

The Americanisation of Southern African Political Campaigns: A Comparative Study of Malawi and South Africa General Elections

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This paper seeks to examine extent and rationale of Malawian and South African campaigns incorporating America –style practices and becoming Americanised. Specifically the paper explores existence of evidence supporting the notion of Americanisation in both Malawian and South African politics. Using a mixed methods approach, semi structured interviews, focus group discussions and content analysis were conducted. Results show evidence of Americanisation and increased use of marketing and campaign professionals in both Malawi and South Africa, due to democratisation, development of the media and changes in the social-economic factors. Practical implications of these findings and ideas for further research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

In their seminal article, Kotler and Levy (1969:15) argued that elections should be one of the new arenas of interest for marketing professionals: “political contests remind us that candidates are marketed as well as soap”. The earliest use of the term “political marketing”, however, did not appear in management studies literature but in the pioneering work of political scientist Stanley Kelley who charted the emergence of the professional campaign industry in the United States. Commenting on the activities of the first election consultancies, Kelley wrote: “The team relies heavily but not entirely upon their own intuitive feel for providing political marketing conditions. They pride themselves on having ‘good average minds’ that help them to see things as the average man sees them” (Kelley, 1956 p.53).

In spite of scepticism from marketing purists, those in sympathy with the “broadening” thesis that involved the application of marketing principles and strategies to political campaigning began to attempt to establish and clarify the sub-field of political marketing from the 1960s onwards. By the mid -1970s, American scholars such as Avraham Shama (1974, 1976) and the prolific Philip Kotler (1975) were at the forefront in developing and deepening theoretical foundations for the subject. Similarly, academics in Europe began to consider the political dimension to marketing, positing the view than an exchange

relationship existed between democratic elites and their voters (O'Leary and Iredale, 1976). By the mid-1980s, a steady stream of research discussing the emergence of the phenomenon helped confirm its importance (Mauser, 1983; Newman and Sheth, 1985). By 1988, David Reid felt able to conclude that: "In Western terms, although seldom recognised by politicians, the problem of getting elected is essentially a marketing one." (Reid, 1988)

Among political marketing scholars, Kelley (1956) may be generally credited with the first use of the term 'political marketing' but Maarek (1995) observes that the first genuine manifestation of modern political marketing as a general, organised strategy dates back to 1952 with the United States presidential campaign of Dwight D. Eisenhower. He argued that political communication as such was not even an invention of the Twentieth Century because as far back as Antiquity, kings and princes knew how to exploit their reputation as warriors and used it as a preliminary scare tactic aimed at potential adversaries, as well as a device to help them raise taxes. He further argued that the introduction of political marketing came with the elaboration of a *policy* of political communication, specifically: a strategy for the design, rationalisation and conveyance of modern political communication. He explained that the dominant role of modern political marketing in the USA was rapidly established: within less than a decade, between the presidential election of 1952 and that of 1960, it became an incontrovertible practice. He suggested that three main factors led to the development of political marketing in the USA, namely:

(a) Its electoral system – with a system of primaries before presidential elections, where voters must choose one candidate over another, expressing broadly similar political ideas, rather than convince them to vote for a politician from an opposition party;

(b) its tradition of elections for all public offices – in an effort to break from the former British colonial policy, it became routine to hold elections for most major public office holders from the local sheriff, mayor or judge to the president; and

(c) the rapid expansion of the modern mass media – in 1952, there was already a television set in nearly 40 per cent of American homes and this figure was as high as 60 per cent in the north-eastern states.

