

CELEBRITY INFLUENCE

Politics, Persuasion, and
Issue-Based Advocacy

Mark Harvey



University Press of Kansas

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Published by the University Press of Kansas (Lawrence, Kansas 66045), which was organized by the Kansas Board of Regents and is operated and funded by Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Kansas State University, Pittsburg State University, the University of Kansas, and Wichita State University

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Harvey, Mark, 1969– author.

Title: Celebrity influence : politics, persuasion, and issue-based advocacy / Mark Harvey.

Description: Lawrence, Kansas : University Press of Kansas, [2017] | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017038274

ISBN 9780700624980 (cloth : alk. paper)

ISBN 9780700624997 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Celebrities—Political aspects—United States. | Celebrities—Political and social views. | Celebrities—Political activity.

Classification: LCC E893 .H37 2017 | DDC 305.5/2—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017038274>.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data is available.

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

The paper used in this publication is recycled and contains 30 percent postconsumer waste. It is acid free and meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1992.

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Since this book takes a serious nod to music and the arts, I must also acknowledge my eternal bandmates: Jonathan Leahey, Jeremy Baguyos, Jeff Matchette, Matt Lenahan, Aaron Green, Mark Hall, Jason McDonnell, Mike Harvey, Andrea O'Keefe, and John Caniglia. I especially remember Phillip Moore, who passed away while I was completing this book.

This journey would not have been possible without my family, who instilled in me the confidence necessary to complete a task such as this, particularly my parents, Dan and Dianna Sutton; my siblings, Mike, Carrie, Amy, and Andrea; my daughters, Madeline and Danielle; and my very loving and patient wife, Kimberly.

Finally, I thank God . . . from whom all blessings flow.

1. The President Meets the Rock Star

"George Bush is a comedian. . . . I walk down the corridor, he comes out and stands to attention. 'Here's the President. . . . What do you want us to do this time, Bono?'"

This is Bono, lead singer of the rock group U2, talking about a private exchange with President George W. Bush at the 2005 G8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland. According to Bono, the president humorously stood at attention, as if he were at the beck and call of the rock star.

At the G8 summit, Bono had a free access "backstage pass," which allowed him to lobby President Bush and other world leaders to sign a communiqué pledging \$50 billion of debt relief to some of the poorest countries in the world. "Now this is a guy who knows where I stand on the [Iraq] war," Bono continues, "a long, long way from where he stands—who knows there are so many things we could never see eye to eye on, and yet the leader of the free world lets us into the room and we're there for an hour, shaking the tree at the last minute, pushing malaria and pushing girls' education, making sure it ends up in the communiqué" (McCormick et al. 2006, 342).

What is a rock star doing at a gathering of the world's most powerful political leaders, and why should anyone listen to him? Bono is not an elected official. The indebted countries he claims to represent are not paying him and did not choose him to be their spokesman. Bono and his organization did not donate cash to Bush's reelection campaign. Bono's main U.S. constituency, so to speak, consists of consumers of U2 records and concerts. Yet Bono gained rare access to some of the most powerful leaders in the world and persuaded them to sign a landmark document pledging a substantial sum. Bono's story presents a modern puzzle: Why would the president of the United States give a rock star an hour of his time to lobby him directly on international debt relief? What does a celebrity have to offer a president?

Prior to 2016, this was a genuinely surprising question. Then, in a twist that seemed to emerge from the fictional political satire of films like Tim Robbins's *Bob Roberts* or Warren Beatty's *Bullworth*, a celebrity became president.¹ Trump won. Donald J. Trump, a high-profile real estate developer and reality show star, was elected to the most powerful political position in the world. Trump did not win the Republican nomination or the presidency based on his resumé. He had

no prior experience in military or public office. Indeed, more than any governor that ever ran an anti-Washington, anti-establishment campaign, Trump ran as the ultimate outsider. The fact that he was a celebrity instead of a politician became an asset rather than a liability. His only relevant experience was as a businessman, which he had promoted for years through tabloids and television. He brandished this experience as a qualification to improve the operations of government.

These facts make Trump rare but not unique. Outsiders with no political experience occasionally come onto the American scene to capitalize on voters' disgust with the establishment. This populist approach has a certain mass appeal. Ross Perot, running in 1992 and less successfully in 1996, took a similar approach, promising to run the government like a business. What makes Trump unusual, according to Bill Schneider of Reuters (2015), is that he "combines two political traditions: the political outsider and the fringe candidate." In addition to populist pronouncements, Trump also appeals to an extreme ideological core of Republicans centered in the Tea Party, who are very committed and motivated.

These factors alone do not necessarily prove his success, however. Many have argued that his bold campaign style may have made an important difference. Trump's campaign events were like rock concerts. He was short on policy details and high on drama. People were as attracted to his insults as they were to his proposals. Indeed, he could utter the most offensive and outlandish statements, making outrageous promises and claims, and his popularity with his base would eventually rebound. Pundits expected disparaging statements about immigrants and a Mexican judge, a public altercation with the Muslim parents of an American soldier, disparaging comments about women and minorities, and revelations of a conversation in which he bragged about hypothetical sexual assault to derail his campaign. However, as Trump himself said at a rally in Iowa, "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters" (Diamond 2016). What people expected from a campaign and a successful presidential candidate was ultimately turned on its head.

While it is correct that Trump has never held public office before, he has still been involved in politics, and his presidential run was years in the making. In 1987, at the encouragement of longtime Republican operative Roger Stone, Trump openly criticized Ronald Reagan's foreign policy and hinted that he might run for president, ultimately landing in New Hampshire with an announcement that he would not do so (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 276). By the mid-1990s, his financial problems prevented his involvement in many political activities other than his routine support of political candidates as an ongoing cost of doing business. In 1999 he suggested that he might run for president for the Reform Party, naming Oprah Winfrey as a possible vice presidential choice. In 2000 he sought advice

from Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura, but decided that he would not run and could not win as a third party candidate. Nevertheless, he won Reform Party primaries in Michigan and California (Kranish and Fisher 2016, 285–87).

Trump changed party identification seven times between 1999 and 2011 before contemplating a presidential run again. Trump's resurgent celebrity, built upon his success as the star of the reality television show *The Apprentice*, made him a front-runner, tied for second behind former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, and polling first among self-identified Tea Party voters. It was then that Trump began a grassroots campaign challenging President Barack Obama's citizenship, alleging that he was born in Kenya rather than in the United States. While the political or media establishment never took these allegations too seriously, it was an interesting enough sideshow to make news. Trump would regularly tweet and show up on news shows to cast doubt on Obama's citizenship and to demand "transparency." Eventually Obama produced his long form birth certificate, announced that he had no time for this "silliness," and then famously roasted Trump at the 2011 White House Correspondents' Dinner. Two weeks later, Trump announced that he would not run for president and eventually endorsed Mitt Romney for president. Twelve days after Romney's defeat, he patented the slogan "Make America Great Again" (Barbaro 2016; Kranish and Fisher 2016, 291–92; Parker and Eder 2016).

Despite Trump's long-term ambition to be president, in some ways he has more in common with Bono than he does with Bush or Obama. Like Bono, he is a celebrity with no experience as a public official. Like Bono, he educated himself in political organizing through networking with political elites. Like Bono, he was really a political activist rather than a politician.

Indeed, outside of his successful presidential run—which one could argue more closely resembled a public advocacy campaign than a political campaign—his most successful political exercise was championing the birther movement. One could argue that it ended ignominiously, with Trump dropping his presidential aspirations after facing the ridicule of the White House Correspondents' Dinner. However, he was extremely effective as a celebrity activist. He forced Obama to release his birth certificate. He likely had an effect on public opinion. In February 2011, one month before Trump weighed in on the birther issue, a CNN poll revealed that only 25 percent of Americans had doubts about Obama's citizenship, and a PPP poll revealed that 51 percent of Republicans believed that Obama was not born in the United States. In March Trump first expressed his birther conspiracy beliefs on the daytime television show *The View*. Just before Obama released his birth certificate in April, a Gallup poll revealed that only 38 percent of all Americans were convinced that Obama was "definitely" born in the

United States. After his birth certificate was released, that number improved to 47 percent. However, even as late as August 2016, an NBC poll revealed that 72 percent of Republicans believed that Obama was not born in the United States, and these results were consistent among both “high and low political knowledge Republicans” (Barbaro 2016; A. Barr 2011; Cheney 2016; Clinton and Roush 2016; Condon 2011; Parker and Eder 2016).

