Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy

An International Study
of Innovations in Electoral
Campaigning and Their
Consequences

Edited by
David L. Swanson and Paolo Mancini

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Series Foreword

Those of us from the discipline of communication studies have long believed that communication is more important than all other fields of inquiry. In several other forums, I have argued that the essence of politics is "talk" or human interaction.[1] Such interaction may be formal or informal, verbal or nonverbal, public or private, but it is always persuasive, forcing us consciously or subconsciously to interpret, to evaluate, and to act. Communication is the vehicle for human action.

From this perspective, it is not surprising that Aristotle recognized the natural kinship of politics and communication in his writings *Politics* and *Rhetoric*. In the former, he establishes that humans are "political beings [who] alone of the animals [are] furnished with the faculty of language."[2] And in the latter, he begins his systematic analysis of discourse by proclaiming that "rhetorical study, in its strict sense, is concerned with the modes of persuasion."[3] Thus, it was recognized over 2,300 years ago that politics and communication go hand in hand because they are essential parts of human nature.

Back in 1981, Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders proclaimed that political communication was an emerging field.[4] Although its origin, as noted, dates back centuries, a "self-consciously cross-disciplinary" focus began in the late 1950s. Thousands of books and articles later, colleges and universities offer a variety of graduate and undergraduate coursework in the area in such diverse departments as communication, mass communication, journalism, political science, and sociology.[5] In Nimmo and Sanders' early assessment, the "key areas of inquiry" included rhetorical analysis, propaganda analysis, attitude change studies, voting studies, government and the news media, functional and systems analyses, technological changes, media technologies, campaign techniques, and research techniques.[6] In a survey of the state of the field in 1983, the same authors and Lynda Kaid found additional, more specific areas of concerns such as the presidency, political polls, public opinion, debates, and advertising to name a few.[7] Since the first study, they also noted a shift away from the rather strict behavioral approach.

A decade later, Dan Nimmo and David Swanson argued that "political communication has developed some identity as a more or less distinct domain of

scholarly work."[8] The scope and concerns of the area have further expanded
to include critical theories and cultural studies. While there is no precise defi-
nition, method, or disciplinary home of the area of inquiry, its primary do-
main is the role, processes, and effects of communication within the context of
politics broadly defined.

In 1985, the editors of *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984* noted that "more
things are happening in the study, teaching, and practice of political commu-
nication than can be captured within the space limitations of the relatively
few publications available."[9] In addition, they argued that the backgrounds of
"those involved in the field [are] so varied and pluralist in outlook and ap-
proach . . . it [is] a mistake to adhere slavishly to any set format in shaping the
content."[10] And more recently, Nimmo and Swanson called for "ways of over-
coming the unhappy consequences of fragmentation within a framework that
respects, encourages, and benefits from diverse scholarly commitments, agen-
das, and approaches."[11]

In agreement with these assessments of the area and with gentle encour-
agement, Praeger established the Praeger Series in Political Communication.
The series is open to all qualitative and quantitative methodologies as well as
contemporary and historical studies. The key to characterizing the studies in
the series is the focus on communication variables or activities within a politi-
cal context or dimension. As of this writing, nearly forty volumes have been
published and there are numerous impressive works forthcoming. Scholars
from the disciplines of communication, history, journalism, political science,
and sociology have participated in the series.

<div align="right">Robert E. Denton, Jr.</div>

NOTES

1. See Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Symbolic Dimensions of the American Presidency*
(Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1982); Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Gary
Woodward, *Political Communication in America* (New York: Praeger, 1985; 2nd ed., 1990);
Robert E. Denton, Jr., and Dan Han, *Presidential Communication* (New York: Praeger,
1986); and Robert E. Denton, Jr., *The Primetime Presidency of Ronald Reagan* (New York:
Praeger, 1988).

2. Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle*, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford Uni-
versity Press, 1970), p. 5.

3. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, trans. Rhys Roberts (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 22.

4. Dan Nimmo and Keith Sanders, "Introduction: The Emergence of Political Com-
munication as a Field," in *Handbook of Political Communication*, ed. Dan Nimmo and
Keith Sanders (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1981), pp. 11–36.