The US literature identifies John Beckley, a member of the 'Thomas Jefferson campaign team' as one of the first political consultants, though similar roles could be identified much earlier in other societies. Robert Harris (2006) in 'Imperium: A Novel Set in Ancient Rome', suggests that Cicero's brother was a political marketer and it has been suggested that Nicollo Machiavelli is the saint of political marketing. The rise of political marketing in the recent past has been attributed to the development of an investigative press, declining party loyalty, and changes in the political and electoral systems (Newman 1994). Most especially, researchers (e.g. Kavanagh, 1995; Scammell, 1995) have identified the expansion of the media, particularly television, as having a significant impact on its development.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Swanson and Mancini (1996) in their seminal article posit 'Americanisation' and 'modernisation' as working hypothesis to explain the spread of political marketing as a phenomenon. To provide a starting point for comparing campaign practices in different countries, we believe the 'Americanisation' hypothesis is particularly useful. In brief, the hypothesis holds that campaigning in democracies around the world is becoming ever more Americanised as candidates, political parties, and news media take cues from their counterparts in the United States. Many campaign methods and practices that have been adopted by other countries developed first in the United States, so Americanisation suggests itself as an easy characterisation of this pattern of innovation (Elebash 1984 cited in Swanson and Mancini, 1996).

The appropriateness of the term is contested, however, by some who argue that surface similarities obscure important national adaptations and variations (Waisbord 1993, cited in Swanson and Mancini, 1996). Furthermore, not every recent change in political campaigning in all countries of interest represents the adoption of methods and practice that emerged first in the US. We regard the matter as an open question and offer Americanisation as a reference point and a working hypothesis with which to begin the analysis. We believe the concept will be useful for comparing common elements in political

marketing practice and electoral change, so long as care is taken not to overlook national variations, adaptations, and deviations from the general pattern.

Despite these caveats, our use of the term Americanisation reflects some important developments that are relevant to the recent changes in election campaigns around the world. Given its super-power status the results of US elections may have important consequences for many countries, which creates in those countries great interest in following the US campaigns. It can also happen that, as people in other countries follow the progress of a US campaign, their attention shifts from the candidates' goals and policies (which can have serious impacts internationally) to the way in which the election campaign itself is conducted.

RELEVANT EMPIRICAL AND CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH

De Vreese (2009) has observed that literature on the professionalization of political campaigns is strongly biased towards the first-order (national) elections in the US and UK. Based on the survey of candidates for the 2004 European elections in eight European countries, she wanted to examine whether campaign efforts to mobilise voters were greater in countries with elite consensus on the issue of European integration than in countries with elite polarization. The results showed that campaigns in the consensual electoral context in which political parties differ marginally on most issues of European integration were longer and involved more public meetings, more canvassing, and a more active use of the internet.

Hutcheson (2007) examined the development of political consulting in post-Soviet Russia. He observed that in recent years, electoral politics worldwide has become firmly reliant on professional advice and labour. In developing democracies the influx of advice and consultants from the West initially resulted in an apparent Americanisation of political marketing techniques. As electoral systems have developed, the political consulting market in each country has evolved in a way suited to the specifics of its electoral conditions. His analysis places the electoral market in comparative context looking at the scope, structure and activities of political consulting firms, examining some of the controversies arising from the professionalization of politics in each country.

Plasser (2000) noted the on-going process of professionalization and internationalisation of electioneering and campaign practices in media-centred democracies as the central topic of his comparative study. He claimed that only recently have scholars in the United States begun to study the professional norms and standards of a new power elite: the professional political consultants. Prominent figures in the US political consultancy business have worked as overseas consultants since the 1970s. In 1980s, they concentrated in Latin America and Western Europe. Since 1989, Russia and the former Soviet bloc countries of Eastern and Central Europe, as well as newly democratised countries in Asia and Africa, have become competitive marketplaces for American overseas consultants. Between 1998 and 1999, a sample of 502 political consultants and leading party managers in the US, Australia, New Zealand, India, South Africa, Latin America, Western Europe, Russia and Eastern Europe were interviewed about their professional experience and their concepts of campaigning, with the main focus being their professional evaluation of various campaign techniques and communication strategies. Plasser (2000) suggests the existence of the market-driven proliferation of American campaign techniques across much of the countries where political consultants were interviewed.

