changed in the period 1951–55? What impact and implications, if any, did these have for driving change in Conservative Party organization? This chapter seeks to answer this with a focus on themes associated with the BBC’s relationship with politicians and the public. It begins with outlining the historical context in the run-up to 1951. A more focused analysis follows, which places television under the microscope in relation to its role in the Conservative Party during Churchill’s post-war premiership, 1951–55. In shorthand, the party during this period is referred to as ‘Churchill’s Conservatives’. The chapter places the party’s approach to television in the context of a broad mix of publicity and propaganda

techniques. It examines aspects of party organization in the early 1950s and provides a discussion of the party's attitude to the advent of political television.

### *The BBC's Post-War Renewal*

Clement Atlee's Labour Government intended to renew the BBC's charter in 1946 without general consultation. Atlee also hoped to keep 'the BBC free from commercial exploitation'.<sup>11</sup> However, in the run-up to the review, the public and political mood was changing. Winston Churchill, Conservative leader of the opposition, tabled a motion in the Commons, as did Lord Brabazon in the Lords, calling for research and discussion ahead of Charter renewal. Growing disquiet included an attack on the BBC's monopoly via a letter in *The Times* by Sir Frederick Ogilvie, BBC Director General, 1938-42.<sup>12</sup> In response, *The Manchester Guardian* (later *The Guardian*), published its stance in firm support of maintaining the BBC's monopoly.<sup>13</sup> That said, there were contrasting attitudes towards the future of the BBC on both sides of the political divide and in and the press not least in the Conservative Party.<sup>14</sup>

## THE RETURN OF CHURCHILL'S CONSERVATIVES

The post-war Conservative Party suffered electoral defeats in 1945 and 1950 to Labour's Clement Atlee. However, under Churchill, the Conservatives returned to power with a slim majority of 16 MPs<sup>15</sup> at the 1951 General Election, 25th October. Their success has been attributed to both a rethink of party policy and a restructure of the party's organization<sup>16</sup> under Lord Woolton, chairman of party organization, October 1946-July 1955,<sup>17</sup> and Stephen Piessene, general director, October 1945-August 1957.<sup>18</sup> Woolton was the man who insisted Conservatives use 'Socialist' to replace 'Labour' in Conservative vocabulary.<sup>19</sup> This tag remains extant today in the labels used in the party's canvass codes. Woolton, who has been described as the 'greatest of all Conservative Party managers',<sup>20</sup> was 'horrified at the apparent lack of system'<sup>21</sup> in the party's organization. However, rather than interfering with the day-to-day procedures of the party workers, he focused on developing the party's propaganda, funds and membership. One of his notable changes in party organization was to limit candidate donations to £25 per annum, thus

democratizing the candidate selection process and forcing the local associations to raise funds through their supporter base.<sup>22</sup>

These changes in the Conservative Party came about at a time when a culture of civic bureaucracy had begun proliferating in the form of committee meetings and increased regulation. For example, the post-war relaunch of television was subject to strict regulations that stemmed from the bureaucratic style of the Atlee government.<sup>23</sup> Early political television had been characterized by its formal and rehearsed appearance in which politicians read scripts to camera. In 1951, the Conservative Party was the first political party to deviate away from that approach in using the broadcaster Leslie Mitchell to perform a pre-rehearsed ‘question and answer’ format with future prime minister Anthony Eden.<sup>24</sup> It is useful to note that in the 1950s, the term ‘broadcaster’ was used in different contexts. In Mitchell’s case, the term refers to an individual who works in the broadcasting industry for a corporate broadcasting organization, like the BBC. However, the Conservative Party also used the term in reference to party representatives who were intended to broadcast on the party’s behalf.

### *Churchill’s Conservatives, Party Organization and Change*

By 1952, Churchill’s Conservatives, with the cooperation of 507 Conservative associations, raised their membership subscriptions by 351,708 in a ten week period to an approximate figure of 2.8 million, of which 124,000 were considered to be Young Conservatives (YCs).<sup>25</sup> This was the first recruitment campaign in four years, the last being when the party was in opposition. The campaign was used as a ‘platform’ for government ministers to influence public opinion,<sup>26</sup> and is a demonstration of the party using its mass-based culture to promote its propaganda agenda. The Conservative associations were notified of the recruitment campaign by a letter which included a plea for support from Churchill, Woolton and Eden.<sup>27</sup> This is an example of the resource intensive procedures that were used to communicate with the mass membership of a national party in the early part of the 1950s; and a time in which Conservative Party elites capitalized on their hierarchical status to engage their volunteers in greater face-to-face interactions with the masses at the grassroots.<sup>28</sup>

During Churchill’s premiership, the party held the collective memories of post-war electoral defeat and maintained a determination, reminiscent

of Churchill's spirit of wartime defiance, that there would be no return to such disappointing times. Churchill's Conservatives went to great lengths to ensure that the organization of the party was 'always up to date, and flexible to meet new needs as they' developed.<sup>29</sup> By 1954, internal party perception leaned towards the notion that its national and provincial organization had 'been flexible and adapted itself to change.'<sup>30</sup> Churchill's Conservatives felt that the National Union and CCO had evolved in line with the provincial and area organization.<sup>31</sup> In May 1886, a 'special conference' was convened to divide the party's provincial areas based on the traditional regional divisions in England & Wales. In the early 1950s, the party was of the view that its organization outside of CCO had developed organically in line with the growth of regional populations and party membership.<sup>32</sup> There was an intraparty awareness, especially at CCO, that the party's organization possessed the ability to adapt and change. Moreover, this was viewed as an organizational attribute and is in keeping with broad scholarly perspectives in Conservative Party studies.<sup>33</sup>

By 1952, the party had begun to explore the role of the area offices and their relationship with CCO departments and local associations.<sup>34</sup> A report claims that 'paperwork' and bureaucracy could be a hindrance to the efficiency of operations; and that the circulation of minutes 'had greatly extended since the war.'<sup>35</sup> It was felt that CCO agents ought be freed from paperwork, thus allowing them to focus on being contact points for MPs, candidates, agents and association chairmen. There was a preference for agents to act as intermediaries that facilitated CCO's agenda at the local level. This is perhaps evidence for early shoots of growth towards a more professionalized organization.<sup>36</sup> The party took an introspective and critical assessment of its own organization and actioned practical changes to its behaviour in order to improve its operations.<sup>37</sup>

This case is somewhat in contrast to the party's own view above that its organization responded organically. It is possible for parties to exhibit both characteristics at different points in its development. But this example demonstrates the party acting deliberately to steer its organization in a direction of its choosing. CCO's objective for taking responsibility of all circulated material provides further evidence of an early trend towards the centralization of specific aspects of the party's operations. Laura Beers identifies similar characteristics in the Labour party five years earlier.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps, driven, in part, by a response to Labour's earlier transformation,

the central party began to realize that in order for its organization to function in a modern context, the local associations had to surrender to CCO some aspects of their historic autonomy.<sup>39</sup>

### *Public and Introspective Interests*

In addition to intraparty discussions, the assessment of mass or ‘public’ opinion had become a growing interest for the central party.<sup>40</sup> Area publicity officers were tasked with gathering such information through a fortnightly survey at the association level.<sup>41</sup> The central party held the same interest in the views of the national Conservative Party membership. There was particular attention paid to comparing, by region, the general trends in the opinions of party members. The matters of concern for CCO included determining the state of party morale; understanding how party policy was resonating among its members; and establishing party opinions in relation to propaganda.<sup>42</sup>

This introspective evaluation suggests the party aimed to be more self-aware. Substantial central party resources were invested in ascertaining and understanding the mood of its members. Therefore, it further suggests that, although there were early signs of a trend towards centralization, the party remained committed to an organization rooted in the type of mass party characteristics outlined in [Chapter 2](#). Through understanding the views of their members, Churchill’s Conservatives aimed to keep its organization in a stasis appropriate for the time. After all, in this period before widespread television ownership and integration of TV and political cultures, in order to compete with Labour, it seems Churchill’s Conservatives had to strike a balance between a strong central operation, on the one hand, and a unified, willing and able body of mass volunteers, on the other.

### *Reaching a Mass Electorate*

In the early 1950s, it seems the Conservative Party sought votes from the mass electorate through an organization primarily based on utilizing its mass membership.<sup>43</sup> However, as outlined in [Chapters 1 and 2](#), accompanying universal suffrage, there were developments in mass communication technologies.<sup>44</sup> The party had been utilizing the media of the time, like film and radio, in order to reach new audiences.<sup>45</sup> Many in the party were proponents of providing the electorate with ‘political education’,<sup>46</sup> a trend that had developed during the interwar period.<sup>47</sup> World War II had led to an austere economy and concerns about national security, which directly

impacted on broadcasting. BBC television went into hibernation from 3 September 1939 to 7 June 1946.<sup>48</sup> Television's slow development from its primitive roots at the end of the 1920s meant that radio remained the primary broadcasting tool prior to 1955.<sup>49</sup> But, by November 1952, the potentials of political television were beginning to stir interests in Churchill's Conservatives shown by 'The Viewers View', a survey of public opinion conducted by the party.<sup>50</sup>

As television began an ascent to become a potential political tool in the minds of CCO officials, the role that film was playing at the association level was beginning to decline.<sup>51</sup>

There was general agreement, with the exception of the East Midlands area, that our film propaganda was not worth the money it must cost... steps should be taken to terminate at an early date our use of IPU's [indoor projector units] and the production of films.<sup>52</sup>

This suggests that an early awareness of changes in media trends was held within at least the professional cohorts of Churchill's Conservatives, and such knowledge impacted on the strategic allocation of resources and the ways in which the party organized its propaganda output. In keeping with the party's approach to its introspective assessment of itself, it seems the impact of external 'environmental' factors,<sup>53</sup> in this case technocultural trends, drove some change in its organization and led the party organization to begin reassessing its own uses of certain media.

### PROPAGANDA AND CHURCHILL'S CONSERVATIVES

CCO propaganda was a tactical extension of party strategy, and was only put into action after being approved by the party chairman.<sup>54</sup> It shows that, unlike some other aspects of the party organization, the party's publicity was already relatively centralized in the early 1950s. However, this did not mean that party propaganda escaped criticism from its members. The central party was quick to recognize that it had a problem when its supporters began questioning the quality of its output in comparison to that of the Labour Party.<sup>55</sup> After the initial euphoria of winning the 1951 General Election had subsided, it seems that the CCO and elite psyche was infiltrated by 'much concern' over the Government receiving 'adverse publicity'. The Conservative elite placed the blame for that on the mechanisms of 'Government propaganda and publicity since 1945', insofar that

it had been ‘set up under the socialists and therefore . . . not . . . entirely in line with Conservative thought and intentions.’<sup>56</sup>

### *Impact of National Advertising Campaign*

In the run-up to the 1951 General Election, Churchill’s Conservatives, on 20 August 1951, mounted a ‘national advertising campaign’.<sup>57</sup> It was led by Mark Chapman-Walker, director of publicity, and Colin Mann, chief publicity officer. It was customary to send a letter from the respective CCO official(s) to the desired party recipients in order to announce the launch of a centrally devised initiative. In the case of the national advertising campaign, a letter from the chief publicity officer went out to all constituency agents, CCO agents and area publicity officers. It was common for association chairmen and/or agents to respond discursively with praise and/or critique in relation to both internal and external Conservative Party matters.<sup>58</sup> This trend of interactivity at the grassroots continued and was even encouraged by the central party.

CCO provided the constituency associations with clear instructions on how to use propaganda in local publications and broadcasts, in order to encourage their participation locally in such media.<sup>59</sup> This included a list of their respective local newspapers<sup>60</sup> that had been deemed appropriate by CCO for participation in the campaign. Adverts were supplied free-of-charge by CCO to the Conservative associations for use in local newspapers. Yet again, an organizational dichotomy of freedom versus control was being exhibited by the central party. On the one hand, CCO encouraged the associations to engage with the media with a greater freedom of interactivity; but, on the other, it was enacting control over certain aspects of those interactions. The use of this type of manipulative tactic is further evidence towards a more centralized approach to party organization. Rather than a coercive dictatorial approach, it seems the *modus operandi* used by CCO was rooted in respectful manipulation. Stuart Ball suggests that CCO achieved control over constituency associations because of the party’s deferential temperament.<sup>61</sup>

### *Film, Television and Flashes of Convergence*

In terms of propaganda output, film was the medium that CCO had held the most control over since the early part of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, it was an already established medium for use in political

communication.<sup>62</sup> However, along the party's journey towards prominent use of television, there was a process of convergence in the uses of the two audiovisual media.<sup>63</sup> For example, political films that were aired on television were also shown at cinema evenings and other party social gatherings.<sup>64</sup> Maintaining these social traditions<sup>65</sup> suggests that Churchill's Conservatives were sceptical about the electoral efficacy television could provide. Moreover, it seems they were somewhat cautious about making sudden changes to its publicity practices and favoured instead the conventionally conservative approach to change. That said, scepticism and caution towards developments in television was, at times, exhibited by both political parties and indeed the BBC, albeit for different reasons.<sup>66</sup> The BBC was keen to ward-off competition from commercial television; and Labour believed they benefitted from maintaining the broadcasting status quo, more than the Conservatives.<sup>67</sup> It seems in this case, the Tories' central organization favoured slow evolutionary, in other words, incremental change. This supports the argument that the party organization underwent gradual evolutionary change that shadowed the steady trends in television at the time.<sup>68</sup>

### *'The Personal Touch': Gramophones and Film*

As a largely agrarian party, the use of 16mm film projectors, also known as the 'cinematograph', was widely used by Churchill's Conservatives in rural constituencies, thus taking conservatism to small villages in the form of cinema evenings.<sup>69</sup> The strategic aim of drawing an audience meant popular films were shown. However, these were prefaced with a political speech on film. Similar approaches were taken in attempts to galvanize party supporters. One film, called 'The Personal Touch', was used to educate campaigners on the best practice for canvassing. The party's use of film as a medium in that way was in keeping with its wider 1950s policy agenda aimed at encouraging a more educated British public.<sup>70</sup> In addition to film, the use of gramophone records was integrated into party events, which were considered to be 'quite attractive social evenings' for local Conservative Party supporters.<sup>71</sup> The in-house use of film and gramophone records at constituency-based political evenings gave Churchill's Conservatives relative freedom and control over the ways in which its message was administered—and how it went about attracting audiences. Comparatively, television at that point had limited audience potential and restrictive regulation, and was dependent significantly on cooperation with the BBC for any broadcast.<sup>72</sup>

The Conservative and Unionist Film Association, based at 70 St Stephen's House, Westminster, played a role in the party's propaganda output during the early 1950s. It communicated directly with Conservative associations in relation to 'advertising material' and produced booklets for the Sound and Film Library, which included both 16mm and 35mm films on topics ranging from political propaganda and history to general entertainment films.<sup>73</sup> 'The Vote', an educational film, is one example of many film lectures used by the party.<sup>74</sup> Before television had taken its place, film was considered to be 'invaluable' for political education. MPs used film to communicate with their constituents, but it was a costly medium at £25 per two and a half minute speech.<sup>75</sup> CCO regularly loaned IPUs to constituency associations for use free-of-charge,<sup>76</sup> but also provided them with advice on the most appropriate projectors for purchase.<sup>77</sup> It is evident that throughout the 1950s, the legacy of film, as a precursor to television, had an influence on the role of television in Conservative Party organization and the ways in which the party managed and processed television as a part of its propaganda output.

For the Conservative Party, the problem with recorded media, like film and gramophone records, was that they had a relatively short political shelf-life. The Speaker's Department at CCO considered that most gramophone records became outdated within three months, and some 'considerably sooner.'<sup>78</sup> It was this factor which determined the party's decision against the use of long-play records. The party used gramophone records in order to distribute snippets of Churchill's speeches.<sup>79</sup> However, the party became aware that there were limitations to the medium. For example, the listener had to turn over the disc after just four minutes, thus interrupting the speech. CCO believed that this was potentially the reason for a decline in the sales of Churchill's voice.<sup>80</sup> The newer medium and recording technology of tape had a greater capacity for lengthy recordings. However, in the early 1950s, the Radio and Recording section at CCO did not have the facilities to transfer recordings from gramophone to tape, nor did it have the budget to record all ministerial speeches to tape directly from radio broadcasts.<sup>81</sup> Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives at CCO were aware of the limiting factors inherent in specific media types. They made assessments in terms of the likely organizational impacts that would be had from the integration of any new medium in CCO operations. As a result, recorded technologies were deemed low priority. The party considered cost implications and organizational factors to be key concerns when proposing change

and investment in new publicity techniques. It invested resources in methods that its elite decision makers considered most effective.

### *1955 Propaganda Campaign and Organizational Transition*

Looking ahead to the 1955 General Election, in 1952 CCO outlined a three-stage tactical propaganda strategy.<sup>82</sup> The plan outlines the party's intentions to use all media in an 'intense' manner in the run-up to the election. It states intent to capitalize on party workers; newspapers briefings; constituency magazines, CCO publications, films, ministerial speeches, membership campaigns and press campaigns. However, the plan makes no mention whatsoever of television or broadcasting. It suggests that, in 1952, television was relatively low on the party's publicity agenda as a medium with any significance in terms of electoral impact. However, in 1954, with the development of the radio and television section, the party's attitude to television changed sharply. This rapid shift, preceded by a period of steady incremental change, fits the evolutionary theory of 'punctuated equilibrium'. Colin Hay defines this as 'a discontinuous conception of political time in which periods of comparatively modest institutional change are interrupted by more rapid and intense moments of transformation'.<sup>83</sup>

Although by 1954 film may have been considered to be a declining medium for political communication, which was, perhaps, partly driven by the anxiety of the looming general election, a flurry of activity occurred in the use of film strip projectors in lecture halls.<sup>84</sup> This coincided with an intraparty realization that, firstly, television could be used to the Conservatives' advantage; and, secondly, party supporters should be educated to use the medium for mutual benefit. Therefore, Churchill's Conservatives' use of propaganda tools in the run-up to 1955 could be characterized by themes of, firstly, convergence and education, in that both film and television were thought to be ideal media for political education; secondly, undulations in internal opinions about how and which media to commandeer; and, thirdly oscillations in its pragmatic responses to the second theme. Ultimately, this inconsistency and lack of clarity was probably rooted in the party's cautious approach to developments in television. Churchill's Conservatives did however consistently maintain opportunities to integrate the party's inherent social characteristic with its propaganda initiatives.

*‘TV Can Tell It’*

The 1954 CCO film production ‘TV Can Tell It’ was used in association and branch meetings. The film was tailored to its niche audience of Conservative Party supporters in order to instruct them in what they should be looking out for on television. In a letter from Chapman-Walker to all Conservative associations, members were asked to take photographic evidence of Government projects in their local areas which could be used for propaganda in television broadcasts.

In view of the growing importance of TV I am sure you will appreciate how necessary it is for the party as a whole to cooperate in, and contribute to, the production of television Party Political Broadcasts. In order to explain how this can be achieved we have made a 16mm 15 minute film . . . <sup>85</sup>

This awakening to political television was partly driven by the party’s observations of trends in the US. It was beginning to submit to the thought that American trends could be crossing the Atlantic to Britain<sup>86</sup> and is in keeping with wider public discourse: ‘Indeed, much of the productivity debate at that time can be characterized as being about how far British industry should be “Americanized”.’<sup>87</sup> Interestingly, the Americanization debate remains in public and scholarly discourse to this very today.

By 1954, it seems CCO came to a realization, driven by observations of wider trends in political communication, it ought to begin restructuring its central, regional and constituency organizations. In response, it appears CCO’s aim was to embed a culture of change across the party organization in which television might be used to the party’s political advantage. In the transition to organizational transformation, the party used the more familiar medium of film in order to help facilitate changes in attitudes and activities among its mass membership. It indicates that 1954 was a milestone. The encroaching spectre of political television partly drove an organizational response that helped modernize the party’s propaganda identity.

