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Exploring the 'Americanization' of political campaigns: Croatia's 2003 and 2007 general elections

Milly A. Doolan

ABSTRACT

The starting point for this research was an ongoing debate relating to political campaigning developments in recent years, which have been labelled by the term 'Americanization'. On the one hand, the developments are seen as being adopted directly from the United States. However, on the other, they are seen as being part of more general developments touching on politics, media and society, grouped in the term 'modernization'. Some of the central characteristics of a seeming convergence of political campaigning practices in diverse political and social systems round the globe include catch-all policies, personalization, media-centricity, professionalization and political marketing.

The driving force behind the research was to explore in more detail why these trends were occurring and what was influencing them. Most importantly, could this convergence also be generalised to a young democracy such as Croatia? And if so, can it be attributed to more exterior (top-

on why campaigning similarities occur in specific national contexts and what they could potentially be attributed to. In addition, since this topic is largely under-researched in Croatia, the research also hopes to contribute to the academic understanding of campaigning developments in such a context.

2. THEORETICAL OUTLINE

FRAMING THE DEBATE ON CAMPAIGN CONVERGENCE

In the late 1990s, interviews were conducted with 502 political consultants from the U.S., Latin America

shopping model with campaigners borrowing whatever techniques are believed to work' (Norris, 2004: 1).

The academic debate on the appropriateness of the term 'Americanization' has resulted in the emergence of suggested replacements for the term which has been labelled as simplistic. Plasser (2002) argued the possibility of Americanization emerging as a consequence of 'modernization'. Also, Swanson and Mancini (1996) believe modernization to be a more holistic term than Americanization.

THE 'MODERNIZATION' OF POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING?

From the point of view of the 'modernization' of campaigning hypothesis, attention is focused not on associating one country with the imposition of a single social concept, but that the changes in campaigning are a part of a more general change occurring in democracies around the world. As Swanson and Mancini hypothesise, 'adoption of Americanized campaign methods may reflect a wider, more general process that is producing changes in many societies, changes which go far beyond politics and communication...we call this more general process modernization' (1996: 6). They argue that the more advanced the process of modernization in a country, the more likely we are to find innovations in campaigning being adopted and adapted (Swanson and Mancini, 1996: 6).

At the core of the modernization theory lies the viewpoint that structural changes on the macro-level (media, technologies, social structures) lead to an adaptive behaviour on the micro-level (parties, candidates and journalists), resulting in gradual modifications of traditional styles and strategies of political communications (e.g. Kavanagh (1995), Norris (2004), Negrine and Papathanassopoulos (2005)). These scholars agree that the changes in election communication are the consequence of an ongoing structural change in politics, society and media systems. Indeed, Holtz-Bacha (2004) emphasises that 'the hypothesis of Americanization that regards U.S. campaigns as a role model has changed into the modernization hypothesis that regards professionalization as a necessity resulting from the

That the emergence of the mass media as an autonomous power centre has been one of the main influences in political campaigning trends is argued by scholars such as Meyer (2005), Blumler and Gurevitch (2001). Meyer (2005) argues that candidates and politicians in general have had to adapt to a new media environment. Swanson and Mancini argue that this effect has occurred in many countries around the world:

(1996: 13).

It is from

To begin with catch-all policies, one of the main characteristics associated with 'American' influenced campaigning trends has been a shift in strategy from ideology to catch-all policies (e.g. Kavanagh (1995), Swanson and Mancini (1996)). As Swanson (2005) argues, this shift can be attributed to the weakening of citizens' ties with political parties. Similarly, Swanson and Mancini (1996) point out that catch-all parties allow the assimilation and representation of diverse interests and demands of different groups, and may even embrace ideologically contradictory policy alternatives. The authors go on to explain that the main goal of catch-all parties is to raise consensus at the election moment. Furthermore, the decline of a party's power to reel in public support not only gives rise to catch-all policies but also to a party leader being the focus of aggregating support at election time.