Medvic (2003) on the other hand focused on the nature of political consultancy itself, and noted that although political consultants have increasingly been the subject of scholarly research, there is little agreement as to what a 'political consultant' actually is. Early research in the field, and a good deal of contemporary work, has provided only vague conceptualisations of the term. Recent quantitative work that attempts to examine the role and impact of consultants in elections suffers from a lack of a common operational definition. After a brief review of the way systematic empirical researchers operationalise 'professional political consultant,' Medvic (2003) offered a comprehensive definition that can be used in future research on the topic. He defines a 'professional political consultant' as "a person who is paid, or whose firm is paid, to provide services for one presidential/ national or more than one non-presidential /

sub-national campaign (whether candidate or issue) per election cycle for more than one such cycle, not including those whose salary is paid exclusively by a party committee or interest group. Medvic (2003) further notes that the study of political consultants and the consulting industry is gathering pace. In recent years, numerous books and articles have been published analysing the role of political consultants in elections in the United States, Western Europe and elsewhere. In addition, major studies have recently been launched to examine the activity of consultants, including the Improving Campaign Conduct project at the University of Virginia by Freedman (1999) and the Global Political Consultancy Survey based at the Centre for Applied Political Research in Vienna. Yet, for all the attention consultants are garnering, there seems to be little agreement on what, exactly, a professional political consultant is.

If the claim that American-style campaigning is being implemented throughout the world can be tested, and if an integral component of American-style campaigning is the use of professional political consultants, then it is incumbent upon scholars to use a standard definition of the central concept when conducting empirical research. Downs (2011) has noted observers of elections in European democracies increasingly encountering the assertion that campaigns and candidacies have become poisoned by a creeping ‘Americanisation’. When a comedian in Denmark, a professional wrestler in Finland, or a porn star in Italy enjoys electoral success by appealing to lowest-common-denominator populism the response emanating from academic and journalistic quarters is typically the same—the US style of politics has, unfortunately, arrived. The literature supporting such seemingly pejorative claims is, however, largely anecdotal, usually atheoretical, and almost exclusively directed at national-level elections. Building upon theories of diffusion at the intersection of comparative politics and international relations—and drawing upon individual-level survey data from elections to the Scottish Parliament—Downs evaluated the merits and consequences of the Americanisation thesis. His results suggest the importance of political uncertainty as a force driving candidates and parties to learn from and adopt ‘American’ campaign strategies and tactics.

Newman (2012) has argued that to fully appreciate where the field has gone over the past decade, it is instructive to define exactly what political marketing is. For the purpose of establishing a conceptual foundation to move the approach forward, a definition was put forward in the preface of the ‘Handbook of Political Marketing’, the first formal collection of works in the field. Political marketing was defined as ‘the application of marketing principles and procedures in political campaigns by various individuals and organisations. The procedures involved include the analysis, development, execution, and management of strategic campaigns by candidates, political parties, governments, lobbyists, and interest groups that seek to drive public opinion, advance their own ideologies, win elections, and pass legislation and referenda in response to the needs and wants of selected people and society’ (Newman 1999, p.xiii). Considering this broad range of activities encompassed by political marketing, the focus is the strategic management of campaigns. Furthermore, what has changed most obviously over the past decade or so is the increasing amount of money necessary to pay for the execution of these campaigns. Changes in technology have also played a significant role in the successful implementation of strategies at all levels of political campaign. Needless to say, the field of political marketing has grown along with and through the establishment of more advanced technological tools that are essentially used to accomplish the goal of driving public opinion in a desired direction (Newman, 2012).

The application of political marketing methods continues to grow in North America, Europe, Asia and Latin America and is now part of campaigns and elections in emerging democracies around the world, whether it is a door-to-door localised grassroots campaign or a national campaign driven by the internet. This is increasingly the case in Africa, with a number of emergent political democracies exhibiting many signs of the techniques and strategies apparently developed elsewhere and debated by political marketing theorists. This is the main focus of attention for our investigation in this article.