How much of Trump’s electoral success had to do with his celebrity status? During interviews conducted for research on this book, respondents were asked, “Is there something about Trump’s celebrity status that gave him an edge in the campaign? If so, what was it?” The following answers seem to reinforce much of the prior analysis:

“People had enough of the typical politician. Trump is different and talks like the average Joe.”

“He appealed to the individuals tired of politicians. His lack of filter seemed to make people feel he was real and more trustworthy than a politician. In addition, his appearance as a successful businessman elevated his status.”

“I believe uneducated Americans saw a familiar face they’d seen on television and decided to vote for him like it was *American Idol*.”

Perhaps too much should not be made of Trump’s success. After all, a majority of Americans voted for former secretary of state Hillary Clinton and her more conventional political campaign. According to some analyses, the number of votes in key districts that made a difference in Trump’s Electoral College victory could fill a small stadium (Meko, Lu, and Gamio 2016). Still, the very fact that a celebrity could mount a campaign to topple one of America’s most experienced political insiders is striking. Is there something that can be learned from stories like Trump’s? Are there dozens of potential “Donald Trumps”? Are there celebrities with enough fame, power, and skills to influence the political system? If so, how does this influence work?

SPEAKING OUT: LISTEN TO BATMAN

For every action, there must be a reaction. The ascendancy of celebrity Trump to the Republican nomination and ultimately the presidency has provoked an intense politicized reaction from his fellow celebrities. To name a few, producer Lee Daniels and many in the cast of his television show, *Empire*, criticized Trump for “violence and nasty rhetoric against mankind.” *West Wing* actor Richard Schiff charged, “We’ve never experienced anyone so blatantly willing to care so little

about what happens to the world.” Actor Lena Dunham, speaking at the Democratic National Convention, said that Trump’s “rhetoric about women takes us back to a time when we were meant to be beautiful and silent.” America Ferrera, in another DNC speech, argued that “Donald’s not making America great again. He’s making America hate again.” Actor Susan Sarandon attacked Trump for making “hatred and racism normal” in America. Accepting her Golden Globe award in January 2017, actor Meryl Streep criticized Trump for mocking a disabled reporter in 2016: “This instinct to humiliate, when it’s modeled by someone in the public platform, by someone powerful, it filters down into everybody’s life, because it kind of gives permission for other people to do the same thing. Disrespect invites disrespect. Violence incites violence” (N. Brown 2017).

The Women’s March on Washington on January 21—the largest protest in American history—featured high-profile celebrities such as Janelle Monáe, Scarlett Johansson, Michael Moore, and Madonna speaking and performing on behalf of a multitude of liberal causes. Other celebrities took to the street and led chants, such as Katy Perry, Julia Roberts, Amy Poehler, Emma Watson, and Felicity Huffman. Countless other celebrities appeared at marches throughout the world that day, including Ian McKellen, Gillian Anderson, and Lin-Manuel Miranda in London (Garfield 2017; Izadi 2017). This celebrity activism was followed by political statements at the Golden Globes, Grammys, Film Independent Spirit Awards, and Oscar ceremonies from stars such as Jimmy Fallon, Hugh Laurie, Viola Davis, James Corden, Beyoncé, Katy Perry, Patton Oswalt, Casey Affleck, Jodi Foster, and Molly Shannon (E. Berman 2017; Del Barco 2017; Greenburg 2017; Konerman 2017). Singer and actor Jennifer Lopez summed up the general mood at the Grammy Awards: “At this particular time in history, our voices are needed more than ever” (Greenburg 2017).

“God help us,” sighed actor Robert De Niro (N. Brown 2017).

Even action star, former celebrity turned politician, and fellow Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger came out against Trump. Schwarzenegger succeeded Trump as the host of *The Apprentice*. In tweets and during a live presidential press conference, President Trump criticized Schwarzenegger for low ratings, calling the show a “total disaster.” Schwarzenegger’s first instinct was to “request a meeting and go back to New York. And then . . . just smash his face into the table.” Upon further reflection, he thought it better to “be above all of that and put him on the spot,” challenging Trump to “work for all of the American people as aggressively as you worked for your ratings” (Arnold Schwarzenegger on Trump 2017).

It is easy to argue that when celebrities speak, people listen. However, whether people pay much attention or care about political statements such as these is quite another question. A survey by CNN/USA Today said that only 3 percent of Americans believed that celebrities can be effective in influencing the political process

or causes. Most (64 percent) believed that they were “not too effective or effective at all,” and 87 percent rejected the idea that celebrities influenced their personal positions on political issues (Gunter 2014, 145).

U.S. Olympic runner Nick Symmonds shares these sentiments. He argues that he and other athletes lack the credentials or ability to influence people, but that they have freedom of speech, just like any other citizen. In an interview expressing support for gun control and opposition to discrimination against homosexuals, he expresses his belief that he is obliged to speak his mind, even if it comes to nothing and even if his point of view provokes controversy:

Too often, athletes go into a press conference and are asked difficult questions and they say, “No comment,” and I never wanted to be that kind of athlete. I have opinions on everything and I have logical reasons why I have come to those conclusions and I’ll tell you why I feel that way. . . . They said, you know, you’re an athlete. What makes you qualified to speak out about anything? Or some people have gone as far as to say I’m a disgrace to America and I shouldn’t be allowed to represent the country because I can’t keep my mouth shut. And I just laugh at these people. . . . First Amendment is the right to free speech. And as an American, I’m going to exercise that right domestically and internationally, barring getting arrested in Russia for speaking out against their laws, where my First Amendment doesn’t necessarily apply (Ashlock 2013).

The public’s awkward, if not cynical, relationship with outspoken celebrities is nothing new. Singer Frank Sinatra supported Roosevelt for president in 1944, stating, “Some people tell me I may hurt my career by taking sides in a political campaign. And I say to them, ‘To hell with this career. Government is more important’” (Suebsaeng 2015).

Despite Symmonds’s self-professed humility about his personal views, few would care about his opinion if he were not an Olympic athlete. Likewise, Symmonds did not write an op-ed in *Runner’s World* or publicly dedicate “his silver medal to his gay and lesbian friends,” enduring criticism from cynics, if he did not hope or expect to change some minds (Symmonds 2013).

In contrast, actor Ben Affleck acknowledges society’s cynicism about celebrities and their causes, but he also claims to be far different from the typical American citizen. His aspirations are explicit. Appearing in a joint interview with Senator Russ Feingold on NPR’s *Morning Edition* with David Greene, Affleck claims:

I’m not an expert. I’m a person who’s spent a lot of energy and dedicated a lot of my time to this issue. . . . What I am is an advocate, and a human

being, and a director, and an actor, and somebody who cares deeply about this, and wants other people to know about it. . . . We live in a society that gives a very, very high profile to even the most mundane activities of entertainers, and so I’d like to take some of that interest and focus it on something substantial (Greene 2014).

Affleck is right. Celebrities are not just typical American citizens. Few media consumers are interested in the real “mundane activities” of regular people.² They want to hear from the next Batman. This may not be logical or rational. Indeed, it makes little sense to consult the next Batman on matters of public policy. Yet people do. And Affleck believes that he has something intelligent to share. Thus when Ben Affleck takes the microphone in an NPR studio, he believes that people will want to listen to Batman’s account of the civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. By appearing on a radio program, he hopes that Batman will be more likely than most experts to raise awareness and move people toward action on this issue.

Feingold and Greene seemed tacitly to concur. In the interview, 68 of the spoken words were Feingold’s, while 963 were Affleck’s. The interview was almost entirely directed toward Affleck, and Feingold did not attempt to intervene in the conversation. From this single example, one could infer that reporters and politicians alike may believe that people just wanted to listen to Batman—or that a celebrity is better at getting attention and making a case than a politician is.

I’M JUST A SINGER IN A ROCK AND ROLL BAND: GOOD INTENTIONS VERSUS REALITY

As mentioned before, there may be more in common between Trump and Bono than between Trump and Bush or Obama. However, Trump’s foray into celebrity activism was different from most of the celebrity activists profiled in this book. One could argue that Trump’s run for public office may have been an opportunity to serve his country and to “make America great again.” However, Trump sought political power. To the extent that he was able to exert celebrity influence, it was on behalf of his own electoral aspirations, not for a particular cause. Unlike Trump, the other celebrities profiled in this book have advocated on behalf of groups and political issues without seeking political office. Thus the motives are different. Trump wanted to gain political power to advance an agenda. The others intend to influence those in political power in order to advance an agenda.

