

УДК 316.334

## **HOW ATTRACTIVE ARE AMERICAN POLITICAL CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUES IN POST-SOCIALIST COUNTRIES?**

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*In this article, there is an attempt to analyze the spread of American style political campaigning in Post-Socialist countries and the elements of this style that are the most widely used in the practice of post-socialist political campaigning. The electoral process in post-socialist polities is influenced by a combination of political campaigning practical elements that resemble those used in the U.S. but with significant degree of adjustment to the socio-cultural realities of the post-socialist countries. There has been found the actual evidence of a significant presence of the American political campaign techniques and political consultants that supports the initial assumption of a diffusion of American electoral practices in most of post-socialist countries.*

**Keywords:** political campaigns, electoral process, elections, political consultants, Americanization, political institutions, media.

*У даній статті проаналізовано ступінь поширеності американських методів проведення політичних кампаній у постсоціалістичних країнах; з'ясовано, які з них є найбільш затребуваними в межах електоральних кампаній; доведено, що електоральний процес у постсоціалістичних країнах містить у собі елементи, які широко використовуються в США та адаптовані до мінливого соціокультурного середовища цих країн; на підставі аналізу емпіричних даних підтверджено гіпотезу щодо запозиченого характеру методів проведення електоральних кампаній на пострадянському просторі.*

**Ключові слова:** політичні кампанії, електоральний процес, вибори, політичні консультанти, американізація, політичні інститути, ЗМІ.

*В данной статье проанализирована степень распространенности американских методов проведения политических кампаний в постсоциалистических странах; выяснено, какие из них являются наиболее востребованными в рамках электоральных кампаний; доказано, что электоральный процесс в постсоциалистических странах содержит в себе элементы, которые широко используются в США и адаптированы к изменчивой социокультурной среде этих стран; на основе анализа эмпирических данных подтверждена гипотеза о заимствованном характере методов проведения электоральных кампаний.*

**Ключевые слова:** политические кампании, электоральный процесс, выборы, политические консультанты, американизация, политические институты, СМИ.

Since the dissolution of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the attempts in democratization of the post-socialist systems, East Central Europe and FSU (especially Russia and the Ukraine) have become an open political marketplace for American political consultants. They entered East Central Europe as early as 1990. Their first activity in Russia took place in 1993, when a team of US media consultants produced TV ads for the Yeltsin government. [1]. Roughly one in every two overseas consultants has worked as a campaign consultant in post-socialist countries during the last few years. Parliamentary campaigns in Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia, presidential campaigns in Russia, Ukraine, Romania, Poland and Serbia, and other countries opened up beneficial business areas for a number of American consultants.

*The goal of this article is to find out the actual impact of American style political campaigns on electoral process in post-socialist countries.*

First, there is an huge demand for the professional expertise of modern political campaigning. Second, in most post-socialist countries it is legal to buy TV time for electoral purposes[2]. However, not only consultants but also providers of campaign technologies, professional pollsters and experts in the field of direct marketing and phone surveys find interested consumers in Eastern Europe, who want to use modern campaign techniques to balance for the organizational weaknesses of their parties. Despite considerable language barriers, socio-cultural misunderstandings, a poor infrastructure of campaign headquarters, and a disperse and unpredictable electorate, top American consultants have managed to establish themselves as key advisors offering their strategic and technical expertise [3:603]. (see Table 1).

Table 1.

**Cooperation with US Overseas Consultants (in percentage)**

East Central Europe	40
Western Europe	30
Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine	27
Russia	23

*Source:* Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

First democratic elections (*founding elections*) with assistance of international organizations, and demands by local political parties, created new business areas for American overseas consultants. Massive sums of money spent on election campaigns, well-funded interest groups and international Democracy Assistance Programs have made the emerging democracies a financially attractive political marketplace for foreign political consultants and providers of campaign technologies. The International Republican Institute (IRI), for example, “has inserted itself directly into some electoral campaigns abroad, such as in Romania and Bulgaria in the first half of the 1990s, where IRI representatives designed campaign strategies, attempted to broker oppositional coalitions, and generally served as campaign consultants to selected parties” [4:143]. As part of Global Political Consultancy Survey it was also surveyed how many of the interviewed party and campaign managers had recently cooperated with a US consultant. The data received confirm the worldwide influence of the professional expertise of American consultants (Table 2).

