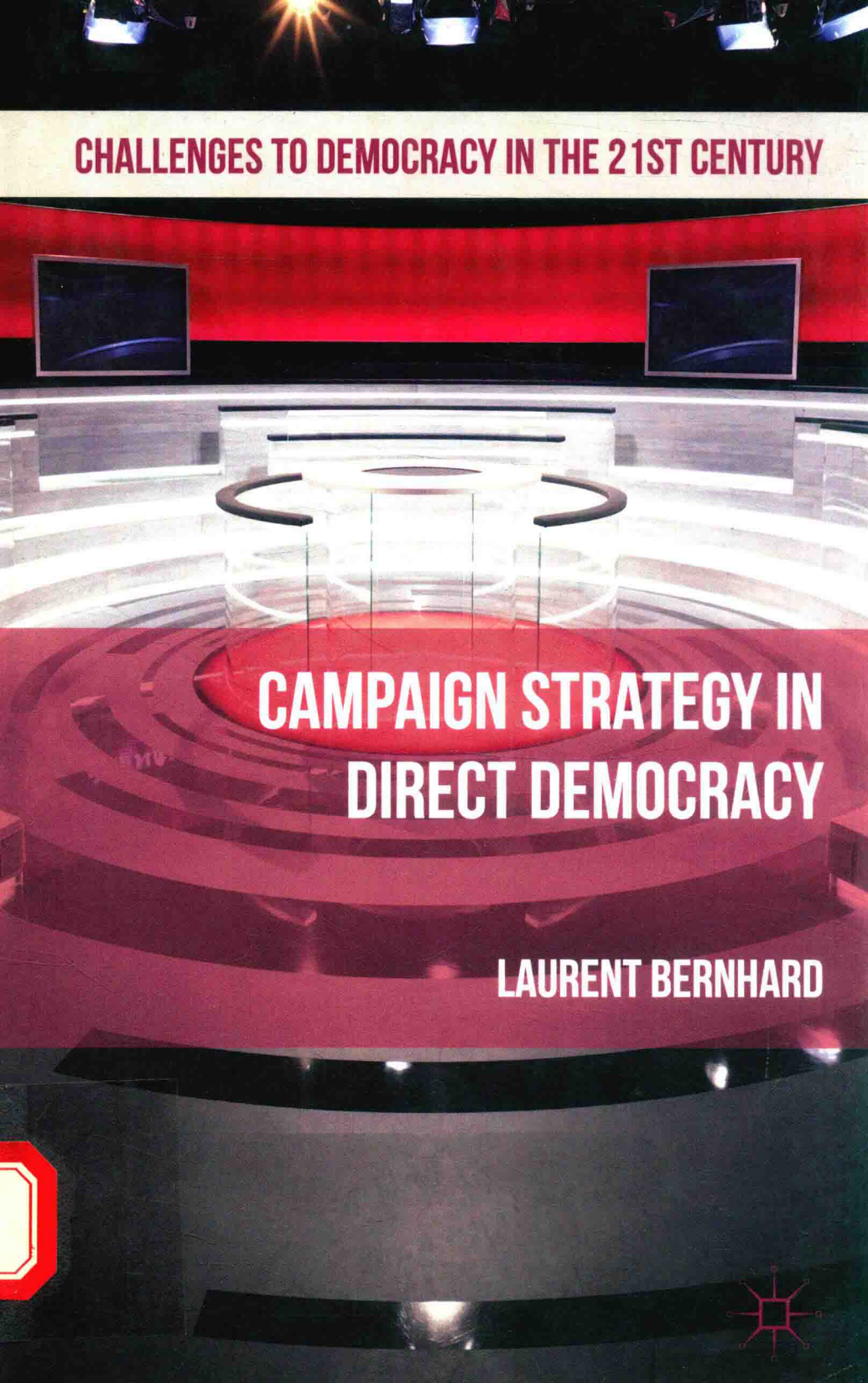
CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY



CAMPAIGN STRATEGY IN DIRECT DEMOCRACY

LAURENT BERNHARD

Campaign Strategy in Direct Democracy

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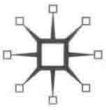

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ACF	Advocacy coalition framework
AHV	Old-age pension scheme
AUNS	Campaign for an Independent and Neutral Switzerland
BAG	Federal Office of Public Health
BFM	Federal Office for Migration
BSV	Federal Social Insurance Office
C2D	Centre for Research on Direct Democracy
CONCOR	Convergence of iterated correlations
CVP	Christian Democrats
EEA	European Economic Area
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
EJPD	Federal Justice and Police Department
EU	European Union
FDP	Free Democrats
FHI	Federal Health Insurance
FMH	Swiss Medical Association
FRC	French-speaking Federation of Consumers
GASP	Group Against Smoking Pollution
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
Juso	Young Socialists
MPF	Popular Family Movement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OLS	Ordinary least squares
PdA	Communists (*Partei der Arbeit*)
PR	Proportional representation
PRA	Parental Rights Amendment
SBV	Swiss Farmers' Association
SGB	Swiss Federation of Trade Unions
SGV	Small Business Association
Sifa	Security for all (Sicherheit für alle)
SMEs	Small and medium enterprises
SNB	Swiss National Bank
SP	Social Democrats