This distinction is crucial. Trump did not have to “land lunches” with politicians to run for office. He could have done so. If, in 2015, he had convinced the

establishment that he was a viable candidate and sought party support, some in the party would certainly have taken him seriously, and his presidential bid might have started more smoothly. Republicans have an interest in running a winning candidate. However, Trump did not want or need the attention of politicians. Part of the appeal of his campaign was to run against Washington in general and against the Republican Party establishment in particular. With his wealth and independence, he claimed to raise his own money and build his own organization, free from influence of the establishment. In Trump's own words, "It would be nice if the Republicans stuck together. I can win one way or the other. I obviously won the primaries without them. I'm an outsider and I won the primaries" (Bronston 2016).

Bono, on the other hand, is "just a singer in a rock and roll band." He has no aspirations for higher office. During early concert performances with U2, he was prone to polemic political statements that were sometimes directed at politicians. Since Trump's candidacy, he returned to this style of criticism in concert, attacking Trump for his policies on immigration and accusing him of "running off with the American dream" (Bruculieri 2016). However, most of Bono's political advocacy has involved working with transnational advocacy groups in which he has played the role of spokesman and lobbyist. In that role, he has little interest in burning bridges with politicians. Good intentions alone will not garner the attention of public officials. Thus, his game is quite different. He wants to land lunches with American presidents and politicians, even if they are diametrically opposed to him on most policies. Celebrities like Bono need to convince politicians that it is worth their time to ally with a celebrity. One could easily envision him attempting to reconcile with Trump in order to gain common ground on international issues, just as he did with George W. Bush, which reportedly began as a contentious relationship and ended as a friendship.

In this spirit, it is worth remembering that not every celebrity came out against Trump during the 2016 presidential campaign or early in his presidency. An adversarial approach—characterized by those who made political statements at awards shows—may not always be the most effective way to influence the political process. At the very least, it is only one part of an overall influence strategy. Some celebrities, like Bono during the Bush administration, utilize more of an insider strategy. Actor Leonardo DiCaprio, an ardent environmental activist, met with Trump to discuss climate change shortly after his announcement that climate science skeptic Scott Pruitt would be appointed to head the Environmental Protection Agency. Former NFL players Jim Brown and Ray Lewis lobbied Trump to support "Amer-I-Can," their organization with the mission of teaching life skills to the poor. Rapper Kanye West spoke with Trump "to discuss multicultural issues" including bullying, edu-

cation, and violence (Flores 2017; Holland 2016; Liu 2016). Despite Trump's strong independent streak, he is still scheduling meetings with celebrities. Why?

In Trump's case, part of the motivation may be to slight his adversaries. Trump's celebrity meetings took place in a context where Jesse Jackson and other civil rights leaders were attempting to meet with the president to discuss urban policies and violence. As of his press conference on February 16, 2017, Trump still had not met with members of the Congressional Black Caucus. It is possible that Trump could be pursuing an outside strategy, just as he did during the campaign: communicating a sensitivity toward issues that concern minorities on his own terms, while making it clear that he does not need or perhaps want the attention of those who have been critical of him, such as civil rights icon and Georgia representative John Lewis (Alcindor 2017; Flores 2017). Instead of relying on civil rights leaders of the establishment, perhaps Trump hopes to legitimate his own leaders.

However, Trump is exceptional. He won the election by inventing his own playbook, so to speak. He has had more experience as a celebrity than as a politician. So an answer to the question "Why would Trump consult with a celebrity?" is likely quite different from the more general question, "Why would any other politician consult with a celebrity?" In answering the more general question, three factors may be at play.

One factor is the need for politicians to attract attention. Trump does not need this, but most politicians do. Most Americans probably never heard of Utah representative Jason Chaffetz until social media made him a temporary social pariah, drawing the ire of thousands of attendees at a town hall meeting for refusing to investigate Trump's conflicts of interest. Even with his high-profile position as House Oversight Committee chairman, and his missteps in handling the investigation into Russian interference in the U.S. election, Chaffetz is still relatively unknown to most Americans. If he wished to draw attention to himself or to champion a cause, he could consult with a celebrity. Likewise, Russ Feingold is a Senate veteran but hardly a household name. His alliance with Affleck was, in part, to focus public attention on the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

While there is a logic to a politician working with a celebrity to raise the profile of an issue, evidence to support this notion has been sparse. Some scholars have argued that celebrities can be helpful to advocacy groups, but may not be powerful enough to gain significant attention or influence the public agenda. Celebrity involvement may attract headlines, but it represents "just one small piece of the media's attention to these larger political issues or causes" (Becker 2010, 96). Celebrities may be more likely to conveniently and cynically "jump on the bandwagon" after a politician has already focused media attention on an issue or if the issue is already generally salient across media sources (Hawkins 2011). Indeed,

Trump did not invent birtherism. He joined the cause. In addition, celebrities may be more effective at attracting the attention of niche audiences rather than broad segments of the population (Marwick 2013; Senft 2008; Thrall et al. 2008). Given the mixed and pessimistic outcomes of this literature, further research is needed. Can celebrities attract attention to causes, and what kind of attention can they garner? Are they more effective at attracting headlines in newspapers or in the more photo-friendly world of broadcast journalism? If they are effective at commanding media attention, what factors contribute to these abilities?

A second factor that attracts politicians to celebrities is the potential credibility they may bring to an issue. This factor is far from obvious, because celebrities are presumed to have very little credibility outside of entertainment. One would assume that scientists, scholars, and business leaders make much more credible advocates. In short, it is not difficult to understand why celebrities would want to speak their conscience and how they might gain some attention for an issue. It is much more difficult to understand why anyone in the public would care. As a result, it is not surprising that political science researchers have focused little attention on the perceived credibility of celebrities. If the person who plays the next Batman is simply “eye candy” to garner attention for a cause, credibility really does not matter.

The marketing and advertising literature has demonstrated that celebrity credibility may affect the power of a product endorsement. The more popular and credible the celebrities, the more likely individuals will agree with them, particularly if they are attractive (W. J. Brown, Basil, and Bocarnea 2003; D. J. Jackson 2008; Khong Kok Wei, and You Li Wu 2013). Businesses make regular decisions about whether a celebrity endorsement will improve or damage brand image (Atkin and Block 1983; Elberse and Verleun 2012; Freiden 1984; Kamins 1970; Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann 1983; Roy 2012). However, do celebrities carry much political credibility, and are all celebrity endorsements equally positive? The massive amount of celebrity support Hillary Clinton enjoyed was not enough for her to win the Electoral College (Robehmed 2016). On the other hand, she was running against celebrity Trump. Similarly, Leah Wright Rigueur, a professor of public policy at Harvard University’s Kennedy School of Government, argues that Trump’s meeting with Kanye West would not give Trump credibility with black voters (Holland 2016). Would different celebrities enhance Trump’s credibility? If celebrities are credible, what is the source of that credibility?

A third factor that may influence public officials to ally with celebrities is their ability to persuade. We know, within certain circumstances, that celebrities can sell toothpaste and cars (Atkin and Block 1983; Boorstin 1992, 162; Gamson 2007; Miciah and Shanklin 1994). Do they have the same ability to succeed in the more serious business of selling issues, causes, and candidates? Research has been limited

on this question. The most common studies focus on the effectiveness of celebrity endorsements of candidates (Boon and Lomore 2001; Brubaker 2011; Garthwaite and Moore 2008; Gunter 2014, 142; D. J. Jackson and Darrow 2005; Lammie 2007; MediaVest USA 2004; Meyer and Gamson 1995; Nownes 2012; O’Regan 2014; Pease and Brewer 2008; L. Powell and Cowart 2012; Schuessler 2000; Wood and Herbst 2007). However, very little has been written on the effectiveness of celebrities in issue advocacy. The extant literature offers some cautious and limited optimism for the possibilities for celebrity persuasion. Becker (2010, 96) argues that “issue advocacy efforts can strengthen public agreement with accepted political arguments and in some cases can also make unpopular political statements seem more acceptable—especially among members of an attentive or captive audience” (D. J. Jackson and Darrow 2005).

However, additional research is needed to support or challenge the notion that celebrities are persuasive in their advocacy of political issues. Not all celebrities are equally good at selling consumer products (Tuttle 2012), so it is likely that they are also not equally good at selling political issues and causes. If celebrities are persuasive, what factors contribute to this ability? Might there be a mismatch of celebrity and issue? Might a conservative politician be seen as less persuasive when standing next to a liberal celebrity? Could a celebrity more effectively persuade someone to support a school funding bill where there is a lot of consensus already than to support a wedge issue like gun control? Moreover, could celebrities’ polemic political statements hurt their credibility with certain audiences? At the end of the day, perhaps Bono, Symmonds, and Affleck—for all of their money, fame, and gifts in entertainment—really are incapable of commanding much attention outside of tabloids. Maybe they have less credibility than politicians. And perhaps their powers of persuasion are little better than those of any politician or citizen.