### BROADCASTING CHURCHILL’S CONSERVATIVES

Prior to the 1950 election, broadcasting was a contentious issue between the Conservative, Labour and Liberal parties, especially on the topic of the allocation of election broadcasts. A precedent was first set in 1939, when

the Conservatives and Labour were given five broadcasts each and the Liberals two. However, these numbers doubled during the 1945 election and led to subsequent ambiguity over allocations of election broadcasts.<sup>88</sup> Conservatives became concerned that their close political relationship with the National Liberals would lead to Labour insisting on National Liberals' broadcasts being deducted from overall Conservative allocations. Ambiguity, frequent interparty meetings, and the parties' cautious approaches to the topic of television, were characteristic of the period. In turn, there was some impact on the ways in which Churchill's Conservatives interacted internally. It seems this manifested itself in timid and contemplative approaches to the use of television. However, the extent to which these factors impacted on the party's dynamics was tempered by the status of radio being the dominant incumbent broadcasting medium.<sup>89</sup>

Some in the Conservative elite at CCO believed that radio was 'a greater vote winner than all other media of propaganda combined.'<sup>90</sup> Frequently, although not always, in organizational and semantic terms, there was little distinction made between the medium of radio and television in CCO organization and discourse. In terms of the organization of party publicity, documentation on both radio and television were often filed together to under the label of 'Propaganda—Broadcasting'.<sup>91</sup> It indicates that, in the early 1950s, Churchill's Conservatives viewed television as a subsidiary of its parent broadcasting medium of radio. Quite often, the two broadcasting media were addressed as being synonymous. Instead of using intraparty processes to differentiate between the two broadcasting media, the party largely focused its thoughts and attentions on the ratio of broadcasts allowed for each party; the broadcast content; the quality of broadcaster performance technique; and which Conservative broadcasters to use.

In the run-up to the 1951 General Election, a meeting held at the Home Office,<sup>92</sup> agreed that the allocation of radio broadcasts would be repeated based on the allocation of the 1950 General Election, giving the Conservatives and Labour five broadcasts each and the Liberals three. The radio broadcasts were ordered on a set calendar of dates with time slots of either 6.15pm or 9.15pm and were national broadcasts, with no options given for regional broadcasts. As for television:

The BBC were anxious that [the] medium should be used; the Labour Party were not in favour of using it... and the Conservative Party wanted to go

into the matter further and be free to reopen if necessary. Later it was agreed that the Labour, Conservative and Liberal parties should each have a TV broadcast of 15 minutes (8–8.15pm).<sup>93</sup>

Therefore, in the run-up to 1951, TV was largely viewed with some suspicion by all the main political parties. Its political development was tentative as a consequence. Interestingly, Churchill's Conservatives, while in opposition, were more open to the potential uses of television for political gain than Atlee's governing Labour Party. Whether innovation in new media is a strategy better suited to opposition parties is also a question for students of new media in contemporary politics.

### *Realizing the Importance of Television*

In April 1951, Churchill's private secretary sent a note of thanks<sup>94</sup> to Pierssene for the memorandum on 'Political Broadcasting'.<sup>95</sup> The note mentions that Churchill said he would keep the memorandum nearby. The memorandum addressed the ratio of party political broadcasts between the Conservatives, 'Socialists' and Liberals. At the time, the ratio was 6:5:1. The governing party was entitled to the most. The paper argued that the ratio should be altered in line with changes in the numbers of votes cast between the 1945 and 1950 elections. The document also notes that the BBC ought to provide party leaders with scripts of broadcasts. However, CCO had not received any. Pierssene was aware that, by the end of 1952, Britain's television coverage was projected to reach 78 per cent of the population. Importantly, progress on transmitters meant that a number of key marginal seats would be brought into the coverage area. Therefore, it became obvious that the party who mastered the political broadcast could make significant electoral gains in some key constituencies.

Churchill's Conservatives were asking themselves a crucial question: would the introduction of televised party political broadcasts strengthen or undermine their electoral aims? Pierssene and his colleagues believed that viewers would become irritated if evening political broadcasts on TV became too frequent. Therefore, CCO was reluctant to take the lead. Even if the party had a slight advantage, it recognized there would be a significant additional workload for its staff. The party was also aware that it would have to invest in, to a greater extent, preparing and rehearsing speakers for broadcasts. The party perceived its own performance in

broadcasts as poor. Confidences had been knocked. Consequently, it seems enthusiasm towards mastering the medium was somewhat tempered.

### *'Taking on Television'*

However, on winning the 1951 election, in terms of television's role in politics, Churchill's Conservatives began to seriously prepare for any eventuality. The party was indeed cautious, but realized all levels of the party organization would benefit from a richer understanding of the medium. The Tories produced the pamphlet, 'Taking on Television'.<sup>96</sup> It was written to give a comprehensive introduction to the world of television and included details of the location of the two British television studios, one at Alexandra Palace, North London, and the other at Lime Grove, West London. The publication detailed TV production considerations like dress, make-up, microphones, cameras, gesture, movement, focus, lighting, programming, scripts and rehearsals. This further supports the argument that the Conservatives' early approach to television fitted their wider policy of educating the population. It also illustrates the party's commitment to understanding, what was considered to be, a relatively unknown and mysterious medium. Like the political world, TV had its own distinct working practices and culture. It would appear that, by that point, the two cultures were beginning to merge. More specifically, it is an example of the Conservatives' first steps towards integrating television culture with its own organization and collective psyche. Furthermore, through the dissemination of this type of literature, the central party was taking active steps to exert its influence throughout the party, thus signalling that its organizational and political culture was expected to adapt in line with political inevitabilities associated with evolutions in broadcasting technology.

In the process of adaptation, the training and rehearsing of party broadcasters became a priority. The facilities at CCO included recording equipment and coaching from the research and publicity departments. The party was intent on widening the pool of what was considered to be 'a small variety'<sup>97</sup> of talented Conservative broadcasters who were being used by the BBC. There was considerable discourse between the various levels of the party hierarchy with discussion and criticism of Conservative broadcasters.<sup>98</sup> The party was acutely aware that its broadcasting communications were lagging and needed to change. Using watching panels, the

party began monitoring broadcasts. They assessed the performance of its speakers and the impact of the BBC's monopoly.<sup>99</sup> The process of self-monitoring and assessing speaker quality is a key example of how the party adapted in order to begin mastering television. The party was sensitive to how its collective voice sounded, appeared and was perceived. It suggests that broadcasting media impacted directly on party organization and its awareness of self-image.

By 1952, TV Licences had reached 1.5 million.<sup>100</sup> The party was investing more extensively in developing its broadcasting talent. Although television was yet to surpass radio in the views of the CCO elite, it was being placed on a more equal footing. In January, Woolton wrote to all Conservative and Liberal Unionist MPs to advertise its broadcasting facilities at CCO.

I want you to know about the facilities which the Central Office has to offer in the tuition and practice of sound and television broadcasting . . . The BBC hold very firmly to their right to choose the speakers for their programmes and the Central Office is rarely even consulted. The BBC are, however, influenced very considerably by broadcasting ability, and in their capacity of purveying entertainment they tend to repeat successes. It is therefore desirable for us to excel in broadcasting technique . . . We have recently set up a television studio equipped with a television set, mock camera, lights, etc. Mr Wyndham Goldie, who has considerable knowledge both as an actor and producer, will be available at this studio for advice on television technique and production.<sup>101</sup>

CCO began receiving significant amounts of correspondence from Conservative agents and supporters with concern for the poor quality of Conservative speakers on radio and television.<sup>102</sup> They noted that Conservative speakers were receiving criticism in the press for their lack of broadcasting talent. The CCO elite were concerned about the widely held belief among the Conservative agents and supporters that CCO and the Parliamentary Party had some influence in the speakers who were put forward to the BBC. A communication was ordered to go out to the constituency associations in order to explain that that was not the case. The complexities of early television, for example, its relative newness, legislation and the monopoly of the BBC, meant there was confusion about the roles of and relationships between the BBC, CCO and Parliamentary Party in the production of political television.

### *BBC Bias and Suspicion*

The BBC's choices in Conservative speakers fuelled suspicions within the party that the broadcaster favoured Labour.<sup>103</sup> Such suspicions had been raised for a number of years due to incidents like discrepancies over the allocation of audience tickets for political programmes. One occasion resulted in 250 tickets for a political programme being sent to both the headquarters of the Labour and Liberal parties, but a much reduced number allocated to Conservative supporters. Furthermore, unlike the other parties, the Conservatives were not given the opportunity to centrally distribute their tickets, which had to be collected from Southampton Borough Council.<sup>104</sup> Later, CCO 'made very strong protests to the BBC about the unfairness of the party balance in the feature "In the News"'.<sup>105</sup> It was incidents like these that placed strains on Tory relationships with the BBC, at all levels of the party hierarchy.

### *Experimentation and Political Broadcasts*

The BBC was keen to expand its coverage of politics to include the 'Ministerial Broadcast' on television, which was already a feature of their radio programming. It 'thought that at some stage ministers would find it necessary to use television to make their broadcasts fully effective, and wondered if the time had now come for an experiment to be made in this field.'<sup>106</sup> Both the Conservatives and Labour felt that it was not time for ministerial broadcasts to be televised. However, within months of that consensus, the Conservatives changed their mind and decided to take the lead on ministerial broadcasts. At a CCO meeting with the general director and the officers of the publicity department, an action plan was put into effect to encourage ministers to participate in broadcasts and to adopt a style and technique suited to television.<sup>107</sup>

Attention had been given to the trends in broadcasting techniques used in the American presidential elections and CCO was keen to source copies of the scripts in order to learn from them. John Hare MP was tasked with addressing the matter of ministerial broadcasts with the Conservative chief whip in Parliament and to discuss who would be the best initial ministers to use in, what were considered to be, experimental television broadcasts. CCO arranged for television technique demonstrations to be conducted with ministers at the Scarborough conference. Mrs Crum-Ewing was tasked with providing the General Director with a costing for an instruction film on political broadcasting.

By this point, the advent of television had begun to have a significant impact in the culture of the party elite. The leaders of the party engaged in regular communication exchanges in order to debate the matters related to television. The new medium had also created a sense of trepidation, even though there was a clear awareness that the trends the party was witnessing in American politics were inevitably coming to Britain. Television was not a passive medium for those involved in the making of the broadcast. It required action and significant resources by both the organization and the individual. Therefore, the party elite were required to work together in ways in which they were less accustomed. The party engaged in greater interplay between the various CCO departments, Downing Street and the parliamentary party in order to develop a culture in which the party would be fit to lead in televised political broadcasting. Increased exchanges of letters and internal memoranda on the subject of political television further intensified the bureaucratic culture of the party in the early 1950s. It appears that the advent of political television roused and stimulated a broad interaction from individuals, represented by all hierarchical levels of the party.

### *Developing a Taste for TV*

1953 was the year of the first televised Royal Coronation. By that time TV licences had reached in excess of 3 million.<sup>108</sup> It was also a significant year in the Conservative Party's relationship with television. Harold Macmillan appeared in the first televised broadcast outside of an election period. Subsequently, other Conservative MPs were developing an appetite for appearing on the medium.<sup>109</sup> However, the confusion among MPs over the selection process for BBC broadcasts continued, which suggests that, for all of the resources and bureaucratic procedures CCO was using to communicate with MPs on the complex matters of political television, the party was unable to effectively establish a cohesive understanding on the main aspect of the new medium that involved its political colleagues.

A comparative audit of the appearance of MPs showed that 84 Conservatives versus 91 'Socialists' were featured on BBC television in 1952.<sup>110</sup> CCO and Churchill's Conservatives believed that Labour benefitted from the BBC's television monopoly. Subsequently, CCO felt that 'commercial television... [would] give a "platform" to free enterprise, capital and management' and that it was 'highly desirable... from the

point of view of the party organization' for commercial television to come into effect at least one year before the 1955 General Election.<sup>111</sup> The Tories understood that the legislation and capital of commercial television would be outside the remit of CCO. However, with an emphasis on propaganda, Churchill's Conservatives saw an opportunity to use the advancement of television for the enhancement of their electoral strategy. CCO elites now believed 'that commercial television would be advantageous to the Conservative Party.'<sup>112</sup> Primarily because of the potential impact on CCO's workload, there had been some reservation in respect to the development of political television. In this instance, CCO demonstrates that it was indeed prepared to adapt its organization to catch up with developments in television. However, it was the lure of gaining an electoral advantage over its main opponent which offered the incentive for change.

Churchill's Government took its time to deliberate and announce its stance on commercial television. Meanwhile, the Parliamentary Committee on Sponsored Television, chaired by Sir Robert Grimston, with the support of the 1922 Committee, asked CCO to publish and distribute to the wider Conservative Party their pamphlet in support of 'sponsored' (commercial) television.<sup>113</sup> However, this placed CCO in a challenging position. Although the CCO elite were in support of Grimston's proposal, it believed itself to be constitutionally bound to 'propagate' only Conservative government policy. However, the chief publicity officer did not want CCO to appear that it was not in support also of the parliamentary party.

CCO was under pressure from the parliamentary party to combat the Labour Party's 'monopolist' propaganda. H. H. Wilson's book on this matter argues the Conservative parliamentary party acted as a pressure group and depicts CCO's precarious positioning between the government and parliamentary party.<sup>114</sup> CCO printed an amended pamphlet, which Woolton believed did not commit Churchill's Government to supporting commercial television. 27,000 of these were distributed to associations.<sup>115</sup> However, this was to the disappointment of Churchill who wrote to Woolton asking for the pamphlets to be recalled.<sup>116</sup> It seems the party was in a state of flux over the developments in television. The major arms of power within the party came into conflict. The CCO's squeezed position placed it in a dilemma. Debates about television created tension in the party's organization. It displayed that sometimes their agendas could be out of sync.<sup>117</sup> Ultimately, consensus was reached and the Television Act

1954 paved the way for the creation of commercial TV. Briggs argues the BBC monopoly was broken in 1954 because elites decided that television was the medium of the future.<sup>118</sup> It seems some Conservative elites had a prod from within, which helped them to find their way.

### *New Possibilities, TV Meetings and the Grassroots*

Debating the role of television was not only to preserve the party elites. The possible uses of television for political gain also occupied the minds of the constituency agents. At a meeting of the National Society of Conservative and Unionist Agents in 1953, television was discussed with extreme interest. Subsequently, the *Conservative Agent's Journal* published a section on the 'possibilities of TV', which described television as a powerful medium for propaganda.<sup>119</sup> The party believed that a higher density of the population had access to television in traditional 'Socialist' areas, with an estimate of two 'Socialists' to one 'Conservative'.<sup>120</sup> The Tories considered this to be to their advantage, figuring that it gave them a greater audience than Labour for the conversion of voters. Subsequently, in the mid-1950s, CCO encouraged an interactive television culture, especially among the party membership in domestic settings.<sup>121</sup> In addition to the film 'TV Can Tell It', which aimed to educate party supporters in the ways of television, Churchill's Conservatives planned an interactive scheme, in order to engage the national party, called 'Television Meetings'.<sup>122</sup>

The purpose of the meetings was for Conservative supporters to show Conservative propaganda and programming on television, between general election periods, to those in their communities who did not own a TV set. Participants for the scheme were targeted using lists compiled by party activists in the constituencies. Television owning Conservatives were identified by local party activists, who went out into the constituency in order to note which Conservative households appeared to have external television aerials. The process was similar to the notation used in canvassing, except the letters 'TV' were used instead of an initial to denote voting preference. Conservative supporters were sent a letter seeking their participation. They were asked to invite 'a few electors' into their homes.<sup>123</sup> Participants joined the scheme by sending a reply slip to their respective Conservative association. They were subsequently contacted with dates and times of Conservative broadcasts and encouraged to invite 'a number of those who normally take little interest in politics or who while not being

supporters are not convinced opponents.'<sup>124</sup> According to Milly Buonanno, there was a wider cultural trend in 1950s Britain in which people who owned television sets opened their homes to those families and individuals without.<sup>125</sup> Therefore, the Conservatives were responding to this wider trend and used it to their advantage.

The Tories hoped to use the TV meeting scheme to gain some electoral advantage over Labour. However, their plans were confronted with a number of setbacks. The scheme was leaked to the press,<sup>126</sup> who were speculating that television had 'killed the public meeting' and encouraged a culture of 'Fireside Politics'.<sup>127</sup> The following day, the Labour Party announced in the press its 'open house plan'.<sup>128</sup> It encouraged owners of TV sets to invite their neighbours into their homes to watch a Labour Party broadcast. The format of the production was in an innovative film style that was in contrast to traditional broadcasts that usually centred on a specific political speaker. The leaked information and subsequent press attention created a flurry of activity. Correspondence was exchanged throughout the Tory organization from the grassroots upward. An official at CCO found '... the original leakage of the confidential matter' of the TV meetings to be 'disturbing'.<sup>129</sup> However, the agent of the Blackpool association was 'not too surprised at this leakage',<sup>130</sup> and had believed it impossible to keep a scheme of that nature secret. Another setback to the scheme included limited television transmission to some parts of the country. Consequently, not all associations were able to engage in the TV meetings scheme.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, the scheme went ahead as planned.

It is clear that television was beginning to rouse interests and excitement across the party's organization. Furthermore, the medium was playing a role in changing the activities of both individuals and groups within the party from the grassroots to the highest levels of the Conservative hierarchy. CCO demonstrated the all-encompassing cultural shift towards television by involving its general administrative staff in rehearsals for a television broadcast, to which they were invited to participate as a mock audience.<sup>132</sup> Labour had raised the bar with their innovative film-style political broadcast and, subsequently, the Conservatives soon began experimenting in similar ways. Lindsay and Harrington suggest that Labour's television broadcasts were largely superior to those of the Conservatives until the late 1950s.<sup>133</sup> However, as early as 1954 the Conservatives were investing significant resources in the attempt to out-perform Labour. The production of 'telefilms' for broadcast were particularly resource intensive. 'Almost the whole office staff' were required to

contribute to the production of a ‘political telecast’.<sup>134</sup> Therefore, by 1954, political television had become a serious competitive consideration for political parties in Britain. Moreover, driven by wider advances in television, Tory transitions towards a transformation of party organization had begun.

## CONCLUSIONS

1951–55 was a time characterized by civic bureaucracy and a wide mix of propaganda techniques in which radio was the dominant political broadcast medium; film was declining, and the BBC’s monopoly was threatened and broken. The proximity to impacts from World War II and the elite culture of high politics, largely in favour of maintaining the broadcasting status quo, meant that political television experienced significant inertia when compared to the US. That said, external factors, like observations of trends in the US, and internal factors, like intraparty factions in favour of commercial television, helped drive changes in Conservative attitudes towards broadcasting. Moreover, the party’s response in the form of significant investment in a radio and television section, before the 1955 election, demonstrates a marked and punctuated adaptation of Conservative organization.

Television was a growing but minor factor in the party. Party organization was balanced between a strong CCO and robust grassroots. Main thematic characteristics of Churchill’s Conservatives include suspicion of BBC bias: unclear, undefined and undulating approaches to understanding television, converging uses of film and television for public education, membership drives notably attracting younger people to the party, a commitment to a mass party culture integrated with new TV-based activities and flashes of centralization.

## NOTES

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## Eden's Conservatives and Television 1955–57

**Abstract** Chapter 4 is characterized by the events involving Eden's Conservatives, Labour and the BBC before and after the Suez crisis, a major international conflict in 1956. The chapter explores the role of television in the context of other media harnessed by the Conservatives at the time. Attention is given to the party's understanding of, and awakening to, the advent of political television, with analysis of its impact on the party's traditional hierarchy and culture—a mass-based party in transition. Eden's, like Churchill's, Conservatives made efforts to maintain a strong mass party culture through substantial two-way interaction with members. However, in contrast to Churchill's Conservatives, Eden's party engaged in centralizing initiatives, which tightened their control, particularly, of propaganda, and it began filtering down to the grassroots level.