THE AMERICANISATION OF AFRICAN POLITICS

From the foregoing discussion, we can formulate a specific question that addresses the key issue – is the American style of campaigning, identified above, a model that seems to have been adopted in other

countries, including emerging democracies like those in Southern Africa? To investigate this, we undertook an exploratory study of campaign practices in Malawi and South Africa, drawing on data from primary as well as secondary sources.

Within the scope of this enquiry, senior politicians from the six political parties represented in the National Assembly in Malawi were interviewed as well as key political marketing operatives from these parties. For South Africa, due to the lack of collaborative partners for primary data collection and also because of non-response from political party officials to participate in the study when requests were made via email, secondary sources (on-line publications and newspapers) which covered campaign activities by political parties in the last general elections in South Africa in 2009 were analysed to ascertain any evidence of Americanised styles of political campaigning. This analysis is followed by some thoughts and remarks on the current nature of political marketing practice in Malawi and South Africa and a discussion of the factors that might influence the adoption of any Americanisation of political campaigns. This includes how candidates and their advisors have perceived the use of 'experts' in campaigns.

METHODOLOGY: THE CASE OF MALAWI AND SOUTH AFRICA

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach wherein qualitative and quantitative methods were used to provide triangulation and crystallisation of findings. Semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with senior politicians (three from each of the six political parties represented in the National Assembly). The parties that took part from Malawi were the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), Malawi Congress Party (MCP), Malawi Forum for Unity and Development (MAFUNDE), Maravi People's Party (MPP) and the United Democratic Front Party (UDF). Three key officers from each of the six political parties were interviewed, namely the Directors of Campaigns, Directors of Research and Publicity Secretaries. Of the 18 eligible officials to be interviewed, 17 were interviewed while one declined to take part in the research.

Interviews were done in three phases beginning with Campaign Directors and then Research Directors and Publicity Secretaries in that order. The interviews were held between September 2011 and January, 2012. The first six (6) party personnel to be interviewed were the Campaign Directors for Alliance for Democracy (AFORD), labelled (CD1), for Democratic progressive Party (DPP) coded CD2, for Malawi Congress Party (MCP) coded CD3, for Malawi Forum for Unity and Development (MAFUNDE) coded CD4, for Maravi People's Party (MPP) coded CD5 and for the United Democratic Front (UDF) coded CD6. During the interviews, they were asked to complete the Professionalised Campaign Index developed from the work of Rommele and Gibson (2001) and Stromback (2007). They were required to tick from the checklist all activities that they recalled were carried out by their respective parties in the previous campaign of 2009. The index had 19 items. In order to measure each item on the checklist, a scale of zero to three emerged as the most practicable and broadly applicable level of measurement to capture variance across the various activities. Such an approach is consistent with earlier work by Gibson and Rommele (2001). An increase in the score reflected an increased level of engagement in the activity in question. Given that we had 19 variables in total, this meant a maximum score on the overall index of 57. A full listing of the variables and scores is provided in the appendix.

During interviews with Research Directors and Publicity Secretaries, some of the issues indicated by campaign directors on the checklist were also raised with these officials as a way of triangulating the information. Therefore, data used to assign scores was collected primarily through a self-assessment exercise by campaign directors and follow-up was by means of interview questions.

Interviews were also held with 17 media managers from both public and private media houses for their comments on the use of new approaches to political campaigning. Four focus groups were also held with media practitioners and voters to gauge how they perceived the use of campaign professionals in recent campaigns.

