

The Craft and the Poetry of Campaigning: How do American Principles apply in a South African Situation?

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In the United States where elections have dominated the political system for over 225 years, there is a healthy body of academic literature about electoral campaigns. By comparison, South Africa's democratic experience is still in its infancy with the political and academic actors still struggling to come to grips with its nuances. Taking cues from the American experience could therefore prove to be a helpful guide to the development of the party system in South Africa. More specifically, using examples from the recent 2000 local government elections in South Africa, this essay attempts to link the principles and fundamentals which are common to the American political system to that of South Africa's electoral dynamic.

Elections have been important features of America's democracy and have assumed the same status in South Africa. Elected officials are charged with determining the political persuasiveness, determining the practical policies, and safeguarding the general well being of the society. Their importance is unrivaled and in present-day South Africa to date, as this paper will show, their significance is underestimated.

Democracy and elections are fundamentally linked. As Herman Finer (1949: 219) summarized:

The real question...is not whether the government designs to take notice of popular criticisms and votes, but whether it can be voted out of office or forced by some machinery...to change its policy, above all against its own will.

Consequently, the contest for office is the machinery used by Americans to change policy, and to change, often against their will, those who govern - a dynamic South Africa is only just beginning to explore.

There are essentially two distinct players active in any election - the *voter* and the *candidate* or campaigner. Understanding the role of both is indeed important but one must acknowledge an additional force - the *political party* the candidate represents. In fact, as history has proved in both the United States and South Africa, "political parties play a major role in structuring most contests for office" (Maisel, 1993, p. 5).

Political Contexts Compared

Much like the United States at the turn of the last century, South Africa is a party dominated system with party officials and party infrastructure essentially controlling the electoral system from purse strings to nominations. Their power derives from a

formidable organizational network of loyal volunteers and voters. These volunteers are strongly motivated by their new found political freedom and these volunteers assist pre-determined candidates win elections by mobilizing their respective communities and exploiting using broad-based partisan appeals that do little to link the *right* messages to with the *right* voters (Riordon, 1948).

Indeed, many people, although justifiably skeptical given previous political and social experiences, view democracy and its party guardians as their only hope for true social and economic improvement. In Africa, today's political parties are the offspring of popular social movements noted for their spontaneity rather than for a clear ideological or philosophical foundation - a direct contrast to the American tradition (Lumumba-Kasongo, 1998, p. 3; Adedeji, 1999). Still, their success is tangible because they are able to mobilize people in support of the nebulous goal of societal change. In very many ways, South Africa's political process resembles the old style of politics which dominated the US political system in the early twentieth century. Trapped in a "shot-gun" approach, parties are unable to proffer clear and coherent proposals that address the nation's most serious problems. Instead they are focused on retaining power by attracting votes based on their historical anti-apartheid role. While this can be interpreted as an advantage, especially as it relates to the electioneering principles of partisanship, it is also viewed as a disadvantage. For example, the African National Congress (ANC) has to date been buoyed by its political past and heroic leaders such as Nelson Mandela. However, these strengths are also perceived weaknesses when fighting a strategic election, especially on a local level. Considering the mass appeal of the party's political stance, it has little choice but to field candidates in all races regardless of their strategic significance or likely prospects (Interviews, 2001). One could argue that parties such as the ANC have yet to escape the confines of a political movement and assume the role of a true political party.

Political parties (in both the United States and South Africa) have traditionally played a central role in structuring the contest of elections for office allowing elections to perform their function effectively. A pivotal question for academics is how effectively that role is played (Brady, Bullock and Maisel, 1988; Brady & Stewart, 1986). The links among differing party platforms, elections and subsequent public policies are not as clear in the American system as they are in parliamentary democracies such as South Africa. V. O. Key Jr. has investigated these links highlighting the important distinctions between parties in the electorate, in their respective organizations, and their roles in government (Key, 1964). He found that while Americans elect officials in individual districts by focusing on their electoral independence, they do not forget the candidate's party affiliation. South Africans, on the other hand, have no choice but to regard the candidate's affiliation because that is principally what they vote for. In essence, the significance of partisanship involves the manner and degree to which partisan elections affect subsequent governmental actions. We will explore the fuller implications of partisanship later.

Furthermore, to understand the role of the political party in the electoral process in both countries is to understand how politicians view elections and their party's role in them. As implied by democratic theory, public opinion is seminal to political decision-making for officeholders and potential officeholders alike. Jacobson goes so far as to suggest that this is a process that might as well be considered a natural act, even for seemingly safe incumbents (Jacobson, 1980, p.108). Constituents are able to make decisions about current candidates based on how well their plight has been represented and addressed. In this way elections can be considered to be public influences. Therefore, a politician's perception of reality is skewed according to his analysis of public opinion, and during election time her/his interpretation is considered regarded to be more important than reality itself.

