Feature Article

Parties and Campaign Professionals in a Digital Age

Political Consultants in the United States and Their Counterparts Overseas

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This article assesses the role of campaign professionals in election campaigns in the Digital Age, with particular reference to their relationship with political parties. In the first section, the authors develop a typology of political consultants and assess the role they play in U.S. elections. This review of the evidence suggests a healthier relationship than has previously been assumed between U.S. parties and consultants. The second section examines comparative trends in Western Europe—which has seen some significant adaptation by the established parties—as well as in new democracies generally. In both cases campaign professionals have become increasingly prominent, indicating a convergence on the U.S. campaign model. Overall, the evidence supports the thesis that election campaigns have outgrown the institutional limitations of political parties, requiring a role for campaign professionals to fill this increasing gap.

Election campaigns the world over have been going through some dramatic change during the past thirty to forty years. The style of electioneering followed by the Gore and Bush camps in the 2000 U.S. presidential campaign bore little relationship to the way elections were fought in the time of John F. Kennedy; indeed, there were some distinct differences from the campaign style of George W. Bush's father in the late 1980s (as personified most distinctly by the use of candidate Web sites, for instance). In similar fashion there have been important shifts in the styles of electioneering by parties and candidates in other countries.

In general, the campaign process has passed through three main stages of development: the Newspaper Age, the Television Age, and the Digital Age (Farrell 1996; Farrell and Webb 2000; Norris 2000). The basic trends can be summarized as having involved a gradual shift from electioneering as essentially a localist, largely amateur, part-time affair directed at party loyalists to the permanent campaign of today that is personified by a focus on slick presentation, the prominent role of campaign consultants, and an emphasis on marketing of image and campaign issues.

The purpose of this article is to address two themes prominent in the contemporary literature on campaigning: first, regarding the role (and possible decline) of political parties, and second, regarding the extent to which these trends might be seen as unique to the United States or, instead, as part of a more general process of campaign modernization (in which, perhaps, the United States may have been leading the way). Our focus is specifically on the campaign professionals—political consultants, as they are referred to in the United States (such operatives are given different names in other countries)—in terms of their role in the process of campaign modernization and also in terms of how, by their growing prominence, they may have had an effect on the role of political parties.
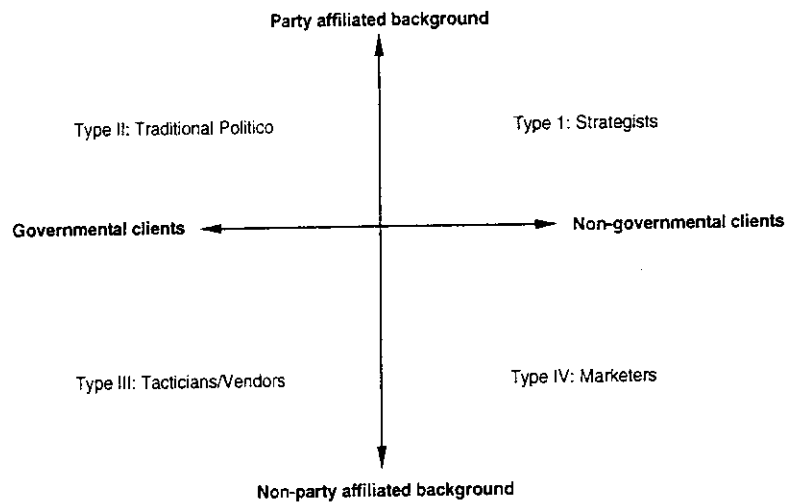
Consultants, Parties, and Campaign Discourse in the United States

A central question scholars ask concerns the relationship of political consultants to political parties (Agranoff 1976; Luntz 1988; Sabato 1981; Thurber and Nelson 2000). Arguably, this is a fundamental issue in the study of political consultants, for if candidates and issue groups believed that their electoral needs could be entirely served by political parties, there would be no market for this bevy of outside vendors. Certainly, there is good reason to argue that modern campaigns demand specialized, technical services that are simply beyond the political parties' institutional capacity to deliver. If we consider that political parties were formed to make mass mobilization of voters occur efficiently for several levels of officeholders (Aldrich 1995), then who is to say that parties still do not deliver on these promises? In short, can parties be reasonably expected to respond fully to the demands of campaigning in a Digital Age? Have the techniques of modern campaigning really been so significant as to force parties to redefine their roles and call for the services of the consulting industry? We suggest below that technology-dependent modern campaigning has indeed exceeded the institutional capacity of political parties in the United States (and, by implication, may be doing the same in other democracies as well). When campaigning in the Digital Age, parties had two options: either to provide the services candidates needed (and become very different organizations than they currently are, or have historically been) (Troy 1996), or to rely on others to help

them fulfill their mission. To become truly viable full-service campaign operations for all the candidates wearing their label, parties would have to fundamentally reinvent themselves, something they have neither the resources nor the expertise to do. Inevitably, political consultants must have an important role here, and one that we would suggest has plenty of capacity for being cooperative and constructive vis-à-vis the parties.