As for South Africa, the study relied heavily on the use of secondary sources (on-line publications and newspapers) which were content analysed for evidence on the use of campaign professionals and political marketing by political parties in South African general elections since 1994. Several online-

publications (five articles) by key authors on South African campaigns and four on-line newspapers namely BBC News (Africa service), The Sunday Times/ The Times, The Star and News24 were analysed for information about the use of campaign professionals. These publications were also analysed for traces of evidence of American style of campaign practices. Political parties whose campaign activities were followed were the African National Congress (ANC), the Democratic Alliance (DA), the National Party (NP), Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), Congress of the People (COPE) and Freedom Front's (FF), also known as Vryheidsfont (VF) due to its Afrikaner links.

RESULTS

Americanisation of Campaigns

Results show that Americanisation was evident in both Malawi and South Africa. By Americanisation we refer to some important developments that are relevant to the recent changes in election campaigns around the world. This is as a result of use of professionals or experts from America who have advised those campaigns to look like those of America or simply a shift of local campaigns towards those of America through diffusion. Americanised campaigns are known for their use of professionals or consultants and extensive use of the media.

In the case of Malawi, it was found through interviews with politicians and media managers and focus group discussions with media practitioners and voters that as early as in 1994 (when the country held its first democratic elections), American campaign experts were drafted into the campaign team for the Alliance for Democracy (AFORD). This was possible through their presidential candidate, the late Tom Chakufwa Chihana who had ties with some campaign experts from the United States. Such partnership with AFORD continued in 1999 and 2004 general elections before the death of its leader in 2006 before the general elections in 2009. The UDF was advised by campaign experts from the Liberal Democrats Party in the UK. On the other hand, the new party, the DPP, formed in 2005 after the general elections in 2004 and run an affective and glamorous campaign in 2009 was advised by campaign experts from Israel, South Africa and Zimbabwe. The MCP also had experts from South Africa and neighbouring Zambia and Kenya. What is observable from these results is the fact that over the years, advisers or experts/consultants have come from places like the US, the UK, Israel, Kenya, South Africa, Zimbabwe and neighbouring Tanzania and Zambia to advise on campaigns in Malawi. These advisers have had direct contacts with their American counterparts or have had their work influenced in some way by their work.

Table 1.0 shows the level of professionalisation of political parties represented in the National Assembly in Malawi. Results also show that campaigns in Malawi were professionalised. On the aspect of professionalisation of campaigns, this paper adopts the view by Stromback (2007) who defines professionalised political campaign as characterised by being permanent, although with varying intensity; by central campaign headquarters coordinating messages and management of the campaign; and by using expertise in analysing and reaching out to members, target groups and stakeholders, in analysing its own and competition weaknesses and strengths and making use of that knowledge, and in news management. Results further show low scores on presence and use of internal as well as external internet communication system and email sign-up or subscription lists for regular news updates/newsletters. One plausible explanation is the low usage of personal computers and internet connectivity throughout the country. According to internetworldstats.com, by late 2011, out of the estimated total population of 15 million people, Malawi had only 716,400 internet users representing a 4.5% uptake (BBC News, 2012). Hence parties had to use other means of communication with their officials and the electorate as opposed to a reliance on the internet or emails. Following a successful campaign period, the DPP secured 114 seats, followed by the MCP on 27, the UDF on 17 and AFORD, MAFUNDE and the MPP, one seat each. The rest of the members of parliament were elected to the National Assembly as independent candidates.

The UDF despite being most professionalised came third because its presidential candidate was rejected by the Malawi Electoral commission (MEC) during submission of nomination papers and that confused their supporters. Results also show the increased involvement of campaign professionals in

Malawian politics. Instead of the campaigns being short and decentralised, there is a shift towards being permanent in which experts such as pollsters and marketing consultants are playing key roles. This agrees with findings by Farrell (1996), and Farrell and Webb (2000) who observe that such is the trend the world over. It was also noted during interviews that there has been a rapid growth of media evidenced by the mushrooming of radio stations (both private and public) in Malawi. In 1994, at the dawn of multiparty politics the country had only 1 public radio station and no television. Television was only introduced in 1999. But as of 2009, there were 26 radio stations, targeting different communities and stakeholder groups.