SPY	Swiss Political Yearbook (*Année Politique Suisse*)
SRG	Swiss Broadcasting Corporation
SVP	Swiss People's Party
UN	United Nations
VCS	Association Transport and Environment
VIF	Variance inflation factor
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature
ZSL	Centre for an Autonomous Life

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1
Introduction

Democracy is best described as a struggle over opposing ideals and interests. According to Schattschneider (1975 [1960]: 135), competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process. From this point of view, the citizens' judgements appear as a reaction to the terms proposed by the political elites. The 'political supply side' approach recognizes that the relevant information is to a considerable extent controlled by the political actors. Manin (1995: 290) has formulated this vision of democracy most pointedly by stating that, in politics, there is no demand which is independent of supply. Political conflicts are organized by collective actors (governments, political parties, economic interest groups, and citizen groups) who set the agenda by providing the policy options. They also promote the particular problem definitions, recommendations, and causal interpretations for the conflict at stake. In addition, political actors mobilize the citizens in order to gain support for their own favoured policy option. Given that citizens' preferences are incomplete and sometimes incoherent, members of the political elites enjoy discrete room to manoeuvre, providing them with a substantial degree of autonomy. Therefore, political communication adopted by political actors can be considered of major importance in the democratic decision-making process.

In the last few decades, political scientists have expressed an increasing interest in the role played by political campaigns. Campaigns can be conceived of as series of communication events conducted by political actors in order to influence the citizens' votes in the run-up of collective decision-making processes (Nimmo 1970: 10). The study of campaigns has long been neglected in political science. It was taken for granted that campaigns only exert minimal effects. Most outcomes

could be explained by factors exogenous to the campaign environment (Lazarsfeld et al. 1968 [1948], Finkel 1993). More recent studies have challenged this conventional wisdom by providing evidence for substantial and systematic campaign effects on citizens' voting behaviour (see Schmitt-Beck & Farrell 2002). As a consequence, some doubts have been raised on the prevalence of the minimal effects paradigm. Since higher volatility entails less predictable outcomes, short-term effects are gaining in importance. Indeed, Iyengar & Simon (2000) maintain that campaigns do matter and can be pivotal. Therefore, the success of political actors depends increasingly on their campaign strategies. Most studies, however, focus on the information processing of citizens and tend to neglect the messages and activities of political actors participating in campaigns. Only in recent years have scholars increased their interest in these strategies. The focus on the political supply side is of primary importance, as the study of campaigning has long been neglected in political science (Farrell 1996, Schmitt-Beck & Farrell 2002). In Rohrschneider's (2002: 308) words, 'campaign decisions are an area too important for political scientists to ignore'.

This study coincides with renewed scholarly interest in campaigns by examining the strategies political actors pursue in the context of direct-democratic campaigns. Referendums and initiatives are considered the most democratic decision-making mechanisms, since the people's will is directly translated into law. They can be regarded as institutional devices of conflict expansion, as they allow for broadening the political debate by moving it from the parliamentary to the public arena. Whereas the actors who enjoy a majority on a given issue prefer remaining in the confidentiality of the former, it is the losers who tend to push for a public trial. In other words, challengers and outsiders are the driving forces in promoting direct-democratic decisions. However, once a given proposal is submitted to vote, the political elites as a whole face a strong incentive to 'go public' (Kernell 1997). Participating in direct-democratic campaigns is the most appropriate means by which they can exert an impact on the outcome of ballot propositions. Since citizens have the final say, political actors will try to orchestrate direct-democratic campaigns to their benefits. In structuring the terms of the choice and in attempting to influence the opinion-formation of the citizens, the political elites are the driving force in the processes of direct-democratic campaigns (Budge 1996, Kriesi 2005, Hänggli 2011).

Direct-democratic contests are characterized by three major features. First, they are narrow in scope in the sense that they refer to specific issues. Therefore, the campaign communication is much more focused

than in elections in which, at least theoretically, the whole range of issues can be addressed. Second, direct-democratic campaigns give rise to the confrontation of two opposing camps. This is due to the bipolar format of direct-democratic votes: propositions can either be accepted or rejected. While the supporters advocate for a change, the opponents wish to retain it. Third, direct-democratic campaigns tend to attract a large number of organizations, stemming from different backgrounds. Besides the government and parties, various economic and citizen groups are likely to take part in direct-democratic campaigns. Coordinating the campaign efforts of a multitude of actors from various stripes can be regarded as a challenging task, however.