Consequently, public opinion polling in the United States is commonplace with political operatives often hard pressed to imagine their jobs without it. South African politicians generally, by contrast, resist polling and have distrusted the results the few that have been conducted have yielded; they argue that this type of sampling adversely affects the public's perception of the political situation (Interviews, 2001). Having said that, key figures in the Democratic Alliance (DA), for example, have acknowledged that their party did indeed use rudimentary polling to assist their campaign research (Interview, Mike Moriarty, 2001). This polling, while certainly not as detailed as those commissioned by American consultants, did indicate the need for a general decentralized strategy to market the strengths of the party's national leader, Tony Leon. In support of this plan, the party's manifesto formulated a broad framework of relevant issues while, to a limited extent, additional polls tested specific campaign messages in an attempt to gauge their effectiveness. Given the increased gains made by the DA in 2000, it would seem as though such methods are not only useful but also, if implemented and interpreted correctly, may contribute to electoral success.

Then there is the question of how politicians view their party. As Maisel succinctly points out: "it all depends" (Maisel, 1993, p. 19). They understand that their chances for election or re-election depend substantially on the role and support their respective parties plays on their behalf. For instance, in the United States to be accepted on the ballot in the US and to establish vital legitimacy in the eyes of the electorate, candidates must receive their party's official nomination. Candidate selection in South Africa's latest elections similarly also saw potential candidates needing to demonstrate constituency support irrespective of their party.

In the case of the ANC, these candidates had to pass a series of complex litmus tests in each of the party's five branches. After passing these tests the national branch would typically put up the registration fee and provide campaign training and materials.

The United Democratic Movement (UDM), with its limited resources, had as a requirement the ability for each candidate to demonstrate not only constituent appeal, but also the capacity to shoulder a significant proportion of their campaign's fiscal costs; the national office was only able to provide printed flyers and, in special circumstances,

official visits by the leadership.

Nonetheless, major-party designation usually means access to both organizational resources (time, people and money) and voter identification and support. In both cases, despite their respective evolutionary changes, the advantages and importance of the political party remains essentially the same.

The Political System: The Case of the Local Government Elections

In an effort to establish a just system that guarantees fair representation to all ethnic and racial groups, South African negotiators at the pre-1994 Congress of a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) agreed to adopt a complicated system of proportional representation. Initially founded on South Africa's British style party-slate tradition, the system has evolved into a complicated mixture of proportional representation and directly elected officials at the local government level. For example, the *Municipal Structures Act* created three principal types of municipalities: the *metropolitan councils*; the *local councils* and the *district councils*. Additionally, during the 2000 cycle, elections were held for six metropolitan councils (Pretoria, Johannesburg, East Rand, Cape Town, Durban and Port Elizabeth), 41 district councils, 5 cross-border municipalities and 232 local councils, decreasing the total number of councilors from 12 000 to around 8 000 (Pottie and Ford, 2001).

The objective behind these structural changes was to ensure "better regional planning and bulk infrastructure delivery" by distributing power between local and district councils after a lengthy consultation process (Pottie and Ford, 2001). In addition, these types of local government can, and for the most part have been, further divided for executive administration (depending on the district) to include a multi-party executive committee, executive mayor or plenary system.

The Act also makes provision for traditional leaders to participate in local government administration. Such representatives do not have official voting rights, but are to be consulted in matters pertaining to traditional affairs. Also, in metropolitan and local councils, the current composition of 60% ward and 40% proportional representation (PR) from party lists has been amended to create a more equitable 50-50 split (Pottie and Ford, 2001). Accordingly, local councils are now able to appoint 60% of councilors to the relevant district council while 40% are directly elected on the basis of PR lists.

Scheduled for a similar overhaul, politicians and observers alike anxiously wait to see whether the national election system will follow suit with this mixed electoral system.

Irrespective of the style employed, there is an inherent conflict in all systems of elected representatives. Specifically, while these representatives are charged with representing the views of people who choose them, they are equally free and responsible for determining what is in the best interest of the people. For Americans, the solution has been to give representatives a good deal of freedom to act, but to hold elections

frequently in order to assure the accountability of the representative. In addition, the system has evolved to allow for public elections of all federal officials. Nevertheless, democratic theory also requires the public to be able to convert its views on current issues into public policy (Dahl, 1961).

Frequent elections do not serve their intended purpose if the electorate is not given a choice, nor if, after that choice is expressed, public policy does not reflect that preference (Maisel, 1993, p. 8).

Variables Influencing Elections: Are they Comparatively Relevant?

A key factor in understanding how an election is fought is to acknowledge that what is considered rational for the voter is not necessarily rational for the campaign. The campaign's goal is to win, but voters prefer candidates that are unbiased, do not distort the facts, and hold essentially the same views and values as they do. In fact, the aims and actions of the voters are not entirely compatible with the candidate's needs, wants and/or wishes. It is vital, therefore, that an examination of the candidate, the party, the voter, and the political context be undertaken to reflect a complete process.

American political scientists have discovered that there are traditionally five key variables that influence elections. According to Shea (1996), they include:

- the party affiliation or partisanship of the candidates;
- the current political climate;
- the economic conditions;
- the access and role of money; and
- the status of the candidates or parties whether they are incumbents or not.

Each variable shapes the character of the campaign while also limiting the choices available to campaign strategists. On the surface, all five are potentially applicable to the South African situation although the extent of their importance does vary.