**Keywords** Anthony Eden · BBC · Conservative Party · Eden's Conservatives · ITV · Suez crisis

### INTRODUCTION

Following Churchill's retirement, General Election 1955 elected Anthony Eden as successor on 26 May 1955. As prime minister, Eden benefitted from a Conservative increase in the House of Commons. Churchill's 16-seat

majority rose to 59 seats under Eden's Conservatives.<sup>1</sup> In the early to mid-1950s, elites at the BBC were beginning to argue that television could do more than sound. That said, although the BBC's TV expenditure between 1948 and 1955 increased significantly over the period, it was only half that spent on sound in 1955.<sup>2</sup> That year, radio was so prominent that it preceded the television listings in the *Radio Times*.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, listening figures at the time were greater than those 370,000 viewers who watched the launch of ITV, 22 September 1955.<sup>4</sup> In 1952, Sir Ian Jacob succeeded Sir William Haley as the BBC's director general. Until 1959, Jacob oversaw the BBC's transition from a Corporation focused on sound to one characterized by television.<sup>5</sup>

Asa Briggs depicts what he describes as significant 'anxieties' associated with developments in television in the 1950s.<sup>6</sup> This chapter offers further evidence of such anxieties within Eden's Conservatives, which are particularly evident at the very top of the party. Moreover, the chapter presents an analysis of the changing nature of Conservative organization at the time of Eden's premiership. Like the previous chapter, the role of television is placed in the context of other media harnessed by the party. Greater attention is given to the party's understanding of, and awakening to, the advent of political television, with a deeper analysis of its impact on the party's traditional hierarchy and culture as a mass-based party in transition.

### GETTING TO GRIPS WITH TELEVISION

The 1950s were often characterized by the remnants of wartime rigour, which impacted also on political television. The development of the 14 Day Rule in 1944, which restricted the broadcasting of any matter debated in Parliament in the previous fortnight,<sup>7</sup> meant that political broadcasting, in particular political television, was governed by significant rules, regulations and acts of Parliament. In this manner, the advent of television was having an impact on the affairs of state, Parliament and broadcasters. But the process of regulating television, and its role in the political arena, was also playing an increasing day-to-day role in the organizational culture of political parties. This was especially the case for the governing party in the 1950s. As Labour before it in the late 1940s, the Conservatives Party of the 1950s held the mandate to steer the development of television broadcasting and, subsequently, its role in British politics and wider society. The subject of television brought together the organizational and political elites of the three main parties

with their equivalents from the broadcasting institutions. Meetings were often held at Parliament in the form of interparty committees.<sup>8</sup> Letters, memos and discussions were exchanged between the Conservative Central Office (CCO) and Postmaster General outside of the interparty meetings.<sup>9</sup> The Parliamentary Committee on Broadcasting played a role, as did the occasional backbench MP and broadcaster.<sup>10</sup>

*Television and Unity: Deliberation, Suspicion  
and Anxiety*

Eden's Conservatives held regular internal discussions through memos and meetings in order to prepare for the external meetings on broadcasting. The topics concerning Conservative interests on broadcasting matters included: the training of party workers to monitor broadcasts, appreciation indices relating to Conservative political broadcasts, regional political broadcasting considerations, the televising of Conservative Party conferences, the use of BBC and Independent Television Authority (ITA) facilities for making political broadcasts, the use of Ministerial Broadcasts and the annual quotas for party election broadcasts and party political broadcasts, how best to use political broadcasts to the party's advantage, and the training of Conservative broadcasting talent.<sup>11</sup> Like other pertinent matters of the time, the debates, discussions and actions in relation to television were detailed in typed minutes. The party used and integrated its resources at the chief whip's office, under Edward Heath MP at 12 Downing Street, Conservative Research Department (CRD) and CCO. Intercommunications between these groups were managed with deliberate care in order to assess matters relating to the role of television in the party's operations. Lengthy deliberations were used to facilitate agreement between the three groups of the Conservative sophisticate. Generating a collective argument or policy helped ensure that there was unity within the more elite ranks and it strengthened the efficacy of their objectives. Unlike examples in Churchill's Conservatives, these groups generally worked together, in terms of attitudes towards television, in order to assist outcomes favourable to the interests of the Conservative Party and its senior administration. Comparably, this gives a sense of a more corporate, centralized and professionalized approach taken by Eden's Conservatives.

The resource and time intensive culture of bureaucratic deliberation, which was sometimes considered to be a cumbersome and an inefficient

process for those dealing with the party machine,<sup>12</sup> was not exclusive to the issue of television. However, the party's investment in these matters reveals that Eden's Conservatives took a keen, but cautious, approach to the new medium, which in turn had an impact on the inner workings of the party. The suspicious nature of Eden's Conservatives towards the use of broadcasting as a political tool can be demonstrated by the words of Selwyn Lloyd, MP, who on a BBC Home Service radio election broadcast said that it was 'a risky occupation these days for politicians to broadcast'.<sup>13</sup> Lloyd's statement reveals that there were individuals in the party, in addition to Eden, who believed that there were risks for politicians to engage in the art of broadcasting. It was also a symbolic admission of the party's anxiety towards changes in new media trends.

### *Egos and Unity: Controlling Political Broadcasts*

The developing nature of political television was playing a role in catalysing a debate within the party on regulatory matters. Externally, the government opposed Labour's argument against relaxing the rules on televised ministerial broadcasts,<sup>14</sup> which would have allowed junior ministers to broadcast on television programmes on an ad hoc basis—in line with the allowance for such broadcasts on radio. However, there was a growing discourse on the matter between party elites at CCO.<sup>15</sup> By keeping to a minimum the television appearances of up-and-coming Conservative ministerial talent, Eden's Cabinet ministers would receive maximum airtime and publicity, albeit shared with backbenchers. The party leadership, and CCO, had less control over the television appearances of backbenchers. The broadcasters held the right to choose which parliamentarians or party representatives were featured in their programmes.<sup>16</sup>

Eden's elites' argument for maintaining their rigid attitudes towards the television appearances of junior ministers grew out of the concern that good backbench television performers might have begun to dominate political programming, and thus develop uncontrollable 'egos' that would have had the potential to work against party unity.<sup>17</sup> However, this is an argument that can be easily flipped. It is indeed plausible to argue that the egos and anxieties of Eden's elites were the actual motivations behind their domineering stance towards controlling ministerial broadcast. The party elite were reluctant to submit to the view that there could be benefits to junior ministers using television.

This Conservative-versus-Conservative internal debate reveals a narrowcast and Conservative centric approach to discussions about ministerial broadcasts. The party elites' motives in relation to television in the mid-1950s seem, at least in this case, egoistic.

### *Propaganda and General Election 1955*

The run-up to General Election 1955 was characterized by a diverse use of propaganda and publicity techniques. Eden's distinguished and photogenic portrait was used substantially in the artwork for the national poster campaign,<sup>18</sup> which espoused the message that Britain had improved significantly under the Conservatives. Printed leaflets, such as the first and second 'election address' and the 'introductory leaflet',<sup>19</sup> and adverts in the press, called 'stereos', remained a significant part of the Conservative campaign.<sup>20</sup> J. W. Hinchcliffe at Conservative CCO was responsible for the organizational process for gramophone records, which were used by candidates in order to distribute recordings of their voices.<sup>21</sup> Continuing the trend evident in Churchill's post-war premiership, the party's communication with voters remained a diverse mix of propaganda and publicity techniques. Television was merely a junior political medium in 1955, even though that very year 'viewing exceeded listening for the first time'.<sup>22</sup>

Between 1951 and 1955, the party underwent a learning exercise, through which it changed and adapted its organization. In learning from the party's experience of the 1951 General Election, the chief publicity officer, Chapman-Walker, reminded his team of area publicity officers that their role was to facilitate the work of the media and frontbench MPs in promoting the party within their respective regions.<sup>23</sup> The area publicity officers were specifically assigned to the local newspapers and regional BBC headquarters. The role of these regional BBC headquarters was to provide local radio broadcasting rather than television. The area publicity officers were encouraged to ensure that panels of party supporters were in place in order to listen to and report on the content of BBC regional sound broadcasts, with a special focus on news bulletins.<sup>24</sup> At the constituency level, interaction with the media was the responsibility of the association agents. This demonstrates how during the period between elections, CCO identified its propaganda and publicity weaknesses, and it exerted significant central control in order to reorganize the management of its publicity through its professionalized workforce.

### *Eden's Conservatives and Understanding Television*

After the 1955 election, CCO, particularly the chief publicity officer, engaged in dialogues in order to analyse television's role in the election, and British politics in general.<sup>25</sup> The impact of television was of interest to the party, the focus of which continued to centre on understanding public opinion and their reaction to specific election broadcasts.<sup>26</sup> The party collated data from different polls including the *Gallup Poll*, the *Daily Express* poll, the *Viewers View*, and the BBC's 'Audience Research', and compared the results. The analysed data included the views of party workers and supporters. The report notes that 'TV critics judged Mr Macmillan as a TV star.'<sup>27</sup> This was timely because, through the party's earlier analysis of trends in American political television, finding new Conservative broadcasting talent was becoming increasingly pertinent to its interests. The party's extensive gathering of public opinion data served to further confirm its own predictions.

The party believed that the responses to surveys of party supporters were likely to be skewed due to bias. Therefore, the party subsequently factored that into the analysis of the results. It attributed its election win to three factors: (1) the government's previous record (2) the unity of the party, and (3) Eden's personality. The CCO report noted the value of BBC television to its aims. This belief was based on the finding that 75 per cent of the audience, approximately four million viewers, were individuals who were unlikely to attend a political meeting and yet gained some exposure to politics through television. Therefore, the party believed that television was a valuable tool for capturing the political interest of potential future voters. It was noted that it was not possible to discern the impact of the election publicity in general, like leaflets and posters. However, because the party's three televised 'election programmes' focused on selling the three aforementioned factors, the party felt that it was likely that television had played some role in their win at the general election. This is a key finding, because, in subsequent elections, this new found confidence in, and recognition of, television, as a useful political medium for the Conservatives, would be a significant element in the party's approach to the medium. Whether or not television did actually help the Tories win the 1955 election is not of central significance here. What is more significant is that the advent of the medium did not prevent them from winning or, indeed, improving their electoral fortunes. In terms of the Tories' relationship with television, 1955 was a bellwether election. In this time of social and cultural change, the loyalty of British

television was put to the test. A definitive outcome of whether television was the Conservatives' friend or foe remained somewhat elusive, but the realization that the medium was not the party's enemy perhaps helped oil the party's transition to integrating with the medium.

In addition to CCO elites, the influence of television on the 1955 election was a matter of interest for party members. Further to the speculation in the press prior to the election, some party supporters at the grassroots believed that television was impacting on the decline of the traditional public meeting.<sup>28</sup> This also something Jon Lawrence might argue, a phenomenon he calls 'The Decline of the Platform'.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, in response to this, the party elite began promoting integrated participation in which the ordinary grassroots member was encouraged to use CCO's television facilities. For example, this included a symbolic open invitation for 'anyone' wishing to view political 'telefilms' during designated show times at CCO.<sup>30</sup> By 1956, there was a trend in letter writing by Conservative supporters on the topic of perceived broadcaster bias. There seems to have been much confusion about the rules and allocation of political broadcasts. The letters contain diverse viewpoints. Critiques included criticism of the broadcasters and the government's broadcasts, with particular denunciations of the Labour opposition.<sup>31</sup> For some individuals at the grassroots, confusion about how the relationship between British politics and television was constituted appears to have evoked emotional responses. CCO responded with letters that explained the process and rules of political broadcasting.<sup>32</sup> In this sense, it seems the advent of television drove greater discursive interactions between the grassroots and party centre, which is in keeping with the wider bureaucratic trends at the time.

### *Suez, the BBC and Eden's Conservatives*

Briggs argues that events in the mid-fifties

... seemed to mark the sharpest of breaks between the old and the new. The most traumatic of them all was the Suez crisis, which reached its peak in November 1956, when a second crisis—in Eastern Europe—had equally serious international ramifications. Suez was a crisis that raised basic questions about power, including the power of broadcasting, and while it lasted, it posed what seemed at the time to be a serious threat to the BBC as a broadcasting institution.<sup>33</sup>

Television itself rose to greater prominence and acted as a symbolic dividing line between the days before TV and the new age of television. The advent of Suez<sup>34</sup> in 1956 and developments in political television collided at a time and in a manner that could be argued to have driven transformational impact for the Conservatives, which likely contributed to Eden's ill health and subsequent resignation. There were significant disagreements between the government and the BBC about how it should report at a time of national crisis. Amid the events surrounding Suez, the BBC were notified by the Ministry of Defence that wartime broadcast censorship would be in place when imminent military action took place.<sup>35</sup> This did not go down well with the BBC. The BBC Charter allowed the Government to take control of the BBC at times of war.<sup>36</sup>

Eden, still strongly influenced by wartime events in the 1930s and 1940s, hoped to control the BBC for the government's own propaganda purposes amid the Suez conflict. The BBC, which had become accustomed to more autonomy, struggled to comply. It was not always entirely clear how and when certain broadcasting rules should apply. These complexities created tensions between the BBC and the Conservatives. It also had implications for the opposition party. Considerable tensions between Labour and the BBC developed because the opposition leader, Hugh Gaitskell, demanded the right to reply to Eden's broadcasts.<sup>37</sup> Labour came to be in significant opposition to the events surrounding Suez. The BBC's internal mechanisms moved slowly in matters like these. Adhering to the rules that would allow Gaitskell a broadcast meant relevant political and broadcasting elites had to be consulted.<sup>38</sup> The slowness of this led to fracas between the BBC and Gaitskell. Eventually, in reply to Eden's broadcast, Gaitskell got his. It aired to the public via BBC television and radio. Gaitskell aimed to appeal to a wide British audience in an attempt to muster public support for a halt the government's actions in Egypt.<sup>39</sup> The broadcast painted the government's international motives as underhand and not about policing matters in the Middle East, but rather regaining control of the Suez Canal. Gaitskell called on support from Conservatives to exert pressure on Eden for his resignation so that Eden's successor could put a stop to action in Egypt and comply with the UN.<sup>40</sup>

Nigel Nicholson and other Tory MPs like him felt the broadcast was aimed at the 30 Tories in Parliament who opposed Eden's actions. Nine million people watched and nine million listened to Eden's broadcast.<sup>41</sup> Gaitskell's audience was smaller, but he had a larger London audience on ITV. Briggs suggests this is because he followed the programme *Armchair*

*Theatre*, which had much larger audience. Gaitskell's radio audience was much smaller than Eden's.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, the Gaitskell broadcast had significant impact. It created public disquiet on both sides of the debate. Many British establishment figures condemned Gaitskell's broadcast. Some felt the broadcast betrayed the British military. However, others thought it appropriate that Britain stand for 'law, not war'.<sup>43</sup> Number 10 Downing Street requested that the broadcast be edited if to be broadcast via the BBC Arabic Service.<sup>44</sup> It marks a turning point in government and BBC relations, which eventually led to a clearer constitutional division between the two.

### *Tory Grassroots: Impact of Gaitskell's Broadcast*

Gaitskell was criticized by one Conservative association which held an emergency meeting to discuss the matter.<sup>45</sup> Following the meeting, a letter to CCO was written by the association agent to express the collective view held by those present at the meeting. The party supporters of Harrow West Conservative Association strongly felt that the Labour opposition should not have been able to attack the Government via a broadcast at a time of national crisis. The party elite considered this to be a 'spontaneous expression of support'<sup>46</sup> for Eden's approach, from which Eden himself was said to have gained 'encouragement'. The letter was followed by a number of written interactions between CCO and the association agent. This case indicates that, by 1956, television broadcasts had the potential to motivate grassroots supporters into some form of discursive action.

### *Television and Tory Bureaucracy*

Culturally, the watching of political television in 1956 remained on the periphery of the lives of some groups within the party. For example, the general director expressed concerns that the CCO agents rarely had chance to view political television, because their evenings were taken up with Conservative functions.<sup>47</sup> The party responded to this phenomenon in its increasingly bureaucratic manner—the matter was addressed in another CCO report on television.<sup>48</sup> Although Eden's Conservatives' recognized the importance of television, and considered ways to address any party imbalances opposed to the medium, the party elite continued its traditionally cautious and considered approach. It appears that CCO understood that TV functioned as a catalyst for change in the wider party and was, therefore, cautious

about committing the wider party to changes which might have had unknown consequences.

Television posed new problems and challenges for the party. The main themes in the narrative to this point suggest that the party responded through a process flowing from identification through to thought > consideration > reflection > solution > and action. This process was mediated by face-to-face human interaction through meetings, often at a committee level, and a prolific exchange of letters, memoranda and other paperwork. Although this included interaction between members representing all levels of the hierarchy, actions on matters concerning television were often centred on CCO, and, to some extent, Downing Street, activity. Decision making was formulated through discursive processes between CCO and parliamentary elites. The lower levels of the hierarchy were led from the party's centre, and the rank-and-file were increasingly expected to fall-in-line via centralized instruction. The trend towards a more centralized and professionalized party was only in party driven by television. However, as TV developed and drove the party organization to adapt, it seems the party's response was to intensify its bureaucracy.

#### EDEN'S CONSERVATIVES AND THE IMPORTANCE OF TELEVISION

In general, television and radio broadcasting in the mid-1950s were organized by CCO in line with other political media of the time. However, there were some differences that were beginning to show between the use of broadcasting media and other forms of propaganda. This change was manifested through the party's bureaucratic dissemination of its ideas to the wider party organization. Throughout the 1950s period, most general communications to the wider party, on publicity and propaganda matters, were disseminated via letters and memoranda.<sup>49</sup> However, in the case of broadcasting media, the party made a special effort in the output of the 'TV and Radio Newsgram' publication. This symbol of change indicates to the increasing importance of television. Moreover, it signals to an extant commitment by Eden's Conservatives to a mass party culture.<sup>50</sup> The party used the medium of the 'Newsgram' to disseminate updates, changes and developments in broadcasting to the wider party. However, it was made clear that the publication was not to be distributed to the general public. Party communications on the subject of broadcasting, via the Newsgram, were not necessarily a one way output. It was accompanied often by a two way

dialogue through written forms of communication between party elites and the other party groups, including letters from the grassroots.

### *Tory Suspicion and BBC Bias*

In an example case, a number of Conservative MPs received complaints from constituents and party supporters relating to perceived bias against the Tories in BBC programming.<sup>51</sup> MPs replied directly to the constituents and then passed on the complaints to CCO. Donald Kaberry subsequently wrote to Sir Ian Jacob of the BBC and included one of the letters of complaint. Jacob responded stating that the ‘difficulty about the letter you enclose is that its allegations are based on suspicions.’<sup>52</sup> The suspicion surrounding politics, broadcasting and the potential for bias was a reoccurring characteristic of the 1950s period. Bias was difficult for the party to prove. Therefore, it led to bureaucratically intensive exchanges between party supporters in order to lodge complaints with the broadcasters. This type of dialogue was not entirely unique to the subject of television. However, the advent of the medium as a tool in the political sphere certainly led to an increase in the frequency and volume of the internal interactions between party groups.

### *Growing Importance of Developing TV Tory Talent*

Through the production and dissemination of the Newsgram, the party elite were signalling to the wider party organization that broadcasting media were indeed important tools for political communication and, therefore, worthy of greater attention and understanding. This development is in keeping with party’s trend of educating its members, as presented in [Chapter 3](#). Therefore, the Newsgram is both a continuation and an incremental innovation. Furthermore, the developing prominence of television for CCO is demonstrated by the chief publicity officer’s comments to the conference of area publicity officers in which he explicitly notes ‘the growing importance’<sup>53</sup> of television propaganda for the Conservative Party. The growing ‘importance’ of television for the party was becoming a widely espoused view, by 1956.