5. Ibid., p. 15.

6. Ibid., pp. 17–27.

7. Keith Sanders, Lynda Kaid, and Dan Nimmo, eds., *Political Communication Year-
book: 1984* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1985), pp. 283–308.

8. Dan Nimmo and David Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication: Be-
yond the Voter Persuasion Paradigm," in *New Directions in Political Communication*,
ed. David Swanson and Dan Nimmo (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1990), p. 8.

9. Sanders, Kaid, and Nimmo, *Political Communication Yearbook: 1984*, p. xiv.

10. Ibid.

11. Nimmo and Swanson, "The Field of Political Communication," p. 11.

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Politics, Media, and Modern Democracy: Introduction

Paolo Mancini and David L. Swanson

Election campaigns are critical periods in the lives of democracies. They select decision makers, shape policy, distribute power, and provide venues for debate and socially approved expressions of conflict about factional grievances and issues, national problems and directions, and international agendas and activities. Elections can accomplish each of these goals in different measure in relation to the particular form of government and political party system existing in a given country at a given point in time.[1] Symbolically, campaigns legitimate democratic government and political leaders, uniting voters and candidates in displays of civic piety and rituals of national renewal. The shared values, history, and aspirations celebrated in election campaigns are perhaps the clearest expression of a democracy's continually evolving mythology and perception of its own essential character. Both the practical outcomes and symbolic meaning of campaigns are important to the health of democracies; if practical outcomes seem to contradict symbolic commitments, or if symbolic commitments ring hollow, the usual result is public cynicism and disaffection with government. In both pragmatic and symbolic terms, campaigns are a microcosm that reflects and shapes a nation's social, economic, cultural, and, of course, political life.

The manner in which democracies conduct their election campaigns is in some ways as important as the results of the voting. The concept of democracy rests, after all, on a view of appropriate procedures for selecting representatives and making political decisions. Governments are regarded as democratic not because their rhetoric describes them as such, but because their manner of choosing decision makers is consistent with some recognizable conception of democracy. In addition, campaign practices are important

because of their influence on the conduct, responsiveness, and effectiveness of government. Among other things, the way in which a democracy conducts its election campaigns can empower or silence particular segments of the electorate, achieve or disrupt a balance of power among institutions of government, support or undercut the strength of political parties, and foster public support or alienation from government.

In recent years, campaign practices have been changing rapidly in many democracies. These changes have often been the subject of intense scrutiny and debate in the countries in which they have occurred. However, the broader question of whether there are patterns and common implications in the changes taking place simultaneously in different countries has received less attention. Scholars have been hard pressed to catalogue the rapid changes in campaigning in various countries, although a modest comparative literature on the subject is beginning to emerge (e.g., Butler & Ranney, 1992b). Growing out of this young literature is what might appear to be a curious phenomenon: Around the world, many of the recent changes in election campaigning share common themes despite great differences in the political cultures, histories, and institutions of the countries in which they have occurred. Increasingly, we find such common practices as political commercials, candidates selected in part for the appealing image they project on television, technical experts advising candidates on strategies and voters' sentiments, media professionals hired to produce compelling campaign materials, mounting campaign expenses, and mass media moving to center stage in campaigns.

The rapid pace of change in how democracies conduct their elections and the apparent similarities in the kinds of changes taking place raise important questions about the nature and future of modern democracy. In countries that have the longest experience with them, the campaign practices mentioned previously have been cited by some as leading to very significant and not always anticipated changes in political institutions, the effectiveness of government, and government's relation to the people. In the United States, for example, such innovations have been linked by some analysts to ineffectual political parties, unresponsive government, failure to address serious national problems, and other ills (e.g., Bennett, 1992a; Jamieson, 1992). Will adoption of these innovations lead to similar concerns in countries that are only now beginning to implement them fully? Or can such innovations be adapted to complement and support the host country's indigenous political culture and institutions? Does the pattern of apparent similarities between countries suggest that, around the world, democracies are developing along a common path? What influences might cause such seeming convergence in widely dissimilar contexts? Or are the similarities more apparent than real? Do superficial similarities mask profound national differences? In short, what can these developments tell us about the practice and path of modern democracy as, caught up in rapidly accelerating changes, democratic government in all its variations alternately strides and lurches into the post–Cold War era?