1. Partisanship

Partisanship is vital in a two-party dominant system such as the United States. Although many citizens take a cynical view of a strong party attachment, not all partisan affiliations are the product of generational inertia or unsophisticated political thinking. Indeed, evidence indicates that politically-informed voters are more likely to develop strong partisan ties than less informed and less concerned citizens. Independents as a group tend to be less concerned about particular elections, and less likely to vote than partisan identifiers (Sorauf, 1984).

Party affiliation in South Africa is equally important, if not more so, since the political system is proportionately defined. Indeed, observers hypothesize that the ANC's overwhelming and persistent victories in the past four elections are primarily because of its historical association with the liberation struggle rather than its ability to deliver on campaign promises. Likewise, voting against the other major parties - the Democratic Party (DP), the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), and the New National Party (NNP) - has traditionally been based on their respective roles during the apartheid era. (Daniel, Southall and Szeftel, 1999). Indeed, party officials across the board acknowledge that the ANC dominance has been traditionally attributed to their historical image, recognizable party colors, and legendary leaders such as former president Nelson Mandela. However, future voter targeting must recognize that an increasing proportion of the potential voting population is younger and further removed from the anti-apartheid struggle harboring a growing antipathy towards the political process (Botha and Holomisa, Interviews, 2001).

A serious concern is the distinct lack of defining values and a lack of concentration on the issues concentration among South African parties. Not only are party campaign manifestos difficult to access but also an analysis of the issues raised during the latest round of elections reveals a consensus of rhetoric. Perhaps this is because society is understandably preoccupied with redressing past histories. Nevertheless, I would argue that the inability to create a clear distinction between campaigns merely contributes to the ANC's political dominance: since every party addresses the same issues in a similar way therefore vote for the one currently in power.

Parties are further defined according to the social characteristics of those who vote for them. For example, the patterns of African-American voters serve to highlight two key impacts of partisanship - they explain candidate preferences during the election, and they prove that not all partisans will vote for their party's candidate. On the surface, this latter finding would seemingly account for the unexpected DA victory in the Western Cape in 2000 (also enabled, in part, by the decision of the DP and the NNP to merge into the DA). However, a deeper analysis proves that voters maintained their party loyalty, thereby combining their individual totals and boosting the overall percentage for the DA.

Robert Axelrod has also statistically traced party defectors (those voters who belong to one party but vote for another) in the United States, based on their demographic characteristics (Axelrod, 1986). The goal of any campaign is, therefore, to minimize these defectors from one's own party and to maximize it from the opposition. This makes accurate targeting of fundamental importance. A campaign must be aware of the potential defector's ideology, the quality of the candidate, and the public's perception of the candidate, the nature of the opposition, and the appeal of the themes communicated by both the candidate and the opposition if it is to successfully persuade.

Partisanship and its relationship to strategic decision-making in American elections are well documented, with the candidate from the majority party always holding the advantage. Attempts to neutralize this core support by nationalizing the election (persuading the electorate to believe that the flaws of the current national administration are to blame for their current woes), and simply avoiding areas that are clearly defined as belonging to the opposition are two lessons South African parties would do well to heed. Since the main objective is to capture the most votes, the last thing any campaign wants is to turn out potential opposition voters who would, by implication, make their task more difficult and expensive.

These targeting techniques (a more in -depth interpretation of their applicability will follow) allow a campaign to maximize the effectiveness of their resources i.e. their time, people, media buys and money. Typically these statistics will guide strategists towards areas that contain significant partisan bases and those areas that have high percentages of volatile voters - voters who will support candidates or parties that appeal to their ideologies, values, and are concerned about similar issues. Measuring the volatility of an area also aids the campaign in determining the unpredictability of the vote and would dictate the techniques used in a particular region. It determines whether the candidate or party leader makes a personal appearance in the district, what media buys are made, whether direct mail and other literature drops or door-to-door visits are used, what get-out-the-vote campaigns work best, and whether viable fund-raising opportunities exist. Ultimately, partisanship and correct targeting help the campaign to hone a strategy that exploits the positive aspects of a partisan base while downplaying the campaign's other weaknesses (Shea, 1996, pp. 71-89).

Indeed the DA was able to use and test their strategy and theme using these principles. However, they do concede that using such methods are insufficient to determine target audiences at this stage in South Africa's election history. A great deal of their efforts incorporated previous (including pre-1994) demographic knowledge and strategies (Interviews, 2001).

2. *Political Climate*

Academics have long hypothesized about the effects the political climate has on the electorate. Some authors have used it to explain the different ideological orientations of voters, suggesting that the climate fundamentally defines the scope and shape of the campaign. For example, in the 1986 Colorado Senatorial campaign, the issue of defense took center stage not because the 'star wars' project was militarily significant but because one candidate interpreted its successful implementation as an effective way to promote job creation (Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988).

The 2000 local government elections were entirely about the political climate following a tradition that has prevailed since 1994. The current state of the economy, unemployment, service delivery, crime, and general development dominated the various campaigns. For example, the ANC claimed that it had a "Broad-based

employment creation plan based on small business, communities, local economic development, public works and a local government job summit to define the role of local government in job creation” (ANC Manifesto, 2000), while the DA “pledge[d] to bring investment and new jobs to your community, and to provide enough social support to ensure that poverty is reduced...” (DA Manifesto, 2000). Noble sentiments couched in powerful rhetoric but eight months later neither plan has materialized, leading voters and academics to wonder if either ever existed.