The general director was keen to reiterate the ‘vital importance of developing radio and TV talent among’<sup>54</sup> party supporters. MPs were also being encouraged to engage in political television. Selected MPs were invited to a

luncheon at CCO in order to discuss ‘aspects of television in relation to party propaganda’<sup>55</sup> and CCO elites held cocktail parties for the BBC and ITA officials.<sup>56</sup> Some party elites believed that the importance of television was ‘increasing daily’<sup>57</sup> and that the party needed to consider new ways of improving its television techniques. This may have been a response to criticisms from its members that questioned the party’s ability to communicate effectively when appearing on television.<sup>58</sup> There was concern that the Conservatives were underperforming against their ‘socialist’ rivals, who were often considered, by both friend and foe, as superior in their grasp of television techniques.<sup>59</sup>

### *Training Tory TV Talent*

Subsequently, the Tories decided to further enhance their broadcasting abilities. This manifested itself in the training of its supporters, which included prospective parliamentary candidates and their team members, like senior local association representatives. Association officers, prominent activists and YCs could be invited. The ‘Radio and TV Course’ was used to administer training in ‘TV Opportunities’ and ‘Voice Technique’ for the selected participants.<sup>60</sup> The party created lists of individuals whom they considered appropriate for participation in the training.<sup>61</sup> The process of selection encouraged discussions between CCO elites about why particular participants were chosen. Moreover, they questioned whether individuals not chosen would become jaded and/or demotivated. The party believed that the savvier their supporters were in the ways of television, the more effective the party would become in representing itself on the small screen. However, CCO proceeded with caution. It appears the party realized that, as a mid-1950s mass party, it still needed to maintain a dedicated workforce at the grassroots, as well as develop a cohort of media trained talents.

CCO perceived television to be a new medium that would appeal particularly to the younger generation. This is demonstrated by the party’s action taken in order to feature the YCs and their political school in the making of political broadcasts, like, for example, the television film ‘Come Our Way’.<sup>62</sup> The film was designed to entice new younger members to the party. The move to incorporate more party supporters in the making of television programmes was a significant characteristic of Eden’s Conservatives, when compared to the party at other times 1951–64. The broadcasting training, which had been traditionally offered by CCO to MPs, was opened up to the wider party. It included the likes of the young

Margaret Thatcher, who attended the one day radio and television course, in 1956.<sup>63</sup> It was just 3 years prior to her election as the MP for Finchley. The objective of this training was for Conservative participants to 'make the best use of any opportunity that is offered to them by the BBC and ITA... [and] to suggest how Conservatives can create their own opportunities for getting on air, by the submission of good and original ideas for programmes.'<sup>64</sup>

The party's interactions with television encouraged increased discourse among CCO elites. A process of self-reflection and self-criticism developed at CCO on the matter of the widely held belief that 'Socialist' TV personalities were dominant.

I am sure that the present situation does not result from any bias in the BBC and ITA, but is due to the personal activity of and enterprise of Socialist individuals, and it is this which we must encourage among our own people. How best this should be done I would not know so far as members and candidates are concerned, but I am taking steps in my department to provide what help we can.<sup>65</sup>

The party responded to this matter of concern by enhancing further the training of its supporters. Eden's Conservatives held one day courses in the regions for a range of party individuals from senior Young Conservatives to parliamentary candidates.<sup>66</sup> The 5-hour courses were instructed by Brigadier Hinchcliffe and Mrs Crum-Ewing of CCO. Courses consisted of an intensive programme in TV opportunities, voice technique, demonstration of TV, practical exercise, initiating programmes and illustration in programmes.<sup>67</sup> Variations of these courses were used also to train association agents and MPs.<sup>68</sup> By 1957, CCO had coordinated a considerable programme of training events which had become referred to as the 'Radio and Television Schools'.<sup>69</sup>

### *TV Training: From Inclusivity to Exclusivity*

By the end of 1956, Kaberry believed that it was important for CCO to focus its training away from agents and other non-MPs and give priority to MPs. This demonstrates an evolving process in which the party went from an open and inclusive stance on training in television techniques; to a more considered and restricted approach in which the selection for training became more exclusive.

Frankly I think we must concentrate on MPs. It is quite clear that more and more are being approached direct in the House of Commons by programming companies and the BBC. The sooner we get through the list of all the MPs the better it will be for us. I think they should have top priority. I should also like to get down to a selected list of candidates as soon as possible, after the MPs have been. I think the agents should come a long way down the list as soon after both the above.<sup>70</sup>

The party's hierarchical structure, which had, until this point, been relatively flexible in its approach to the role of television in the party's organization is shown here to have tightened to some extent. The party based its priorities on a logic and hierarchical order rooted in the importance of achieving its central aims. In the wake of Suez, the opposition party personalities had begun profiting from their relative freedom to experiment with the new medium. It seems Eden's Conservatives did not want to be left behind.<sup>71</sup>

### *Training Selection, Power and Anxieties*

Selection for the very first training course was based on Conservative MPs being identified through a discursive process at CCO. A 'cross section' of 'likely types' were selected.<sup>72</sup> This demonstrates how television could catalyse micro-shifts of power towards the party centre. Contextually, at this point, it seems it was manifested intermittently in specific cases of organizational activity that were related to developments in television. Donald Kaberry and other CCO elites appear to have employed this power through handpicking members in order to satisfy the objectives of the central party. However, this power was kept in balance by a degree of conscience. Kaberry stated his anxieties about the matter. He was keen to ensure that the first group were told that they are the first group; and that other courses for their colleagues would follow. Clearly, Kaberry was sensitive to letting the chosen elites know they were selected as top TV talents, while attempting to minimize the potential offence taken by other Conservative and parliamentary colleagues. It suggests also that television training was becoming viewed as a desirable opportunity for which there was competition among MPs.

### *Intraparty Trust Amid a Time of Caution*

CCO staff, with access to intraparty secrets, were trusted to contribute to BBC and ITV political television programmes. However, the party issued clear rules which limited their contributions to a personal capacity. They

were not permitted to discuss party organization, unless they gained permission from the general director.<sup>73</sup> Initially, the TV training conflated opportunities that were open to both parliamentary politicians and general party supporters. CCO's openness to allow party supporters to engage in television suggests that there was a sentiment of trust held by the central elites for those operating at the grassroots. This is particularly symbolic when considering the evident caution towards television within the Tory elite. The deference held by the party workers for their leadership was rewarded by a relatively unsuspecting and trusting sentiment towards their supporters. Similar to the symbiotic relationship Michael Kandiah identifies between the BBC and the Tories,<sup>74</sup> it would seem this offered the party some balance insofar that it helped maintain a cultural and organizational symbiosis with the mass membership.

The Conservatives were somewhat confined by their role as the governing party, which naturally contributed to a tendency to exhibit caution in the early stages of the significant technocultural changes they were witnessing. Although the Conservatives had been experimenting with television at all levels, it would appear that the impact of the medium is most salient in the party's internal organization and culture. To a large extent, it is a space in which the party was able to contain, manage and control its experimentation with the new medium. External environmental factors, like heightened broadcaster interests in Conservative TV personalities, and on-screen competition from their political rivals, meant that a tension to drive forward more significant change, perhaps even organizational transformation, was beginning to build. The party had begun to understand the medium and recognize that, in order to compete on the small screen with the rise of 'Socialist' personalities, they would have to adapt—or die at the polls.

### *Party Professionals and Television*

In relation to party agents and television, CCO was concerned about their limited availability to watch political programming. For example,

I think the chairman was a bit shaken at the Central Office agents' conference to hear that Central Office agents rarely saw TV. I am sure it is becoming increasingly important that both they and area publicity officers should regularly watch political and controversial programmes if they are to appreciate intelligently the growing importance of this medium.<sup>75</sup>

The Conservatives' reaction was to produce, within the following three months, a draft document which aimed to (a) 'enable CCO agents to make a close study of the political aspects of TV' and (b) 'promote the study of the art of television broadcasting with a view to establishing the party's ascendancy in the field'.<sup>76</sup> The party proposed to achieve this in the purchase of TV sets for loan to CCO agents and specific members of the CCO elite. The use of the term 'ascendancy in the field' indicates to the early beginnings of a desire at CCO to master the medium for political gain. However, the reality of that prospect would not be realized for a number of years to come.

### *Tory Activism: The 'Viewers View'*

The advent of television was impacting on the everyday role of the party workers at the grassroots in the ways in which they conducted their activism in support of their local association and the wider Conservative cause. The first televised Party Political Broadcast to be shown on both the BBC and ITV simultaneously was the Conservative election broadcast, 9 May 1956. Using the TV and Radio Newsgram<sup>77</sup> to communicate with the constituency associations the CCO TV department requested canvassers to collect the names and addresses of TV set owners of all political persuasions in order that they could be sent a 'Viewers View' survey prior to the broadcast. Therefore, television was impacting on the ordinary supporter in terms of activist processes, which was largely at the command of the central party.

### *Commercial Television—A Tory Domain?*

The advent of commercial television had a significant impact at CCO. Although the Television Act 1954 was enacted under Churchill's Conservatives, the relationship between the Conservatives and ITV was initiated under Eden. ITV launched in the September, shortly after the General Election, May 1955. Churchill's Conservatives' aim for ITV to be a more favourable Conservative platform for political programming looked likely to be realized. Eden's Conservatives considered ITV to be seeking to do business with the party.<sup>78</sup> However, by November 1956, CCO had begun to be concerned that ITV's representation of the Conservative Party was becoming unfavourable.<sup>79</sup> For example, the Granada Network Company, an ITV franchise, was accused by the

Conservatives of making unjustified attacks on Eden's government during one of their programmes, named 'What the Papers Say', which opened with: 'This week has been dominated by trouble in the Tory Party'.<sup>80</sup> The programme was also transmitted in London by another ITV franchise, Associated Rediffusion. Therefore, the Granada programme was distributed to wider ITV audiences than some of its other productions, which enhanced the Conservatives' concerns. Eden's Conservatives were now beyond simply experimenting with television. They were acutely aware of its potential for influencing mass public opinion.

When comparing the party's anxieties about BBC bias at the time of Churchill to its concerns about ITV during Eden's premiership, the latter edition of the Tories reacted rather more promptly. The party made a complaint to the postmaster general. It received a prompt reply, which stated that the ITA itself 'had been seriously concerned about this programme and that, on their own initiative, they had already sent a letter to the programme company concerned drawing their attention to Section 3(f) of the Television Act—the need to preserve a due impartiality'.<sup>81</sup> The speed with which the party reacted in this instance shows an increase in its sensitivity to the role of television in its interests. It demonstrates that, as television was developing, the party's awareness of the medium increased. Moreover, it would suggest that, in turn, it led to the party machine reacting quicker to matters of concern in relation to television broadcasts. The more Eden's professionals understood the nature of television, the more confident they were to challenge the broadcasters. Therefore, in the 1957 run-up, it appears that the party was beginning to mature somewhat in its relationship with the medium, when compared to the party under Churchill.

## CONCLUSIONS

During the 1955–57 Conservative Party responses to television, for example, the increased training of Tory personalities were, to some extent, amid a period of continuity that flowed fairly seamlessly from Churchill's to Eden's Conservatives. That is until the abruptness of the Suez crisis, in which the ambiguity of Conservative-BBC relations intensified. A range of complex external forces collided, like world events, BBC protocols and Labour Party responses, which, in turn, impacted on Eden's premiership. Perhaps amplified by its place in history, a period characterized by its transition from the old world, recovering from war, to a new age of prosperity, symbolized by

television, these events would shape significantly the trajectory of the Conservative Party, ultimately under different leadership.

The main thematic characteristics for the Tories and television, 1955–57, include the party's awakenings to the scope of the medium, insights rooted in research, deeper anxieties and suspicions at elite levels, which were juxtaposed against relative enthusiasm and freedom to engage at lower levels, highly bureaucratic deliberations, process flows influencing incremental developments and gradual adaptations of structure and culture. Eden's, like Churchill's, Conservatives made efforts to maintain a strong mass party culture through substantial two-way interaction. However, in contrast to Churchill's Conservatives, the Eden party engaged in centralizing initiatives, which tightened their control, particularly, of propaganda, and it began filtering down to the grassroots level.

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# Macmillan's Conservatives and Television 1957–58

**Abstract** Chapter 5 is set in the context of television's dominance arriving at the door of the Conservative Party, while Macmillan was resident in Number 10. The chapter explores how Macmillan and the Conservative Party responded to such developments in British broadcasting during the period 1957–58. Moreover, it examines the impact of cultural change on the party's organization. The chapter map changes in Macmillan's Conservatives on their journey from transition to transformation. Rather than significant marked changes, the characteristics established under Eden intensified further like, for example, the use of television to attract younger members, data-driven training, development of TV personalities, schmoozing of broadcasters, amplification of political egos, civic culture of bureaucracy and trends toward professionalization and centralization.

**Keywords** Conservative Party · Harold Macmillan · Macmillan's Conservatives · Party organization · Television · Transition

## INTRODUCTION

The circumstances under which Harold Macmillan succeeded Anthony Eden's premiership were a torrid affair in the wake of the Suez crisis.<sup>1</sup> Eden's resignation on health grounds, 9 January 1957, led to Macmillan being appointed by cabinet ministers of the incumbent Conservative

government. During his time as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Macmillan had utilized his American connections and political prowess in order to rise in the eyes of his contemporaries as the right man to take forward the Conservative Party. The new prime minister, aged 63, became known for his approach to a mixed economy,<sup>2</sup> and for his use of the political media of his time.<sup>3</sup>

Chapters 3 and 4 presented Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives' transitional and exploratory approaches to the new medium of television. This chapter continues the chronology featuring Macmillan's Conservatives, 1957–58. Macmillan's Conservatives' narrative continues in Chapter 6 with an analysis of General Election 1959 for which this chapter offers a contextual prelude.

Asa Briggs suggests that during this period the development of political television continued to undergo a process of incremental change, which would eventually result in a transformation of political and broadcasting landscapes in Britain.<sup>4</sup> The Rochdale By-Election, February 1958, attracted television coverage from ITV, but not the BBC. It signals to a time in which commercial television began forging its own distinct path. The run-up to the 1959 General Election is in the context of a Tory prime minister whose party lost the Rochdale By-Election, and whose leadership had not yet been tested at a national election. It was also a time in which the reach of television transmission continued to expand. ITV's viewership rose and the remnants of the BBC's monopoly eroded, which continued into the 1960s. The combined licences (radio and TV) exceeded sound-only licences, for the first time during 1957–58.<sup>5</sup> Eden's Conservatives were merely attempting to understand the importance of television. However, the medium's dominance in broadcasting arrived at the Conservatives' door while Macmillan was resident in Number 10. How, then, did Macmillan and the Conservative Party respond? What was the impact of these advances in television on the party's electoral campaigns and organization? This, and the following chapter, map changes in the journey of Macmillan's Conservatives' from its transitional state to its transformation as a more television centric party.

## DAWN OF MACMILLAN: RISE OF TV

### *Macmillan: Rising TV Star*

Macmillan's 1953 historic television appearance, the first political broadcast outside of an election, is described by D. R. Thorpe as 'a tightly controlled and rehearsed operation'.<sup>6</sup> This style of broadcasting was

characteristic of the on screen political communication of the time. The Conservative Party praised Macmillan's performance through the dissemination of a 'TV and Radio Newsgram' to all levels of party hierarchy. It included a quote from a headline in the *Sunday Express*, which read: 'The Tories Find a New Star'.<sup>7</sup> Macmillan's early embrace of the new medium of television was symbolic of the recognition in the party that Britain should modernize.<sup>8</sup> For example, research and development 'was high on the Conservative political agenda, especially from the late 1950s, and was a central part of the "modernising Britain" rhetoric'.<sup>9</sup> This modernizing agenda extended also to changes in party organization. John Charmley suggests 'that under Macmillan the Conservative Party had successfully adapted itself to the new age of affluence'.<sup>10</sup>

Throughout his career Macmillan embraced the use of political television as a publicity tool from its earliest developments. However, like his predecessors, Macmillan was suspicious of, and at times concerned about, the potential negative impact that television, and particularly the BBC, could have on British affairs. In relation to the Suez crisis, Thorpe suggests that a

... worry for Macmillan was the information the BBC might broadcast, no wartime censorship being in place. On 3 August [1956] ... Macmillan saw Sir Ian Jacob, Director-General of the BBC, to argue for restraint. Jacob was sympathetic to his concerns; but Macmillan was convinced that the BBC and the press could only be managed through a reimposition of wartime controls.<sup>11</sup>

Macmillan was practiced in using his influence in attempts to manage broadcasters, in advance of him becoming the premier. Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives took a tentative approach to television and it somewhat neutralized their advancement in it. Macmillan's suspicion of television led him and his party's organization to make attempts to firstly control and, secondly, master it. That said, Colin Seymour-Ure suggests that, although Eden and Macmillan were 'sensitive' to the potentials of political television, Labour's 'Harold Wilson was the first TV prime minister'.<sup>12</sup>

### *Macmillan's Conservatives and Organizational Change*

In the months following Eden's resignation, there were a number of changes in the operations and key personnel at Conservative Central Office (CCO).<sup>13</sup> Guy Schofield resigned as chief publicity officer in

order to return to his former career in journalism, thus making way for his deputy, Ronald Simms, to succeed him.<sup>14</sup> In August 1957, Stephen Pierssene resigned due to ill health<sup>15</sup> from his position as general director and was replaced by W. Urton. Less than a month later, Viscount Hailsham became chairman of party organization, following Oliver Poole's resignation.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, expenditure cuts led to the general staff being asked to help save the office resources.<sup>17</sup> Financial concerns had been expressed already at the 'General Meeting of the South Eastern branch of the National Society of Agents on 29 May 1956'.<sup>18</sup> The party was experiencing difficulties in fundraising, both at the constituency and national levels. A new leader, departing elites and budget constraints signal a new phase for 1950s Conservative organization.

One of Poole's final acts as party chairman was to appoint a 'committee under Lord Colyton's chairmanship'<sup>19</sup> in order to examine the structures and functions of party organization at the branch and constituency levels, and to understand the roles of individuals at those levels. There was a mood for change at the local level towards a simpler and more streamlined organization for the associations. At the Conservative Central Council, the West Midlands Union of Conservative Associations,

... noting the difficulties in finding suitable men and women to undertake the duties as officers and committee workers in the constituency and branch organizations, and recognizing that people today are often not able to give unlimited time to politics, [called] upon the executive committee of the National Union to consult with the chairman of party organization with a view to setting up a committee to examine the structure of the party organization so as to bring it into line with present day requirements.<sup>20</sup>

This demonstrates some desire and willingness at grassroots levels for a degree of organizational change in the Conservative Party. The grassroots volunteers were beginning to seek freedom from local level responsibilities and modernize the party's national operations.<sup>21</sup>

### *Committees, Campaigns, Civic Culture and Change*

A subsequent report assessed the roles of committees, at all levels of the party, including advisory committees and those in the provincial areas, cities, boroughs and the National Union, with the exception of organization matters at Parliament, Downing Street and CCO. The committee

used the Bexley Conservatives as an example on which to model the structure and functions of a Conservative association. The role of activists at the grassroots was described as

... being responsible for basic election activities such as the distribution of literature, canvassing and the like, the Street System normally undertakes the distribution of the monthly 'Conservative News' and other leaflets (confined if possible to one delivery per month), the collection of subscriptions and collection and distribution of books to all members in Divisional Draws.<sup>22</sup>

The party's agents held a collective awareness that post-war campaigning and fundraising had been intensified and that this change in the culture of activism was placing a great strain on the voluntary party, many of whom had been overloaded and consequently become disengaged from party activism 'entirely'.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, a natural, organic, culture change and erosion of the mass-based party seems to have been occurring around the time that political television was increasing.