If celebrities are found to be politically influential, the normative question remains: Is this a good thing? This question has received far more attention in the academic literature than the aforementioned empirical questions.³ Ben Affleck’s involvement in politics may be good for raising awareness about the Congo, and it may be good for his image. However, is his activism good for democracy? Many have argued that celebrity advocacy illustrates a democratization of politics, where citizens other than politicians may gain media attention and advance issues on behalf of worthy causes that would not otherwise receive public attention. As citizens have felt more jaded about elected officials, they have felt less jaded about celebrity activists (West and Orman 2003, x). Moreover, the identification and idolization of celebrities may inspire some citizens who otherwise would not be involved in politics to pay attention and perhaps even to get involved, which offers a potential benefit to participatory democracy.

Others have argued that the possible perception of celebrities as opportunistic

may numb citizens to the seriousness of the issues.⁴ In addition, those who follow celebrity news are often the least likely to be involved—or even interested—in politics. Thus rising coverage of a few celebrities' pet issues may raise awareness, but may not lead to any increased likelihood to act or vote. Perhaps celebrity activism leads citizens to become even more apathetic or to withdraw from political processes (Coudry and Markham 2007; Tsalki, Frangonikolopoulos, and Huliaras 2011). Perhaps a loose social media awareness of an issue, an identification with a celebrity activist, and a compulsion to share articles or comment on social media convinces the average citizen consumer that s/he has already performed a civic duty.

Finally, if we accept the purported benefit of celebrity politics—that the system is somehow more democratized and accessible to nonpoliticians—we must also accept the potential downside of that promise. Do we want inexperienced citizens or celebrities with disproportionate access to mass media to influence the political system or to attain higher office? Donald Trump is the perfect manifestation of everything that is promising and perilous about celebrity politics. On the one hand, he is a real outsider who has the potential to radically change the operations of the presidency and introduce policies and reforms that may have been beyond the scope of conventional politicians. On the other hand, his inexperience, lack of expertise, and potential conflicts of interest led to many tactical and policy missteps early in his administration. To the right, he is a hero who is ready to drain the swamp, attack the media, and potentially bring radical action out of gridlock. To the left, he is a demagogue whose disregard for republican principles and the judiciary, coupled with his ability to turn supporters against individuals and businesses with a single tweet, makes him dangerous for democracy. Unlike most other politicians coming into public office, Trump has a base of power that extends beyond the power of the office of the presidency—a power that may allow him to do things that other presidents could not. Will this power that offers so much informal influence supersede the formal institutional powers bestowed by the Constitution?

While there is much still to study about the relationship between celebrity politics and democracy, it is beyond the scope of this work to engage extensively with this issue. This book does not endeavor to provide deep insights on whether celebrities empower quality citizens, demobilize an ignorant public that is otherwise hungry for social media and reality television, or mobilize the disenfranchised to support demagogues. However, this book does provide research that supports the empirical base of that literature, and to that extent it may be helpful to the extension of that academic discussion. If it can be shown that celebrities are adept at gaining attention for political issues, that they are more credible than traditional politicians are, and that they are uniquely persuasive, normative scholars will continue to wrestle with these normative challenges.

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF CELEBRITY INFLUENCE

Political scientists have long assumed that public officials crave power in order to achieve their objectives. Powerful public officials also solicit the help of others who are powerful in the pursuit of their self-interest. Might celebrities have some “powers” not available to the ordinary politician that would enable them to influence political processes and outcomes? What powers might Bono have, for example, that Bush did not? The purpose of this book is to answer these questions.

Too Much Information: The Relationship between Celebrity and the Media

An understanding of celebrity power is only possible by understanding the growth of the mass media in the twentieth century and its interdependence with the growth of celebrity. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine celebrities with any significant influence without the existence of a media-drenched society. Granted, celebrities have skills that make them experts at communication. They evoke emotions through their physical abilities, their speech, their ability to tell stories or to relate to audiences through music. However, the media acts as a megaphone that increases the volume of celebrities' voices and—to borrow President Teddy Roosevelt's language—gives them a “bully pulpit” comparable to that of presidents and politicians.

Celebrities have been around at least since ancient Greece, although celebrated public figures of those days do not resemble those of today. Roots of modern celebrity can be traced to the eighteenth century as the earliest wide-circulation newspapers were established (Gunter 2014). Giuseppe Garibaldi, an Italian general and politician, is considered by some to be the first modern celebrity. Nineteenth-century British newspapers featured stories of his heroic exploits, and a small industry emerged around Garibaldi merchandise, including pictures, figurines, plates, cups, and tankards (Kehoe 2017). In the United States, Mark Twain copyrighted not only his books but also his name and image, using them to sell “playing cards, Oldsmobile cars, Pullman train passenger cars, baking flour, jumping frog mechanical banks, scrapbooks, photograph albums, cookbooks, postcards, sewing machines, shaving soap, fine china, decorative silver spoons, and, of course, whiskey and cigars” (Trombley 2010). Twain is an exemplar of one of the earliest modern American celebrities and an outspoken political satirist and critic—a reminder that politics, celebrity, and satire have been intertwined long before the powerful influence of Jon Stewart's *Daily Show* and his successors: Stephen Colbert, Samantha Bee, and John Oliver.

In the early to mid-twentieth century, phonograph records, film, and radio placed singers, actors, and athletes in the national spotlight. The diversification of media access and the speed of delivery—from newspapers and books, records and films, to television and ultimately to the internet—created more demand for content and changed the kind of information that media organizations wished to deliver to their consumers (Adorno 2002; Fenster and Swiss 1999, 226; Marshall 1997, 63–64). As celebrities gained in public attention, they also grew in stature and sometimes in credibility. This attention led to political statements and activism, predating Bono, Affleck, Symmonds, and countless others by decades.

In the late 1920s, Will Rogers became one of the most influential celebrities in America and may likely be considered the father of modern celebrity activists, fully utilizing these emerging technologies. He started out as a circus and vaudeville performer, and millions watched his movies or listened to him on the radio. He wrote a weekly syndicated column for the *New York Times* between 1922 and 1935 in which he skewered American politicians across the political spectrum. He spoke at a Democratic National Convention; testified before Congress on flood relief; unofficially advised secretaries of war, aeronautics, and the Navy; and was a “frequent, savvy, and welcome presence in the hallways of the Capitol and in informal summits of the powerful” (Yagoda 2000, 293). According to biographer Ben Yagoda, he “became the political equivalent of a reversible figure—the psychological test in which a wavy line on a blank page can be seen to be either a table lamp or a human profile,” which enabled him to appeal to a broad spectrum of citizens because of—or despite—his political convictions. Politicians “knew better than to overlook what he had to say on the issues” (Yagoda 2000, 291–92). NPR’s Scott Simon argued that when Rogers passed away, “the most famous man in America besides Franklin D. Roosevelt died, and in 1935, I’m not sure you needed to add a ‘besides’” (Rogers, Sterling, and Sterling 1993; Simon 2015).

With the onset of the Great Depression and the ascension of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis in Germany, the political atmosphere changed, and with it, the relationship among celebrities, politicians, and the media. In World War II, the entertainment industry was famously employed to produce pro-American propaganda in music and film. However, not all celebrities acted in concert with the U.S. government. Director/actor Charlie Chaplin satirized the “automation of the individual” in films such as *Modern Times* (1936) and Hitler himself in *The Great Dictator* (1940). He was booed at the premiere of *Monseigneur Verdoux* (1947) for criticizing American capitalism and weapons of mass destruction. In response to his criticism, FBI director J. Edgar Hoover publicly discredited Chaplin by using a paternity suit to bring criminal charges against him (Larcher 2011, 29; Maland 1991, 164, 204–5). Likewise, aviator Charles Lindbergh was famous for his transatlantic flight

and for what the media termed the “Crime of the Century”—the kidnapping and murder of his twenty-month-old son. In both cases, every major newspaper in the United States was willing to provide serial details of these events. As war with Germany loomed, Lindbergh became the spokesperson for the America First movement in 1940, which advocated isolationism and neutrality with Germany, and he charged that the British and the Jews were conspiring to bring America into the war. After speaking to overflow crowds in Madison Square Garden, he was publicly denounced by President Roosevelt (Duffy and Weiner 2010; Lardner 2015).