Table 2.

**Areas Covered by Professional Activities of US Overseas Consultants (in percentage)**

“Worked as a consultant in...”	N=65
Latin America	64
Western Europe	59
Post-socialist Countries (Russia, Poland, Hungary, etc.)	45
Middle East, Asia, Africa	28
Oceania	7

*Source:* Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

In the end of 1990s American consultants worked in almost all West European countries. The situation is comparable in East Central Europe, where market-driven activities of American political consultants, combined with donor-driven activities of Democracy Assistance Programs [5], have led to a sustainable transfer of American campaign techniques. Forty percent of the respondents in East Central Europe and a notable one-third of the respondents in Russia, Georgia, Belarus and the Ukraine worked with US consultants during their last parliamentary or presidential campaigns. In the December 1993 election, there was found that the “participation of foreign political consultants, especially those who did television ads, was such a contentious issue that the parties made sure that very little surfaced in the media and that foreign consultants kept a low profile” [1, p. 155]. During the Russian presidential campaign of 1996, the contribution of a team of US consultants was kept a secret, while there is contradictory evidence for their actual impact on the course of Yeltsin’s campaign. In fact, Yeltsin’s campaign directors hired dozens of campaign managers from different political parties and “virtually every major research firm, think tank, and public relations company had received some work for the wealthy Yeltsin campaign” [6:22]. Regarding the presidential elections 2000, 2004, 2008, and 2012 there is no evidence for a direct involvement of US consultants beyond informal contacts and secluded briefing meetings. More than half of the respondents in East Central Europe and Russia assume that any American campaign strategy could also be implemented in their countries.

American consultants do not have a monopoly on the global political marketplace and “the idea that international consulting is limited to US-consultants traveling abroad and exporting American political methods is outdated. Although American consultants may work in a greater number of countries than their international counterparts, many non-US-consultants are building impressive client lists outside their home countries” [7:52]. Western European consultants and international political consulting firms located in London, Paris and Stockholm have also started to offer their services worldwide.

In the post-socialist polities of East Central Europe in particular, but also in Russia, Belarus and the Ukraine Western European know-how, as represented by French and Swedish consultants as well as by German experts meets with considerable response. Forty percent of the East Central European respondents have recently cooperated with a US consultant, while 52 percent report cooperation experience with West European consultants. Even in Russia, Belarus, Georgia and the Ukraine cooperation is obviously more intense with West European consultants than with US consultants, and the Russian political marketplace has recently also been discovered by Latin American consultores politicos as an attractive place for the transfer of select third-world styles of campaigning (see Table 3).

Table 3.

**Cooperation with Western European Consultants (in percentage)**

East Central Europe	52
Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine	40
Russia	35

*Source:* Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

This also involves a considerable reluctance to accept the media-driven US-campaign style before 1995. With this election, “political advertising, together with public opinion surveys, public relations firms, and political consultants—homegrown or foreign—came of age in Russia and continued to gain importance in future elections” [1:112]. At the 1995 parliamentary elections those parties which employed traditional advertising and mobilization strategies were most successful. The situation was different at the 1996 presidential elections, when a team of five American consultants developed the media campaign of Boris Yeltsin and managed to improve the poor image of Yeltsin despite the low approval ratings of the acting president in January 1996. The political TV ads made by Yeltsin’s team indicated “how quickly Russian spin doctors picked up the American style” [6:7].

Even though the United States represented the most widespread role model of modern election campaigning worldwide, it was not the only one. The Western European style of campaigning is definitely seen as a model of increased professionalism by party managers and campaign experts outside the United States and Western Europe (see Table 4).

Table 4.