There are two dimensions to the relationship between parties and consultants. First, there is the background of political consultants. We know from historical accounts that the early consultants tended to originate in the commercial world, almost stumbling as it were into the arena of politics (Kelley 1956; Mayer 1958). Today, at least superficially, the routes of entry appear quite different, with many consultants being trained by the political parties and increasingly in specialist courses at universities across the United States. Second, we need to assess the types of clients that consultants are taking on. For instance, there is prima facie evidence that political consultancy today is more of a full-time occupation, unlike in the past when consultants had to serve clients in the business and political worlds at the same time.[1] Although in other countries political consultancy appears to be still only a sideshow for commercial agencies, in the United States we see consultants employed predominantly by political clients as well as consultants who started out in politics and moved back to the commercial world.

We can construct a fourfold typology of consultants at work in the United States based on these two dimensions (background and client type). This helps sort out the conflicting conclusions that consultants are at once a danger to and an ally of political parties (see Figure 1). Marketers (type IV in our scheme) are consultants who come from nongovernmental training and take on mostly nongovernmental clients. Early U.S. consultants were of this type, and it seems many contemporary European consultants belong in this category. Vendors (type III) also do not have political backgrounds, but provide technical services to predominantly political clients. In the United States, these include specialty software firms, Web page designers, and voter file compilers. Traditional politicos (type II) are the predominant form of consultant in the United States today and refer to individuals who have begun by working for the parties or government, left their employment to form independent firms, and take on predominantly political clients. More than half of political consultants in the United States follow this career path (Kolodny and Logan 1998; Thurber et al. 2000). Finally, strategic consultants are a new breed of politically bred specialists who take on (by outsourcing) commercial clients for governmental affairs work (e.g., lobbying) or broad public interest campaigns designed to change public opinion and policy (a good example today is the British anti–fox hunt campaign, which has received some professional advice from U.S. consultants).[2]

Party affiliated background

Type II: Traditional Politico   Type 1: Strategists

Governmental clients   ◄——————————————►   Non-governmental clients

Type III: Tacticians/Vendors   Type IV: Marketers

Non-party affiliated background

Figure I
Distinguishing Different Types of Political Consultants

Our typology has the principal merit of indicating variations in the individual and institutional links between the campaign consultancy industry and political parties. It also provides a useful means of comparing different scenarios under which such relationships may occur. For instance, there are clear signs of a temporal dimension, especially regarding generational cohorts of political consultants. In the early era of political consulting (1930s to 1960s), consultants were more likely to have nonpolitical backgrounds but applied their trades to political settings. As campaigning became more technologically sophisticated (1970s to 1980s), we find more traditional politicos emerging. More recently, as these consultants begin to age and move farther away from political work and business firms are recognizing the need for more political savvy, strategist consultants are becoming more prominent. In short, our typology should not be viewed as a static diagram, but rather, a typology consisting of several significant stages in which consulting appears to be developing a particular life cycle.

Much has been written on the decline, resurgence, and general role of political parties in U.S. elections. Whatever may have been the cause for the initial usurpation of the parties' dominance in electoral politics, it is now generally believed that professional consultants and parties have important roles to play in campaigns (Herrnson 1988; Sabato 1988). Indeed, the relationship between parties and consultants has even been called "cooperative" (Herrnson 1994:55). But exactly which tasks are carried out by the individual candidates or parties, and which are best devolved to the political consultants?

There is a fair amount of case study literature that documents the activities believed to constitute an effective campaign (e.g., Guber 1997; Shea 1996).