TABLE 1
PROFESSIONALISED CAMPAIGN INDEX SCORES BY PARTIES IN MALAWI

| | Campaign Item | AFORD | DPP | MAFUNDE | MCP | MPP | UDF |
|----|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Use of campaign controlled opinion polling | 0 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 2 | Use of campaign controlled focus groups | 0 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 2 |
| 3 | Use of computerised databases | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 4 | Use of in-house and/or outside consultants in news management/PR | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 5 | Use of in-house and/or outside consultants in analysing public opinion | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 6 | Use of in-house and/or outside consultants in advertisements | 0 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| 7 | Use of in-house and/or outside consultants in voter segmentation | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 2 |
| 8 | Use of direct mail to target groups | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 9 | Use of direct mail to own members or campaign volunteers. | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| 10 | Use of telemarketing for contacting target groups. | 0 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 1 | 0 |
| 11 | Use of telemarketing for contacting own members or campaign volunteers. | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 12 | Conducting semi-independent research of (SWOT) own campaign | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 3 |
| 13 | Conducting opposition research | 1 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| 14 | Use of rapid rebuttal-unit | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 15 | Presence and use of an internal internet communication system | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 16 | Presence and use of an external internet communication system. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 17 | E-mail sign-up or subscription lists for regular news updates/news letters | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 18 | The Campaign being continuous | 1 | 3 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 3 |
| 19 | A centralised campaign headquarters coordinating management of campaign | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| | Total Score | 13 | 24 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 30 |

In the case of South Africa, it was noted through content analysis of Tom Lodge's (1995) article that the ANC borrowed an approach from Bill Clinton's campaign team, and convened a series of 'People's Forums' at which Nelson Mandela and other select leaders would arrive at local gatherings. The audience would be summoned through press invitations directed at specific groups: workers, teachers, women,

squatters and so forth. Here leaders would listen to the people (indeed, this was essentially the 'Hearing' phase of the ANC's campaign). Bertelsen (1996) supports this view by arguing that parties go to some length to portray themselves as listening and caring parties to the voters.

It was further noted through Bertelsen (1996) work that parties hired different agencies to help them during the campaign. For example, the ANC account was handled by Hunt Lascaris, advised by Frank Greer and Stan Greenberg, organisers of Clinton's successful 1992 presidential campaign. They suggested to the ANC to avoid negativity and stick to key issues, underlying principles and a clear, positive message. Their advice seems to have set the tone for the campaign in that it was assumed people will be looking for a distinct set of policies: 'even if you do not read or cannot read the details, you get the message: the ANC has a plan; it's serious' (Greenberg, 1994). On the other hand, she observes that the National Party (NP) advertising account was handled by Optimum Marketing Communications, the South African subsidiary of Saatchi and Saatchi. This she argues subjected the electorate to what was known as the "Battle of the Titans" in political marketing terms: as packagers of Bill Clinton wrestled for power with the marketers of Margaret Thatcher. Interestingly, the National Party – with its association with apartheid – was rebranded "The New National Party" to position it as a different party (BBC News 2005 and Independent online News (2005). She further observes that the Democratic Party (DP) advertising account was handled by The Jupiter Drawing Room and their campaign message was to portray themselves as a small, strong and principled, organisation, indeed a blameless party ('with no blood on their hands') who could protect the voters from abuse. She also observed that Mass Market Co-ordination was responsible for setting up the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) campaign ads. Nationwide they were few in number, and concentrated, due to Inkatha's strategy of withdrawal and then late re-entry into the process, in the last week of the campaign. Freedom Front's (FF) advertising campaign appears to have been handled internally by Communications academic Professor Pieter Mulder who is its current leader. The party is also known as Vryheidsfont (VF) due to its Afrikaner links.