Prominent celebrities also pressured the government to support controversial stances on civil rights. Famous contralto Marian Anderson found herself in the middle of a dispute when the Daughters of the American Revolution denied her access to sing at Washington’s Constitution Hall because of her race. This event drew criticism and support for Anderson from Eleanor Roosevelt and the Roosevelt administration. As a result, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes arranged for her to perform at the Lincoln Memorial in 1939 before a clearly integrated audience of 75,000 people (Stamberg 2014).

Likewise, President Eisenhower’s initially weak response to segregation at Central High School in Little Rock in 1957 drew fire from jazz musician Louis Armstrong, who was quoted on September 17 as saying, “The government can go to hell.” He cancelled his plans to appear on a goodwill tour to the Soviet Union, creating a public relations disaster for the U.S. government. Some citizens called for boycotts of Armstrong’s concerts, and the Ford Motor Company intended to pull advertising from a Bing Crosby special in which Armstrong was to appear. The controversy only ended when Eisenhower ultimately sent troops to Little Rock to enforce desegregation on September 24 (Margolick 2007).

The consequences were more dire for Paul Robeson, one of the most famous and respected celebrities of his day. As a singer, stage and film actor, and professional athlete, he spoke out on behalf of black culture and workers’ rights as early as 1934. He was ultimately blacklisted between 1950 and 1955, in part because of his advocacy of communism (Duberman 1996).

Those celebrities who spoke out against the United States or American capitalism were exceptional. Prior to the 1960s, celebrities were largely dependent upon their employers (A. W. Campbell 1994; Williamson 2011; Zirin 2009). In addition to the U.S. government’s attempts to convert entertainment material to propaganda and to blacklist anyone in the entertainment industry who might have expressed dissent, the industry itself also had mechanisms to prevent the free expression of its artists. In the early to mid-twentieth century, actors and musicians exclusively signed to a single studio or record company. Athletes, likewise, were not free agents. Movie studios, record companies, and sports teams were

concerned about controlling the image of celebrities for fear that the tarnishing of a celebrity's image would adversely affect movie or album sales or attendance at sporting events. Celebrities that had commercial corporate sponsorship had even less freedom of expression for fear that speaking out could risk losing a product endorsement. Contracts sometimes stipulated that the entertainer or athlete could not speak against the interests of the employer. For example, Warner Brothers prevented Ronald Reagan from leading a protest against nuclear weapons in 1945, arguing that it was a contractual violation and that it would bring negative publicity to the studio (Lettow 2006). Even today, "morals clauses" in entertainment contracts are commonly used as an excuse to release actors whose behavior undermines the success of a project. In 2011 Charlie Sheen's erratic behavior led to his release from the popular sitcom *Two and a Half Men* (A. W. Campbell 1994, 394; Huliaras and Tzifakis 2011; "Morals Clause at Issue in Charlie Sheen Legal Fight" 2011; Williamson 2011; Zirin 2009).

Folk singers such as Woody Guthrie and Pete Seeger wrote and performed music that many thought was subversive, but carried on the oral tradition of a political troubadour that had existed for centuries. By the 1940s and '50s, these troubadours' voices and messages could be recorded and distributed through vinyl records and broadcast over radio waves on stations that were desperate for content to fill airtime. Like Robeson, many of these musicians were blacklisted from radio and television in order to prevent their leftist messages from entering public discourse (Eyerman and Jamison 1998; Greenway 1977; Phall 2008).

As celebrities became wealthier and more autonomous, many risks to political activism declined. By the 1960s, the record-buying public accepted folk and rock musicians as artists with rights to express themselves politically (Ballantine 1984; Balliger 1999; Brackett 1999; Fischlin and Heble 2003; Grossberg 1987; Marshall 1997; Mattern 1998; Small 1987). The Beatles' and Bob Dylan's wealth and commercial success proved that popular musicians could make strong political statements without undermining their career. Their counterculture audiences were increasingly receptive to politically challenging messages and believed that musicians who were more outspoken were more authentic. By the 1970s, the notion of musicians making political statements was not typical but was also no longer shocking.

Some actors became increasingly politically involved in the 1960s, despite the chilling effect the blacklists had in Hollywood. Actors Charlton Heston, James Garner, Sidney Poitier, Marlon Brando, Burt Lancaster, Paul Newman, and Joanne Woodward were involved in the 1963 March on Washington, and Jane Fonda spoke out against the war in Vietnam (Cannon 2013; Gunter 2014, 141). However, the industry had changed little since the 1940s, and these actors were exceptional.

Chaplin could make films like *The Great Dictator* because he had financial independence and total control over his product, and eventually he moved outside of the United States, but there were still potential legal and commercial consequences. More actors became politically involved in the 1970s and beyond, as actors had more freedom to enter into different contracts with different studios. Even then, actors were more likely than musicians to be restricted by morals clauses.

Professional athletes are still bound to high-profile advertising campaigns that may limit their expression (Williamson 2011). Thus the 1950s and 1960s saw rare expressions of political dissent. Jackie Robinson organized with the NAACP. Boxer Muhammad Ali went to jail for refusing to serve in Vietnam. Olympic runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos protested discrimination against African Americans at the 1968 Olympic Games by displaying the black power salute during the playing of the national anthem. Basketball legend Michael Jordan is the more typical exemplar of the twentieth-century athlete. When given the opportunity to endorse political candidates, he stayed silent. The phrase "Republicans buy shoes, too" was probably incorrectly attributed to Jordan. However, it does neatly summarize the attitude of many athletes who perceived that they would pay commercial consequences for taking political stands (Wagner 2016).

The twenty-first century has found a radical increase in athlete activism. Professional football players Brendon Ayanbadejo and Chris Kluwe have advocated for LGBT rights across society and in the National Football League. In 2003 Toni Smith-Thompson, senior captain of the women's basketball team at Manhattanville College in New York, turned her back on the flag during the national anthem to protest the war in Iraq. LeBron James and others in the NBA criticized President Trump's first travel ban, which was intended to prevent Muslims from entering the United States. Six of the New England Patriots refused to attend a meeting with President Trump after winning the Super Bowl. Perhaps most famously, Colin Kaepernick refused to stand for the national anthem during football games in the 2016 season because "he didn't want to demonstrate pride in a country that oppresses black people and people of color" (Ayanbadejo 2009; Farhi 2016; T. Goldman 2016; Inskip n.d.; Kluwe 2012; Mather 2017; NPR Staff 2015; Torre 2017). However, commercial incentives still dissuade political activism among athletes. Kaepernick himself is a case in point. His performance on the field was weak early in the 2016 season but rebounded by December, causing some commentators to suggest that he would be a good pick as a free agent for the 2017 season. In October 2016 *Forbes* reported that the NFL was "losing millions of TV viewers because of national anthem protests" (Ozanian 2016). Whether or not this is literally true—and whether or not Kaepernick deserves the blame for this loss of revenue—these perceptions have harmed Kaepernick's chances of being picked

up by an NFL team in 2017 and likely affected his potential earnings. Indeed, according to sports commentator Adam Stites, “The media whirlwind surrounding his protests made it entirely feasible that no other team would take on the distraction and criticism that would come with signing Kaepernick” (Stites 2016).

Blurred Lines: What Is the Difference between a Politician and a Celebrity?

A celebrity “is a person who has a high public profile, usually promoted by appearances in the mass media and they are consequently readily recognized by others . . . characterized by exceptional or extraordinary qualities in terms of their abilities, attractiveness, personalities, and lifestyles” (Gunter 2014, 2). They tend to have occupations that put them in the public light—such as artists, entertainers, and sports stars, although some are business people, lawyers, politicians, and scientists (Gunter 2014, 2–3; Marwick 2013). Moreover, celebrities are not personally known to their audiences, yet they are connected through “para-social interaction,” a phenomenon when people experience intimacy and familiarity with individuals and characters when listening to their music, watching their displays of athleticism, or seeing them perform. These relationships with distant characters and personalities that seem immediate and intimate can be emotionally gratifying because audiences come to implicitly act as if these characters were their friends (Horton and Wohl 1956; Marwick 2013, 119).