Our aims in this volume are to explore recent changes taking place in how democracies conduct their election campaigns, to test how well the appearance of similarity holds up under close examination of developments in different countries, and to gauge what the apparent similarities may reveal about

common influences and processes shaping the evolution of democracies around the world. We endeavor to place these changes within a framework that explains why apparently similar developments may occur in otherwise quite different national contexts. We attempt to identify the general pattern of change and the possibilities for variation within that pattern. Throughout the analysis, we hope to locate the causes of changing campaign practices in more general social, economic, cultural, political, and technological developments. It is in the context of these developments, we believe, that new practices can best be understood, their significance and likely consequences assayed, and questions about national similarities and differences pursued most fruitfully. In undertaking this analysis, we are keenly aware of the risk of self-fulfilling hypotheses that might lead us to overlook the special structures and elements characterizing the mass media and political systems of each country and to attribute unwarranted significance to superficial similarities (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990). We shall therefore be cautious in pointing out common characteristics, and in every case shall try to be attentive to how similar practices find different applications in each context.

In a larger sense, beyond our specific subject matter, this book is about democracy and change. It appears at a time when those two terms seem welded together. Around the world, we see new democracies struggling to take root, as in the countries of the former Soviet Union, and older democracies that have returned to life after limited periods of authoritarian rule, such as Brazil and Chile. When hopeful new democrats look to the established democracies, they find not only inspiration and guidance, but also manifestations of ferment and calls for reform: declining confidence in political institutions and leaders in most of the major Western democracies, voters overturning the long-standing political order in countries such as Japan and Spain, the traditional system of proportional representation being challenged and restricted in some Western European countries, concern about whether government is capable of acting effectively to address trenchant problems in the United States, and so on. Democracy always has been a system of government that is keyed to fostering and managing change. Democracy as practiced in the United States in the 1990s is dramatically different in many ways from American democracy in the 1950s, and the same could be said for other established democracies. During the last few years, however, change has occurred so rapidly on so many fronts that it is difficult to have much confidence that we understand very well what is going on and where it is leading. Can close examination of changing election campaign practices in many different countries shed light on broader issues of change and transformation? As we examine developments and their implications on the smaller stage of election campaigning, many themes of the larger drama of modern democracy will necessarily come into play.

OUR APPROACH TO THE SUBJECT

Election campaigns are complicated subjects to study. What happens within them reflects, in each campaign, a singular coming together of history, opportunity, circumstance, tradition, personality, political culture, and other

things. No campaign is exactly like any other. Certainly, no nation's election campaigns are exactly like those of any other nation. And the methods and practices used in election campaigns are changing constantly. How might one begin, then, to come to grips with this complex and continually changing subject, and do so in a comparative manner that looks beyond national boundaries without overlooking national differences in the process?

"Americanization" and "Modernization" as Working Hypotheses

In order to provide a starting point for comparing campaign practices in different countries, we believe the "Americanization" hypothesis is useful. In brief, the hypothesis holds that campaigning in democracies around the world is becoming more and more Americanized 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 Americanization suggests itself as an easy characterization of this pattern of innovation (e.g., Elebash, 1984). The appropriateness of the term is contested, however, by some who argue that surface similarities obscure important national adaptions and variations (e.g., Waisbord, 1993). And, of course, not all recent changes in campaigning in every country of interest represent adoption of methods and practices that emerged first in the United States. We regard the matter as an open question, and offer Americanization not as a conclusion, but 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 electoral change, as long as care is taken not to overlook national variations, adaptations, and deviations from the general pattern, as Schou (1992) recommends in a related context concerning Americanization as a more general cultural phenomenon.

Despite its flaws, our use of the term Americanization reflects some important facts that are relevant to recent changes in election campaigns around the world. The results of U.S. elections may have important consequences for many countries, which creates in those countries great interest in following U.S. campaigns. However, it often happens that, as persons in other countries follow the progress of a U.S. campaign, their attention shifts from the candidates' goals and policies which can have serious effects abroad to the way in which the election campaign itself is conducted. Seen from the perspective of other countries, U.S. campaigns are in many ways striking, curious, and strange. Such spectacles of the 1992 U.S. presidential campaign as billionaire businessman Ross Perot's on-again, off-again candidacy unconnected to any political party and the journalistic attention given to candidate Bill Clinton's marital fidelity do not easily find parallels in many other countries.