Building on this point about the rise of the party leader, Kavanagh (1995) explains that 'there has been a 'presidentialism' in the sense of television focusing more on the activities of the party leaders in an election campaign' (212). For Swanson and Mancini (1996), empowering individual figures at the expense of the authority of the political parties within which the figures operate is a consequence of modernization: 'This has occurred within the last few years in Europe, where the role of stable internal factions has been declining, while the capacity of individual politicians to aggregate the support of diverse groups has been expanding' (10). This rise of the individual results in a personalization of politics. Swanson and Mancini recognise this personalization of politics as one of the major elements associated with modernized or Americanized campaigning where 'the voter's choice de

In looking at the genesis of the Croatian political system since Croatia's independence from the former Yugoslavia in 1991, Zakošek (2002) identifies the rise and fall of three political systems. He claims the first was established following the first free elections in 1990, which saw the end of the one-party system and the development of a two party system: a right wing party (HDZ or the Croatian Democratic Union) and a left-wing party (SDP or Party for Democratic Change), with the HDZ gaining almost two-thirds of the seats. The second political system developed with the 1992 elections for the Representative House of Parliament¹ which saw the rise of the HDZ (61% of the seats in Parliament) into the dominant party². The third system rose from the 1999 Parliamentary elections which saw the fall of the conservative HDZ Party and the rise of a coalition-led Government headed by the SDP (the Social Democratic Party). From 2000 to the general elections in 2003, it became clear that the political system with one dominant political party was over (Čular, 2004).

The 2003 elections saw the rise of a reformed HDZ, with a new president, Ivo Sanader, at the helm. Although the Party secured 62 seats in Parliament, this was not enough to form a Government so a coalition Government was formed with four smaller parties, giving HDZ and its allies control of 76 out of 152 seats. SDP won 34 seats and the Croatian People's Party (HNS) became the third largest party in the new parliament with ten seats (source: NORDEM).

In November 2007, the Croatian Democratic Union or HDZ secured a second term in office again by establishing a coalition with two smaller parties. The largest opposition party was and remained the Social Democratic Party or SDP. HDZ secured a total of 66 seats in Parliament, SDP 56 and HNS as the third largest party 7.

marketing and the use of catch-all policies. What scholars agree on across the board is that campaigns in democracies around the world seem to be adopting these techniques. They also agree that these techniques were first developed and used in the United States.

The aim of this research is to explore the debate surrounding campaign developments by placing it in the context of Croatia's 2003 and 2007 general elections. It is important to note at this point that the term 'Americanization' will be used as a starting point and a 'question rather than a conclusion' (Swanson and Mancini, 1996) for framing the debate in a Croatian context.

To gain a better understanding of how the theory falls into the research, the theoretical framework will be observed on a macro and a micro level. The micro level will analyse the data concern-1 (o) - t. r (-127 (a) -1 -1 (a) -6 -1 ()) -1 (r) -13 (r)() -4 (c)89 rrThe macro v

By focusing on Croatia's 2003 and 2007 general elections, this research could detect whether these changes can be attributed more to exterior (top-down) or interior (bottom-up) influences on campaigning techniques. This could further shed light on general developments within Croatia, namely, the political process, the media and society in general.

The main questions that sparked the research were connected to the notion that similar campaigning trends can be found in dissimilar national contexts in democracies around the globe. But why do these trends occur and what influences them? Are these similarities more apparent than real? When applied to Croatia, these questions become more specific. Therefore, the research questions that are the driving force of this research will attempt to determine to what extent Croatian elections have been influenced by 'Americanization'. Also, how do the 2003 trends differ from the 2007 trends? Which trends were used in 2007 that were not used in 2003? Overall, the research aims to see whether we can speak of an 'Americanization' in the sense of Plasser's shopping or adoption model, whether it is more of Norris's notion of an import-export of trends or whether these changes came from society, indicating that it is more of a case of Swanson and Mancini's societal modernization that has influenced campaigning developments.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

METHODOLOGY REVIEW

The main questions that sparked this research were connected to the notion that similar campaigning trends can be found in dissimilar national contexts in democracies round the globe. To try and answer these questions, this research aims to explore them through the example of Croatia's 2003 and 2007 general elections. More specifically, the questions will attempt to determine to what extent Croatian elections have been influenced by American campaigning trends.

One of the ways of obtaining this information was to go directly to the source of

and time⁴. One must also take into account the possibility of the informant omitting important details that are for him or her commonsensical which, as Gaskell (2002) notes, 'may lead to the interviewer making invalid inferences about situations and events' (44). Nevertheless, it is from the accumulation of insights from a set of interviews that one comes to understand the issue at hand straight from the source.