Another factor contributing to this variable is the size of the territory being canvassed. In the United States, the size of the district impacts the style and tone of a campaign. Larger geographic and dense population regions such as California require a campaign that traverses several media markets. Smaller districts with fewer residents will see a similar emphasis on media because it is the most cost-efficient way to reach geographically outlying territories, but it is usually coupled with several personal appearances by the candidate or party leader (Hershey, 1984, p. 226). It is also common for party affiliated special interest groups and Political Action Committees (PACs) to use smaller markets to test their advertising campaigns.

In contrast, South Africa’s election battles are waged not on television screens and computer monitors, but rather over the airwaves and in open-air arenas - a true grassroots campaign. There is, a tradition of mass meetings and the occasional radio broadcast has governed the way campaigns are shaped. The numerous media markets in this instance, make it imperative to determine what language to use and therefore what listenership is to be targeted. Even so, political parties spend comparatively small amounts of their budget on airtime; they favor a campaign of street-lamp posters instead - a technique that seems out of touch with the reality of a high illiteracy rate. While all parties admit to not fully understanding the electoral implications of illiteracy, they are able to defend their choice of a poster campaign. They cite its usefulness in the pre-1994 election era, and respondents also held that the presence of party posters influenced their coverage and perceived success in all forms of media, especially in printed media texts in much the same way as TV or radio advertising helps determine the viability of an American candidate.

Additionally, these political parties have underestimated the impact of a burgeoning community radio industry and in turn missed a vital means of reaching key and commonly illiterate audiences¹. Another poorly -researched aspect is the use of taxi advertising both inside (through radio and/or cassette tape instruments) and outside with visible sticker advertising. Techniques in smaller geographic districts which lack significant infrastructure and historically defined patriarchal voting patterns are considered to be of little political impact and so warranting little effort. This not to say

¹ The only exception is the ANC, who stated that a significant proportion of their budget was spent on procuring air-time on community radio stations nationwide in a variety of languages (Interviews, 2001).

that no effort is made but certainly that what effort is expended has been it is comparatively minimal and of less importance.

Academics have also found that candidates and parties in South Africa, are driven by similar incentives - so much so that the study of these motivations have spawned two political theories - the "economic theory of democracy," and the "theory of political ambiguity." The two theories are essentially the same in most respects but depart when they consider what defines "rational strategy" in a party system. For Anthony Downs "rational strategy" for a candidate concentrates on maximizing the vote and doing whatever it takes to achieve this end. Downs suggests that the optimal position for each party is defined as "the median of public opinion" and that key or optimal issues are dependent on how public opinion is distributed within the electorate (Downs, 1957; Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, pp. 13-14).

Downs further acknowledges that the median will vary dramatically across the electorate, implying that it will not necessarily always be found right down the center but rather that it will move according to the electorate, forcing campaigns to shift accordingly. Campaigns will "position [themselves] in an attempt to approximate the median of opinion as the optimal position in the campaign" (Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, p.14). Ultimately, since all parties seek the same proportion of voters - those who are perceived to be the most volatile - they will converge at the optimal position in order to capture the electorate. Furthermore, if one candidate deviates from this "rational strategy" and refuses to pursue the median s/he runs a greater chance of losing the race. While Downs' theory draws on a substantial body of evidence (the recent 2000 US Presidential elections as a case in point), one must acknowledge the lack of rational choice offered to the electorate. With a lack of rational choice, voters are compelled to search for other non-issue defining features such as the character of a candidate to ground their decision.

Benjamin Page's "theory of political ambiguity" challenges Downs' assumptions of median rationality, saying that only foolish candidates will focus on policy choices for their campaign. Page maintains that all issue positions are costly trade-offs which have the potential to alienate a significant sector of the population. In fact, according to Page, it is impossible for a campaign to consistently pursue the median. Rather, he suggests, a campaign will avoid issues altogether and "focus on safer themes" (Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, p. 14; Page, 1976). The contest will be defined by the key valiance attitudes of the electorate such as the importance of leadership, experience, and character issues all of which are likely to be inoffensive to voters.

We know empirically that on most matters of specific policy, opinions differ. Americans have disagreed vociferously on whether busing should be used to accomplish school desegregation; how much (if any) income maintenance should be given to the poor; how much money should be spent on military troops and weapons. But practically everyone goes on certain goals, so long as they are put in general terms: racial harmony;

abolition of poverty; world peace. Similarly, nearly everyone wants such qualities as honesty, intelligence, prudence, and energy in government leaders (Page, 1976 quoted in Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988 pp. 14-15).

The true craft art of campaigning for Page is to remain as ambiguous as possible on all issues. Former President Jimmy Carter is an acknowledged master at maintaining ambiguity and it is arguably one of the key factors that has contributed to his success. South Africa's 2000 local government elections showed characteristics of both theories. While a cross section of the issues shows that only those regarded as consensually significant were debated, the rhetoric used to describe these issues were typically ambiguous. For example, the PAC's response to creating employment was simply, "Crushing unemployment and poverty through job creation" (PAC Manifesto, 2000, Pottie and Ford, 2001); while the IFP's plan stated, "South Africa can no longer deal with dramatic issues such as unemployment by calling for job summits which [do] nothing to address the problems facing the country" (IFP Manifesto, 2000, Pottie and Ford, 2001).