Because of widespread interest in them, U.S. campaigns receive extensive news coverage around the world, nearly equivalent to the coverage given to domestic stories (Gurevitch & Blumler, 1990). Information about U.S. campaigns received from news coverage has been supplemented by popular cultural materials. Popular films about U.S. political campaigning are now part of everybody's imagination: *The Candidate, Nashville,* and *Power* have all helped

to create the myth of the figures and professions associated with the U.S. political campaign.

Knowledge of new campaign practices developed in the United States has also been spread to other countries through wide dissemination of technical information. Great numbers of politicians, public-relations personnel, and other interested persons from many countries have visited the United States to study and report firsthand on election campaigns.[2] In addition, the publication of books and manuals on the subject has helped to spread U.S. campaign methods and expertise to other countries.[3] These works have helped especially to support the professionalization of political campaigning in many countries along U.S. lines, in which technical experts in mass media, opinion polling, fund-raising, and campaign strategy are regarded as essential to effective campaigning. Professionalization has been further supported by the frequent involvement of U.S. political consultants in electoral campaigns in other countries.[4] The export of new campaign practices to other countries also reflects the more general, central role the United States has played in development and diffusion of mass-media communication. The United States occupies a pivotal position in today's interlinked, global networks of mass communication and information (see Fisher, 1987; Friedland, 1992; Wallis & Baran, 1990). The United States has long been the pacesetter for innovations in mass communication and campaign practices around the world, inventing new media, strategies, models, and structures. This is particularly clear in the case of the internationalization of U.S. advertising firms (Anderson, 1984; Kaynak, 1989). In 1988, foreign billings exceeded domestic billings of U.S. advertising agencies for the first time (Frazer, 1990). Acting within a field very close to that of election campaigns, the increasingly global reach of the U.S. advertising firms has served as a vehicle for spreading adoption and adaptation of U.S. practices in other countries.

One effect of the dissemination of information about U.S. campaign techniques, both through popular sources (news, popular culture) and technical sources (campaign manuals, firsthand observation of U.S. methods), has been to create a mythology of the great power of U.S. election campaign practices. Naturally, many politicians and political operatives in other countries have sought to take advantage of new, powerful-seeming U.S. campaign practices by importing them for use in their own countries, as in the early case of political advertising.

The term "Americanization" will be useful as our initial reference point, provided it is understood in a particular, restricted sense. Readers may have encountered the term, most often in debates about cultural imperialism and whether the United States exerts undue cultural influence over other countries. Although the question of cultural influence is an important aspect of our subject, the question is a very complex one that concerns topics far beyond campaign practices; accordingly, we shall not consider here the question of cultural imperialism per se.[5] Rather, we use the term Americanization to refer descriptively to particular types and elements of election campaigns and professional activities connected with them that were first developed in the United States and are now being applied and adapted in various ways in

other countries. Hence, spread of these elements has naturally been described as Americanizing political campaigns in other countries. In conceiving of Americanization, we do not mean to imply that these processes have taken place everywhere or always in the same ways with the same consequences or the same intensity; indeed, one of our major concerns will be to understand and account for differences between countries in the extent and ways the techniques we are interested in have been adopted. Nor do we mean to suggest in any way that Americanization is necessarily a desirable model for electioneering in democracies (indeed, this model is more deplored than celebrated in the United States) or that it accurately describes the course of transformations that have occurred in other countries. The latter issue is, in fact, the question we investigate in this volume.

Our concerns in this volume are not limited to the use of particular campaign techniques. Rather, we believe that campaign practices are worth examining, in part as an entry point to considering fundamental changes that may be occurring in democracies around the world. We hypothesize that adoption of Americanized campaign methods may reflect a wider, more general process that is producing changes in many societies, changes which are difficult to attribute to a single cause and which go far beyond politics and communication. Following several theoretical hypotheses (Giddens, 1990; Murdock, 1993; Tomlinson, 1994), we call this more general process "modernization."[6]

Thus, we are interested in Americanization, the export and local adaptation of particular campaign techniques, and in modernization, the more general and fundamental process of change that we hypothesize leads to adoption of these techniques in different national contexts. Most especially, we are interested in the relationship between Americanization and modernization. In that relationship, we believe, lie the keys to understanding the causes, significance, and implications of changing campaign methods and practices.