Conducting interviews enabled the researcher to obtain a unique perspective on

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were set against the television political advertisements and then further seen in relation to the interview with a more neutral specialist.

An important point for this study has been the issue of 'construct validity', which according to Yin (2003) requires the establishment of correct operational measures for the concepts being studied. It is hoped that in-depth reading of appropriate literature around 'Americanization' has contributed to this.

RESEARCH DESIGN

As mentioned earlier, this research included interviews with campaign experts from the three main political parties in Croatia: Miroslav Kovačić from the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), Milan "ivković from the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Igor Kolman from the Croatian People's Party (HNS)⁶. The respondents were interviewed due to their direct insight into the campaigns development and implementation. They were chosen for the interviews based on a recommendation from each of the three parties. A fourth interview was conducted with professor Goran Čular from the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb, who had previously analyzed Croatian electioneering. The motivation behind conducting the fourth interview came from the need for a more neutral analysis of the 2003 and 2007 election campaigns.

Two of the interviews were face-to-face semi-structured interviews (HDZ and SDP) and two were conducted through electronic correspondence (HNS and professor Čular). The former, expectedly, enabled a more probing approach, whereas the latter were more structured. The interview with Mr. "ivković was recorded while the interview with Mr. Kovačić was not in respect of his request.

Prior to conducting the interviews, a topic guide was created that would guide the inquiry. As Gaskell points out, 'a good topic guide will create an easy and comfortable framework for a discussion, providing a logical and plausible progression through the issues in focus' (Gaskell, 2000: 40). However, although the researcher had a list of specific topics to

⁶ In an effort to observe research ethics, the researcher outlined the general scope of the research study and asked for informed consent. The interviewees were assured that if they wish confidentiality to be observed about any part of the interview, the researcher would respect this. One of the interviewees wanted the opportunity to approve the interview transcript and this was also respected.

After presenting the theory and methodology that drive this research, it is important at this point to reiterate the specific research questions that underlie the analysis. The aim of this research was to determine whether we can speak of an identified trend of political campaign convergence in the Croatian context and, if so, whether this was a result of what has been referred to as 'Americanization' or as also being part of a general change that is occurring on other social levels (i.e. top-down versus bottom-up influences). Also, are these changes occurring because American trends are being adopted or are they being adapted to

4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

OVERVIEW

So far this research has outlined the general theory behind the analysis and the methods driving the analysis which aims to explore the emergence of similar campaigning trends in dissimilar national contexts around the globe. Specifically, it aims to look at how and to what extent are trends⁷ that have emerged in the U.S. being applied in Croatia.

By focusing on Croatia's 2003 and 2007 general elections, this research could speculate whether these changes can be attributed more to exterior (top-down) or interior (bottom-up) influences on campaigning trends. Overall the research aims to see whether we can speak of an 'Americanization' in the sense of Plasser's shopping or adoption model, whether it is more of Norris's notion of an import-export of trends or whether these changes came from society indicating that it is more of a case of Swanson and Mancini's societal modernization that has influenced campaigning developments. The term 'Americanization' is therefore used as a question rather than a conclusion.

To get a practical as well as a theoretical understanding of the research aims, this research analyzed campaign television advertisements of the three parties from the 2003 and the 2007 elections. A second viewpoint was obtained through conducting three interviews with party officials involved in the campaigns and one interview with a professor whose work has dealt with elections. After considering the appropriate approaches to data analysis, this researcher decided to apply Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of critical discourse analysis. The first two levels of the model look at the text, i.e. the

The results of the analysis will be presented on two levels: the micro level will observe party television advertisements and interviews relating firstly to the election year 2003 and then to 2007. The results will then be brought together and analyzed on a macro level while placing the results in the context of the research questions and outlined literature.

CROATIAN GENERAL ELECTIONS 2003

As was outlined in the research design section, the television advertisements were selected on the basis of three criteria: they had to have been aired in prime time television, they had to present a synthesis of the various messages presented in the other aired political advertisements and they had to be advertisements that the parties themselves considered to be central to the final two weeks of the campaign.