Whichever theory one subscribes to it is important to realize that candidates in the US and parties in South Africa drive the process by emphasizing the issues on which they choose to focus.

3. *Incumbency*

Typically, incumbents (including incumbent parties) are more likely to lean towards a moderate stance as re-election looms. Challengers, on the other hand, are willing and eager to define themselves and, therefore, are prone to taking more risks. In looking at the 1982 elections, Wright and Berkman detailed this phenomena as moving from the purview of the Congressional elections to include the Senatorial contests as well. The DP's controversial decision to align with the former NNP is one such South African example. Merging with a historically despised foe, was a huge gamble that paid off and helped the party wrestle control in the Western Cape (Pottie and Ford, 2000).

Incumbency and its broader implications is another key variable in determining a successful election strategy. Those candidates or parties already in office and fighting for re-election are able to legally access vast resources in support of their re-election bid. For example, they already employ a significant number of people (both paid and volunteer) to staff their local constituent offices, they have developed a network of trusted advisors who have a vested interest in their political cause, and have an established "constituent service" which is able to assess the public mood through utilizing franking privileges for frequent and effective communication. This entire infrastructure contributes to a strong base presence that is capable and has a history of fielding constituency complaints - an ability noticeably absent from a challenger.

In South Africa, represented political parties receive public funds based on their share of the seats in national and provincial legislatures. Seen as unfair by smaller and larger parties alike, the incumbency status of the ANC has other significant funding advantages. Being the ruling party of the day, the ANC is able to raise significant off-shore funds for their election efforts based on their incumbent status, thus depriving smaller parties of similar funding advantages - major international funders are either bound by foreign policy objectives to support educational election activities or are unconvinced of any other party's ability to achieve significant success against the ANC (Interviews, 2001). This will be explored further in the next section.

Incumbency has other privileges as well. While challengers have to struggle to define themselves to the public, incumbents are able to manipulate the news cycle and other media outlets. They are able to garner media coverage of their events because of their current political status while building on their name recognition. They are also able to raise significant funds by relying on their recent legislative track-record and current status on in government. However, the benefits of incumbency are also dependent on the size of their district or constituency. Hibbing and Brandes have found that representatives from smaller states, and therefore smaller constituencies, had more of a chance of surviving their re-election bid, than did those hailing from larger ones (Hibbing and Brandes, 1983).

Incumbents enjoy electoral advantages in all forms of political governance, "but such advantages were particularly marked in Africa's neo-patrimonial regimes where the chief executive monopolize[s] power and rule[s] through prebends" (Bratton and Van de Walle, 1997, p. 204). Since 1994, the ANC has held national power and controlled at least seven of the nine provincial governing bodies. Its status as incumbent was a defining factor in its last victory in 2000. Able to capitalize on its historical and current political status, the ANC waged a lackluster local government campaign that ostensibly stumbled its way to victory (Pottie and Ford, 2001).

4. *The Role of Money in the Election*

As much as incumbency status is an advantage, challengers are similarly disadvantaged from the outset when voters are asked to assess the quality of their candidacy. The most important element in any election is making sure that the candidate has widespread name recognition within the district. With the incumbent already moderately established from previous campaigns, the challenger has to overcome this initial hurdle. This is why campaign strategies are generally driven by the status of the challenger. As Mark Westlye suggests:

A low-key race...is one in which the challenger - by virtue of his inability to raise funds, to attract media coverage, or both - is not able to mount a forceful, stimulating campaign. This is a familiar picture in most House races in which an incumbent is seeking reelection; it is a characterization that also fits many Senate elections. (Westlye, 1983, p. 253 quoted in

Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, p. 15).

Political parties in the South African arena are not as preoccupied with creating name recognition as are their counterparts in the United States. The notable exception would be the DA's 2000 campaign which principally sought to promote its newly- formed alliance in the hope that that in itself would capture enough of the vote to win a majority (Pottie and Ford, 2001). Characteristically, however, political parties are mired in a struggle to over come past political associations and policies. These campaigns are also generally poorly funded and, attracting little media coverage which together stifle the challenger's message and appeal.

As Westlye mentions, the flip side to the status of the candidate is his/her capacity to raise money. In fact these two aspects are intrinsically inter-related as Jacobson and Kernell outline. If a candidate/party is well respected and perceived to have the potential to win the race then they will be able to generate significant quantities of campaign cash (Jacobson and Kernell, 1981, pp. 29-43). Potential donors use the amount of press coverage garnered (both paid and unpaid), polling statistics, and the presence of political and personal scandals to assist them in establishing a campaign's viability. The ability to raise money is also dependent on the candidate's personal resources, motivation, access and appeal to Public Action Committees (PACs) and key lobbyists, as well as their general political experience in government.