Innovations in election campaigns over the last few years that resemble practices developed first in the United States result fundamentally, we believe, from transformations in the social structure and form of democracy in countries where the innovations have taken place. These transformations are part of the modernization process: The more advanced is the process of modernization in a country, the more likely we are to find innovations in campaigning being adopted and adapted. We cannot discuss modernization in detail here; that would require another volume, no doubt a very long one. Nevertheless, we believe it is important to point out those elements of the modernization process which are most closely related to election campaigning.

National Data and Comparative Analysis

Our approach focuses on detailed analyses of electoral changes that have occurred in a diverse group of countries. The countries that will be examined are Argentina, Germany, Israel, Italy, Poland, Russia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela. These countries were selected to present vivid contrasts along a number of dimensions that we hope will reveal the advance and variety of campaign innovations, and their

adaptations and consequences in differing contexts. The sample includes countries with long traditions of ideologically based voting and countries where ideology has been less important. Both parliamentary and presidential systems are represented. Within parliamentary systems, the sample includes genuine multiparty systems and systems where only two or three dominant parties compete for power. Some of the youngest and oldest democracies are included, along with a mix of more traditional and more modernized societies. Some of the countries to be studied are found at the leading edge of campaign innovations, others at the trailing edge. The world's most technologically advanced national media systems are represented, as are less advanced systems, and various patterns of media structure and ownership are found in the sample. Also found are countries that closely regulate campaign techniques and countries that do less to control campaign practices. By maximizing variation along dimensions such as these, we hope to get a comprehensive picture of patterns of electoral change and their causes and consequences in various contexts.

The volume will progress through a series of chapters that each examine, in detail, the particular experiences of a single country concerning electoral change. In this way, the analysis of each country will give due attention to the unique aspects of that country's situation and campaign practices. These chapters provide the rich data stressing national differences which any comparative analysis must take into account. The explicit comparative analysis will be offered in a concluding chapter that, among other things, assesses the merits and limitations of the unitary Americanization hypothesis in light of the practices and unique aspects of electoral campaigning in the countries that have been examined. Within the comparative analysis, we also hope to gauge how Americanized practices have been mingled with and superimposed over previous practices and models, leading to new adaptations and combinations that differ in important ways from the U.S. model. Finally, the comparative analysis will offer more general conclusions concerning common experiences and directions in modern democracy.

The remainder of this introductory chapter outlines an analytical framework that sets the stage for the detailed analyses of individual countries that follow. The framework is general and abstract, as it precedes the chapters that present intensive analyses of individual countries. We will return to this framework in the concluding chapter, where it will be tested against data provided in the analyses of particular countries. For now, we outline the framework in order to define some of the major topics and issues that make up our subject.

DEMOCRACY AND THE MODERNIZATION PROCESS

Modernization and Social Complexity

The most basic and far-reaching attribute of the modernization process is steadily increasing social complexity. The concept of social complexity is not easy to define. According to a simplified interpretation, it could be reduced to the high number of subjects that interact in today's society and to the mul-

tiplicity of their interactions. Several authors have dealt with the problem of social complexity from various perspectives. The German sociologist, Niklas Luhmann (1975), has relied on systems theory to develop an interpretative hypothesis that has proved useful in understanding such phenomena as public opinion (Noelle-Neumann, 1993) and can be of some help in our effort. According to Luhmann, social complexity is tied to the functional differentiation of society and the development of specialized competing and overlapping systems.

Following Luhmann, social complexity can be said to be articulated in two major dimensions: a formal or structural dimension and a symbolic dimension. The first dimension refers to increasing functional differentiation within society, in which growing numbers of subsystems develop that become more and more specialized to satisfy the increasing demands of particular sectors of society and groups of citizens. Interactions between these subsystems become more and more complex, with each subsystem acting to protect its own area of autonomy and public or constituency.