Whether in the United States or elsewhere, certain elements of campaigns are thought necessary at even the most basic level. These include: headquarters and staff organization, polling, message and strategy creation, day-to-day campaign management, fund-raising, message dissemination, issue and opposition research, speech writing, scheduling and advance work, media production and placement, canvassing and voter contact by phone (both of which require database and file management), volunteer coordination, direct mail production and printing, press relations, get-out-the-vote efforts, and (increasingly) Web site creation and maintenance.[3] Obviously, not every campaign undertakes each of these activities in a well-thought-out, coordinated fashion, though in the U.S. context, individual candidates are expected to create this separately from the party organization. As we move toward higher offices we find more and more of these functions carried out in a professional manner.[4]

One might guess, given the history of how consultants rose to prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s, that consultants would handle the technical end of the campaign while parties would handle strategy and message. In fact, surveys of consultants and state party leaders by Kolodny (2000) reveal that both sets of political operatives are in agreement that parties have an advantage in terms of information about the local campaign context and at maintaining voter files, conducting get-out-the-vote efforts, and organizing the grass roots. Consultants, on the other hand, are thought to be better able to undertake the technical aspects of the campaign, like media production (and, according to parties, polling and direct mail). They are also better able to give individual attention to candidates, important in single-member plurality systems such as the United States. Leaving aside fundraising (which parties were unsure about and consultants clearly thought parties handled better), the two groups disagreed most regarding the question of message creation. Parties were certain that they were best at carrying out this function; the consultants completely disagreed (Kolodny 2000).

Thus, while there seems to be general consensus among the consultants and state party leaders in the United States that the consultants are more effective at providing technical expertise, there is no such consensus with regard to whether the parties are superior at message and strategy creation. Parties may be effective at message creation and strategy in certain campaign environments and for certain types of candidates. Nevertheless, one is left with the impression, at least from the consultants' vantage point, that message and strategy, as well as technical operations, are the domain of the consultants, while parties are best at offering background and dealing with voter contact and mobilization. This is perhaps the most troubling area for our assessment of the implications of consultant work on parties. If parties cannot control their central campaign themes, then what do they control? On the other hand, that parties continue to mobilize voters effectively may be even more central to their viability than the nuances of message construction.

Campaign Strategy and Treatment of Issues

If consultants really are better at handling campaign strategy, we might ask how they generally go about this function. There are, essentially, two schools of thought on party campaigning. The first, which comes out of the Downsian tradition of voting behavior (Downs 1957), is generally referred to as a *spatial strategy*. In this view, the range of possible issue positions is spread out along a one-dimensional continuum from left to right. Parties and voters place themselves along the continuum according to the combination of positions they take on issues (which amounts to their ideological positioning). According to spatial logic, candidates and parties have a clear incentive to make appeals to the median voter (Klingemann et al. 1994).

The spatial model allows for a great deal of flexibility in terms of the positions parties may take. Indeed, there is nothing to prevent parties from leapfrogging their opponents on the ideological continuum in an attempt to capture a greater number of voters. In reality, however, parties and candidates have histories (or ideological anchors) that prevent too great a redefinition of party principles. In addition, voters have relatively static perceptions of which parties perform better on given issues.

A second school of thought, the saliency theory of campaign strategy, seeks to paint a more realistic picture of how parties and candidates behave. According to Budge and Farlie, *saliency theory* "sees party competition in terms of varying emphases on policy areas," where the parties "devote most attention to the types of issue [*sic*] which favour themselves, discuss these with less reference to details than to general reviews of their past achievements and promises for the future, and give correspondingly less attention to issues which favour their opponents" (1983:24). This selective emphasis of issues results in parties/candidates talking past each other.

Although there is currently little empirical evidence on the matter, consultants can be seen as employing a strategy similar to saliency theory. Medvic (1996, 1997) has argued that consultants urge candidates and parties to deliberately prime voters by focusing on a few select issues on which they have an advantage (see also Jacobs and Shapiro 1994).[5] A fully professionalized campaign (which may exist only as an ideal) would begin to form a strategy based on polling. Quite apart from any advantages parties may have on some issues over others, individual candidates may have specific issue advantages that differ from the national image of their party. The goal of polling, then, is to determine which issues are salient among voters and, of those, which play to the individual candidate's advantage. Once these are revealed, the beneficial issues are selected for priming. The professionally run campaign will deliberately prime voters by effectively employing images, messages, and symbols that foreground those issues in the voters' minds. Proper sign selection is crucial to the success of a priming strategy. Media and direct mail production and placement are then

employed to disseminate the message. Of course, any campaign, including those run by party operatives or by a candidate's own amateur organization, can engage in deliberate priming (and, to some extent, all do). Recall, however, that consultants are considered superior to parties in terms of attention to individual candidates. The theory of deliberate priming is really a candidate-centered one in that consultants are able to find (and focus on) those issues that may not coincide with the national or state parties' issues or may choose to emphasize personality traits. Party operatives are understandably more hesitant to campaign in any way contrary to the national party's theme for a given cycle, and hence would not necessarily coach candidates to prime in this way. Nevertheless, since in the United States parties are interested in winning control of government in a candidate-centered system, they do not disagree with individual candidate strategies that differ from the party if it will mean that the party will win majority control of that governmental institution (Kolodny 1998).