Jacobson proved, by statistically analyzing previous congressional elections, that spending by the challenger is more indicative of the outcome of an election than what is spent by the incumbent (Jacobson, 1980). Again this is primarily because of the visibility and name recognition the challenger has when s/he enters going into the contest. Yet the incumbent's spending has marginal returns given their already well - established identity. This means that challengers must strive to outspend their incumbent opponents. Apart from the general Presidential elections, all American elections depend on individual fund-raising efforts. Finding this capital is challenging daunting in itself with and candidates having to rely initially on their personal wealth and networks to attract other individual contributors (through special events and direct mail shots), PACs, and political parties. In the wake of the Watergate scandal, fund-raising regulations are strictly monitored with all contributions declared to the Federal Election Commission (FEC) in an attempt to control the political influence of money. As a result the support from individuals is limited to US \$20,000 per candidate per election, PAC donations may not exceed \$5,000 for the same period, and political parties are confined to a similar amount in addition to being able to contribute a total of \$25,000 in coordinated expenditure. The resurgence of political parties in American politics has been spear headed by their ability to manipulate the legal order and assist in the raising of "soft" money (money raised outside of the FEC regulations) in the form of issue advocacy and other uncoordinated expenditures.

Money speaks volumes in any campaign regardless of the actors and the South African system is no different. Elections here are ostensibly public funded with huge amounts additions added on the side to bolster certain political causes. It is estimated that political parties spent some R300-R500 million on the 1999 national election (*The Citizen*, 2 February 1999), with the ANC using a mere R30, 608,560 and the NNP allowed R10,145,260 of public funding (Pottie and Ford, 2001)². The overall public allocation was a mere R55 million - implying that a substantial amount of money was raised from other sources. Since there is a distinct lack of legislative control, sizeable donations have come from foreign ‘friends’ and wealthy private donors. For example, Prior to the 1999 national election Nelson Mandela, prior to the 1999 national elections admitted to raising \$10 million from Saudi Arabia, \$60 million from Indonesia and \$50 million from Malaysian donors (Pottie and Ford, 2001). It is an undisputed fact that the ANC’s incumbency status contributed to raising these contributions.

5. *General Economic Condition During Election Period.*

According to the former speaker of the US House of Representatives, Tip O’Neil, “all politics is local.” Several analysts have documented the wisdom of this statement by factoring the defining effects the general economic health has had on several campaigns. Kuklinski and West have suggested that economic self-interest plays a tangible role in the voting behavior of the electorate (Kuklinski and West, 1981). They maintain that the size of the “pocket book” has had both positive and adverse effects on the re-election bids of several incumbents with them being held directly responsible for the current economic health of their constituents. Other scholars (Kinder and Kiewiet, 1979; Kiewiet, 1981) disagree. Instead they argue that voter’s perceptions of the national economic trends matter more than their individual predicaments. “[V]oters’ personal economic fortunes do not figure more prominently....because part of the American social fabric is the self-reliance ethic - the view that individuals, not government or societal conditions, are responsible for their own welfare” (citing Feldman 1982 in Murray, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, p. 27). Therefore, personal economic problems are not blamed on the government.

This is in stark contrast to Africa’s political tradition: Africa, in general, is a continent struggling to overcome its colonial heritage, rising poverty, and soaring international debt (Bates, 1999, pp. 83-95). It has become a continent accustomed to begging, a sad ethic characteristic of the people inhabiting it. Consequently, the personal economic malaise is often attributed to poor government intervention. However, Kuklinski and West’s assessment still does not necessarily apply when looking at the results of past South African elections and the 2000 local government in particular. Between 1999-2000 South Africa witnessed an economic downturn that spawned a noticeable increase in fuel and energy prices, a significant rise in interest rates, and a general rise

² These amounts are allocated from public funds based on the parties’ previous election showing. Figures for 2000 local government elections have not been released.

in inflation that has pronounced intensifying individual hardships. Nonetheless, although repeatedly blamed for the country's economic woes, the ANC was still re-elected by a handsome margin in 2000 seemingly supporting the claim that personal economic problems do not have an impact upon individual voter choice.

Nevertheless, there are supposedly only three factors that influence the outcome of elections: presidential popularity and real disposable income, the current state of the economy (Lewis-Beck and Rice, 1985), and most importantly, the changing political environment (Eismeier and Pollock, 1989). But this assumes that national elections are merely a referendum of presidential economic performance and entirely ignores state, local, and sub-regional contexts. Ladd finds that voters in different states perceive the state of the economy in different ways, implying that a campaign should be broken down by district and campaign messages targeted specifically according to their respective characteristics (Ladd, 1987 cited in Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988).

Using Information to Hone a Campaign Strategy: Some Practical Pointers

American elections, like those elections across the globe, are driven by money and the need for contextual information. These appropriate and pertinent information needs helps strategists calculate voter patterns which in turn determine how resources are allocated within the campaign. Accurately understanding the context of the election is equally important and has mostly been covered earlier in this text discussion. However, the campaign context also depends on the ability to squarely target the electorate by ascertaining through demographic and polling information exactly how many votes are needed to win and where these votes can be found. Additionally, the campaign must be also be keenly aware of the legal procedures required to compete in the race, when the election date is scheduled, which candidates/parties are running, and how the ballots will be counted (e.g. is a plurality or majority of the vote required) (Shea, 1996, pp. 27-28).