In addition to street activism, the strain of expectation and responsibility on the voluntary committee member and the mass-based party culture was becoming evident in testimonies sourced for the Colyton Committee. For example, Birmingham Conservatives were

... concerned by the number of people who were involved in more than one committee. It seemed that there were two types of person: the professional committee attenders to whom it has no burden at all but who were not a great help, and the people who were prepared to be on a committee but found two or three committees a burden. This was too much for the right type of person to cope with under modern conditions, particularly in big cities... In Birmingham they had decided that it would be better if a large number of people worked for a short time and concentrated on the activity in which they are interested, whether it the political, financial or social aspect.<sup>24</sup>

Changes in 1950s committee culture was not unique to the Conservative Party. The press had begun to recognize changes in wider civic society. One article entitled 'We're All Committee Men Now'<sup>25</sup> remarks that Napoleon's earlier observation of Britain as a nation of shopkeepers would, in the 1950s, have been better expressed as a nation of 'committee men'. The article claimed that this proliferation of committees was spawning from the political culture at the House of Commons. Advances

in British committee culture, broadcasting culture and TV regulation were developing in the same period. Therefore, television became a widely debated medium in the very committee meetings that were playing an integral role in the changing life of the party. In turn, this array of factors had begun to integrate and form a new type of culture at the heart of the party's bureaucratic organization.<sup>26</sup>

The party's awareness of and sensitivity to the influence of bureaucratic trends in its organizational culture is shown in the Colyton Committee report, which was disseminated to constituency chairmen. It sought to strike a balance between the role of committee work and political activism in the lives of party supporters. The report was accompanied with a letter from Oliver Poole,<sup>27</sup> in which he urged Conservative associations to focus on 'doorstep' activities and interaction with the electorate rather than wasting the time of party workers in unnecessary committee meetings. For example, in underlined text, the report stated that: 'We cannot emphasize too strongly our opinion that . . . chairmen should cancel or postpone any meeting for which there is no reasonably important business.'<sup>28</sup> The party was demonstrating its consciousness for the need to streamline its resources across its organization. This included budgetary cuts at CCO and efficient uses of manpower at the grassroots.<sup>29</sup> It seems that an intraparty consciousness at CCO awakened to pressures driving the party organization to change, a key driver being declining mass party culture.<sup>30</sup> There is no mention of party publicity and TV in the report. However, television, was presenting itself to the political parties as a tool for reaching-out to mass electorate, which could potentially emancipate the parties from older, more people and resource intensive, ways of the past.<sup>31</sup>

### *Macmillan's Mass Conservatives Locked in Transition*

Nevertheless, the party remained locked in the transition of change. Therefore, it continued to act like a mass-based party in a number of ways. For example, CCO led initiatives to expand the party's dominance at a local level through a national membership campaign.<sup>32</sup> It was executed in tandem with the party's 'Roll Call for Victory', which Macmillan urged party supporters to sign in order to 'affirm their belief in Freedom and Opportunity and their opposition to the creation of a Socialist State in Britain'.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, following the events surrounding Suez, the membership drive acted as a mechanism for boosting the party's self-confidence, which had been less surefooted in the wake of the crisis:

It was claimed at Conservative Central Office yesterday that the membership recruiting campaign launched on 16 September 1958 has been 'remarkably successful' . . . The object was not only to recruit new members but to give existing members an opportunity to 'confirm their faith' in the party.<sup>34</sup>

This highlights how external events that influenced the public opinion of the party contributed to an impact on the internal nature of the party's organization. Suez not only knocked the party's confidence, but led to the party responding with the use of pragmatic tactics in order to strengthen and boost its belief in itself.<sup>35</sup> The party's collective self-belief was symbolic for the party elites. Although the party was transitioning towards a wider use of political television in elections, it was yet to understand how to fully manage the medium; or to experience the extent to which television could be used as a tool for political communication.<sup>36</sup> Reaching the voter through the mobilization of traditional mass activism, to which it had become accustomed, was, in the run-up to the 1959 General Election, a known and reliable resource that the party had become proficient in controlling in order to achieve electoral success. Seymour-Ure argues that 1959 was a 'watershed' year for British political television because of advances in broadcasters' approaches.<sup>37</sup> It suggests that the Conservative approach to political television at the time was perhaps lagging behind wider developments in the medium. Mark Jarvis suggests the party 'had always been positive about the political influence of television on the electorate'.<sup>38</sup> However, given the mixed evidence presented in the chapters thus far, it is questionable to what extent such arguments are true.

## TRANSITIONAL TV IMPACT AND MACMILLAN'S CONSERVATIVES

### *'Come Our Way'*

In the transition from Eden to Macmillan, CCO used a television broadcast to attract young people to membership of the party. The political broadcast, called 'Come Our Way', was developed by Eden's Conservatives. After significant delay, it finally aired, on 7 February 1957, between 7:05–7:30pm, on BBC television—a month after Macmillan became prime minister. The party elites, especially those at CCO and 12 Downing Street, were becoming increasingly interested in viewing figures and appreciation indices. For example, the BBC viewing figures for *Come Our Way* on 7 February, reached almost 4 million.<sup>39</sup> The

broadcast also received a strong audience appreciation rating. The power of television was becoming apparent to CCO by the hundreds of written requests from young people wishing to join the Young Conservatives (YCs).<sup>40</sup> In order to manage the interaction between the young viewers and the party, CCO organized structured processes that involved incoming letters being passed to the organization department for reply by the chief organization officer.<sup>41</sup> CCO's organization department kept a record of the names and constituencies of the individuals.<sup>42</sup> The enquiries were also forwarded to the respective constituency agent, with a covering letter explaining the course of action to be taken. This case demonstrates television's potential catalytic impact on the party's bureaucratic activities. Impact could filter down from CCO to the day-to-day role of the constituency agent.

Furthermore, it shows how a number of factors influencing party organization were beginning to conflate. Firstly, television was being used by the party in ways that actually enhanced the mass-based party culture. The Conservatives had begun to understand the uses of television in relation to reaching the voter. However, before that realization had any significant impact in reality, it appears television was being used as a tool to develop the party organization in terms of strengthening the mass membership. The advent of television, and its use in this way, required intraparty cooperation across a range of bureaux at CCO. 'Come Our Way' grew out of collaborations between the publicity department's radio and TV section and the organization department, which, ultimately, resulted in some integration of their bureaucratic functions.

### *Tory Television Research*

The audience figures of another political broadcast 'House to Let', 14 March 1957, which featured the Conservative MP Henry Brooke, a founder of the Conservative Research Department (CRD), presented a significant development for Macmillan's Conservatives. The party had begun to compare the efficacy of the two broadcasters, the BBC and ITV,<sup>43</sup> to their needs and aims. In this case, it showed that just over half a million viewers watched the broadcast on the BBC, compared to over 4 million on ITV.<sup>44</sup> The party elite was beginning to understand why this might be the case and how it could work to their advantage.

In a letter to Edward Heath, the Independent Television Authority (ITA) explained that

... ITA audiences per home are larger than the BBC audiences per home. Broadly, this has been the case from the beginning, and applies more or less to all types of programme, the average ITA audience being 2.9 people per set and the BBC figure being 2.6 people per set.<sup>45</sup>

The party was developing a significant appreciation for the understanding of television. In turn, this influence is evident in its perception of the impact of television. A 'Report on Party Political Television Broadcasts'<sup>46</sup> claimed that the role of the press was diminishing because political television was 'no longer news'.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the report claims that there had 'been a marked improvement in the interest taken in programmes by party workers, professionals and volunteers'.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the party in general was beginning to develop a wider interest in the role of TV.

The party's expanding understanding of television meant that CCO could improve its assessment of television broadcasts. It considered its own weaknesses and devised practical 'remedies'.<sup>49</sup> The main weakness was deemed to be the pressures on any given government minister to perform in the moment for a broadcast, thus resulting in an unconvincing performance. Lack of preparation time and confidence using the medium were attributed to this. The party's solution was to focus on consulting with the minister prior to broadcast about the central message and target audience. The party was beginning to understand the need for their politicians to be brief—speaking in bullet points, which would later be known as sound bites. Some of the self-identified weaknesses in Tory television culture at that time were unique to the Conservatives, largely because of their status as the governing party. It had become incumbent upon Macmillan's Conservatives to master the medium, setting the precedent for future governmental broadcasting.

### *Audience Research and Enlightened TV Training*

By mid-1957, CCO attentions had turned significantly towards television. The Conservatives had devised integrated methods for assessing the impact of political television on audiences. It was considered that: 'While measuring the size of the TV audience is a mathematical problem, measuring impact is more complex and largely a matter of judgement.'<sup>50</sup> The

party had taken resource intensive steps in order to understand such ‘impact’, which included analysis of the ‘BBC Audience Research’ (that came to the party by covert informants working at the BBC); ‘Viewers View of [political] Personalities’ and ‘Viewers View of Programmes’ (both used surveys on political broadcasts); ‘Press Cuttings’ (although it was noted that the ‘novelty’ of reporting about television was wearing off); ‘Gallup Poll’ and ‘Daily Express Poll’ data (that covered election periods only); and views of the ‘Party Workers’ (this was encouraged through the Radio and TV Newsgrams. Party workers fed back their views on broadcasts to association agents and area publicity officers who subsequently relayed the information and their own thoughts to CCO).

The party used seven questions for analysis in order to devise their conclusions, but noted that in all cases more evidence was desirable. The findings of these analyses were significant in the organization of the party and in the educational development of the party, because the Conservatives used them as ‘the basis of everything’ they taught in their ‘Radio and TV courses’.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, the party used pamphlets entitled ‘How to Utilize Radio and Television Effectively.’<sup>52</sup> This shows how, like film previously, television was becoming integrated significantly into political education agendas and party TV programmes.<sup>53</sup>

### *Developing Tory TV Personalities*

The medium was gaining growing interest from the party outside of CCO. Conservative MPs continued to take a keen interest in how the party was being perceived on television. One example was Robert Allen, MP, who wrote a long and detailed letter to Donald Kaberry, MP, stating that the subject of Conservative speakers on television arose during a dinner. Allen argued that there were too few Conservative TV personalities and that the best known were ‘Socialists’. He believed

... that the Conservatives should build up expendable TV personalities, i.e. people who might become well known to the public for non political broadcasts, but who would be prepared to sacrifice their reputation in the interests of the Conservative Party at the time of a general election.<sup>54</sup>

Allen proceeded to argue a case in which he encouraged CCO to consider training him to become a Conservative TV personality and admitted that it sounded ‘rather vain’,<sup>55</sup> but that his self-promotion was on the advice of

anonymous sources. This case would suggest that Allen's ego was being enticed by the medium and that he would have liked to have received special treatment. However, this was tempered by a policy at CCO that supposedly gave equal opportunities to all MPs in terms of television interaction and training. If so, this policy is in contrast to the 1956 case given in [Chapter 4](#) in which selected MPs were given special treatment. Kaberry's reply to Allen acknowledged the dominance of 'Socialist' broadcasters, but argued that some TV personalities were indeed Conservatives.<sup>56</sup>

As per [Chapter 4](#), concerns about the domination of 'Socialist' TV personalities had been developing for some time and was related to the ongoing debate within the party elite about allowing junior ministers to participate in television broadcasts. This is illustrated by a letter to Lord Hailsham from Sir Toby Low MP.

I have been worried for some time about some of the TV programmes in which MPs are asked to appear. Last Friday I was cajoled and bullied into appearing in the Granada 'Under Fire' half hour on unemployment and neglect in Wales. Alan Green was with me and did as well as anyone who is not immersed in the problems could do. I did not do well: I was unhappy before the programme and unhappier after. But that is not the point I wanted to make. The real point is this—why do ministers, junior or senior, not take the opportunity of these programmes to stand up for their policies and explain them thoroughly and also to get themselves known? I know the risks, and can well understand why Sir Winston Churchill made rules about Ministerial TV performances four or five years ago. But though the risks may not have decreased the advantages of ministers appearing on TV—indeed the vital importance of it—have increased enormously. Front bench Labour men do not miss these opportunities.<sup>57</sup>

Low's narrative describes the contrast between the Conservative front-bench approaches to television compared to Labour.

Prominent Labour politicians, while in opposition, had experienced a freedom to explore the exploitation of television. However, most Conservative political elites had not. Tories had been stifled under Churchillian rules restricting ministerial broadcasts. This is another example of how television played a uniquely different role in the Conservative Party, as the governing party 1951–64, when compared to other British parties. Seymour-Ure identifies this as a 'historic tension' that has been evident between broadcasters and governments, both Conservative and

Labour, since the advent of political television.<sup>58</sup> But television was at its newest as a political medium throughout this continuous 13 year period of Conservative governance. Therefore, throughout 1951–64, the suspicions surrounding broadcasters in the psyche of the Conservatives, as the governing party, is, generally, incomparable with Labour's experience, because by the time Labour were in government in the 1960s, political television, and the parties' understanding of it, had matured considerably.

Comparing Allen's and Low's discourse reveals that the advent of television had the potential to both enhance and diminish the egos and confidence of politicians. Both MPs used colourful language like 'expendable' and 'sacrifice', and 'worried' and 'bullied' in order to express their very different attitudes towards the role of television in the party and how it was impacting on the life of a Conservative MP. This vivid and symbolic language illustrates how television remained, for some Conservative politicians, a very new medium. The issue of ministers appearing on TV continued to be debated at CCO:

I understand that there is quite a lot of feeling among Members of Parliament in agreement with what [Low] says. In this particular programme it had been hoped that Robert Carr would put the Government's case, but he was either unable to do so or not allowed to take part in the programme. The feeling is that it is a pity that junior ministers are sometimes denied the opportunity of appearing on the programmes because they are considered unsuitable either by Dr Hill, the minister or the Chief Whip, and their places have to be taken by backbench Members of Parliament who are not really in a position to know all the answers.<sup>59</sup>

In an effort to maintain control of output and in order to protect their own interests, the Conservative governing elite remained cautious not to take 'risks' in using ministers liberally on television. However, it was becoming apparent that their approach might not be in the best interest of the party.

### *Macmillan's Conservatives: Out of Touch*

As Lindsay and Harrington write, the Conservatives were appearing to fall behind Labour in adapting to wider social trends and the changing political and media culture of the time.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, the status quo of the hierarchy, organization and structure of the parliamentary Conservative Party was being challenged by the developments in political television.

The top elites in the parliamentary party appeared to be out of touch on matters of political television. Many of those below them in the parliamentary hierarchy, and the CCO elites, had been contemplating the modernization of the party's approach to political broadcasting for a number of years. In this case, there was discord between the position of top government elites and a collective of individuals within the parliamentary party. The case demonstrates how the manner in which Tory engagement with political television was constituted at the government level had the potential to unsettle relations between different party factions. As outlined in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#), tensions between party factions have themselves been identified as drivers of party change.

## TORIES IN THE TV AGE

### *TV Age: Capturing Conservative Imaginations*

A memorandum by Robert Orme, Conservative councillor for Kensington, offers insight into his own perspective on the role that 'The Advent of Television' was playing in British politics. His unsolicited memorandum provided a lay analysis of political propaganda entitled 'A New Approach in the TV Age'. This was followed by a similar memorandum on 'Political Television' from Richard Hornby MP.<sup>61</sup> Orme sent his ideas to CCO and received a reply from Lord Hailsham,<sup>62</sup> which declared that the party's TV staff agreed with Orme's perspective on television. Orme's document stated that

... the lesson remains for any party that it must so revise its methods of approach to the electorate as to take full advantage of any new medium. Considering that a TV audience for a popular programme can now number up to 10 million viewers, but writing that number down by three quarters because a political programme can never be 'popular', one could hope, with the right approach, to influence some two and a half million people. Thus a thousand pounds, or a thousand hours, spent in preparation of such a programme are more worthwhile than ten times that money or time spent in preparing local events. The full significance of these facts has not yet been appreciated by any party. To us Conservatives, the significance should be doubly applicable, for we are handicapped against our principle opponents in that, through the influence of shop stewards and by the generally more intensive campaigning of the Socialist fanatic, they more easily penetrate to the inner ear of the electorate.<sup>63</sup>

The act of Orme sending his memorandum to Hailsham demonstrates that there was an active awareness outside of CCO operations that the party could be doing more with the medium of television in the pursuit of connecting with the electorate—and using it to win Conservative votes. Orme uses the word ‘influence’ which suggests that there was a belief that the medium could be used as an instrument of power. He also indicates that he believes the Labour Party rhetoric of the time was more effective in reaching the voter than that of the Conservatives. It is a belief consistent with that of earlier periods in 1950s Conservatism. Views such as this may well have contributed to changes in approaches to television in Macmillan’s Conservatives in the run-up to the 1959 General Election. Tim Bale notes that in terms of broadcasting ‘the Conservatives were generally thought to have performed poorly in 1959’.<sup>64</sup>

### *Tories, Television, Reaction and Interaction*

In keeping with earlier trends discussed in [Chapters 3](#) and [4](#), Conservative supporters continued to write to CCO in relation to political television. For example, Ronald Simms, chief publicity officer, wrote to Charles Hill MP, March 1958, to report that the party had received ‘two spontaneous reactions to’ a party political broadcast by Sir David Eccles.<sup>65</sup> Simms explained that ‘the first came from the women’s chairman of East Grinstead, who felt she had to tell someone how good Sir David Eccles was last night, and added that she thought it the best thing since Iain Macleod on Skipton.’<sup>66</sup> This illustrates what appears to have been an inherent impulse for some party members and officers within the mass party culture to communicate with CCO and express their views on matters of interest.

Although it was changing, political culture of the 1950s remained characterized largely by its tradition as a party of activism.<sup>67</sup> A nature of action was imbedded deeply in Conservative norms and customs. Individual members and supporters were inclined and encouraged to engage in aspects of the political life of the party. It seems the visual nature of political television brought the day-to-day politics of political leaders into the living rooms of the ordinary party supporter and, thus, provided a novel reality that radio and printed media had not.<sup>68</sup> It made the party leadership feel tangibly close to those at the grassroots who watched them on TV.

Therefore, this new found tangibility of television held the potential to act as a catalyst for party supporter engagement. In the 1950s, it was the cultural default setting of party supporters to interact in the political process. In the grassroots' transitional phase, from a face-to-face politics to one of armchair politics, in which political television is thought to have contributed to the redundancy of mass activism,<sup>69</sup> some of the TV viewing party membership were prompted, by what they saw on TV, to engage in written discourse, as a method of showing support to their new on screen party personalities. Therefore, the act of letter writing became a symbolic gesture of active party support in the transitional complexities of culture change in the party.

This ritual of paper-based communication exchange was a two-way affair. By the end of 1957, Macmillan's Conservatives were recognizing the significance of the role of television in politics and the incremental impact that it had had on its party's organization overtime. The radio and television section at CCO continued to use the TV and Radio Newsgram as a medium to disseminate such matters to the wider party organization.

TV and Radio Newsgram was started in April 1953, six days after the political parties agreed with the BBC that television should be used for party political broadcasts. The impact of television on politics and the effect on political organization was even then considerable. It has grown daily ever since. This short Newsgram has been a means of enlisting the interests and help of constituency agents throughout England, Wales and Scotland in the new responsibility assumed by the Central Office since entering the field of television production. At the same time, sound radio remains an equally important factor in politics. The Newsgram—as its name implies—covers both. Because television is comparatively new and sound is something which has become an accepted part of normal communication since the 1920's, it is very easy to neglect sound. It is worthwhile to put the relative importance in perspective. The number of licences taken out by October 1957 is 14,677,612. This includes 7,524,071 TV licences. That means that 7,153,541 receive sound but not TV.<sup>70</sup>

This extract shows how the radio and television section intended to present the party as an organization which had submitted to the continual changes that it believed had been brought about by the impacts of and developments in television.