One final point relates to the allegation that consultants distort or oversimplify issues. If the preceding discussion describes reality at all, it should be clear that consultants do not distort issues in the sense that they convince candidates or parties to alter their issue positions to suit the whims of the electorate (i.e., unless we are to accept the perspective of the political marketing literature). Nor do they falsely attribute positions to opponents (Thurber et al. 2000). By emphasizing those issues on which they have an advantage and largely ignoring those on which they are disadvantaged, candidates (with the help of consultants) are true to their own positions and help clarify voter choices. The line, however, between the clarification of issues and their oversimplification is a fine one. Because candidates rarely discuss the details of their plans and instead emphasize broad policy areas, campaigns serve to simplify complex policy debates. Of course, this is not a new phenomenon, nor is it an inherently bad thing.

Consultants Versus Parties?

Do consultants add something to campaigns that had never before existed, or are they now responsible for some functions that had previously been the purview of parties? The answer may very well be both. It would appear that much of what traditional politico consultants offer campaigns—tapping voter sentiment, developing and disseminating a message, and mobilizing voters—are those things that have always been done, albeit now in a more sophisticated fashion. Consultants and parties seem to agree that some of these functions are better left to parties, while others are more effectively (if not efficiently) conducted by consultants. Thus, on one hand, consultants have risen to prominence as surrogates for parties.

On the other hand, consultants do appear to be providing at least some new services. To what extent, for example, did presidential candidates in the United States use polling (i.e., as an information source, not a horse-race measure)

before Louis Harris provided the service extensively for the Kennedy campaign of 1960? Furthermore, media placement has become a highly technical service (one that covers thousands of radio and television stations in hundreds of distinct media markets in the United States) that parties are not equipped to develop. Most of the unique services that consultants provide are the result of rapid technological developments that consultants (who on the whole focus on a relatively narrow area of campaigning) were better positioned than parties to learn and provide. Thus, parties never had the opportunity to offer Web site maintenance, for instance, because when the Internet came along vendors were already in place to offer their wares.

This is not to say that the parties were incapable of adapting to technology. Indeed, the changes in U.S. parties in the 1970s and 1980s prove that they made some necessary adjustments. In the 1980s especially, parties employed more staff to take on these new technical tasks (Herrnson 1988). In an age of fragmentation, however, there is likely to be room for more than one entity in a campaign. Thus, the choice between the uniqueness and surrogacy of consultants is a false one; the two are not mutually exclusive. Alan Ware (1988:10) has correctly noted that much of the "party decline" thesis is based on the myth that consultants could not have emerged if parties had been successfully assisting candidates in their campaigns. He compared that myth to arguing that railroads would never have developed if the canal system had been strong. Consultants, according to this line of reasoning, would have burst onto the scene whether or not parties were functioning effectively (Ware 1988:243). Indeed, the consultants/party relationship has simultaneously witnessed consultants offering a unique product as well as replacing the parties in providing traditional services (though mostly on the cutting edge of technology), just as parties have been maintaining responsibility for those things they do best.

In general, our review of the evidence would suggest a healthier relationship than has previously been assumed between U.S. parties and consultants. The majority of today's consultants are traditional politicos who start life as party operatives (or, at least, with some kind of party-affiliated background), and the bulk of whose clients are in some ways linked to government. With few (if any) exceptions, they remain loyal to their ideological roots: The Dick Morrises of this world (i.e., consultants who will work for any candidate regardless of party or ideology) are few and far between. There are even some consultants with political parties as clients who go so far as to describe themselves as part of the party, almost like extensions of the party staff.[6] Quite apart from the degree of linkage between parties and (most) consultants, it is also apparent that the consultants fill an important skills gap for the parties. New technologies require new technicians, and, as we have seen, as the demands and specializations of the modern professional campaign have grown, so also has the need for consultants.

Parties, Professionals, and Consultants: American Exceptionalism or Americanization?