A key contextual determinant is the commission and use of tracking polls. These are continuous polls conducted night after night to trace the impact of the most recent campaign events. Their results indicate the effectiveness and viability of particular messages allowing a campaign to assess and modify its strategy virtually instantaneously. Implicit in this strategic monitoring, are four essential components that must be considered in any campaign: the candidate, the message, the voter, and the response.

Fishel has described the candidate as pivotal to the campaign process (Fishel, 1985). In a South African context this is becoming increasingly important with the evolution of the local government electoral system. Nevertheless, a candidate's/party's personal weaknesses and strengths can and need to be controlled by the campaign. These include the candidate/party's character development, professional and public office experience and political capabilities that assist in raising necessary funds, party support, get-out-the-vote efforts and the like.

By far the most important objective of any campaign is to persuade the correct number of voters to turn out and vote. The ultimate focus, therefore, is the election day and how to motivate voters towards it.

In understanding all the actors, a campaign should define its target audience and determine which voters to approach. How a campaign should interact with the electorate is an essential question if a campaign is to be successful. The manner and mode of engagement is typically dictated by analyzing the four key characteristics of voters: not every person in the district is a registered voter; not everyone registered will cast their ballot; the degree of partisan support; and the fact that higher-income suburbs are more likely to vote than their lower-income counterparts (Grey, 1999).

If properly researched, these factors help campaigns target their messages properly by mobilizing enough of the vote to capture the desired number to win. American consultants typically use two approaches in their quest to narrow the campaign's scope: quantitative and qualitative techniques. The quantitative technique allows the campaign to focus on geographic areas with certain types of voting groups who hold specific attitudes and are concerned with definite issues. The qualitative technique is responsible for painting a picture of the candidate, the opponent, and issues that are potentially important. Combining these approaches creates a complete profile of the area allowing the strategy to effectively communicate a suitably motivating message to the "right" voters - a stark contrast to the "shot gun" approach used in the United States at the turn of the last century and in recent South African elections.

Quantitative Techniques

Quantitative analysis can be divided into four areas: electoral targeting, polling, demographic characteristics, and an analysis of individual voter histories.

1. Electoral Targeting

Electoral targeting is perhaps the most essential component to be conducted - it helps the campaign understand the historic voting behavior of the district and in so doing target the areas which are more important than others. The district is divided into different voting units, for example, media markets, cities, townships, rural districts, wards and precincts. With the help of statistical equations, strategists are able to determine the percentage of effort to be allocated, the extent of partisan strength and performance, the volatility of the voters, and the typical turnout performance per unit.

2. Polling

Besides these statistical breakdowns, polling results enhance quantitative approaches. These results provide information about the candidate/opponent: name recognition, candidate/opponent evaluation, media habits, issue interests, demographics, and

actual voting patterns depending on the type and detail of the poll commissioned. Using this information “candidates can work to overcome their own deficiencies, attack opponents on their weaknesses, [and] speak about issues of current interest to the electorate” (Fishel, Gopoian and Stacey, 1988, p. 35).

3 *Demographic Characteristics*

Investigating the essential demographic characteristics is equally important. For this information, univariate demographic targeting is used to determine the racial, ethnic and religious proportion and concentration of the district. Ordinarily this information is available from the Census Bureau, however, recent South African data are in dispute and are largely dismissed as skewed and unreliable. Therefore, a multivariate analysis is more likely to provide more accurate data. This is a costly procedure since a multivariate analysis uses sophisticated statistical sampling and analyses to find people with similar demographic qualities such as, yuppies, college graduates, and “blue chip blues”³.

4 *Analysis of individual voter histories*

This technique involves locating core and peripheral voters. Campbell defined the difference between the two as being a voter that votes regularly (a core voter) and those who only turnout for presidential elections (a peripheral voter). In other words, a strategist is typically able to examine the frequency of individual turnout that ultimately impacts the scripting and effectiveness of the campaign message, which, in turn, will be different for each sector (Campbell, 1966).

The findings will also assist the campaign managers to time their activities for maximum effectiveness. Each decision of the campaign whether it is when the announcement of a candidacy is announced, when to the launch, and who to target in a direct mail campaign, where to send the candidate to conduct door-to-door visits, when and where money should be raised, or whether to attack early on in the campaign, are decisions that are based on the information available to the campaign team. This information also determines the campaign theme as well as the level of comprehension of the electorate, i.e. whether they are still learning getting to know which candidates are running, or whether the electorate has already formulated an opinion of the opposing candidates/parties, or, in fact, whether the electorate has already made their final decision. The campaign tactics and allocation of money will

³ Blue Chip blues® are individuals who are high school graduates and have become well-paid skilled and technical workers and insurance agents, for who two incomes have become a central part of life (Robbin, 1987; Schneider, 1983).

similarly adjust in response to the perceived location of the voting population (Shea, 1966).

Qualitative Techniques

1. Opposition Research

The qualitative approach, contrary to the quantitative approach, involves an extensive investigation into the candidates themselves, the opposition, and an extensive issue research component. Included in this analysis is an investigation into the opponent's public service history, their respective personal information, media-derived data, prior campaign details, and relevant business and career data⁴.