The first task was to transcribe both the visual and the verbal elements of each advertisement⁸. The second task was to decide on a unit of analysis for the advertisements. In previous analyses of such political advertisements (Lalić, 2004), the unit was the change of a scene. This researcher decided to use a time cue of 5 seconds. The advertisements were then analysed drawing on Fairclough's (1992) three-dimensional model of analysis (linguistic elements and discursive elements). Ad

HNS 2003: 'Let us build our future together'

The Croatian People's Party (HNS) campaign advertisement selected for this analysis was entitled 'Let us build our future together' and was 30 seconds long. It featured the party president at the time, Vesna Pusić, and the former construction minister Radimir Čačić - the current HNS president. We see president Pusić walking down the streets of Zagreb coming into contact with young people, while Mr. Čačić is seen supervising a construction site. We further see president Pusić being recognized as an authority by the youths: two teenage girls call to her using her first name, a young man wants to shake her hand and gives her the thumbs up, break dancers dancing in the background. Towards the end of the advertisement, we see the two together now walking up the steps leading to the Government buildings. The power that the images possess is in combining a youth connection with responsibility. The images are closely connected with the campaign slogan 'Let's build our future together': we see young people, who are generally considered to represent the future, and we see construction, the need for building that future within the European Union.

When examining the wording and grammatical structure of the audio material, a purposeful juxtaposition becomes apparent. The juxtaposition is along the 'us versus them' form. For example, president Pusić starts the advertisement by saying 'While others kept quiet, we knew we had to speak'. She also says '...we directed Croatia towards the European Union'. Mr. Čačić continues by saying 'we built the building...let us give it a European roof'. It is interesting to observe the power relations presented in this advertisement through the words used. Mrs. Pusić and Mr. Čačić are presented as the ones who spoke while others, implying all other politicians, kept quiet. And now they are the ones who can truly bring Croatia to the EU. They had the power to resist the political silence⁹ and they are the ones with the real power to take the country to the EU. Both the imaging and the wording are pointing to interdiscursivity. On the image level we see youth, building, future. On a linguistic level we see power (to resist and move forward).

The images and the words used in the campaign advertisement were aimed at appealing to voters that research showed would vote for the party, explained HNS

been gathered for the purpose of returning fairness, expert knowledge and credibility to Croatian politics, '...which has been missing in the past four years' (Milanović, 2007). Here Mr. Milanović is clearly juxtaposing 'team of experts' with 'lack of expert knowledge' from the current HDZ Government.

The images and the wording point to a number of discourses that can be read from the advertisement: equality (even in the slogan itself), reform (justice system that works, credible Government), team work (he says a team has been gathered, and at the end he addresses the voter and says 'You are also part of that team'). This interdiscursivity points to a catch-all policy campaign advertisement. However, it is important to place the text into the overall campaign context.

For the 2007 campaign, SDP had 7 videos from 21 to 45 seconds long. Four of them were very similar in that they featured party members outlining the party's program. Their slogan was 'People are the strength'. Since one of the criteria set out before was that the advertisement had to be the main video in the final campaigning weeks, the researcher decided to analyze the advertisement 'Every man is equally important', which stresses team work but is more catch-all oriented than the other SDP campaign advertisements. This video brings together the main messages from the other advertisements: an honest Government, anti corruption, the individual as the focus of the campaign, restoring faith in politics. However, it fails to mention some other messages that the campaign really became known for¹¹.

Milan "ivković explains that the policies had to be different from the opponents: 'In 2007 SDP wanted to move from a catch-all strategy. We wanted to present the party as being truly socially democratic, not as a catch-all party' ("ivković, 2008). "ivković went on to explain another reason for wanting to move from catch-all policies: 'Parties are starting to look alike. Such a democratic development is not necessary and for this reason the SDP decided to take a different course' ("ivković, 2008). "ivković explained that the messages were influenced by the use of focus groups. In general "ivković believes the campaign was more professionally run than in 2003 but pointed out that that is a natural progression in general.

¹¹ Such policies included annulling the expatriate communities' right to vote in Croatian elections. Also, getting rid of catechism-based religious education in schools.

Professor Čular explained that in 2007 the SDP went with an ideological campaign (Church, taxes, expatriates) while in the 2003 campaign there were issues people agreed on.

him. Referring to the 2007 campaign, professor Č

President Čačić says 'Thank you' at the end of 9 of the 18 advertisements and former president Pusić says 'Thank you' at the end of the other 9. Mr. Čačić is in this particular advertisement presented as someone to be trusted, who gave jobs to local workers and someone who carries out his promises.