To what extent is the U.S. case unique? To what extent can the U.S. experience of political consultancy development and apparent political party decline be compared with the experience of other democracies? Inevitably, there is no easy answer to this question; however, given the recent burgeoning of new democracies across Latin America, parts of Africa, East and Central Europe, and the former Soviet Union, the comparative scholar now has a number of new clues with which to provide a rather more informed answer. For a long time the principal problem was a shortage of cases, leading to a certain West European–centrism in much of the comparative analysis of parties and elections. Therefore, any consideration of comparative trends needs to take account of what has been happening in the newer democracies; however, given the wealth of material on the West European case, it is useful to begin here.

The Demise of the West European Mass Party?

Viewed through West European lenses, there are one of two possible answers to the question of whether the tendencies in the U.S. electoral process that we have outlined are unique: Either (1) yes or (2) maybe once, but Europe is catching up. The "yes" perspective is based on an appreciation of the fundamental differences between the two continents in terms of history, culture, and institutions. In particular, West European countries are seen to have well-developed, highly cohesive political parties based on strong ideological cleavages that formed the original party systems at the time of mass enfranchisement in the early decades of the twentieth century (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). The traditional organizational structure common to most West European parties is the mass party, characterized by a large and active membership, a well-resourced organizational bureaucracy, and a stress on internal democracy (Duverger 1954). By contrast, the U.S. party model is far more fluid: The ideological differences between Democrats and Republicans are less distinct, and vary starkly in different parts of the United States (see Gimpel 1996). There is not much organizational structure, apart from the roles played by the various semiautonomous congressional campaign committees. American parties are best described as empty vessels (Katz and Kolodny 1994).

From this perspective, therefore, there is good reason to expect significant differences in the styles of campaigning. In particular, we should expect the U.S. model to be personified by a candidate-centered orientation where campaign consultants hold sway as the key organizational and support features in a campaign. By contrast, the West European model should manifest a strong tradition of party-centered campaigning, with the campaign being arranged through and

on behalf of the party (Bowler and Farrell 1992). Whereas in the United States the party's role in a campaign is to support the election goals of the candidate, in Western Europe the individual candidate's role is to further the campaign objectives of the party. In the United States, the campaign specialist is a political consultant employed for a specific set of specialist functions by the candidate or by the political party on behalf of a candidate; in Western Europe, the campaign specialist is a permanent employee of the political party.

The second of our two answers—that Europe has been catching up with U.S. campaign practices—accepts the basic picture just presented, but adds an important temporal dimension in recognition of the evident fact that the parties and party systems of Western Europe have been undergoing significant transformation in the final quarter of the twentieth century. There are two competing arguments, both of which lead to much the same conclusion. First, there is the view that West European parties are merely following the U.S. trend of decline (Lawson and Merkl 1988; Reiter 1989). The obvious implication here, for our present purposes, is that if the West European parties are weakening and becoming more fluid campaign machines in the U.S. tradition (Epstein 1980), then inevitably some of the slack will be taken up by campaign consultants.

The suggestion that West European parties are following the decline tendencies of their U.S. cousins may be persuasive, but it is not without its critics. Prominent among these is Peter Mair (1983, 1997), who preferred to refer to the changes of West European parties as a process of adaptation that might in time amount to a growing vulnerability of parties, but by no means should it lead to their demise. The adaptation theme has a long pedigree among West European political scientists, dating back to the classic works of Maurice Duverger (1954) and Otto Kirchheimer (1966), among others, and most recently explored by Angelo Panebianco (1988), and in the detailed data-gathering exercise led by Richard Katz and Peter Mair (1992, 1994).

Party Staff Changes and the Role of Agencies

According to Katz and Mair's (1995) cartel party thesis, the future for West European parties looks quite bright. Their argument is that contemporary parties have formed an oligopolistic-like arrangement among themselves in terms of taking turns to be in power, and by "nest-feathering" themselves with state financial subsidies and free access to the public broadcasting networks. While this cartel party thesis has not been without its critics (Katz and Mair 1996; Koole 1996), the available evidence is certainly supportive of the view of party consolidation rather than decline, at least up until the end of the 1980s (Farrell and Webb 2000).

As Table 1 shows, in a number of respects, West European parties were significantly stronger in the late 1980s than in the 1960s: Their central headquarters were better staffed (indeed, this was even more the case with regard to the

Table 1

The resourcing of West European parties in the closing decades of the twentieth century

	Percentage Increase/Decrease		
	Central Party Staff	Central Party Income	Central Party Campaign Expenditure
Austria	+36	+192	+14
Britain	+18	+42	+25
Denmark	+33	+66	+22
Finland	+91	−13	+13
West Germany	+8.6	−22	NA
Ireland	+216	+91	+162
The Netherlands	+61	+90	+39
Norway	+59	−16	+6
Sweden	+39	−17	+18

Source: Farrell and Webb 2000; Katz and Mair 1992.