**Countries Believed to Be Able to Provide Campaign Experience and Techniques for Own Country (in percentage)**

<b>Providing Countries</b>	<b>Own Country</b>					
	Latin America	East Central Europe	CIS	South Africa	India	East Asia
Germany	30	39	24	54	7	8
France	45	41	22	8	0	0
United States	78	47	38	62	23	78
United Kingdom	27	45	24	50	26	12
Italy	33	22	18	8	7	0
Spain	19	0	4	19	19	0
Sweden	0	14	22	15	24	0
Russia	0	0	17	0	0	0
Poland	0	0	9	0	0	0

*Source:* Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

The interviewed campaign managers from Russia, Belarus, Georgia and the Ukraine have an even greater number of reference countries. Although the United States is the leading role model for their professional campaigning, Western European campaign techniques also play a noteworthy role. Campaign practices and experiences in Germany, the United Kingdom, Sweden and France are thought by East European campaign experts to have greater relevance and to be more adequate for the specific competitive situation in their own countries than the American style of electioneering.

The noted Americanization of campaigns in Russia and the Ukraine obviously concerns only select aspects of campaign practice in these respective countries. Looking at the data, it is also possible to speak of a *Western Europeanization* of campaign techniques taking place in the CIS at the same time. However, later Russian experts founded their own consulting firms, such as VESTI which is managed by the former Yeltsin-advisor Mikhail V. Margelov and, among others, is also active for Yabloko. Other companies playing an important role in Russian parliamentary elections, as well as dozens of gubernatorial campaigns on the regional level, are the Center of Political Technologies; ROMIR Research Group, one of the largest market research companies in Russia, specializing in public opinion polling and political consulting; the Center for Regional Research; the Intellectual Communications Agency; and the Center for Political Consulting Nicolo M. The Center for Political Consulting, founded in 1989, offers “ready-made” electoral campaigns, including political and psychological studies, advice in strategy and monitoring of public opinion trends. The Center of Political Technologies, created in 1993, also offers expertise on developing ties with power structures and using them for political campaigning [8: 51–52]. Similar to the situation in Latin America during the eighties, in Russia there is also already developing a network of local campaign professionals [8], which combines Western campaign know-how with specific features of the Russian style of political competition. A similar situation can be observed in East Central Europe. Campaign managers in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland and Romania regard the United States, together with the United Kingdom, France and Germany, as their main reference countries as far as professional campaign experience and techniques are concerned. A party-centered style of campaigning, specific electoral laws, limited campaign budgets compared to US standards, and a geographical and

cultural proximity to the Western European neighboring countries, favor an orientation towards the strategies and techniques of English, French or German parliamentary election campaigns [9]. In addition, numerous party and campaign managers from East Central Europe have been integrated into transnational European party networks of social democratic or conservative parties and there is a regular exchange of experience on a European level [10]. Traditional cultural alliances counterbalance the incursion of American-style campaigning. The French top consultant Jacques Seguela was involved in the Polish presidential campaigns 1995 and 2000 and other Western European consultants and leading party managers are frequent guests in East Central European parties' headquarters. However, in recent times according to Eryk Mistewicz, a leading Polish political consultant: "there is an enormous fascination in Poland with U.S. politics". Over the last 20 years, many political consultants have made trips to watch U.S. elections, hoping to bring some of the same techniques to Polish politics.

In this article, we will take a closer look at the evaluations of American campaign techniques by foreign campaign professionals. How are American techniques and practices transferred by leading campaign professionals to other countries? First we will concentrate on foreign campaign techniques in a broader sense. Which campaign techniques from other countries could be of interest for their own country? The data show area-specific demands, which seem to reflect the degree of professionalization in the respective countries.

Utilizing the potential of electronic mass media represents the core interest of campaign experts from East Central Europe when observing foreign campaign developments. Surprisingly, campaign managers and consultants from Russia, Belarus, Georgia and the Ukraine show at least an isolated interest in foreign campaign techniques with a small focus on more professionalized organization of the campaign management process and the increased use of the potential of electronic mass media for political campaign communication. Table 5 shows which American campaign techniques are attractive to foreign campaign professionals.