Becoming a celebrity does not necessitate special talent. Some are the epitome of Andy Warhol’s famous 1968 remark, “In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes” (Guinn and Perry 2005). For example, Ken Bone, an attendee at one of the 2016 presidential debates, famously asked the candidates a calm and reasoned question, sparking a brief burst of celebrity on social media (Simon 2017). Others became celebrities for simply associating with other celebrities. Some have been born into famous families, such as Peaches Geldof (daughter of musician Bob Geldof and television presenter Paula Yates) or Paris Hilton (heir to the Hilton Hotel fortune) or the Kardashians (children of the high-profile attorney in the O. J. Simpson trial, Robert Kardashian, Kris Kardashian Jenner, and former Olympian Bruce Jenner—now known as Caitlyn Jenner). Kevin Federline was famous not for being a dancer but for marrying Britney Spears. Instead of being famous in their own right, these figures capitalized on the fame of their family and associates in order to establish their own celebrity.

In addition, traditional celebrities have become more politicized while political figures increasingly behave as Hollywood actors, engaging in the image building common in the entertainment industry (Corner and Pels 2003, 2; West and Orman 2003, x). Conventional celebrities and modern politicians have blurred as

actors such as Ronald Reagan and Arnold Schwarzenegger became elected public officials, and presidents from John F. Kennedy to Barack Obama achieved a virtual celebrity status (Street 2004; West and Orman 2003). Celebrity political activities are still an unusual attraction—fascinating fish-out-of-water stories compared with the less attractive, less glamorous political figures who are more likely to feature in typical stories about politics and policy. As a result, journalists chase celebrities, and politicians emphasize image over substance in an attempt to relate to the public in the same way that celebrities do.

Darrell M. West and John Orman document this convergence by denoting four categories of celebrities: political, newsworthies, legacies, famed nonpoliticos, and event celebrities. “Political newsworthies” include figures such as James Carville, George Stephanopoulos, Mary Matalin, Jesse Jackson, and others who are skilled at appearing on television, offering political punditry, and simultaneously informing and entertaining. “Legacies” are those political figures who are descendants of powerful political families or figures such as the Kennedys, Bushes, and Clintons. “Famed nonpoliticos” include two distinctive groups: elected officials who gained fame before running for office, such as Ronald Reagan, Jesse Ventura, Bill Bradley, John Glenn, Sonny Bono, and Jack Kemp, and unelected citizens who lobby or speak for causes based on their fame, such as Charlton Heston, Jane Fonda, Robert Redford, Willie Nelson, Barbra Streisand, Warren Beatty, and Martin Sheen. Finally, “event celebrities” are overnight celebrities who rise to fame based on a tragedy or predicament, such as Sarah Brady, wife of James Brady, who went on to become a prominent gun control spokeswoman (West and Orman 2003, 2–8).

The strength of West and Orman’s categorization is their embrace of all forms of celebrity. As they argue, even Anita Hill, an obscure assistant in the Department of Education who leveled charges of sexual harassment against Clarence Thomas during his Supreme Court confirmation hearings, had more than fifteen minutes of fame when she raised a national dialogue about the subject. At that time, she was an unlikely celebrity who was at the center of political controversy. West and Orman’s model implies that the exposure given to any of these categories of celebrities provides them with a pulpit to advance their message. Indeed, the concept of event celebrities could even encompass internet celebrities, who may become temporarily famous for appearing in a video gone viral.

However, the model says little about the effect of celebrity intervention in politics. It puts public figures into categories but does not offer any insights about celebrities’ sources of power and influence. What does calling a public figure a “famed nonpolitico” say about their capacity to attract attention, to speak credibly, or to persuade? The inclusiveness of these categories is also a potential weakness. The categories are descriptive but not particularly distinct or meaningful

when making comparisons. When it comes to power and access in the “famed nonpolitical” category, for example, was Sonny Bono’s power truly equivalent to Ronald Reagan’s? Was Willie Nelson’s power as a public spokesman for marijuana legalization comparable to Charlton Heston’s when he was the president of the National Rifle Association? Are “legacies” such as the Kennedys and Bushes powerful because they are celebrities, because they were elected to powerful public offices, or because they were very wealthy? What about people like Barack Obama, who had no real fame before being elected as an Illinois senator but gained a sort of enduring celebrity status as a result of his inspirational speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2004? Moreover, given Obama’s popularity in 2007 and his iconic status as America’s first black president, it is quite likely that he may continue to be treated as much like a star as a former president.

Finally, this model does not comment on what kinds of celebrities gain media attention at particular times or on particular issues. To what extent do traditional celebrities compete with traditional politicians for this space? Do media organizations treat celebrities with the same credibility as public officials? This model offers no answers to these questions. Celebrity status does not always last. Not all celebrities have the same status, and some are more famous within some communities than others (Gunter 2014, 2–3; Marwick 2013). Since this model is merely a categorization of celebrity politics, it implies that celebrities are roughly equivalent, because they all are capable of gaining media attention or at least have appeared in media outlets for various reasons. Thus, while it points out the various kinds of people who have found fame in various ways, it identifies no meaningful difference between Bill Clinton and Lady Gaga, as long as they are famous and talk about politics. In short, the model presumes that anyone who is famous is a celebrity, which makes it impossible to differentiate between politicians and celebrities.

Politicians and celebrities are quite different in their occupations, in their sources of power, and in the way that they go about influencing others. Politicians have legitimacy and are supported by bureaucracies that execute their decisions. Celebrities have no such policymaking capabilities unless they put their performing career on hiatus and run for public office. Thus, in this book, for the purpose of precise measurement, celebrities and politicians are operationally separate. A celebrity is someone who is otherwise famous—usually involved in the media and entertainment industry. Celebrities who advocate on public issues or get involved in political organizing are not politicians. A politician is a public official who holds (or held) public office. George W. Bush is a politician.

Once an entertainer runs for public office, s/he ceases being a celebrity and begins a career as a politician. When elected, public officials do not have to engage exclusively in agenda setting through insurgent grassroots methods or as a politician’s guest at a dinner, although these approaches are available to them.

In this way, celebrities who engage in political activity are more like activists and less like public officials. The main meaningful similarity between celebrities and politicians is their fame and the high-profile public platform, adulation, and criticism that come with fame. Thus, for the purpose of comparison, there is utility in treating them as separate political actors.

Ronald Reagan is the perfect exemplar. He was an entertainer when he became involved in politics. He was a liberal celebrity activist who supported Franklin Roosevelt and appeared with Harry Truman during a campaign event in 1948 (McCullough 1992). His perspectives shifted during the Cold War, as he grew more concerned about communism. By 1964 he was entrenched enough in the conservative movement of the Republican Party to give the keynote address at the Republican National Convention. In 1966 he was elected governor of California. When that happened, he was no longer an actor, even if he continued to use his acting skills to communicate with his constituents. This deep political experience from activism to public speaking to public office is as conventional as a noncelebrity’s path. He was an activist, a networker, a fixture of the establishment, and eventually a candidate and an official, gaining crucial political experience until he arrived at the Oval Office. He just happened to have started his career as an actor.

Celebrities such as Arnold Schwarzenegger in California and Jesse Ventura in Minnesota also launched successful gubernatorial campaigns. Schwarzenegger may not have held public office, but before becoming governor of California, he served as the chairman of the President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports under President George H. W. Bush. He then held a similar position in the state of California, serving Governor Pete Wilson, before writing and sponsoring the successful Proposition 49 to fund after-school education programs. Likewise, Jesse Ventura served as mayor of Brooklyn Park, Minnesota, before running for governor.

It is rare when a politician becomes a full-time entertainer after a life in politics, although there are some examples. Long before becoming a talk show host, Jerry Springer was elected to city council and then mayor of Cincinnati and ran a failed 1982 gubernatorial campaign in Ohio. Other than briefly considering Senate runs in 2000 and 2004, he was strictly an entertainer and a celebrity from 1991 onward with *The Jerry Springer Show*. Actor Clint Eastwood spent most of his career in entertainment, taking a short break to serve as the nonpartisan mayor of Carmel and in various capacities in appointed state positions for the state of California. However, these activities have primarily been avocations as he continued acting and directing films. Eastwood and Springer are primarily celebrities. However, it is much more difficult to categorize Schwarzenegger, considering that he served two terms as governor and then returned to acting. Likewise, Tennessee senator Fred Thompson also went from acting to politics and back to acting again.

What is Donald Trump? Prior to being elected president, he was a celebrity. After winning the presidency, he became a politician. However, considering West and Orman's model implying a broad definition of celebrity, I conducted a survey in October 2016 to determine whether respondents believed that Trump was a politician or a celebrity. Would his status as presidential nominee make him seem less like a celebrity and more like a politician? Using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, the survey asked 304 respondents whether they agreed with the statement "Donald Trump is more of a celebrity than a politician." As a benchmark, the survey asked the same question about Hillary Clinton, considering that Clinton was indeed famous but also very much a traditional establishment politician. In the results, Clinton's mean score was 3.12, suggesting that she is in the middle: perhaps famous for being a legacy politician, to borrow West and Orman's term, but not completely agreeing with the celebrity tag. Donald Trump's mean score was 4.50, suggesting a very high level of agreement that he is more of a celebrity than a politician.