As will be exposed in the following section of this chapter, the literature on direct-democratic campaigning is very sparse. The primary motivation for this analysis arises from the fact that little systematic research has been undertaken so far to understand the strategic decisions political actors face in direct-democratic campaigns. This contrasts with the considerable body of literature dealing with public-oriented strategies in the context of elections. There is now a range of cumulative insights about the role played by message selection strategies (Petrocik 1996), negative campaigning (Lau et al. 1999 for a comprehensive review), targeting (Burden 2005, Shaw 1999b), campaign appearances (Shaw 1999a), and the allocation of resources (Erikson & Palfrey 2000, Stratmann 2005). However, it seems that political scientists have been limited in their ability to move beyond the analysis of single aspects. There is an obvious lack of theoretical approaches and empirical studies taking into account several strategic components. Hence, my second motivation is to develop a theoretical framework that, in very general terms, aims at identifying the crucial strategic choices political actors face when involved in political campaign contexts. A concise overview is provided in Chapter 2.

State of the art

As a consequence of the worldwide rise of referendums and initiatives, research on direct democracy has intensified in recent years. There is now an impressive amount of empirical work in this field. When reviewing the scholarly contributions (Lupia & Matsusaka 2004, Smith & Tolbert 2004, Kirchgässner et al. 1999), it becomes apparent, however, that the political supply side has only received little attention so far. Most studies are either concerned with the citizens' opinion formation processes or with the effects of direct-democratic institutions. The first

strand of literature tends to examine voting behaviour rather than campaigns. Scholars have devoted considerable attention to the ways in which citizens make up their minds. The most comprehensive study in this regard is the analysis of Kriesi (2005) of 148 proposals that were submitted to vote in Switzerland between 1981 and 1999. As far as the second category is concerned, there is a range of cumulative insights about the mostly favourable role played by direct democracy on various phenomena, such as economic performance, tax morale and subjective well-being (see Kirchgässner et al. 1999, Lupia & Matsusaka 2004). Compared to other sub-fields of political science, relatively few scholars have studied the inner workings of direct-democratic campaigns (Smith 1998). In other words, a lot of questions on how these campaigns are run have not been systematically considered yet. In the following, I shall review the scholarly contributions pertaining to the issue of direct-democratic campaigning. This survey is based on an extensive search of the literature. To identify the relevant contributions, I followed three steps. First, I looked at the empirical scholarly work on direct democracy. Second, from this body of literature I then selected those that address the role of the political elites. Third, I focused on the analyses which deal with strategic choices of political actors.[1] In so doing, I obtained 16 contributions. Table 1.1 provides an overview of the studies published in this domain. They are arranged according to the country examined. As is obvious, most analyses on direct-democratic campaigning refer to the USA in general and to its Western part in particular where referendums and initiatives are pervasive. I shall first present the contributions pertaining to the USA. Subsequently, I will focus on the remaining four European studies. Three of them pertain to the Swiss context and the final one to Liechtenstein. Generally, the analyses pertaining to the US context address two kinds of strategic decisions. The first refers to the 'messages' campaigners tend to emphasize in order to win over citizens.

The second area of interest relates to what I propose to call the 'means' dimension (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, scholars deal with the amount of resources political actors use during their campaign involvement. Particular attention is devoted to the role of money. On the other hand, they often look at the mode of campaigning by focusing on the degree of professionalization political actors adopt during their campaign involvement. Manweller (2005) is the only study that does not fit into this classification. It focuses on the challenges posed by ideologically heterogeneous coalitions. The analysis is based on documents and in-depth interviews of 33 groups that placed 49 initiatives

Table 1.1 Overview of studies about direct-democratic campaigning

Author(s)	Country	Number of campaigns	Institution(s)	Number of issues	Number of opposed camps
Alexander (2002)	USA	2	Initiatives	1	2
Brown & Paul (1999)	USA	1	Referendum	1	2
Carp (2004)	USA	1	Initiative	1	2
Givel & Glantz (2000)	USA	2	Initiatives	1	2
Guber (2001)	USA	2	Initiatives	1	2
King & Catlett-King (2007)	USA	1	Referendum	1	2
Manweller (2005)	USA	49	Initiatives	Many	1
Smith (1998)	USA	3	Initiatives	1	1
Smith (1999)	USA	1	Initiative	1	1
Smith (2004)	USA	6	Initiatives	1	1
Smith (2005)	USA	1	Referendum	1	2
Smith & Herrington (2000)	USA	1	Initiative	1	2
Epple-Gass (1988)	Switzerland	8	Initiatives	1	1
Kobi (1998)	Switzerland	25	Referendums	Many	2
Gilland Lutz & Marquis (2006)	Switzerland	3	I. & R.	1	2
Marcinkowski (2007)	Liechtenstein	1	Referendum	1	1

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