### *Tory Transition from Older to Newer Media*

CCO was signalling to its party the importance of the sustained adaptation to television culture for both the central and regional organizations. The party was no longer resisting the inevitable, and thus realized that television culture was bigger than its own. However, the party was clear to place the role of television in perspective. Shown in the extract, CCO tempered its own embrace of television. It did this by assessing the medium in terms of its popularity, which the party based on a comparison of the public's uptake of television and radio licences. Therefore, Macmillan's Conservatives in 1957, like the party of the earlier 1950s period, had not quite reached a point at which television had become an omnipotent medium with precedence over all others. This placed significant pressure on organization at CCO, because, while in transition, it maintained the old methods of propaganda output while embracing newer approaches to communicating with the electorate through TV. The party had remained in a state of steady transition and change since the early 1950s, but by 1957 the party was engaging with radio and television on a relatively equal footing.<sup>71</sup>

The above Newsgram extract mentions how the party had entered into 'the field of television production.'<sup>72</sup> The intensive processes involved in creating and amending broadcast scripts for programming is an example of how TV had begun impacting the daily life at CCO.<sup>73</sup> Before television, the party had engaged with cinematic film and radio broadcasts. To some degree, the party was prepared for television, because film, as an audio-visual medium, and radio, as a broadcast sound medium, both held characteristics in their productions which were similar to some of the characteristics in the field of television production. For instance, all three media required a political idea or theme, central message or information, creative planning, script, speaker/political personality, rehearsal, dissemination and audience. In order to remain politically competitive, CCO assigned specific tasks to professionals in those fields.<sup>74</sup> Film and television shared the obvious characteristics of both using moving visual images and sound, which involved the use of camera and microphone technology.<sup>75</sup> Films could be, and were, used for broadcast on television, but not on radio. Film and radio were relatively formal media in comparison to the conversational style of television. As illustrated in [Chapter 3](#), film was used to draw an audience at political social gatherings in the constituencies. Television and radio were used in a similar manner in the form of the

forementioned Tory TV meetings. However, the nature of these were comparatively intimate when evaluated against the publically open tradition of hustings and film gatherings, which further highlights the symbolic domesticity of television.<sup>76</sup>

Radio as a broadcast medium shared many characteristics with television. It usually required a studio setting, and broadcasting facilities. Unlike film, political broadcasts were restricted by strict legislation and rules, which meant lawyers were used by the party to consult on legal aspects of broadcasting. The party's internal deliberations in preparation for inter-party meetings on political broadcasting grew out of a custom which was first grounded in radio, and later evolved to incorporate the role of television in political broadcasting. The focus on voice for radio meant that the party's presentation style had to be adapted for television broadcasts.<sup>77</sup> Political television was often a visual broadcasting medium that was transmitted live, which meant speakers needed to be well trained in the art of television performance, and well briefed and rehearsed. Like radio, TV had the potential to reach large numbers of the electorate. Therefore, the potential for impact was greater than the more limited dissemination of political films. Furthermore, unlike film, live broadcasts could not be carefully edited. Therefore, scripts and speeches required a great deal of attention. The themes from this research suggests that, as the demands of political television grew over time, the party underwent a process of observing, learning, understanding and executing the appropriate aspects of political television production useful to its aims. The central aim of this process being to achieve successful transition in the use of political television for electoral gain. Eventually, as is argued more fully in subsequent chapters, this Conservatives journey led to a more professionalized party<sup>78</sup> that in turn synthesized with the more intensive occupation and culture of television production.

### *Tory Pride and Prejudice: Nonsense and Sensitivities*

The source materials testify that by 1958 the Conservative Party had invested great time, thought, resources, energy and passion in the development of its television operations. The party's significant investment in its broadcasting endeavours led to a sense of pride in its achievements. Therefore, the CCO elites, who had channelled much of their skills and ideas into developing the party's television presence, could be sensitive to

misrepresentations of it. This is evident in a letter from the party's chief publicity officer to the editor of *The Observer*.

I was amused to see that Maurice Richardson expects the Conservative Party to follow the lead of the Labour Party in providing a studio with closed circuit for television training. Some 200 Conservative MPs as well as hundred or so candidates and others, will doubtless share my amusement, as, for the past two years, they have been enjoying precisely those facilities in the studio in the Conservative Central Office. It is just over ten years since our first studio was equipped for sound radio training, and six years since we extended the service to cover television. Your readers may be interested to know that it has taken the Labour Party quite a time to follow us.<sup>79</sup>

It suggests that, although the party initially took a cautious approach to political television, which, at times, meant it was slow to adapt and change to the new technology and its culture, it was naturally competitive and especially sensitive to advances by the Labour Party. Not only did Macmillan's Conservatives want to win the next election, they wanted to be seen as a modern and progressive party in terms of their organization and publicity. Therefore, the party was balancing between, firstly, its caution in embracing change and, secondly, its competitiveness to be ahead of its opponents. In contemporary contexts, this might seem like nonsense. But the evident tension demonstrates how important the transition to television was for political parties at that time.

### *Courting Commercial Broadcasters*

By mid-1958, the CCO elite were paying greater attention to building stronger relationships with commercial broadcasters and advancements in broadcasting technology. The party officials began taking opportunities to socialize more closely with commercial TV producers. This often involved dinner parties and other 'suitable social gatherings'.<sup>80</sup> For example:

Sir Wavell Wakefield arranged a dinner at the House of Commons... The chief guest was Mr Adorian of Associated Rediffusion. The latter is also going to a dinner given by the Labour Party in the near future. He stressed that his political sympathies were with us although he has of course to give a fair amount of time and consideration to the other parties.<sup>81</sup>

The party had held on to its belief that there was socialist bias in the BBC and other media, therefore the party began combating the phenomenon through providing hospitality and schmoozing with commercial broadcasters. In making the effort to build the relationships, the party found that it gained tangible benefits, especially in terms of information relating to advancements in broadcasting technologies that could be used for the benefit of the party. Kaberry had been informed of the

... development made recently in regard to the recording of sound and vision programmes on tape. It will be possible to make a recording on a tape of the programme in question, which can then be played back on the air within a matter of minutes if necessary. ITA have got the first two camera recorders of this type in the country. The BBC expect to get one at the end of September. They are all imported from America. This process completely overcomes the necessity of filming for TV purposes and enables complete editing to be done on any tape. It would be an ideal process for use in party political broadcasts particularly for the type we have in mind for the prime minister. It means that quite a long shot can be taken of a free discussion. This can be reasonably quickly edited and a fresh tape taken and put out on sound and vision.<sup>82</sup>

Officials at CCO were now immersed in the culture of television and the processes of television production had become an everyday aspect of their understanding.

## CONCLUSIONS

During 1957–58, commercial television was becoming more established and political television was no longer news. These markers of wider change suggest the medium had begun to culturally mature. Macmillan's Conservatives' relationship with television was characterized largely by the party starting afresh under new political and organizational leaderships amid the aftershocks of Suez. Furthermore, set within the wider context of the party streamlining its organization and finances, it began lifting expectations placed on members at the grassroots; while making further investments in television resources at CCO, by 1958. That said, approaches to television during 1957–58 resemble many characteristics exhibited in the party under Eden. TV remained part of a diverse mix of party propaganda techniques.

The party remained locked-in on its journey of transition towards transformative change, the realization of which culminates in [Chapters 6](#) and [7](#).

Rather than significant marked changes, the characteristics established under Eden intensified further like, for example, the use of TV to attract younger members, data-driven training, development of TV personalities who lagged behind their Labour equivalents, schmoozing of broadcasters, amplification of political egos and insecurities, civic culture of bureaucratic committee meetings, and trends towards professionalization and centralization. Deferential member attitudes seem generally amenable towards CCO initiatives that had begun a retraction from the mass party culture. It made way for a non-resistant erosion of the importance of the Tory grassroots, while, at the same time, the pertinence of political television was continuing to rise.

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## 1959 General Election, Tories and TV 1958–63

**Abstract** Chapter 6 focuses on analysing marked changes in Macmillan's Conservatives before and after the 1959 election. It argues that the party's organizational culture continued to adapt in line with advances in wider television culture and that the party underwent transformation post-election. Laying ground for the major theme of [Chapter 7](#), this chapter argues that Macmillan's Conservatives underwent rapid organizational changes resulting in a more professionalized and television centric party. Key drivers of organization change in Macmillan's Conservatives include the post-Suez empowerment of broadcasters, realization by political elites that TV production could not be controlled by parties, instincts and choices of leaders like, for example, Edward Heath, in key mediatory roles, increased familiarity with the medium by 1959 and insights and experiences from the 1959 election.

**Keywords** Conservative Party · General Election 1959 · Harold Macmillan · Macmillan's Conservatives · Professionalization · Television

## INTRODUCTION

The 1959 General Election held on 8 October was 20 months after Harold Macmillan succeeded Anthony Eden. It was the first opportunity the British electorate had to endorse the Conservatives' choice of leader at the polls. Macmillan's Conservatives defeated Gaitskell's Labour Party with an increased majority from 59 to 99 seats in the House of Commons.<sup>1</sup> Macmillan had been dubbed 'Supermac', and it seems his new nickname was befitting of his electoral success. Continuing the narrative and questions raised in [Chapter 5](#), this chapter focuses on analysing marked changes in Macmillan's Conservatives before and after the 1959 election. It argues that the party's organizational culture continued to adapt in line with advances in wider television culture and that the party underwent transformation post-election. Laying ground for the major theme of [Chapter 7](#), this chapter argues that Macmillan's Conservatives underwent rapid organizational changes resulting in a more professionalized and television centric party.

### 1959 ELECTION: TORY TV PREPARATION

One aspect that influenced Macmillan's Conservatives' approach to political television, especially in the run-up to 1959, was the developments in their relationships with the BBC and Independent Television Authority (ITA). After many years of interparty committee meetings that had formed an integral part of the behind-the-scenes political television culture in Britain, the relationships between the broadcasters and the Conservative Party elites were becoming less formal. Rather than simply complying with the rules, ideas and acts of Parliament, which were laid down by the political parties of the past, it seems the broadcasters, who had become empowered by the popular uptake and naturalization of television viewing in wider British culture, were developing confidence. The broadcasters used this to exert influence on the direction of political television culture and the political parties were required to adapt.<sup>2</sup> Naturally, this shifted the dynamics between broadcasters and political parties.

#### *Broadcasting and Politics: Elite Formalities*

Following Macmillan's succession to the premiership, the inevitability of a general election was an opportunity for the broadcasters to begin putting their case to the Conservative elite both at Conservative Central Office

(CCO) and 12 Downing Street for changing the status quo of political TV coverage. By mid-1958, serious, formal discourse on the matter had begun within the party elite. Viscount Hailsham wrote to Edward Heath:

On 25 June, you wrote to Donald Kaberry with a memorandum prepared by the BBC and the ITA on broadcasting at elections. I have had a small office meeting about this memorandum and what follows is partly the result of my own thinking and partly of their advice. I will deal first with the proposal for the General Election. I would think that the main objects of any programme of broadcasting for an election are three fold. The first is that the election is news and needs to be covered by reporting. The second is that the parties will legitimately require to use part of the broadcasting time for their election party political broadcasts. The third is that the election being topical will give both to the Authority [ITA] and the Corporation [BBC] an opportunity to clarify and discuss some of the issues at the election in programmes of their devising and production.<sup>3</sup>

Some Conservative elites believed that the status quo of TV legislation was a disadvantage to the party. There was, therefore, some appetite within Macmillan's Conservatives to amend the legislation. However, the party realized that the legal position meant that all parties would need to be in agreement before any change could be enacted in law.<sup>4</sup> Hailsham, representing CCO, was beginning to bend to the 'advice' from the broadcasters. This demonstrates that the broadcasters had some impact on the thought patterns and broadcasting policies of the party elites; and that Macmillan's Conservatives were open to permitting the broadcasters more freedom in their coverage of elections.

Hailsham used written discourse as a tool to outline his arguments in order to persuasively convince Heath. It would appear Heath played a mediatory role between both the party elites and the broadcasting elites. As chief whip his responsibility was to represent the best interests of the government and, therefore, the Conservative leadership. Heath's incumbency in this unique mediatory role, at that specific point in the history of political television, meant that his inclinations and choices played a significant role in broadcasting events in the run-up to the 1959 General Election. [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#) highlight some scholarly perspectives on how some individuals in party leadership roles, like, in this case, Heath, can act as a driver of change.

On 14 July 1958, Heath chaired a meeting on 'political broadcasting' at the House of Commons, which focused its discussion on the matters of regional political broadcasts for minor parties, broadcasting of general elections and by-elections, and election coverage involving comment and opinion.<sup>5</sup> Heath was joined by other party elites including Hailsham, Donald Kaberry MP, W. Urton and Ronald Simms, who debated external pressures in relation to political broadcasting.

Mr Heath pointed out that the new factor with regard to regional broadcasts was that the BBC had now joined with the Scottish and Welsh national councils in pressing for regional party political broadcasts and had asked to bring the two national governors to a meeting with the parties. While the Conservative and Labour parties had been united in their opposition to such broadcasts, the Labour Party were now beginning to waver, especially in regard to Wales.<sup>6</sup>

Although television was becoming more familiar to the Conservative Party, and was, therefore, less of a new medium, the evolving nature of television in the 1950s and early 1960s meant that the party was continually affronted with 'new' factors. The changing dynamics of the party's relationship and interactions with the broadcasters led to these factors being addressed through the party's tradition of bureaucratic discourse and committee meetings, which included a process of thought, deliberation and potential action. Actually, regional broadcasts were not a new factor in terms of their concept. But the prospect of them becoming a reality was a new concept for the Conservative Party. Moreover, it was made all the more pertinent an issue as it was one that their opponents were beginning to favour. This shows how the Conservatives filtered out issues for attention on the broadcasting agenda, until the time came for it to engage fully with the subject matter. Furthermore, it demonstrates how a once weak broadcasting elite, were beginning to gain greater powers of persuasion over the British political elite.

The commercial broadcasters demonstrate their new found confidence in a letter to Hailsham:

We have been discussing the most helpful and effective way of handling the next general election in our programmes. We feel that it would not be sufficient for Independent Television just to relay official party political

broadcasts. I hope you agree that the millions of voters who will not go to meetings but will be ready to follow the election campaigns on TV should be given every incentive to do so, and that the programmes must therefore be as varied and stimulating as possible.<sup>7</sup>

Macmillan's Conservatives reacted to these external pressures from broadcasters by developing a paper 'to enumerate and describe the different sorts of broadcasts which the BBC and the ITA may wish to make (i) at the time of an election and (ii) at the time of a by-election'.<sup>8</sup> The paper suggests that the party's understanding of the broadcasters' motives behind the expansion of election coverage was 'to inform the public'.<sup>9</sup>

Macmillan's Conservatives both at Downing Street and CCO proceeded to formally deliberate their position through written dialogue. In January 1959, Simms wrote to Heath stating that the 'question of regional broadcasts as proposed by the BBC and ITA will be difficult to oppose, and it seems to us that there is some danger of the public being satiated by political broadcasts during the election period'.<sup>10</sup> CCO elites had considered that the voting public may be overwhelmed by too much political broadcasting and, therefore, presented their proposed allocation for ten television broadcasts to be shared among the Conservatives, Labour and Liberals: 5:4:1. By April 1959, Macmillan's Conservatives had submitted to the inevitability of regional broadcasts. The party prepared itself for this with a set of procedures:

A list of persons suitable to appear in regional programmes produced by the BBC and ITV companies was circulated. Mr Kaberry stressed the importance of selecting candidates with local connections in each area. Guidance to MPs, candidates, Central Office Agents and constituency agents about consulting Central Office before accepting invitations to appear in regional broadcasts would be issued by the General Director when the date of the General Election was known.<sup>11</sup>

Macmillan's Conservatives' approach to regional broadcasts was in keeping with the cautious approach evident in the party under Churchill and Eden. However, the new-found power by the broadcasters seems to have driven the party to finally break with their traditional attitude towards political television and begin preparing for the new broadcasting challenges of the upcoming election.

*Conservative Attitudinal Changes Towards Television*

This attitudinal change within the party is evident in a number of other documents that addresses the matter of television from early 1958 onwards. For example, correspondence between party elites at CCO and Downing Street were becoming more explicit in their understanding of the importance that television was expected to play in election proceedings.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the party's continued research on matters of television became more heavily focused on the matter of getting the best use out of the medium as a mass communication tool for reaching the voter.<sup>13</sup> This was a significant shift in the party's focus on television. Earlier, it had been largely centred on three organizational aspects. Firstly, the engagement of party individuals with television, secondly, their interaction with the medium, and thirdly, the adaptation of the party organization in line with developments in television culture. As the 1959 election loomed, the party also began to demonstrate a commitment to improving its collective television technique, in the belief that 'every time our ministers appear on TV and answer questions in a situation contrived by the programme companies they become better known to the public as great personalities and leaders'.<sup>14</sup>

Party supporters had noticed improvements in the party's small screen presence and praised, in particular, Macmillan for his broadcasting skill in a television programme.

Several people have spoken both to Mr Hearn and to myself in the most glowing terms about the recent television programme in which the prime minister was interviewed by Ed Murrow. It undoubtedly seems to have given great encouragement to our own supporters. The suggestion has already been put to me that we ought to use a similar technique in presenting the prime minister to the public in one of our own party programmes.<sup>15</sup>

Television had become an important tool for party morale. Improving the party's broadcasting talent enhanced confidence in the political arm of the organization. The party's self-perception of its broadcasting abilities had become of importance to the wider party organization—under the assumption that greater confidence in its leadership would produce a more dedicated workforce at the grassroots.

### *Tory Troops: TV Training for 1959*

In February 1959, at the area publicity officer's conference, it was highlighted that a list of marginal and non-marginal seat candidates with the potential to become 'TV personalities' should be put forward for coaching.<sup>16</sup> Subsequently, the party continued to encourage its candidates<sup>17</sup> and MPs<sup>18</sup> to partake in television training courses and regional television conferences for candidates.<sup>19</sup> The party had become concerned about the imposition of travelling distance and time for candidates outside of London and the South East regions, and that it might hinder the attendance on the courses. Therefore, a number of training courses were scheduled and held in the regions. In April 1959,

...a special television course was held in Manchester by the television department of Central Office under the auspices of the North West Area. This took the form of a reproduction of the studio, with complete closed circuit television, lights, sound etc., such as exists at Central Office. This was considered to be a highly successful venture...<sup>20</sup>

The party had begun to 'strongly' emphasize also the importance of attending these training sessions.<sup>21</sup> When compared to the earlier periods, the language used by CCO to address the television matters was taking a more confident and coercive approach to the medium. Furthermore, the focus of the training had changed to place more emphasis on practice and giving good performances on camera. The courses lasted for two hours and consisted of 'instruction, with opportunity for individual practice in the three principle aspects of television appearances—talking to the camera, interviews, and question-and-answer programmes'.<sup>22</sup> As well as innovation in the manner in which it administered its training, the party maintained its approach to networking selected MPs with TV officials.

I have arranged with Donald Kaberry to hold a cocktail party, 6 pm to 8 pm at St Stephen's Club, on Thursday 4 June, so that a selected number of Members of Parliament may have an opportunity to meet informally some radio and television producers of current affairs, news and feature programmes. I am sure this will be of great value and interest to both sides and will serve to create a happy relationship between Members and the production side of radio and television.<sup>23</sup>

These examples suggest that in the run-up to 1959 CCO was beginning to take a more assertive approach to leading the party's involvement with television. 1959 is considered to have been the party's most sophisticated campaign in terms of strategy and marketing techniques when compared to those elections before it.<sup>24</sup> The focus had moved from educating the party on matters of political television and introducing the organization to the culture of the new medium; to equipping the party with the necessary skills and opportunities to win over the voters in the impending general election. Furthermore, there was an active intention for the party's collective face to be improved on the small screen.