Indeed, Trump was a celebrity. But he was also more. In the past, celebrity politicians were people who gave up their "day job" as entertainers to run for or assume public office. Activist entertainers advocated on issues. Trump blurred those lines. His lack of experience in public office made his victory a surprise, suggesting that celebrities can skip lower offices and go straight to the presidency. His experience as a spokesperson for the birther movement made him more like a celebrity activist. Trump also did not exactly quit his day job. He maintained his businesses, occasionally used the campaign as a platform to advance his business interests, and utilized his fame to say and do things that were foreign to a conventional politician. He actively ran against the party establishment. Yet once he became the Republican standard-bearer, he was every bit the nominee as Mitt Romney was in 2012 or Ronald Reagan was in 1980. Likewise, as president he has continued to deploy the tools of the celebrity activist—criticizing public figures on Twitter or in the media as if he had never won the presidency and attacking the government as if he were not part of it. Donald Trump is just as much president as Barack Obama was before him. However, the lines between Trump as celebrity and Trump as politician are likely to continue to blur as his presidency continues.

A Model of Celebrity Power

To be fair to West and Orman, their model does not aspire to answer all of these questions or make these distinctions. They did not seek to theorize celebrity power. Their framework was distinctive because it illustrated how fame provided a platform to so many different kinds of potentially political actors, and they wrote their book at a time when few in academia were taking celebrity politics seriously. Thus

the problem is not with their model but with the lack of theoretical development around the concept of celebrity influence. A perusal of the celebrity politics literature reveals that few scholars offer a clear framework explaining the foundation of celebrity power and comparing it with that of conventional politicians.

Partzsch (2015) offers one such theoretical answer to the power question. She argues that celebrity power includes two dimensions. The first, "power with," suggests that celebrities have the power to bring "together people from different backgrounds, such as international, business, and civil society organizations." The second, "power over," explains how some celebrities engage in a Weberian zero-sum game to influence the thoughts and actions of others. The use of resources to influence others is known as "visible power." "Hidden power" is that which is not noticed: the ability to get others to discuss one issue at the expense of other issues that remain hidden, or the ability to connect with institutions and raise money in ways that are not explicit in the public sphere. "Invisible power" is the ability to influence ideas through forms of persuasion.

Partzsch's theoretical model offers a way to conceptualize some sources of celebrity power. Her approach does not apply to conventional politicians, although one could apply it that way. Politicians have the ability to bring people together from different backgrounds and to influence others through visible, hidden, and invisible power. However, further specification is needed to capture the full range of power capabilities available to politicians and celebrities alike, particularly since there are some forms of power that may be unique to one group and not to the other. The legitimacy that comes from holding public office, for example, has long been established as a source of power in the sociology and political science literature, and it does not easily fit into Partzsch's categories. For the purposes of this study and for the broader literature, a theoretical power framework has to be broad enough to encompass the range of powers available to both kinds of political actors and specific enough to integrate with the existing political science literature. Moreover, some concepts can also be drawn from the business and advertising literature, which has been documenting the impact of celebrities in advertising for far longer than the political science literature has.

The literature on activism, social movements, and transnational advocacy networks emphasize theoretical concepts that further specify the kinds of activities and abilities utilized by political actors to influence others. "Information politics," for example, refers to the ability of political actors to generate information and to deliver it efficiently and effectively. "Accountability politics" includes the ability of activists and advocacy organizations to hold people accountable for their actions by blaming or shaming them (Badiwala and Brown 2006; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Rodrigues 2004; Shaw 2005). "Symbolic politics," the ability of public figures to reference "symbols, actions, or stories" to simplify complex and distant issues for

the purpose of consolidating or dividing audiences, has also been a long-standing, if unspecified, expression of power (Edelman 1985; Keck and Sikkink 1998, 23–24; Lim 2012; Santesson-Wilson 2001). A more precise understanding of credibility is also key to understanding whether and when celebrities may be able to project influence. Those who are not credible or perceived as experts presumably may be less influential, although results across studies are mixed (Atkin and Block 1983; Becker 2010; Buhr, Simpson, and Pryor 1987; Lammie 2007; Maddux and Rogers 1980; Ohanian 1991; Speck, Schumann, and Thompson 1988).

An alternative approach is to integrate French and Raven's (1959) bases of power model. This model encompasses the diversity of power sources described above and utilizes an existing framework that is broadly accepted by the academic community. This allows scholars to build upon the existing literature on power while aligning the concepts that political scientists employ when trying to explain media impact and persuasion. At the same time, the model also includes a focus on material resources, legitimacy, bureaucracies, and other sources of power that are more available to public officials and less available to celebrities. Moreover, since it was originally designed to explain power relations across many contexts, it allows scholars to more easily compare political actors that have different characteristics and power sources.

French and Raven specify six types of power: legitimate, expert, reward, coercive, informational, and referent (Costa and Martins 2011; French and Raven 1959; Raven 1993). Legitimate power refers to the formal power exercised by those who formally have a title and are placed in a position of power. Expertise power refers to the knowledge and credibility that individuals hold and how they convert these into power. Reward and coercive power refers to the ability to punish or grant favor to those who behave accordingly, both of which include elements of psychological and material power. Informational power is the ability to persuade through manipulation of information, and it includes many of the concepts described in the political science and business literature above, including information and accountability politics. Referent power includes charismatic power and refers to the ability of a political actor to connect and identify with an audience. Thus Partzsch's "power with" would be considered a referent power as well as symbolic politics. Her concept of "power over" finds expression in many of the other types of power. Visible power can be a form of reward or coercion. Hidden and invisible power both seem to be encompassed by informational power. Chapter 2 further specifies French and Raven's model, connecting it to the literature on the media and persuasion and to the current literature on celebrity politics.

French and Raven's model offers a way to operationalize the powers accessible to public officials versus celebrities and to compare their abilities and attributes. To understand how this power translates into the policymaking realm, I draw

from the agenda-setting literature, which connects the roles of the media, activist and interest groups, and politicians, and explains how they work together or compete to affect public policy.

Some political actors—politicians and activists alike—who want to accomplish political goals are known as policy entrepreneurs. They employ strategies to get the powerful and the public to focus on some issues and not on others, and to move policy in a desired direction. First, they attempt to diffuse or minimize cost and uncertainty, ideally by incorporating alliances of political actors to share their burden and support their efforts. Second, they engage in "shakeout" strategies where they attempt to disrupt the status quo in order to exploit or open a "window of opportunity" to advance their issue (Crowley 2003, 13–14; Galligan and Burgess 2005; Jaiani and Whitford 2011; Kingdon 2010, 3, 87). During shakeout, politicians and celebrities may engage in insider activities where they work within policy institutions to pressure those in power through personal appeals. Likewise, they may employ outsider activities where they align with activists and civil society to gain attention from media organizations and pressure policy institutions from the outside (Baumgartner, Green-Pedersen, and Jones 2008; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Birkland 1997; Cobb and Elder 1975; Cobb and Ross 1997, 26; Cook 2005; Iyengar 1994; Soroaka 2003; Zaller 1992, 1996). Given the previous assumption that celebrities are like high-profile activists, many engage in these strategies in order to achieve their ends.

SPOTLIGHTING, CREDIBILITY, AND PERSUASION

The empirical studies in this book illustrate three approaches to celebrity influence. The first, covered in chapter 3, focuses on the "spotlighting" effect, that is, celebrities' ability to step into a political situation and draw attention to an issue.⁵ If celebrities publicly involve themselves in political issues, is there an increase in coverage on that issue? I answer this question by examining what happens when a celebrity intervenes in a political issue—by staging events, giving interviews, writing op-eds, and the like. When the celebrity speaks up, to what extent does the media cover the event? Does coverage of the event lead to a larger, amplified conversation about the issue in the media? Finally, how does their ability to draw media coverage compare with public officials' abilities?

A content analysis of media sources and time series reveals that celebrities can, with a high degree of certainty, command attention on political issues. In individual cases, they outperform politicians and presidents across broadcast and print media alike. In addition, the more celebrities involved in an intervention,

the more likely they are to generate a positive spike in coverage. The same effect does not hold for more politicians at an intervention. Moreover, a discrete event or series of celebrity interventions can increase total media coverage on that issue, even increasing the number of stories that do not make direct reference to the celebrity him/herself. The effect is evident across media types. In other words, if the broadcast media has an interview with George Clooney that does not receive direct coverage in the print media, there may still be a burst of media attention on that issue in newspapers.