The public service background assists strategists develop a profile of the opposition's official record. For example, a record of his/her position on taxes may be used to depict how removed a representative is from their constituents. If party positions have switched positions during the term on key issues an attacking campaign may interpret it as an indication of indecision and incompetence to hold office.

For example, in the South African context, absenteeism is yet another contentious factor. Knowing how many sessions / votes have been missed by an individual Member of Parliament as well as the debates and issues that were discussed in their absence have, in the past, been cited as shirking official duties and being insensitive to needs of the people. In addition, allegations of corruption and the inappropriate use of government office may feed these perceptions (e.g. recent accusations of ANC MPs receiving bribes involving luxury motor vehicles - *The Star*, July 11, 2001, *Business Day*, July 11 and 12, 2001).

2. Media as a Source

Media-derived data are also useful to highlight contrasting and contradictory actions, statements, or scandals. Prior election information similarly helps the campaign team to determine the direction and conviction of opposing officials by tracing prior campaign pledges and matching them to the legislative agenda. Lastly, relevant business, career and personal information is also uncovered. These include any incidents of résumé embellishments, questionable business practices and associates, the regularity of voting, and potentially corrupt recreational and social affiliations.

Using this data, strategists are able to hone their negative or attack campaign while still keeping within ethically acceptable boundaries. This is a skill South African politicians will need to acquire ahead of the 2004 election cycle. Until now, negative campaigning has been viewed skeptically, but more and more party officials are seeing the need to

⁴ A similar report should also be compiled on the campaign's own party or candidate.

explore these techniques as their democracy evolves with problems of voter apathy and indifference akin to those experienced in the American dynamic. In addition, it also helps the team to manipulate the news cycle - arguably the most important function of any campaign - by constantly feeding the press. Journalists have little need to conduct in depth investigations and the campaign management team can, therefore, ensure that issues relevant to their strategy and highlighting their strengths enjoy coverage (Grey, 1999).

South African party strategists are not as adept as their American counterparts at controlling the media. The plethora of party representatives in South Africa who are seen conducting interviews and posing as experts is indicative of this difference. At most, two people beside the principal should handle all media communication. This centrality creates the impression of unity and consistency within the party and the campaign because the messages as well as the spin are controlled.

3. Campaign Message / Theme

The message that is touted must be relevant and meaningful and must be developed from the quantitative and qualitative analysis. Usually short and pithy, the message should provide a contrasting position to the opponent(s) and must capture the essence of the campaign. It is the topic sentence that reconciles what the voters want with what the candidate has to offer. However, the content and distribution of messages will vary according to the target audience and purpose. For example, a broadcast message contains the central idea of the campaign - the campaign theme - and is distributed indirectly to a general audience via paid media campaigns. A narrowcast message, on the other hand, supplements the broader theme but specifically targets an audience. Narrow or specific messages are the focus of direct media such as mail and other targeted literature drops.

The pithiness allows the message to be repeated and remembered. Crafting the theme is a delicate process which considers the contextual backdrop and the valence, positional and referenda issues of the election and the relevant national trends (Salmore and Salmore, 1989). South African campaigns have a great deal to learn in this regard as suggested by examples such as the ANC's campaign slogan "Together speeding up change and fighting poverty and creating a better life for all."

4. Voter Response

The last factor of a campaign is measuring and interpreting voter response. Intent on securing the necessary votes to win requires accurate targeting, effective turnout techniques and a message that is continually repeated - moving enough energy to create matter. Effective management of the campaign's time and resources is essential and its success hinges on the selection and passion of the people involved. For instance, the candidate's energy levels, fund-raising abilities, personality and eloquence are defining features of the theme; the staff (paid or volunteer) are

responsible in one manner or another for delivering the message; while paid consultants are vital for accurate polling and demographic research, electronic media development and conducting successful voter contact campaigns.

A sound and effective strategy is compatible and incorporates the candidate or party representative. Its focus is to highlight the importance of a message that is being consistently punted in both earned and paid media. The strategy centers the campaign helping it to anticipate attacks and preparing for eventual counter measures. Ultimately, its presence creates stability within the ranks and allows the campaign to remain on the attack for prolonged periods.

Conclusion

This discussion has attempted to see if the American democratic experience could be of assistance to its comparatively naive South African counterpart. The comparison has allowed us to highlight such common features as the seminal role of political parties in the election process. In addition, the importance of partisanship, current political climate, incumbency, campaign finances and the role of the general economic condition have also been noted.

This trip through shared political pasts has also shown key similarities in each country's historical trajectory. For example, there is a need in both the US and South Africa to develop strategies to overcome political apathy especially amongst the youth, to understand the limits to negative campaign advertising and to understand public distrust of the political system.

In outlining the principles and fundamentals common to the American political system, it is clear that South African political parties apply similar techniques although in an often subconscious and inaccurate manner. With shared political dilemmas, South Africa could therefore draw some interesting lessons from the American experience.

It is also obvious that given the pivotal role played by South African political parties in the electoral process, their effectiveness would be greatly enhanced by using key quantitative data and targeting strategies - a process that will be more accurate and plausible after the 2001 Census is completed. Learning from the scientific procedures developed in the years of American electioneering such as being able to accurately use qualitative and quantitative techniques, South African politicians will be able to use them to further hone their own craft in waging election battles.

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