Note: NA = not applicable. The change refers to the difference between the position in the late 1960s or early 1970s and that in the late 1980s or early 1990s; only those parties are included where it proved possible to make a direct comparison over time. The financial data have been standardized using cost of living deflators (base year of 1987).

parties' parliamentary staff), they had larger annual incomes, and they were spending more on their election campaigns. And for those parties that seemed to be somewhat bucking the growth trends—in Germany and the Scandinavian countries where central incomes had been falling slightly—it is worth noting that they started the period as the richest parties in Europe (Farrell and Webb 2000).

Of course, Table 1 may be telling a slightly outdated story, for the process of campaign and party organizational modernization has an ongoing dynamic. Campaign professionalization has gone through a number of phases of change, arguably the most recent of which has only begun in the past decade. Coinciding with and in large part caused by the emergence of new information technologies, the parties have been gearing up for campaigning in the new Information Age (Farrell 1996). The latest technologies are being brought to bear on the campaign process; the focus of the campaign is shifting, with even more attention focused on the presidentialized leadership and campaign imagery; and new technicians are being employed to facilitate this process of campaign transformation. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence of how parties are employing new types of staff: people from the marketing and public relations world, "bright young things" who are not afraid to bury the party philosophy where necessary so long as the number-one objective of keeping the campaign "on message" is achieved (Norris et al. 1999).

This suggests that not only are the contemporary West European parties' staff members continuing to become ever more professional—with old-fashioned

party bureaucrats being replaced by new-fashioned marketing, public relations, and media professionals—there may also be important internal shifts taking place in terms of the balance of loyalties of a lot of these new staff. For instance, the phenomenon of the "leader's office" has achieved a certain prominence in recent years in a number of countries. Here we find the party leader being surrounded by hand-picked staff working exclusively for him or her. Their fate as party employees is tied directly to the fate of the leader; loyalty to the party per se is always secondary to loyalty to the party leader. Clearly it would be going too far to argue that these developments presage a move toward candidate-centered politics, because the party leader remains just that—the leader of a party. However, they are indicative of a further peeling off of the parliamentary party from the other parts of the party (Katz and Mair 1995).

It is also the case that party staffing is far less permanent, not simply because talented and ambitious people are more likely to be mobile anyway, but also because the parties are moving toward more of a "revolving-door" philosophy toward their staff. Specialists are employed for particular services, and once the task is complete the employee is (and should be) dispensable. We saw this before the 1997 British election when the Labour party made it clear to their staff that most of them would be laid off once the election was over and, sure enough, within weeks of the party's dramatic election victory, its organization was downsized (similar trends were evident after the recent German election). Many of these former party employees ended up working as lobbyists, honing their skills (and contacts) as former party workers, though as is common in the United States, there is every likelihood that many of them will end up being reemployed by the party come the next election.

Given these trends—different staff working for different bosses within the same party, a far greater fluidity in the nature of party employment, and the movement of party staff in and out of political work and commercial work—the West European picture starts to look quite familiar to a North American audience. We appear to have a lot of the ingredients for a description of the U.S. campaign process (at least in terms of the role and flow of campaign personnel). Indeed, in many respects what we are looking at in terms of the profile of the contemporary party staffer in Western Europe bears increasing resemblance to the traditional politico political consultant described previously. The principal remaining difference is nominal; rather than referring to these staff specialists as political consultants, they may instead be given such titles as spin doctors (in the United Kingdom) or handlers (in Ireland).

Of course, in the new campaign environment of Western Europe, the personnel changes are not only internal to the parties. For the past twenty years or more, parties right across Western Europe have been making increased use of specialist agencies (Bowler and Farrell 1992). Work that in the past would have been handled in-house (advertising design, public relations, campaign feedback,

etc.) is increasingly being farmed out to agencies and specialist individuals.[7] Indeed, in many respects the major determinant of just how much of this kind of work is farmed out is related to the extent of in-house expertise among the party employees and the willingness of the party leadership to make use of outside agencies.