The second manifestation of celebrity influence is credibility. Utilizing data drawn from an original survey, chapter 4 compares respondents' perceptions of politicians' credibility to celebrities' credibility. Results of the survey reveal that on some issues, such as same-sex marriage and increased funding for international AIDS prevention, celebrities are more credible than politicians are. In other cases, celebrities rank second behind a major party leader such as Barack Obama or Hillary Clinton. In no cases were celebrities ranked as least credible among political actors, and in most cases they are comparably credible to politicians. Given the general assumptions of the academic literature, we would rationally expect politicians to be more credible than celebrities on issues of public policy. The discovery that celebrities' credibility ranges from being indistinguishable from major politicians to being distinctly more credible is important, suggesting that celebrity power is greater than many have previously assumed.

When breaking these rankings down by party affiliation, it may not be completely surprising that a Republican may rank any celebrity higher than Barack Obama or that a Democrat may rank any celebrity higher than Donald Trump. This, too, is an interesting finding, suggesting that celebrities may be able to cross political lines more easily than established politicians can. Perhaps a partisan is more inclined to take a celebrity seriously over a representative of the opposing party. Moreover, as politicians are seen as less credible by voting publics, this study suggests that celebrities are filling that vacuum.

Finally, some celebrities are more credible than others are. Celebrity credibility seems to be tied to their experience and expertise. Those celebrities who are closely tied to issues, such as Ellen DeGeneres on gay rights, or those who have gained expertise and experience through formal learning and specialized knowledge, such as Bono on debt relief, makes them seem more credible. In addition, those celebrities who are more closely tied to established transnational advocacy networks are also seen as more credible.

Celebrities may be able to cast a spotlight on a political cause. They may have credibility that rivals or even exceeds politicians' credibility. However, do celebrities' issue endorsements affect the way people feel about an issue? Do people agree with their endorsements? To discover whether celebrities have the power of per-

suation on political issues, chapter 5 presents the results of an original experimental design study intended to test how receptive respondents were to celebrity appeals. Each control and experimental group was exposed to detailed information on a public issue, offering reasons to support competing policy alternatives. However, the experimental group's information ended with an additional "frame," a persuasive statement in which a celebrity takes a side on an issue in order to persuade the target respondent. When focusing on two distinct issues—U.S. intervention in the Syrian conflict and legalization of same-sex marriage—some celebrities were found to be persuasive versus the control group, a finding that was statistically significant while controlling for age, gender, and party affiliation. Further analysis revealed that some celebrities were persuasive whether they advocated for or against a particular policy position, and this ability was independent of whether or not the subject likes the celebrity.

Upon further analysis, four factors were found to be related to the ability of celebrities to persuade. First, the more salient the issue is—that is, the more prominent the issue is in the mind of the public, the more likely celebrities are to be persuasive. Second, those issues that are highly polemic are more difficult for celebrity persuasion. As one might expect, a celebrity is unlikely to persuade people to change their minds about issues such as gun control. Third, celebrities who are perceived as more authentic based on their talents and abilities are more persuasive. Finally, celebrities seem to be able to persuade people on either side of a given issue. Celebrities may be persuasive irrespective of whether people believe they are advocating in a direction that is contrary to expectations.

Chapter 6 concludes that celebrities are comparably credible to politicians and capable of both spotlighting and persuading target audiences on political issues, making them potentially powerful and capable of affecting the public agenda. Clearly, not all celebrities are equally credible, equally able to garner attention, or equally able to persuade. However, many celebrities who engage in policy advocacy can be pivotal in achieving strategic goals. Moreover, the potential of celebrity power is substantial enough that politicians might well benefit or suffer because of their interventions.

CELEBRITY INFLUENCE AND THE STUDY OF POLITICS

This book intends to explore why a public official would pay attention to a celebrity. Photos of President Bush and Bono in 2005–2006 speak volumes. At times Bush appears awkward in front of the camera, while Bono looks, well, like a rock star. If Bono can attract attention and is effective at persuasion, why would George

Bush *not* want him on the team? Moreover, if Bono is actually better than Bush in at least one of these skills, Bush might perceive that he is *less* likely to “win” without Bono. Bono facilitates Bush’s ability to push debt relief on the public agenda. On the other hand, if Bono is effective at this agenda-setting game and disagrees with Bush’s policy, perhaps Bono is more threatening outside of the White House than inside it. If true, it may illuminate why Bush might tolerate or even appreciate Bono. In addition, if the answers are conditional—that is, if a celebrity is skeptical of his/her ability to command media attention in a particular situation—it might explain why *s/he* would pursue an insider strategy by playing the role of policy lobbyist and confidante instead of pursuing an outside media strategy.

If celebrities are more influential than conventional wisdom assumes, the implications are profound. Academically, it deflates a common assumption within political science that public officials are dominant in their influence over public discourse on political issues. This book certainly does not negate that in most areas of public policy, elected officials retain an incredible amount of power. It does, however, specify areas in which other political actors—in this case movie actors and the like—may compete and even exceed the power of traditional politicians over public agendas. While politicians remain dominant in legitimate power—and perhaps even in coercive, reward, and expert power—celebrities are capable of utilizing information and referent power in ways that may threaten or enhance the power of advocacy groups or legitimate politicians. Ultimately, exploring the role of celebrity in domestic and international politics may cause us to rethink our conceptualizations of power.

This book also contributes to our understanding of the relationship between celebrity and media, both internationally and in American studies. It discusses the way that capital and technology have opened avenues for the rise of celebrity in western society. Not only has this avenue opened an opportunity for celebrities to get involved in the political process, but it also has led traditional politicians to engage in the image-building strategies inherent in the entertainment industry. This is a striking cultural shift. If the modern media—with all of its technological delivery systems—is an electronic assembly line for the twenty-first century, then politicians and celebrities alike are the products. They roll to the end of the conveyor belt in shiny digital packages, electronically delivered to consumers who want their news and entertainment as tailored to their personalities and beliefs as their choice in designer clothes. In this environment, it is not at all surprising that less material forms of power such as credibility, expertise, authenticity, and the ability to manipulate information have put politicians and celebrities on more level playing fields. Indeed, the success of Donald Trump in 2016 and beyond has been to understand himself as a brand. He is the product at the end of the assembly line—the ultimate reality show—delivered to his target demographic and

refined by information manipulation, image branding, and live political theater. Instead of purchasing the product, the excited consumer simply needs to show up at the polls and vote. According to Kranish and Fisher in their book, *Trump Revealed*, Trump believes that “all attention, fawning or critical or somewhere in between, accrues to his benefit, that his personal image defines his brand, that he is his brand” (Kranish and Fisher 2016, vii)

Academics who study policymaking might also find valuable insights in this book. Two major components of agenda setting—gaining attention for one’s issue and persuading target audiences—are the key dependent variables in this study. This book borrows from the agenda-setting literature by conceptualizing celebrity activists as high-profile policy entrepreneurs. It contributes to this literature by explaining how activists with skills in spotlighting and persuasion may be able to affect the policy process. Moreover, it specifies conditions under which celebrities can gain attention and persuade target audiences.

In addition, much of the theory equating celebrities with activists is drawn from the transnational advocacy network and social movement literature. As a result, these findings also support this literature, particularly illustrating how celebrities as activists exploit opportunity structures. It is this final point that reveals the book’s practical potential. Advocacy organizations and politicians alike have employed celebrities for their own purposes. What happens when a celebrity speaks on an issue of public importance? This question is profoundly important for politicians and activists alike. When Bono supports debt relief for the developing world, does he create a global media conversation on the subject? Or is the discussion limited to the events where Bono appears? Is he persuasive? If Bono and his fellow celebrities are unsuccessful, perhaps politicians and activists are wasting their time with celebrity endorsements. Perhaps they lack the credibility necessary to make any measurable difference. On the other hand, if he is successful, he potentially creates a policy window for advocacy organizations to exploit the moment and pressure policymakers for change. This has important implications for policy strategists and activists alike. Bono’s success implies that advocacy organizations and politicians who want to advance their issue may benefit from someone like Bono. As Michael Jordan sells Nikes, perhaps Bono can sell debt relief. If so, the introductory scenario of Bush jokingly snapping to attention as Bono walks by may be less ridiculous than previously assumed.