The party's advancements in preparing, coaching and training its politicians to perform effectively on television were beginning to receive praise from those to whom it had given support. For example,

Last Friday, I was on the television programme, 'Who Goes Home?'. I do just want to write and tell you how helpful and efficient Central Office were in briefing and preparing me for this frightening ordeal. Hinchcliffe's coaching was quite invaluable, and Michael Fraser and his staff produced for me with incredible speed all the information I could possibly need. I think you, as chairman of the party, and the rest of us as party members, can be very proud of our organization at Smith Square and Old Queen Street.<sup>25</sup>

It would appear that CCO operations had reached a confident stage in preparing politicians for interaction with the new medium. But its approach to offering its resources to 'anyone' was changing.

### *Maturing Medium: Tightening Tory Organization*

CCO had a relatively liberal and open policy towards access for staff and visitors to view its television studios in the run-up to 1959. However, evidently due to the party's increased and sustained proud advertisement of its television facilities, demand by the ordinary individual had begun to overwhelm the television section's operations. This led to the general director restricting access to the studio<sup>26</sup> and indicates that the television culture of the party was reaching another phase. This is also evident in CCO's decision to cease informing area publicity officers of the political programmes that were expected to be monitored, '...we should now have reached the stage where you are well aware of the various programmes upon

which it is necessary to keep a watch'.<sup>27</sup> It indicates that the television culture of Macmillan's Conservatives had reached a point of relative maturity.

TV was beginning to rise significantly and challenge the party's mass party culture. Film was certainly in its final decent. In January 1959, the chairman of the Conservative Film Association wrote to notify the party that the association was going to cease its operations because of the increase in television.<sup>28</sup> During the 1959 General Election, a campaign memorandum suggested that canvassing of homes should be discontinued during television hours.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, political television was being given priority over the traditional grassroots' activity of canvassing. Television's precedence over traditional face-to-face activism signalled the beginnings of the decline for the mass party and the proliferation of TV centrality in the party's organizational culture. However, there is evidence to suggest that although television was maturing in the party's strategy, radio remained on equal terms. As early as April 1958, the party was using the TV and Radio Newsgram for advertising internally to its supporters the upcoming broadcasts of political programming. But both radio and television continued to be portrayed as equals in the Newsgrams until at least November 1961.<sup>30</sup>

### *Macmillan, Television and 1959 Election Preparations*

Macmillan himself took a keen interest in the developments in television broadcasting and its uses as a party propaganda tool in the run-up to the 1959 General Election.<sup>31</sup> In May 1959, five months before the election, Macmillan wrote a personal note to his chief whip, stating: 'I would like to have a word with you before we leave for our holiday about television broadcasts at the general election. They ought to be carefully tied in with the pamphlets and general propaganda.'<sup>32</sup> He also suggested content for televised party political broadcasts<sup>33</sup> and personally 'approved the choice of speakers . . . to represent the party in BBC hustings programmes', in other words, regional broadcasts.<sup>34</sup> This shows that Macmillan was engaged in the propaganda process and that he had some understanding of the place of television amid a number of other political media in the election. It also indicates Macmillan's desire to be in control of the medium.

The prime minister took the time to write personally to Hailsham on television matters.

I have read with great interest your minute of 30 December. I altogether approve of the line on which the programme should be prepared. In the '2.

Standard of Living’, I hope a good deal of emphasis will be put on housing—it is a good story and has a certain opportunity, as I shall try to prove in my speech in Newcastle next week. I would only observe that none of these programmes is related to the Commonwealth or Foreign Affairs. It might perhaps be worthwhile having a Commonwealth programme. I think some material on these subjects ought to be got ready in case it is of vital importance to use it. With regard to speakers, I agree that you could take decisions nearer the time. The important thing is that they should be lively, modern, up-to-date people.<sup>35</sup>

Macmillan understood that in order for political television to be successful, the choice of performers or ‘speakers’ was an essential aspect of the party’s broadcast strategy.<sup>36</sup> He made attempts to ensure that there was consistency in both his public messages and party broadcast on television. Furthermore, he held a meeting ‘in order to consider how the provisional broadcasting arrangements [fitted] in with the manifesto’.<sup>37</sup> In contrast to Churchill and Eden, Macmillan took an interactive hands-on approach to the party’s TV output. This divergence from his predecessor is described by Jon Lawrence as ‘Macmillan’s slick “makeover” for the television age’.<sup>38</sup> However, what seems most pertinent is how the party learned from and responded to analyses of the 1959 General Election.

### ROAD TO PROFESSIONALIZATION: AFTER GENERAL ELECTION 1959

A range of Conservative Party attitudes towards TV after General Election 1959 are featured in a pamphlet, published and sold for two shillings, by the Conservative Political Centre. One example claims

Television is the domestic symbol of the decade, and it may be making the greatest impact on human thought since Caxton’s printing press. It has grown in the last ten years from a luxury which gave a modest performance to a comparative few to an accepted service which brings a remarkable range of programmes into about two thirds of the homes in Britain. In June 1950, there were only about 400,000 television licences, but by the middle of 1960 the number had reached the 11 million mark. Television has a powerful impact on the family.<sup>39</sup>

This endorsement of the medium from proponents within the Conservative Party was significant. The publication aimed to influence

British television policy. It called for a more aggressive approach to the exportation of British TV in line with what was being witnessed in the US. But, as Tim Bale writes, this perspective was rather more favoured by Conservative backbenchers than the party's political elites.<sup>40</sup> For some Tories, television was the future and required significant investment to ensure that Britain was competitive in a developing global market. Therefore, although some political elites remained cautious, television had begun entering the imaginations of other Conservative Party members and, in this case, it led to a collective group of Conservatives forming in the attempt to influence the direction of the medium outside of the party's organization. Indeed, as H. H. Wilson and [Chapter 3](#) of this book can testify, this seems to be a repeat characteristic of an earlier phenomenon in which Tory backbenchers and CCO took a more favourable stance towards commercial TV than the Churchill government.<sup>41</sup>

### BBC, TORIES AND POSITIVE RELATIONS

Throughout the 1950s, CCO had attempted to develop better relations with the BBC. By 1960, it seems the relationship was developing positively.

I had lunch today with Carleton Green and Harman Grisewood. Carleton was kind enough to say that they have never known a time when relations between the BBC and the Central Office were smoother and more friendly. However, he felt that since the resignation of Mr Heath as chief whip there was a vacuum in the relationship between the BBC and government circles. His feeling is that they used to have very close relations with Mr Heath, and that they would like to have equally close relations, either with the present chief whip or Dr Charles Hill, whichever you would prefer.<sup>42</sup>

This extract suggests that the relationship between the party and the broadcasters was dynamic in that it changed over time. Furthermore, the party's relationship with the broadcasters could be simultaneously close or distant dependent on the individual relations between specific party groups. In this case, and at that specific point in time, there was a dichotomy between the BBC's relationship with CCO, and Downing Street.<sup>43</sup> The good relations the party held with the BBC were largely dependent on specific individual elites in mediatory/liason roles. The BBC's claim, that it had a strong relationship with Heath as chief whip

supports the aforementioned assertion that Heath's mediatory role was pivotal in the party's relationships with the numerous actors which together constituted British political television. Again, in this case, it is evident that the same could be claimed for Downing Street's direct relationship with the broadcasters.

### *Macmillan's Conservatives and Mastering Television*

In the aftermath of Macmillan's Conservatives' win at the 1959 General Election, the central party understood that it would not be able to 'control the production'<sup>44</sup> of political programming, but that it could 'do a great deal to ensure that the right type of person represents the Conservative Party, and that he or she is adequately coached'.<sup>45</sup> In the run-up to the election, the Tories had already begun to submit to the reality that they could no longer exert control over the broadcasters. The North West area agents reported<sup>46</sup> that, after the general election, the BBC and Granada ITV made 'very high' demands 'often at short notice'.<sup>47</sup> The 1959 election had demonstrated to Britain that the prominence of political TV culture was on the rise. There was now general acceptance that the time had arrived for greater use of television as a tool for reaching the mass electorate; and that, used effectively, the medium could yield significant electoral advantages. It appears the broadcasters became empowered by this and the dominance of the political elite over political broadcasting began to be diminished.<sup>48</sup> Those who were involved in politics were beginning to find themselves being more shepherded by the broadcasters than in previous elections. This transition and change was an irritant for some individuals in the Conservative Party and meant that, at times, tensions built between the local party professionals and regional broadcasting officials during the election campaign.

An example of this was when the North West area Conservatives were asked to provide Granada's *Last Debate*, which was held two nights before polling day, with 120 Conservative audience members. It was the agents' responsibility to organize the speakers, questioners, commentators, audience members and questions for the regional broadcasts. These types of broadcasts were a new and extra responsibility in the role of a Conservative agent at election time. Furthermore, 'all the area publicity officers agreed that during the general election the arranging of audiences, questioners and questions for television had taken up more than half their time'.<sup>49</sup> This placed added pressures on the party professionals. The testimony of

the North West area agents, demonstrates their realization that the behind-the-scenes election time TV culture was a cumbersome process with high demands on the resources of those who were expected to engage with it. The nature of the election game was changing and the ordinary association members and officers were ill equipped to manage the broadcasting process. Regional Broadcasts were new and, therefore, had not been factored into the party's pre-election TV training. The responsibility for regional broadcasts was placed within the remit of the professionalized party staff at the local level. However, many of them had little or no experience of managing broadcasts of this nature during an election.

It appears that, to some extent, the advent of regional broadcasts played a role in driving further integration of the cultures of television broadcasting and party organization. How this transpired is evident in the following extract:

As arranged between the parties and the BBC these names have been submitted direct to Broadcasting House, London, who will in turn notify the regional producers. So as to ensure that no party takes advantage of the knowledge, the parties' nominations will be kept in confidence by the BBC and ourselves until late on Nomination Day... With regard to ITV, details of party speakers approved will be notified as soon as possible, and arrangements left to the relative Central Office agent. In the meantime Central Office should be advised of approaches received and arrangements made.<sup>50</sup>

Although Macmillan's Conservatives realized that it was a futile activity to attempt to control the broadcasters of political television, it would appear that the central party understood that its hierarchical deference remained and, therefore, it was better equipped to control the collective individuals who made-up the party and, in particular, those who represented the party on television.

The party had reached the realization that, if the medium of TV could not be controlled, then, the party should make every attempt to master it through controlling output and training its speakers and audiences. Therefore, a centralization process of control was beginning. In January 1960, learning from the election of the previous year, CCO decided to resume 'television training' and made direct contact with members of parliament on the matter.<sup>51</sup> Provision for the training of candidates in general was made also, but, unlike MPs, the party did not plan to contact the candidates individually.<sup>52</sup> Television sessions for ordinary association

members now became limited to training in audience participation. This shows a clear hierarchical pattern with correlation between the levels of seniority and the provisions for television training. Furthermore, CCO's steps to further centralize party broadcasting operations resulted in the attempt to influence the performances of Conservative participants in political television audiences.

By 1961, the term for television training had changed to the more casual 'TV Practice',<sup>53</sup> indicating that developing one's political broadcasting technique was becoming an established feature of the life at CCO for middle tier Conservatives. The process of mastering the medium had been in early development from the time of Eden, with the repeated drive to train its members, staff and politicians in the ways of television culture.<sup>54</sup> However, there became distinct differences between the party's interaction with television culture before and after the 1959 election period. Under Eden, the party presented to all levels of the party hierarchy opportunities to interact with political television. Engagement at all levels of the party in the earlier periods of the 1950s was openly encouraged by CCO and the associations. However, towards the end of the decade, the opportunities for the ordinary member to actively engage with television on behalf of the party became fewer and fewer. Activities that fed into the production and broadcasts of political television programmes, on which Conservative speakers were featured, largely became the preserve of professionalized CCO staff and organizational and political elites.<sup>55</sup>

### *Central Office Centralizes TV Uncoupling the Grassroots*

The change in attitude towards the views of the party membership on political broadcasts is evident in a reply from the party to William Boven, an ordinary Conservative supporter from Stafford. Boven wrote to CCO to suggest a topic for broadcast. Simms replied stating that there was a structure in place for the election broadcasts and that it was 'impossible' for Boven's idea to be considered.<sup>56</sup> Boven may very well have received a response with a similar conclusion had he written a letter of this nature in the run-up to the 1955 General Election. However, what is quite different is the tone of the reply. Under Eden the party officials welcomed, if not encouraged, discursive correspondence, creativity and innovation, from its membership on the use of television—and the language used in written correspondence often reflected that intent. But by 1959, in signalling that

a contribution by a supporter was ‘impossible’, the party had begun to block from its membership the creative flow of ideas for political broadcasts.

By 1963, the general director of the party was signalling to the wider membership that the CCO was no longer interested in receiving correspondence from individuals in the constituencies on the matter of perceived broadcaster bias—whether it indicated bias for or against the Conservatives. In a letter to association and CCO agents, the general director notes that writing to the party is not the most effective method, because broadcasters ‘are generally most sensitive to public criticism’.<sup>57</sup> It demonstrates CCO’s greater command for the ways of the broadcasters; and suggests its role was changing to a more centralized operation under the influence of wider television culture. Therefore, its resources were better invested in broadcast production rather than handling general correspondence on political programming. It would appear that its focus shifted away from serving the interests of its mass membership as a hub for information exchange. In the new TV age, the medium of political television was substituting much of the traditional methods that the party used to communicate with the public.<sup>58</sup> Therefore the party membership, which had been the party’s traditional medium to connect with the voter, was becoming less valuable to the needs of the Conservative Party. Consequently, it seems that some of the focus shifted from engaging the membership to centralizing and professionalizing the party’s television output and operations. Compared to the earlier periods, it indicates to marked changes in both CCO attitudes and organizational dynamics between the grassroots and party centre.

## CONCLUSIONS

Marked changes in Macmillan’s Conservatives before and after the 1959 election show that the party’s culture continued to adapt in line with wider advances in television. The main thematic characteristic of the party, 1958–63, is its accelerated and intensified adaptation, largely engineered by CCO, towards a more professionalized and television centric party. Key drivers of organization change in Macmillan’s Conservatives include the post-Suez empowerment of broadcasters, realization by political elites about the importance of television and that TV production could not be controlled by parties, increased broadcaster influence to which politicians

responded by using TV experts, instincts and choices of leaders, like, for example, Edward Heath, in key mediatory roles; increased familiarity with the medium by 1959; and insights and experiences from election 1959.

Ultimately, this culminated in a tightening of CCO policies in which political and organizational elites became prioritized to the relative exclusion of the wider party, when compared with earlier periods. At the grassroots, TV's political ascension is symbolized by television taking precedence over doorstep activism. Macmillan's hands-on approach to his party's mastery of the medium helped transform the party from one rooted in a mass culture to a more television centric party organization. By 1961, CCO's attitude to TV was more casual and confident. It somewhat uncoupled from wider engagement with the grassroots on the topic of television, and TV became the preserve of CCO professionals and the political elite. Given the evidence, it seems plausible to suggest that the party underwent transformation post-election in which rapid organizational changes resulted in a more professionalized and television centric party. These themes are developed further in [Chapter 7](#).

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## Tories, Television and Professionalization 1962–64

**Abstract** Chapter 7 explores the impact of transformation on the Conservative Party. It argues the party changed from being characterized by its mass party culture to a centralized structure in which an elite and professionalized party centre developed a television centric operation. Firstly, it analyses the Selwyn Lloyd report, which offers insider perspectives about how ordinary members were feeling disenfranchised by the early 1960s. The chapter also provides a snapshot of the more centralized image of the party under the leadership of Douglas-Home, 1963–64. It concludes that Douglas-Home’s Conservatives’ relationship with television is characterized by the marked change in, firstly, the tightened control that a newly strengthened Central Office team of experts held over the party’s television operations and facilities, and, secondly, the relatively diminished role and place of the ordinary membership at the grassroots.

**Keywords** Alec Douglas-Home · Conservative Party · Douglas-Home’s Conservatives · Professionalization · Television · Selwyn Lloyd report

## INTRODUCTION

In the early 1960s, the Tories were plagued by a new type of scandal that was broadcast across the nation in a manner that had not been experienced before in Britain. The 1963 ‘Profumo Affair’ broke at the same time as the release of the Selwyn Lloyd Report, on party organization, thus resulting in the coverage of the report being dropped by broadcasters.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Profumo scandal, which followed a handful of additional political challenges for Macmillan, contributed to a decline in public confidence in the party.<sup>2</sup> Subsequently, Macmillan resigned due to ill health, on 13 October 1963, and was succeeded by Alec Douglas-Home, on 18 October 1963.<sup>3</sup> Douglas-Home served as prime minister for just one year. It marked the end of 13 years of Conservative continuity in government. However, Churchill’s Conservatives of 1951 seem in stark contrast to the party under Douglas-Home, 1963–64. It suggests that the Tories underwent marked changes by the time Harold Wilson became the first Labour prime minister since Clement Atlee left office, in 1951. Wilson achieved a small majority of just five seats in the Commons at the 1964 General Election on 15 October.<sup>4</sup>

This final case-study chapter outlines the impact of the transformation of the Conservative Party from a mass party culture to an elite professionalized and television centric operation. Firstly, it analyses the Lloyd report on party organization, which offers insider perspectives about how ordinary members were feeling disenfranchised by the early 1960s. The chapter also provides a snapshot of the more centralized image of the party under the leadership of Douglas-Home during 1963–64. The chapter concludes that Douglas-Home’s Conservatives’ relationship with television is characterized by the marked change in, firstly, the tightened control that a newly strengthened and professionalized team of experts at CCO held over the party’s television operations and facilities, and, secondly, the relatively diminished role and place of the ordinary membership at the grassroots.

### SELWYN LLOYD’S REPORT ON PARTY ORGANIZATION

In 1962, Lloyd was asked by Iain MacLeod MP, party chairman, to conduct a report on the state of party organization akin to the 1948 Maxwell-Fyfe Report.<sup>5</sup> There was some concern that there had become disconnect between the upper-ranks of the party and the ordinary members at the grassroots.

I have been very impressed wherever I have been so far, by the feeling that the loyal party workers never get near senior ministers. It is certainly not a case of one or two isolated grumblers putting this view. I have heard it from almost everyone. They feel that ministers are remote, out of contact, they never hear what the officers in the constituencies think, and are completely under the thumbs of their permanent officials.<sup>6</sup>

By the 1960s, it appears that the newly professionalized ranks in the party were embracing change. The wider party had noticed this change and was feeling a sense of redundancy from traditional political action. Therefore, MacLeod, in discussion with Macmillan, thought it timely that the party undergo an assessment in order that it may become more self-aware of its efficacy as a political organization in modern times.

Political television was a one-way method of communicating with the masses and its embrace by the central party had an impact on party organization. While television had been part of a mix of communications that the party used in the early to late 1950s, it did not have much impact until the 1959 General Election. Political television was becoming a substitute for meeting ‘the people’ in person. Therefore, with the increasing focus on the party’s political elites, like senior ministers, and their appearances on television, the Conservative Central Office (CCO) officials were slow to realize that the workers at the grassroots had become disconnected from the traditional organization.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, Lloyd came to the opinion from his meetings with ordinary Conservative members that they were beginning to feel forgotten and silenced.

Lloyd’s final report<sup>8</sup> provided a clear and concise insider perspective of the state of party organization in the early 1960s. His comprehensive plan, which was informed by extensive interviews of party individuals at all levels of the hierarchy and in many roles within the party organization, included a number of criticisms and corresponding recommendations that had direct relevance to the role of television in the party. Lloyd criticized that ‘the Conservative Party broadcasts should be much more hard hitting’ and with ‘more facilities for training of potential contributors to political programmes. More Conservative women should appear on them’.<sup>9</sup> He recommended that ‘there should be more contact between ministers and leading party workers’ and ‘more training in television techniques’.<sup>10</sup> He worded these examples in terms of organizational functionality.