In this respect, one could argue that, until relatively recently, West European parties have felt somewhat constrained. Given that most of them originated (or at least passed through a phase) as mass parties, with all the attendant features of large activist memberships and bureaucratic organizational structures, it is perhaps no surprise to find some delay in switching to the new styles of campaigning outlined above. As we shall see next, it is evident that political parties in the newly emerging democracies have not experienced the same mass party phase. This raises an intriguing question as to whether Western Europe (and the other older democracies outside of the United States) might be seen as the exceptional region in terms of party change and styles of campaigning.

New Democracies:
More Fertile Territory for Political Consultants?

The past decade or so has seen the rise of a plethora of new democracies across Latin America, East and Central Europe, the former Soviet Union, and parts of Africa. The nature of party organization that has emerged in many of these new democracies is characterized by a far looser organization, with little emphasis on a mass membership, less attention to long-term organizational goals, and more focus on the immediacy of the election campaign (Kopecky 1995; Lewis 1996; Mainwaring and Scully 1995; Mair 1997). The fact is that the process of campaign modernization in the newer democracies has kept apace with trends in the more established democracies, and in many respects the newer democracies may be developing newer techniques at a faster pace than in Western Europe (Farrell 1996).

Many (if not most) of the newer democracies have proven fertile territory for political consultants. A glance at the membership lists of the International Association of Political Consultants or the World Association of Public Opinion Research reveals just how many political consultants are based in or have worked in newer democracies, with a clear emphasis on Latin American countries. In a recent survey of members of both organizations, it was found that of the 161 countries the international political consultants claimed to have worked in, 34 percent were established democracies and the remaining 66 percent were new democracies, with the following breakdowns: 34 percent in Latin America, 21 percent in East and Central Europe and former Soviet republics, and 11 percent in Africa (Bowler and Farrell 2000). It is not only foreign political consultants who are playing these fields. In 1996 the Asociación Latinoamericana de Consultores Políticos (ALACOP) was formed, which currently has thirty-eight members (all

but eight of them based in Latin American countries). While hardly conclusive evidence, these sorts of examples certainly support the impression that newer democracies (in particular Latin American countries) provide more suitable environments than West Europe for U.S.-style developments in terms of the role of political consultants.

As yet, we have no information either on the background of indigenous political consultants in the newer democracies or on the nature of their client market. The survey of international political consultants revealed that most of them attach importance to the ideological persuasion of their international clients: 71 percent of the respondents to the Bowler/Farrell survey expressed a clear preference for working for candidates of the same ideological tendency as themselves. However, this needs some qualification, as quite a few of the respondents indicated that the meaning of *ideology* tended to be more ambiguous in overseas markets (Bowler and Farrell 2000). This point was reinforced in some closer interviews with a selection of international consultants, revealing that in some prominent cases the preference was to work in overseas markets because then the ideological persuasion of the client mattered less. The bottom line in all cases was that the client should support democracy.[8] In short, then, the bulk of these international consultants appear to fit into our traditional politico category; however, with an evident willingness in many cases to work for clients of more than one ideological persuasion.[9]

Why has political consultancy appeared to take root so quickly in newer democracies? Three reasons can be offered (Farrell 1998). First, there is the question of timing, or more specifically, life-cycle effects. The West European democracies are products of a mass party age, where the buzzwords are party activism and organizational density. These countries have gone through a gradual, in some respects almost painful, process of party adaptation, with the parties jealously guarding their role as principal campaign machines. By contrast, the newer democracies are products of the television age, where the buzzwords are vote maximization and campaign professionalism. Parties and political elites in these countries were not shackled to old structures. Change and adaptation were easy, and political consultants could emerge with little apparent restriction. Furthermore, the emergence of political consultants was also facilitated by the fact that these new parties were in receipt of state finance before they had established organizations. In a sense, the process could be characterized as one in which venture capital came first and shareholders arrived later.[10] On the other hand, without the benefit of the old structures a mass party history provides, new democracies need some surrogate to help educate the people about democratic processes to insure that those processes will endure.

Second, it is important to take account of the institutional features of these newer democracies. For instance, many of them are presidential systems (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997), manifesting all the familiar features of candidate-centered

campaign politics. There is also evidence to suggest that the campaign environment is more susceptible to the work of political consultants. For example, unlike most West European countries, there are no restrictions on the broadcasting of television spots. Also, in most of the newer democracies there have been television debates between the leading candidates, and in many cases the campaigns (or party organizations) receive state funding to help finance their national campaigns (Bowler and Farrell 2000).