Johnston (2005) has observed that the opposition Democratic Alliance (DA) moved much more quickly, openly and aggressively than the ANC to develop the kind of focused media and campaign strategies characteristic of mediated politics and 'Americanisation'. Using focus groups to direct targeted advertising, and media strategies that combine rapid response rebuttal with self-conscious image building around its leadership, it has successfully remobilised whites and other minorities by appealing to them as consumers, rather than on the basis of any deeper or longer-lasting attachment.

Agiza Hlongwane (2009) writing for The Star under the heading 'South African politicians innovate to win voters', showed how parties have turned to technology, T-shirts and taxis to get their messages across: even water bottles, bibs and CD pouches were branded in party colours by the ANC and IFP. She observed that Thabo Mbeki had emerged as the most popular South African politician on social networking website Facebook after Nelson Mandela: "It seems South African politicians have sought to emulate Barack Obama in using technology such as SMSes, e-mail and social networks to drum up support" (Hlongwane, 2009, p.8). Sibusiso Ngolwa (2009) writing on how the "Obama bug 'bites the ANC'" commented about the song the ANC campaign had produced which drew parallels between Mr Obama's and Mr Zuma's humble backgrounds. Siyabonga Mkhwanazi (2009) observed that posters are still a vital communication tool during campaigns in South Africa while Kim Hawkey(2010) comments about the spiralling costs of campaigns bringing to the fore the fact that the ANC hired the services of advertising agency Ogilvy for their 2009 campaigns and were failing to settle the bill.

Given this evidence, there is little doubt about Americanisation of campaigns in South Africa, though the performance of political parties during elections cannot solely or even mainly be attributed to this Americanisation. There are other underlying factors which would need to be explored. As noted by De Klerk (2010), disappointingly, voters continue to cast their votes overwhelmingly according to race and not according to political principles or their satisfaction with the performance of a government. This, he observes, will mean that the Democratic Alliance (DA), despite its energetic leader – Hellen Zille – will find it difficult to increase its support much above the 20% represented by the white, coloured and Asian minorities in South Africa. On the basis of these findings, it can therefore be concluded that political campaigns in South Africa have been professionalised. Parties have used professionals both externally

and as well in-house in planning and managing their campaigns which is a mark of Americanised campaigns.

According to the BBC News (2012), South Africa is the continent's major media player, and its broadcasters and press reflect the diversity of its people. It has established state-run and commercial TV broadcasting nationally, and hundreds of thousands of viewers subscribe to satellite and cable. South Africa-based Multi-Choice markets satellite pay-TV in dozens of African countries. There were 6.8 million internet users at the end of 2010 – nearly 14% of the population (via internetworldstats.com). The use of mobile phones to access internet is driving growth in web access. Local instant messaging service Mxit is the most popular social media platform followed by Facebook. YouTube is available in Afrikaans and Zulu.

DISCUSSION

From these findings, it is important to note that the growth in the use of campaign professionals has been closely related, not coincidentally, to Malawi and South Africa's process of democratisation (and therefore to the increased competition between parties) and the emergence of the new media system. In spite of the evidence presented in this paper, it is important to note that "Americanisation" is not only a consequence of internal structural changes (modernisation for example, media development, increased economic development and technological development) that these two countries underwent in the last decade and a half, nor does it imply progressive homogenisation of campaign practices. The Americanisation of Southern African campaigns is evidenced by the incorporation of political marketing and professionalised and media-centred campaigns which is also a consequence of transnational diffusion (Plasser and Plasser, 2002:17) and imply a direct imitation (...), the selective importation and adoption (...) or the adaptation of American practices to an existing set of practices, assimilating "new modes of operation in older ones." (Blumler and Gurevitch, 2001 in Plasser and Plasser, 2002:20).