Development of specialized and competing subsystems undermines or renders irrelevant the traditional, aggregative structures of socialization, authority, and community, replacing them with more narrowly defined and fluid structures of identification and interest. While traditional structures are based on inclusion and aggregation of interests, specialized systems in more differentiated societies are based on fragmentation and exclusion. Among the specialized systems that develop in the modernization process are both microaggregations of all kinds and larger interest-based organizations of citizens which have autonomous symbolic structures and powers and operate in a wide and varied sphere of problems and interests. The latter organizations sometimes are able to intervene in questions of public policy (even when their focal concerns center on the private interests of the individual or family, as in the case of organizations based on religion or avocational interests) and influence the development of opinions and the process of public decision making. Such aggregations partly replace earlier structures of interpersonal exchange such as is seen, in some European countries, in the weakening of the traditional role of the parish in socialization, political socialization, education, and even entertainment and village governance.

The newer, more specialized aggregations that develop in modernization often have a lower level of institutionalization and hierarchy as compared to the parish, for example, and are able to form networks with each other using opportunities provided by new information technologies such as computer networks, desktop publishing, and low-cost computer support for creating mailing lists and compiling information. In the United States, for instance, these technologies have been used to good effect by very large numbers of loosely organized and highly specialized groups that have developed around particular issues and interests of all kinds.

The symbolic dimension of the concept of social complexity underscores how increasing social differentiation is accompanied by the fracturing of citizens' identities. Old aggregative anchors of identity and allegiance in traditional social structures, such as church and political party, are replaced by overlapping and constantly shifting identifications with microstructures that

themselves are always entering into changing patterns of alliances with other structures in search of more effective ways of advancing interests. In order to achieve and maintain their viability, the new microstructures create their own symbolic realities; their own symbolic templates of heroes and villains, honored values and aspirations, histories, mythologies, and self-definition. Each such symbolic reality reflects the particular interests and viewpoint of the given microstructure and its public. As a result, microstructures tend to produce symbolic realities that conflict with and may contradict those produced by other microstructures representing other interests.

In modern societies, as Luhmann points out, citizens typically affiliate with or operate with reference to multiple microstructures, each of which offers a particular symbolic reality. Accordingly, the citizen's task in imposing order upon experience becomes increasingly difficult as his or her identity is framed in terms of the contending symbolic realities propounded by multiple microstructures, each of which is embedded in its own spatial and temporal dimensions (Giddens, 1990; Luhmann, 1975; Meyrowitz, 1985; Tomlinson, 1994). In general terms, then, modernization fragments social organization, interests, and identity, creating a complicated landscape of competing structures and conflicting symbolic realities which citizens must navigate.

Increasing Complexity and the Political Process

Increasing social complexity leads to a series of radical social changes, including, in particular, changes in the forms and practices of democratic government. Contemporary democracies are marked by ever-growing numbers of groups and organizations that participate to advance their interests and their increasingly bitter competition for public resources and social capital. This takes the form of establishing increasing numbers of structures that act as intermediaries between citizens and the political system, structures to which citizens entrust responsibility for advancing their private interests. As a result, more powers compete with each other for political influence and are in conflict than in previous forms of society. At the same time, direct participation by citizens in the political process may decline as citizens deputize intermediary organizations and structures to act as their agents in influencing the political system. The form of democracy that arises in this situation has been described by Dahl (1956, 1971) as "polyarchy,"[7] an arena within which different groups, not of a strictly political nature (e.g., interest groups, conglomerates, media organizations), confront and struggle with each other. In this arena, the mass media system undertakes socialization functions which previously were performed by the political parties.

Social differentiation also implies a change in the form of political parties, as more specialized groups of various kinds (e.g., economic, social, cultural, and issue-centered groups) coexist and act within the same party organization. The needs of the new forms of organizations for representation seem to be answered by what Kirchheimer (1966) defines as "catch-all parties." These political parties are segmented and pluralistic organizations that have weak or inconsistent ideological bases, well exemplified, on some accounts, in U.S. political parties. Catch-all parties allow assimilation and representation of