# Blue Jean Nation "Shred the playbook"

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***Why do politicians keep behaving the way they do when it's clear it only makes many dislike them? They stick with what they know, the handbook provided by consultants, handlers and party bosses.***

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ALTOONA, WI - Most people hate politics and don't hide how little they think of your average politician. Makes you wonder why politicians keep behaving the way they do when it's clear it only makes people dislike them more. Maybe it's because they don't know any other way to behave. They've been operating out of a well-worn playbook for so long that they know all the plays by heart. So they stick with what they know.

Most of the plays in the playbook have at least three things in common. They are decades old or older. They are expensive. And they work like a charm, if the goals are to alienate the general public and cripple democracy.

The first page in both parties' playbook is **nonstop fundraising**. It's the favorite play because it makes so many other plays possible. It's why politicians see you and me as nothing more than ATMs.

The playbook then says spend heavily on **paid media**. Television, radio, direct mail advertising, online ads. This is political gospel. The conventional wisdom is looking less and less wise, however, when you consider that public t
rust in advertising has been falling
. This trend is sure to continue in the future because young Millennials are
especially distrustful
of advertising.

TV ads in particular are losing effectiveness , partly because viewers are increasingly wary of them and partly because it is getting easier by the day to avoid them, using digital recording and online video streaming to watch programs but skip the accompanying ads. Yet the vast majority of election campaign spending still is devoted to TV and other traditional forms of advertising. Makes the political professionals and media corporations billions. Turns voters' stomachs. Starves democracy.

So what actually works? Word of mouth. The information we trust most comes from people we know , especially friends and family. Which makes it all the more curious that neighbor-to-neighbor outreach programs like street teams and other kinds of direct voter contact are so hard to find in the playbook.

With face-to-face campaigning downplayed and a premium placed on paid media, the playbook says **attack** your opponent at every turn. It is an article of faith among political professionals that negative advertising "works." It certainly does, if the goal is to shrink and polarize the electorate. If the goal is to persuade or motivate voters, or make our society governable, then a growing body of evidence challenges the devotion to scorched earth campaigning.

Right next to attack advertising in the playbook is a related go-to play, namely **spin**. The play is based on the Costanza rule . It's not a lie if you believe it. Meaning honesty is optional and truth depends on your perspective. If you spin people dizzy, they'll no longer be able to see where the truth lies.

The playbook calls for **continuous polling**. This is one of the few places where the Democratic and Republican playbooks differ. Both parties swear by public opinion polling. But as a general rule, Democrats rely on polling to craft their message and guide their actions, while Republicans use polling to drive home their core message and demonstrate support for their actions. Voters are left wondering why politicians can't seem to move a muscle without first consulting a pollster.

The playbook also says **run to the center**. It is another article of faith that most voters are in the middle, so that's where the smart politicians should be. Most of today's Republicans have torn this page out of their playbook. Many Democrats have remained partial to it. Bill Clinton " triangulated " his way to two terms in the White House, locating a middle point between right and left, although not without a cost. During Clinton's tenure in office, Democrats surrendered principle and lost control of the national narrative before losing control of Congress and most statehouses as well. They have never recovered.

Another dog-eared page in the old playbook says **pick your spots**. Focus on a few key battlegrounds that have a history of swinging either way, concentrate resources on those contests, and write off all other territory. Both parties do it, leaving large numbers of voters in many parts of the country with no choice of which party will represent them in Congress or the state legislature. It's been a disastrous practice for the Democrats, being in the minority in most places. Without candidates running locally in large swaths of the country, voters in those areas only hear what ruling Republicans tell them, which ends up handicapping Democrats trying to run statewide or nationally. More importantly, the play shortchanges voters.

Everyone but the consultants, handlers and party bosses would be better off — as would American democracy — if the X's and O's of conventional politics were to give way to some ne w plays .

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