Malawi's and South African's internal factors were important causes of the change to use American campaign techniques; however the process also incorporated diffusion. Modernisation theorists claim that structural changes at the macro-level (changes in media, political and social structures) have caused adaptive behaviour at the micro-level (parties, candidates and journalists) resulting in gradual modifications of traditional styles and strategies of political communication (Plasser and Plasser, 2002:17). Supporters of the transnational diffusion theory proffer two models, the shopping model and adoption model. Whereas the adoption model leads to standardisation of campaign practices, the shopping model leads to hybridisation of campaign practices. "It is clear that there is a massive global interest in US campaigns." (Scammell, 1997:1). The US is both the pioneer, "the media revolution took place first in the US" (Plasser and Plasser, 2002:1) and the current leader "the US leads the world in the development and application of high technology tools for campaigning" in campaign techniques and strategies, which implies that many political parties and candidates from other countries including Malawi and South Africa, can copy and adapt its models. They do this to conform to what is taking place elsewhere in the world.

Also and in spite of the evidence for the growing incorporation of US-style campaign practices and techniques in Malawi and South Africa from 1994 to 2009, Americanisation is not overwhelming in these countries. "The diffusion of the US-American campaign and marketing techniques is not a linear process resulting in uniform standardisation of international campaign practices." In fact Americanisation was adapted to the country's specific context, resulting in a hybridisation of campaign styles. This agrees with the observation by Plasser and Plasser, (2002:19). As evidence of this, traditional campaign styles were still present in Malawi and South Africa. For example, traditional dances, imbidzos (a meeting or gathering called by Zulu elders), door-to-door canvassing, public rallies were evidence of campaigns run in the African way. Even in the highly sophisticated (or Americanised) campaign of 2009 general elections, it is important to note both the DPP of Malawi and the ANC of South Africa used both styles of campaigning. In fact public rallies and traditional dances formed a dominant feature of the campaign strategy which also proved effective in mobilising the electorate.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND PRACTICE

Political communication in Malawi and South Africa has changed since the last 18 years (when both countries became democracies) and has been swept in the direction of what is labelled as “Americanisation”. The 1994, 1999, 2004 and 2009 general elections in Malawi and South Africa bear witness to this process of expanding of US-like practices in campaigns, specifically in relation to political marketing, professionalisation and media-centredness. The increasing use, impact and importance of polls, consultants, internet and television are evidence of this change.

In the first place this change can be explained by internal conditions. In Malawi and South Africa, Americanisation of campaigns was closely intertwined with very structural changes. These changed the countries’ political, social, economic and media systems and transformed closed authoritarian regimes into open liberal democracies. These processes brought with them an increase in political competition, expansion and autonomy of the media, the decline of partisan identification and increased volatility, which among other changes, facilitated the incorporation of US-style campaign practices.

However important, this Americanisation process cannot be solely explained by the on-going structural changes in politics, society and media system (Negrine and Papathanassopoulos et al, 1996 in Plasser and Plasser, 2002:16) (modernisation); the transnational diffusion of these practices and their local adoption and adaptation is also important. Furthermore, Americanisation is not a completely overwhelming trend that ends with standardisation of campaigns although in Malawi and South Africa we can see an important expansion of American style campaigning, this does not mean that these practices have totally replaced others. In fact Americanisation supplements country-specific situations (hybridisation). However, in adopting these new approaches, politicians are still conscious of the local needs and cultural norms, as one politician from Malawi summarised it for us as follows: “We are aware of the pressure our western friends are putting on us to change our campaigns to look like theirs. They want us to be in fast-track mode which can be dangerous for Malawi. We will get there. Just give us the time because we need to respect our culture as well”. (CD2)

Traditional dances, imbidzos, canvassing, rallies, door to door campaigns are clear evidence of this hybridisation. It is clear that internal contexts of these two countries are fertile grounds for the adoption of these practices.

These results provide useful knowledge and insight to international political marketing consultants and advisers to design-country specific strategies taking into account the media environment and other country-specific factors. Further research ideas stemming from this include the inclusion of other countries in the Southern African region so as to make the findings of this research of uniform application to the entire region and continent.

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