Table 5.

**US-Campaign Techniques Transferable to Own Country (in percentage) (open-ended question)**

	CIS	East Central Europe
Strategic Use of Research	3	6
Strategic Planning	13	13
Increased Use of Electronic Media/TV Debates	15	13
Image Building and Candidate Positioning	15	7
Computerized Campaigning	8	9
Media and PR Strategies	4	19
Professional Campaign Management	3	3
Fundraising Techniques	1	9
Event Marketing	15	17

Source: Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

Campaign professionals from the CIS have more focus on strategic planning and advanced techniques of electronic mass media, and also camera-ready performance of top leaders to event marketing techniques. The latter, as well as advanced techniques of professional public relations, are the centerpieces of US-campaign practices respondents from East Central Europe consider to be transferable.

Political consultants outside the United States do not only differ in their degree of professionalization but also in their experience with campaign practices in the United States. To demonstrate these differences, respondents with a self-reported closeness and acquaintance with US-campaign practices have been classified as US-connected. This group of foreign campaign professionals consists of frequent observers of American elections, who have a keen interest in learning about recent innovations and rely on the newest American campaign literature regarding their professional qualification. Table 6 reveals the different degrees of US-orientation based on data from our Global Political Consultancy Survey.

Table 6.

**Experience of Foreign Campaign Professionals with and Orientation toward US Campaign Expertise (in percentage)**

	Recently Cooperated with a US-Overseas Consultant	US-Connected*	Implementation of US-Campaign Techniques in Own Country Possible
East Central Europe	40	17	52
Western Europe	30	25	n.a.
Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine	27	39	50
Russia	23	17	57

\* Strong orientation toward US-campaign expertise.

Source: Global Political Consultancy Survey (1998–2000).

A more remote attitude toward the transmit of US-campaign techniques to their own countries is characteristic for campaign professionals from East Central Europe. While 40 percent have personal experience with the cooperation with a US-overseas consultant, only every second sees a chance of a direct import of select US-campaign techniques.

25 percents of the Russian respondents have been cooperating with a US-overseas consultant in recent years. One-sixth could be classified as US-connected and nearly 60 percent of the Russian political consultants believe in the practicability of US-campaign techniques for their own country.

Tracing the worldwide spreading of American campaign techniques has revealed some modifications that must be made to the ongoing process of professionalization and internationalization of electioneering and campaign practices in media-centered democracies. Rather than an American dominated one-way transfer we have to differentiate between at least three paths of diffusion of professional campaign expertise. The first, and most influential one, is the American-driven proliferation of techniques and practices first developed within the special context of US-campaign experience. The second path is the ongoing Western Europeanization of campaigns in East Central and Eastern Europe in particular. The third path is the development of a distinct third-way style of campaigning. This style combines select US-campaign specifics with a more traditional party-centered style of mass mobilization. Last but not least, there are some hybrid forms of campaigning. For example, combinations of US-style TV campaigns, UK-style constituency campaigning at the grass-roots level, and experience of rallies, parades and folklore for stirring up the masses. But by far the most influential standard model of professional campaigning seems to be the US-American model of media-, money- and consultant-driven campaigning with its potential of electoral success but also the inherent dangers of an uncontrolled proliferation of high-risk techniques. The data obtained from the Global Political Consultancy Survey draw highly complex patterns of interactions and connections within the ongoing process of a worldwide proliferation of US-American campaign practice and expertise. There is clearly a market- and donor-driven diffusion of American campaign techniques worldwide and network of cooperation between US consultants and foreign party and campaign managers. However, there are also differences in the degree of Americanization. A great deal more problematic is the situation in Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union. A lack of complex electoral traditions, as well as party structures that are at best embryonic and well-funded special interest groups controlling the mass media, have turned campaigning into rivalry in which TV spots modeled on the US example and dirty technologies flourish as the Russian counterpart of negative campaigning in the United States. In post-socialist polities we can observe the situation when political corruption, electoral fraud and the purchase of votes form an alliance with high-tech campaigning imported from the United States.