Additional unpublished memoranda show that the final report was in fact sanitized from Lloyd’s full assessment of television and the

Conservative Party. The final report, published by CCO, was intended for open distribution, for the price of one shilling. Lloyd's act of sanitizing the public version of the report demonstrates that the party's careful and cautionary approach to output was not necessarily limited to new media.<sup>11</sup> In a draft copy, he suggested that the party should be investing in, firstly, more TV advertising than traditional literature, secondly, more women speakers on TV, thirdly, more, broadcasts aimed at women and fourthly, more broadcasts referring to 'Tory trade unionism'.<sup>12</sup> It suggests that the party's broadcasts had transmitted messages orientated towards the middle-class male vote; and, perhaps, were lagging behind in recognizing the expansion of enfranchisement earlier in the twentieth century. It is not a far stretch of the imagination to attribute such anachronistic characteristics to mid-twentieth century British Conservatism.

It seems pertinent to place this in context, because Lloyd's ideas for television were amid a range of other improvements in the party's communications strategy. The telling arrangement of his contributing notes suggest that he considered 'press and television'<sup>13</sup> to be distinctly separate from 'general communications'.<sup>14</sup> He suggests that he believed the former deserved special attention. MacLeod charged Lloyd with the task of investigating the party in terms of its organization. It is interesting that Lloyd's approach was holistic when compared with the traditional view of party organization at that time, as, unlike the earlier Colyton Report, it did not simply identify the structures and functions within the party. It assessed the testimony of individuals and, in doing so, it provides an analysis of the working and living culture of the Tory Party at that time. Moreover, Lloyd incorporated the role of party publicity into his assessment to a significant degree. It suggests that, although the report demonstrates sensitivities and great affection for the loyalty of party members, party publicity was most prominent in the party's agenda. It appears that, as party professionalism and mass communications were increasing, the traditional role of the mass party organization was in decline.

### TELEVISION AND DOUGLAS-HOME'S CONSERVATIVES 1963–64

The Conservative Party that Douglas-Home inherited was markedly different to the party under Churchill. In terms of television culture alone there was a stark difference in the focus of the party's communications. In 1952, around 1.5 million homes held television licences. By 1963, the number of television licences in the UK had reached 12,290,173,<sup>15</sup> which

was an increase of approximately 5 million since 1957. This is compared to a significant decline in radio licence holders from about 7 million in 1957 to 3,304,098 in 1963.<sup>16</sup> The even balance between the number of radio licence and television licence holders in 1957, which had so influenced the organization of Conservative publicity in the early days of Macmillan's premiership, had changed significantly within a six year period.

In the run-up to the 1964 General Election, one of the party's three vice chairmen, Paul Bryman, sent a memorandum to all MPs and candidates noting that 'television coverage of the coming election is expected to be more intense and more regional than it was in 1959'.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, members and candidates were encouraged to use the TV coaching facilities at CCO for refresher courses. They were expected to make early appointments with the studio director, John Lindsey, in order to avoid the same type of congestion which was considered to have spoilt the TV training in the run-up to the 1959 election. The party politicians were coached in 'straight-to-the-camera talk' and 'interview' technique. Television training was a top priority for Douglas-Home's Conservatives, who increased their training operations significantly when compared with earlier elections.<sup>18</sup> CCO continued to take pride in their television operations and believed that their training provided 'opportunities for people to acquire some knowledge of the medium and to practice and rehearse for possible and probable appearances'.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, they invested resources in sending repeated reminders for TV coaching to party politicians whom they expected to gain from the training.

Furthermore, in learning from the party's television experiences at the previous election, the party adapted their procedures. An insight into the CCO elite's thoughts on the matter is given in a confidential document from Lord Poole, another of the party's vice chairman, to the chairman, Viscount Blakenham, in relation to election tactics in post-1959 elections.

Our first TV must be a surprise and a complete success. It must be flexible and put together in the last few days. This can only be done by careful preparation and many trials at which ministers and others must take part. Certain selected ministers must be asked now to be ready to cooperate over this. It will take much time and effort. The prime minister must take much more part in the conduct of the campaign than has been the practice in the past. It will not be enough for him just to make a tour of the country, leaving the control of the campaign in Central Office. A small 'tactical headquarters'...should accompany him everywhere, leaving Central Office as a sort of 'main headquarters'... The prime minister should do the

last broadcast himself—if possible alone—but should be prepared to take part in at least one other as circumstances demand. The manifesto must be launched with a major press conference which should be taken by the prime minister at which there should be a number of other cabinet ministers to answer questions on their own subjects. This should be on TV if this is possible and must of course be at the beginning of the campaign. The details of this press conference must be carefully worked out... You will see that what I am recommending is that we fight the campaign on the exact opposite lines that we did in 1955 and 1959.<sup>20</sup>

The most striking aspect of this extract is the sense of confidence and knowingness that radiates from the language. The party appears to have matured in its approach to its publicity and television techniques to the extent that members of the now experienced CCO elite began addressing these matters with greater authority than in previous elections. Furthermore, the party hierarchy appears to have changed to some extent. No longer were the party elites paying absolute deference to their leader and prime minister. In fact, the CCO elites were beginning to assume greater control over the process of mastering TV and publicity techniques. At almost every level of the party hierarchy, including the highest ministerial elite, the maturation of political television culture was being experienced. Political participants were now required to fall in line under these developments, which in turn influenced significantly the Tories' organizational culture.

Therefore, in keeping with the party change theory outlined in [Chapter 2](#), it seems plausible to suggest that the wider developments in broadcasting trends placed some external pressures on the Conservatives which, in turn, drove marked changes in its organization that led to a professionalized and centralized transformation of its operations and structure by the mid-1960s. The operations described above are certainly a marked difference to those characteristic of Churchill's Conservatives 1951–55. It seems that, in keeping with an age old Tory tradition, during 1951–64 the party adapted to survive to a new age, the television age, in which it was required to keep pace with the developments in wider technocultural trends in order to compete electorally with Labour.

## CONCLUSIONS

By 1963, there were over 10 million more TV licences than in 1952. Furthermore, the evidence suggests that trends in party professionalism and mass communications were on the rise, and the role of the mass party in

significant decline. Douglas-Home's Conservatives' relationship with television is characterized by the marked change in, firstly, the tightened control that a newly strengthened and professionalized team of experts at CCO held over the party's television operations and facilities; and, secondly, the relatively diminished role and place of the ordinary membership at the grassroots.

Lloyd's report suggests that by the early 1960s, the grassroots were feeling forgotten and silenced by the transformation in Conservative organization and culture since the 1959 General Election. It seems the party elites' new found confidence in mastering television and the increasing redundancy of the wider membership drove a widening gulf between the professionalized political classes and the ordinary party workers. Both deference for the leadership and the prominence of the mass party were fading phenomena. Quickly replaced by a centralized tightening of CCO television operations, it seems evident that wider technocultural trends in political production and domestic television consumption contributed to driving a transformation in Conservative Party organization, between 1951 and 1964.

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18. Sec, television training file, CPA CCO 4/9/387—Propaganda—television, general—1961–62.
19. CPA CCO 4/9/387 Memorandum from John Lindsey, Head of Radio and Television Section, to MPs and candidates, 30 July 1964.
20. CPA CCO 20/17/4 Confidential letter from Lord Poole to the Chairman, 30 December 1963, p. 3.

## Broadcasting an Elite

**Abstract** Chapter 8 aims to bring together some of the diverse strands of thought throughout the book, and offer some final conclusions. Forming a comparative history, it argues that developments in television paved the way for a culture in which the active role of the grassroots membership became notably reduced and Conservative Central Office priorities turned significantly towards broadcasting the party elite. The chapter concludes that 1951–64 was a period in which the party experienced a progressive tightening of party hierarchy, which was exhibited through both incremental and punctuated changes. This helped shift the party towards a more centralized and professionalized organization in favour of a more strengthened and autonomous party elite.

**Keywords** Broadcasting · Elites · Centralization · Conservative Party · Professionalization · Television

### INTRODUCTION

Across a relatively short period in history, Britain transitioned from wartime rationing, in which television was thought of as a luxury,<sup>1</sup> to times in which prime ministers were aiming to master the medium.

Harold Macmillan is remembered for claiming that ‘television has introduced a new dimension into politics, and some of us don’t know what to make of it, but we old dogs have to learn new tricks’.<sup>2</sup> Preceding chapters set out their cases for the Conservative Party’s adaption to the new medium of television. Together, they contribute to a mapping of Tory transition and transformation under four Conservative prime ministers, throughout a 13 year period, 1951–64. The overarching trend from Churchill to Douglas-Home appears to have been unidirectional, insofar that the party centre increasingly professionalized and progressively tightened its central operations towards a more television-centric party organization. Furthermore, it seems that as the importance of television rose, the role of the mass-based party declined. Leon Epstein explains this as the mass party being challenged by new forms of mass media campaigns,<sup>3</sup> which can lead to a tightening of party affairs.<sup>4</sup> As television became more institutionalized, it seems so did its role in the party. Maurice Duverger’s theory states that centralization is an inevitable result of the institutionalization process.<sup>5</sup>

So, then, how do the major themes from the individual case studies compare, and relate to the main scholarly perspectives outlined in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#)? This chapter aims to bring together some of these strands of thought, and offer some final conclusions. Forming a comparative history, it argues that developments in television paved the way for a culture in which the active role of the grassroots membership became notably reduced and Conservative Central Office (CCO) priorities turned significantly towards broadcasting the party elite.

## UNITS FOR COMPARISON

Drawing on influences rooted in the major scholarly themes, theories and perspectives presented in [Chapters 1](#) and [2](#), some key units are identified for use as markers with which to compare key themes developed in the historical case studies, [Chapters 3](#) to [7](#). These cases are compared in the context of the thematic units in the subsequent sections below. These include the comparison of key ‘actors’,<sup>6</sup> like leaders and factions; the rise and decline of key ‘communication technologies’,<sup>7</sup> key changes, including the extent to which transition and/or ‘transformation’<sup>8</sup> occurs; the extent of key ‘drivers of change’,<sup>9</sup> like internal and external forces, and ‘professionalization’<sup>10</sup> and ‘centralization’<sup>11</sup> trends.

## PROFESSIONALIZATION AND CENTRALIZATION: FROM TRANSITION TO TRANSFORMATION

The evidence and analysis presented in [Chapters 3–7](#) suggest that the Conservative Party's adaptation to the advent of the new medium of television occurred in two main phases of change. The first is characterized by transition; and the second by transformation. The first phase, 1951–59, was a period under the leaderships of Churchill, Eden and the early premiership of Macmillan. It was characterized by its relationship with the medium of television through a transitional culture of caution, tentative and incremental change, civic bureaucracy, regulation, research, experimentation and a desire to understand the phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> The second phase, during the years 1959–64, was under the leaderships of Macmillan and Douglas-Home. During that period the Conservative Party appears to have undergone a significant transformation of punctuated change in terms of the party's attitudes to television and the ways in which it adapted to a more professionalized organizational culture.

The Conservative Party focused on its mastery of television, it seems, in order to fully engage with developments in wider political culture. By 1960, television was recognized largely as the primary new political communication tool in Britain. Training in the use of the medium became more exclusive and ranked in order of party seniority and priority, which was a shift away from the earlier approach of inclusivity that was exhibited by the central party in the first phase. Therefore, it appears that there was both an incremental and a punctuated tightening in close succession in the party's development. Overall, it suggests that the party embarked on a trend towards centralization 1951–64, which narrowed further towards the latter half of the period. Partly driven by intensifying bureaucratic trends and the arrival of new experts at CCO, it seems the party became progressively more professionalized towards 1964.

Mark Jarvis suggests television symbolized affluence in this period. However, in this context, the television appears to be symbolically reminiscent of 'high politics', in other words, the elite nature of politics, extant in the late 1940s.<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, Richard Cockett's notion of the 'Darwinian' Tories that adapt to 'survive'<sup>14</sup> seems immaterial in the case of TV during 1951–64. Of the four general elections across the period, 1951, 1955, 1959 and 1964, the Conservatives won all but one of them. The Tories lost in 1964, even though the party's major adaptations to television occurred after 1959. The party won comfortably in the earlier elections, but not in 1964.

Why the party lost is beyond the scope of this chapter. However, it seems appropriate to deduce that the role of television in the party's electoral chances may, at times, be overstated, especially in the context of the period of interest. What this study is able to demonstrate, with greater clarity, is that the party made efforts to respond to wider trends in TV and it did not necessarily improve their ability to win the 1964 election. It suggests that many other factors are at play in electoral fortunes, and television is just one factor.

This book offers a broader perspective when compared to Michael Kandiah's study, which ends at 1955 and emphasises the strengths of early interrelations between the Conservatives and BBC as contributing to developments in political television.<sup>15</sup> Colin Seymour-Ure claims continuance in television strategy between Eden and Macmillan,<sup>16</sup> which, to some extent, may be the case. However, based on this research, the line of organizational continuance appears stronger and more transitional between Churchill and Eden, and weaker yet more punctuated between Eden and Macmillan.

### IMPACTS ON THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY

So, then, it seems the party during 1951–64 transitioned from being a party rooted in a more traditional mass-based culture to one that became more professionalized and centralized. In this sense, the party's culture shifted from one similar to Duverger's 'mass party'<sup>17</sup> to a culture matching characteristics of Angelo Panebianco's 'electoral professional' party.<sup>18</sup> In that case, how does this fit with the theory of British liberal media history<sup>19</sup> outlined in [Chapter 2](#)? Did television act as a driver of change that strengthened general democratic activity? Outside the party, perhaps it did. However, inside the party it would appear that the advent of television catalysed a more democratized party culture until the mid-1950s, after which the trend reversed, as the medium began to mature and the central party began to understand and control it. This is a trend that seems to have continued in the party until the advent of the Internet in the form of Web 2.0.<sup>20</sup> From 1960 onwards, this trend meant that a significant and orchestrated divide in party culture is observable between the professionalized elites, at the top of the party hierarchy, and the more emasculated ordinary participants, at the party grassroots. Furthermore, along that journey the party became progressively more television centric. The

intensity of the bureaucratic management of party publicity increased to the point that it began to integrate its television operations with a carefully processed and sanitized output. In terms of impact, the seemingly active and pragmatic management by central party operations, towards tighter control of party television output, became an identifiable trait that was characteristic of the changes observed in the Conservative Party during the second phase between 1959 and 1964.

### KEY COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGIES

Chapters 3 and 4 suggest that the Conservative Party 1951–55 was characterized by a broad mix of political communication tools from gramophone records and posters to the party workers, acting as a vehicle for communicating the party's message, at the grassroots. Radio is shown to have been the dominant broadcasting medium and film, although in decline, was usefully converging with aspects of the new medium of television, through which the party also expanded its mass membership. Television, although on the rise, and of significant interest to the imaginations of many Conservatives, it played relatively muted roles in daily politics and campaigns. That is until the complex and explosive events surrounding the Suez crisis,<sup>21</sup> involving the BBC, both party leaders and the wider international community. It demonstrated that events involving television could have significant impact on political culture.

In this context, Conservative Party operations involving television would not operate in the old context again. As Chapters 5–7 illustrate, following Suez there was a trend towards a more confident, less deferential approach to political television by the broadcasters. It meant that political elites, like Macmillan, were required to up their game through a more professional approach and operation. It seems in turn this had some impact on the place of the Conservatives as a mass party.<sup>22</sup> From the contemporary perspective, the trends in political television over the 1950s and 1960s period seems inevitable. However, it also seems plausible to suggest that Suez acted as a catalyst that sped-up Conservative attitudinal and organizational approaches to television in the run-up to the 1959 General Election and beyond. By 1959, in stark contrast with the beginning of the period, it appears that political television was firmly in place as the dominant political medium in both party organization and political marketing contexts.

### KEY ACTORS AND DRIVERS

In terms of engagement with the advent of television as a new political medium, Churchill's and Eden's Conservatives' grassroots played an important and significant role as key actors in the party's organization. So too did factional groups, like the Conservative parliamentary party, in terms of steering the Conservative government's policies towards the direction of commercial television.<sup>23</sup> Until the mid-1950s, through campaigns, bureaucratic deliberations, education and training, elite actors, like senior CCO staff and politicians, actively encouraged grassroots engagement with in-house political television initiatives. Edward Heath is a key actor whose role offered continuity across the two party phases and intensified in the latter part of the 1950s. Through his significant mediatory role, Heath helped facilitate positive relationships between other key actors like the government, CCO, MPs, BBC, ITV and other political parties.

In the run-up to 1960 and beyond, the replacement of many other elite political and organizational actors at CCO and Downing Street, resulted in some of them, like Harold Macmillan himself, taking a more centralized grasp of the party's dealings with television. In 1959, overwhelming enthusiasm at the grassroots for interaction with the party's television facilities drove the party's general director to act in restricting access to the party's television studio. This example is one of many within the case studies which provide evidence to support the main arguments of this book. The party's observable trend towards centralization seems to be driven to a significant extent by elite actors; and to a lesser extent, as in the aforementioned case, by unwitting activity at the grassroots. Perhaps to the largest extent of all, the wider technocultural developments in television and other social forces like intensifying civic and bureaucratic cultures contributed to the trends and changes observed in the Conservative Party, 1951–64. Therefore, this would suggest that the findings from this study offer validity to aspects of Samuel Huntington's theory that social forces play significant roles in shaping political parties.<sup>24</sup>

### KEY CHANGES

The 1951–64 period provided Britain and the Conservative Party with 13 years of continuity in government. That said, as [Chapters 3–7](#) suggest, the period was anything but continuous. Unlike, the Thatcher government

during 1979–90, which maintained one Tory premier for 11 years, the Conservative Party of 1951–64 underwent continuous change at key intervals. The most salient being the changes in leadership. The transfer from Churchill to Eden is characteristic of a stable period of transition for the party. The way in which television integrated through smooth incremental changes was also characteristic of transition. The grassroots and central party were engaged in a mutually satisfying symbiosis, similar to that which Kandiah identifies between Tory and BBC relations,<sup>25</sup> thus providing relative stasis in the mass party culture.

However, in the wake of Suez, and under Macmillan's new leadership, the party began shifting from a transitional period of incremental change, in which the party gradually adapted and tweaked its organization to embrace developments in broadcasting, to a period characterized by the TV age. After the 1959 General Election, a newer, more modern Conservative Party, driven by research insights, and ideas for efficiencies and streamlining resources began to reorganize its operations and relations with the grassroots. It implemented this in a manner that went some way in disenfranchising the role of its wider membership, while building new organizational and professionalized architectures at CCO. These protocols characteristic of a new party model would support and fortify the firm place of television as the prime method for external communications with the voter. Tied-in with the complex social changes outlined in [Chapters 1 and 2](#), the rise of television to become the prime political communication tool had contributed to driving transformative organizational changes which had direct consequences for the grassroots and its declining mass party culture.

## CONCLUSIONS

In exploring the role of television in the transformation of Conservative Party organization from Churchill to Douglas-Home, this book argues that the medium was one of a range of factors that acted to drive change in the intraparty dynamics between Tory elites the party grassroots. Amid wider social and cultural changes, the advent of television is argued to have acted as a catalyst for change, the impact of which intensified as the omnipotence of the medium grew in political campaigning.

As a result, the relevance of the party's mass membership became eroded over time and contributed to a shift in the campaign mechanisms and intraparty power balance.

Ultimately, it appears that 1951–64 was a period in which the party experienced a progressive tightening of party hierarchy, which was exhibited through both incremental and punctuated changes. This helped shift the party towards a more centralized and professionalized organization in favour of a more strengthened and autonomous party elite. It seems this was largely driven by significant external developments in wider culture, including, in part, political television; and the choices made by elite decision makers in the party. In terms of engagement in party campaigns and organization, it seems developments in television paved the way for a culture in which the active role of the grassroots membership became notably reduced and CCO priorities turned significantly towards broadcasting the party elite.

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