The discourse in this advertisement is that of responsibility. Others include

the impact the media have on campaigns. The second concerns how the role of the Internet in campaigning has changed. The third is linked to a question posed in all of the interviews which focused on the influence of foreign advisors on campaign development.

When talking about the differences in campaigning approaches in recent years, Mr. "ivković of the SDP explained that 'the impact of the media leads to a Western model of campaigning' ("ivković, 2008). In 2007, the party had an office at journalists' disposal 24 hours a day; however, the party spent more money on phone identification of voters and on polling than it did on advertising 'because the media demand certain information to publish the story and this was a way to directly reach voters' ("ivković, 2008). Similarly, Igor Kolman of the HNS claimed campaigns were run according to the pace of media coverage: 'The way a campaign is conducted and its relationship with the press is very much determined by the fact that the media have become profit-oriented corporations' (Kolman, 2008). Professor Čular had a different assessment of the media's impact on campaigning, believing that the influence of the media has increased in the political realm but is far from actually determining election results.

Mr. "ivković explained that one of the ways of avoiding the traditional media was through the Internet, which is why the SDP's 2007 campaign was heavily covered on the party's web page. Miroslav Kovači

2003 AND 2007 RESULTS: A MACRO PERSPECTIVE

When asking the question which 'American' trends were present in 2007 and were not present in 2003, it

To sum up, the analysis revealed the use of 'American' campaigning trends in Croatia: trends such as the use of catch-all policies, personalization and a marketing approach to message formation were to an extent present in 2003 as well as 2007. The 2007 campaign was more professional but, as the interviewees pointed out, this was due to more developed polling agencies and a generally natural progression in campaign management. What was different in the 2007 campaign was that it became more media

5. CONCLUSION

The motivation for conducting this research came from learning that similar campaigning trends were occurring in countries around the world despite their specific political cultures, histories and societies. What furthered the motivation was learning that these trends originated in the United States and were the focus of much scholarly debate. The debate was centred on the question of what to call this emergence. Is the appropriate term 'Americanization', which implies one-way influences with no room for adaptation to a local context? Or are the changes part of a wider concept of 'modernization', which implies change on a larger scale of politics, media and society in general?

Using the term 'Americanization' as a question rather than a conclusion, critical discourse analysis was applied to television campaign advertisements of the three main political parties in Croatia from the 2003 and the 2007 elections. The analysis was supplemented with interviews with campaign experts.

This combination of text and context revealed that 'American' campaigning trends have found their way into Croatian campaigning. These trends include the use of catch-all policies in television advertisements, a focus on the party leader, a marketing approach to message formation, a rise in campaign professionalism and a campaign that is media-centred. These findings could lead to the conclusion that in Croatia we can speak of Plasser's diffusion approach to 'Americanization'. Therefore American trends are being adopted in Croatia in spite of the outlined differences in media structures and electoral laws. However, a deeper analysis of the findings reveals a different image.

First of all, personalization was present in both 2003 and 2007 in varying degrees. The variation came from the SDP which decided to stress team work in 2007. Secondly, it was revealed that while the 2007 campaign was more professional, this was due to a professional development of polling agencies and a generally natural progression in campaign management. Also, catch-all policies were present in 2003 as well as 2007. It was claimed that their appearance are a sign of a post-ideological society that is less concerned with ideology and more with development. The SDP did move away from them in 2007, a decision prompted by voters generally thinking politicians were all the same and this was a way of telling the voters the SDP was different.

- Hallin, D. and Mancini, P. (2004). . New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Holtz-Bacha, C. (2004). Political Campaign Communication: Conditional Convergence of Modern Media Elections. In Esser, F. and Pfetsch, B. (Eds.) . (pp. 213-230) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

WEBSITES:

- ! Social Democratic Party official website: <http://sdp.hr/>
- ! Official website of the Government of the Republic of Croatia: www.vlada.hr
- ! Croatian Democratic Union party official website: <http://hdz.hr/>
- ! Croatian People's Party (HNS) website: <http://www.hns.hr/modules/news/>

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