### **Conclusion**

We end this discussion of whether modern techniques are contextualized in post-socialist countries by returning to the theme with which we began: The particular forms and adaptations of modern campaigning that are practiced are shaped by the full range of contextual factors acting in concert. For instance in post-socialist countries, the convergence of cynicism about the political establishment, access to the public through television advertising as well as party broadcasts, the possibility of candidates mounting media campaigns against opponents, and a lengthy pre-campaign in which limits on campaign activities do not apply, invites a fuller, less selective utilization of the modern model of electioneering. It is also the cases where modern media-centered strategies have been adopted in spite of some important contextual factors, leading to contradictions between campaign practices and enclaves of traditional cultures. Politicians' decisions about whether and which campaign practices to adopt, and in what form, are not in every case appropriate to the context, but their motives in selecting strategies and the likelihood of modern methods succeeding are determined to a significant extent by local contextual factors.

Within post-socialist polities there is a remarkable example of a hybrid style, combining different features already discussed with unique characteristics resulting from the legacies of the socialist past and the fragility of a transformational democracy. Basic characteristics of this style of campaigning are:

#### *1. Television compensating for weak or nonexistent party organization.*

The media and TV centeredness of candidates and their struggle to control the flow of news of the dominant public and private TV stations are characteristic for campaign practices [1]. The 1995 parliamentary campaign created the basis for mediated, television-driven campaigning in Russia, which culminated in the 1996 presidential election and was fought almost exclusively on TV with strong interference by the government. It resulted in an unbalanced and biased campaign coverage, where both state-owned public TV as well as the private television channels failed to provide factual and substantial information for their audiences. Similar practices were used during 1999 parliamentary campaign where carefully scripted appearances of candidates, professional image building and aggressive negative campaigning, attacking and destroying the opponent's personal integrity have were used by the mass media in an unprecedented degree [8]. The 1999 Russian Duma elections introduced "the concept of

compromising material and dubious new shows attacking political rivals” [The 8: 43]. Considering the lack of party organization capable of mobilizing voters, with exception of the Communist party which could arrange at that time over 570,000 members and is strongly connected with local networks and community authorities, parties are more elite-driven leaders’ platforms rather than institutionalized organizations. Where Western political parties have become weaker in organizational terms, Russian parties were “also socially detached, but importantly without having first established grass roots. Television might, it was thought, substitute for the parties’ historical function of aggregating local demands and loyalties into a national fabric of party identification” [1: 111].

*2. Leader-Focused campaigning.*

Russian political culture is hierarchically structured, resulting in patronage relationships between leaders and followers, with a strong emphasis on leader personalities capable of fulfilling the expectations and needs of their clients [11]. This traditional pattern of Russian culture is represented by candidate-centered campaigns, emphasizing the personal attributes and leadership qualities of candidates. Where parties are discredited by the legacy of the past or appear as virtual platforms for the electoral success of a core group of political entrepreneurs closely affiliated with strong and powerful economic interest groups (oligarchs), personality and credibility of candidates are seen as the most reliable reasons for voting decisions [12].

*3. Elite-Driven Political Marketing Operations.*

Deficient party organizations, besides the organizational network of the KPRF, lacking supporter or membership bases and the character of Russian parties as elite-driven electoral platforms have consequently strengthened the influential role external political consultants and media experts. They were working closely with the top candidates and an exclusive circle of personal advisors on planning, designing and crafting media and television centered campaign activities, as well as framing, influencing and frequently even dictating the content of mass media reports and campaign coverage. The Russian campaign style is, therefore, a hybrid combination of modern televised politics and professional media operations, and an intense, aggressive struggle for access to and control of media institutions, especially television (13).

These characteristics are also relevant to Ukrainian campaign practices and, with certain degree of adjustment, to Eastern European style of campaigning (although with less amount of financial resources available).

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