Third, in the international relations literature there is some discussion regarding the role of international actors in influencing the institutional design of new democracies (Schmitter 1996), a process Laurence Whitehead (1996:5) would describe as contagion. In this context, the work of nongovernment agencies in the United States (e.g., the National Endowment for Democracy) and the United Kingdom (e.g., Westminster Foundation), and the German party foundations, in furthering democratic development in other countries is significant (Burnell and Ware 1998; Carothers 1996; Pinto-Duschinsky 1991, 1996). The agents of change (namely advisors and consultants working for the nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], and in some cases political consultants actually paid by the NGOs) are focused principally on the establishment of proper democratic procedures for the conduct of elections, and therefore their focus is on the immediate concerns of an election rather than long-term and ephemeral questions regarding the nature of party organization more generally. Needless to say, of course, there are exceptions to this general picture, and prominent among them is the National Democratic Institute whose remit—in large part in reaction to the campaign focus of the other democracy agencies—is specifically focused on nurturing party organizational development.[11]

Conclusion: The Ascendancy of the Political Consultant— A Convergence in Campaign Styles?

There seems little doubt that political consultancy is still in its ascendancy. In the United States, its growth has mushroomed in the past two decades; and as we have seen, political consultants are increasingly plying their trade internationally, leading in turn to the emergence of an indigenous political consultancy coterie in these new markets. In this respect, therefore, there are grounds for accepting the argument that there has been an Americanization of the election campaign process (Scammell 1997; Swanson and Mancini 1996). There is clear evidence of a convergence in styles of campaigning, a prominent feature of which involves the role of the political consultants. It is also pretty evident, as we have seen, that Western Europe (and most of the other older democracies) have had the greatest distance to travel in catching up with the United States.

Given all the changes in the election campaign process over the past quarter century or so, it is inconceivable that the political parties would be able to fulfill

all the requirements of a campaign in the modern age. There are clear limits on just how much a party can do in a campaign; there are clear signs that much of the work required of a campaign organization is better handled by campaign specialists. In short, election campaigns appear to have outgrown the institutional limitations of political parties, requiring a role for political consultants (and other campaign agencies) to fill this increasing gap. In this respect, therefore, the role of the political consultant is important for helping the client (whether party or candidate) meet the demands of a more competitive campaign environment.

To put this another way, many of the events described here are a function of the communications revolution—the "global village," if you will. As the distinctions between the political and commercial worlds are becoming increasingly blurred (witness type I and type III consultants), it is no wonder that parties' central role in public life is on the wane. Katz and Mair (1995) explained that forming cartels with the state is a logical way for parties to retain their centrality. In Western Europe, such cartelization has been very successful. In North and South American contexts, there has been more resistance to close state-party relations. Parties, then, are left to compete with cable television, the World Wide Web, and multinational ad campaigns for the attention of voters. It is no wonder, then, that consultants are in demand. It is ironic, however, that just as politics regains some saliency, strategic consultants (those moving from political to commercial clients) emerge to remind us that political strategies can be used to settle other competitions, such as whether we should carry Visa, MasterCard, or American Express.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Of course, the majority of consultants still find it financially necessary to supplement their political work with commercial clients. Nevertheless, increasing numbers of consultants work exclusively for political clients.
2. Kolodny/Farrell interviews with U.S. consultants, Washington D.C., 1998.
3. In fact, *Campaigns & Elections'* most recent "Political Pages" lists at least thirty-eight activities for which professional consultants can be hired.
4. What distinguishes professionalism from amateurism is the extent to which a campaign or a campaign function is handled by someone who works on campaigns for a living; or, more

formally, someone who derives at least part of his or her income from providing campaign services to multiple political clients.

5. The difference between saliency and deliberate priming is slight, but the latter accounts for the actual selection of issues and the manner in which campaign messages are communicated and places more emphasis on voting behavior (by drawing on schema theory).

6. Kolodny/Farrell interviews with U.S. consultants, Washington D.C., 1998.

7. These agencies lie somewhere in between U.S. type III (tacticians/vendors) and type IV (marketers) consultants. Their origin is most definitely nonparty, but they tend to have a mix of political and commercial work.

8. Kolodny/Farrell interviews with U.S. consultants, Washington D.C., 1998.

9. There would also appear to be some U.S. consultants who see the international market as a place to operate as type I consultants, even if that same work might be considered as type II consultants in the United States (Kolodny/Farrell interviews, 1998).

10. We are grateful to Peter Mair for this observation, as well as the analogy.

11. Farrell interviews with senior National Democratic Institute personnel in Washington in 1999 and Johannesburg in 2000.

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