

POLITICAL MARKETING IN MODERN CANADIAN FEDERAL ELECTIONS

Alex Marland
PhD Student
Department of Politics & International Relations
Lancaster University

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Abstract

For all the attention it has received in the United States and United Kingdom, the application of commercial marketing tactics to elections has yet to be examined in Canada. Few insights exist about the use of most political marketing tools in Canada, or even about marketing at the constituency level in parliamentary systems.

This paper presents data from mid-2002 depth interviews with two-dozen Canadian federal election campaign strategists. In addition to discussing the existence of political consultants, five classic political marketing tools (comparative advertising, celebrity endorsements, direct mail stealth campaigns, oppo, pre-campaigning) and five newer tactics (Internet campaigning, push polls, robo-calls, paid phone banks, video imaging) are examined.

It is explained that even the most senior strategists as well as Canadian election decision-makers are selective in the American-style marketing tactics they adopt. For example, the backlash associated with the Tories' 1993 ads that mocked Liberal leader Jean Chrétien continues to cause strategists to be wary of adopting American-style attack ads. The conclusion is drawn that, regardless of their electoral prospects, all Canadian campaigns have been increasingly professionalized, though some components of political marketing are practiced only by major parties at the national level and in those parties' winnable constituency campaigns.

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Alex Marland (PhD Student, Lancaster University)

Political marketers use primary research to understand elector needs and desires, to help shape political offerings to meet elector preferences, and to make educated communications decisions while better achieving electoral objectives. Insights gained from opinion research can be used to adjust political communications, such as through the selection of messages, images, and mass media. Alternatively, marketing intelligence can be used to structure the actual party or candidate offering, such as the design of party policy or the development of an election platform. International practice and study of political marketing has grown with the maturation of broadcast media that has triggered declining emphasis on personal contact with electors.

The United States has long been at the forefront of commercial marketing innovations, many of which were adapted for use in American elections a decade or more before other nations did so.¹ As these techniques have been integrated into elections elsewhere, there have been objections to the erosion of traditional practices, ethical concerns, and laments about the expenses of mass media. In Canada, anxieties about the “Americanization” of politics have existed for some time now.²

¹ For example, D. Butler and A. Ranney, eds., *Electioneering: A Comparative Study of Continuity and Change* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

² For example, D.V. Smith, “President and Parliament: The transformation of parliamentary government in Canada,” in T.A. Hockin, ed., *Apex of Power: Prime Minister and Political Leadership in Canada* (Toronto: Prentice-Hall, 1971): 224-241.

However, while political marketing has received considerable attention from American and British academics, little is known about its status in Canada.³ The practice is also unknown at the constituency level in parliamentary systems. In this paper, I aim to provide insights into the existence of political consultants and selected American-style tactics in recent Canadian federal elections at both the national and constituency level.

1. RESEARCH DESIGN

An interview respondent pool was developed that included national strategists from the 2000 Canadian general election, as well as constituency campaign managers from the 2000 election and the seven May 2002 by-elections. Twenty-four depth interviews were conducted between June and November 2002—ten with national-level political strategists and fourteen with constituency campaign managers. Strategists from the Liberal, Canadian Alliance, Bloc Québécois, New Democratic Party, and Progressive Conservative parties were interviewed, as were officials from the Green and Marijuana parties. That most of the national respondents were situated in Toronto or Ottawa is reflective of the locus of national political decision-making in Canada. Conversely, constituency-level respondents were selected by balancing partisanship, seat typology, district typology, candidate typology, and region.

2. MARKETING PRACTITIONERS IN CANADIAN ELECTIONS

As campaign organizations assume a marketing philosophy, the basis of decision-making shifts to for-hire political consultants and freelancers. Americans' election culture supports hundreds and perhaps thousands of full-time political consultants in the United

³ Carty's recent comparison between Canadian political parties and business franchises suggests that the political marketing discipline is now being indirectly discussed in Canada. See R.K. Carty, "The Politics of

States, some of whom have even attained quasi-celebrity status.⁴ Conversely, the infrequency of elections in parliamentary systems means consultants are almost exclusively communications specialists who typically rely on private-sector clients. However, little has been documented about modern Canadian consultants.

National Political Consultants

There are two types of national political consultants. *Party consultants* have commandeered the authority once held by regional party officials. They tend to be commercial pollsters who work for the major parties even though there is little short-term reward. In other cases, they are experienced election strategists who are paid to share their political communications expertise as campaign managers. Throughout the 2000 election campaign, party pollsters provided communications advice, monitored the electorate, and responded to officials' requests for strategic counsel. Their confidence in research evidently conflicts with some party campaign managers' outlook:

“The average politician is not equipped mentally, or by training, or by education to absorb a public opinion poll, or really even to look at the finer parts of political campaigns... I'm not a party hack, I'm not a spin doctor, I don't even vote—I know if I ever start relying on it or get too close, I won't be all that useful to my client.”

(Party pollster)

“People love to talk about strategies. But frankly, at the end of the day, logistics are at least as important, if not more important. There's an old saying that amateurs talk about strategy and professionals talk about logistics... After the fact people go back and point to their own genius, or something that put it over the top, but as a matter of fact it's a whole lotta luck.”

(Party campaign manager)

The range of resources consultants have at their disposal varies considerably. The government's pollster, for example, uses the resources of his marketing research firm to keep

Tecumseh Corners: Canadian Political Parties as Franchise Organizations,” *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 35 (2002): 723-745.

⁴ B.I. Newman, *The Mass Marketing of Politics* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999); P.L. Gianos, “Political consultants in American film,” in D.D. Perlmutter, ed., *The Manship School Guide to Political Communication* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999): 39-46.

the Prime Minister informed throughout the parliamentary session. These two men, along with a candidate recruiter, formed the locus of the Liberal party's 2000 election campaign decision-making. By comparison, in 2000 a political consultant doubled as the campaign manager for the least successful national parties. In these instances, financial constraints were explicit, young amateurs held positions of high responsibility, and there were preoccupations with rallying caucus support for the party leader. Some support was found in war rooms with a team of strategists, some of whom had worked on American campaigns.

All consultants reported that party officials were eager to release their authority and then dutifully followed consultants' directives. The election readiness committee of one party told its strategist, "you tell us what to do, and we'll do it, just don't spend money that we don't have." During the 2000 campaign, consultants entered a routine of morning meetings to review media coverage, of identifying daily issues and messages, and of adjusting strategies. Conversely, party campaign managers held a largely supervisory and organizational position. In stark contrast, for minor parties even hiring a full-time campaign manager would be a major initiative. For these organizations a few key personnel, including the party leader, began the campaign by contacting prospective candidates, rushing to get a platform together, and lobbying news outlets and polling firms to include party issues on the public agenda.

The other major type is the *media consultant*, who is hired by news media outlets in a more traditional supplier-client relationship. In 2000, these opinion research professionals collected and interpreted polling data for national newspapers and television news programs that co-sponsored the research. Pollsters' horserace numbers were treated as headline news. They provided journalists with a credible interpretation of the campaign's progress and data were purposely publicized so as to increase audience size (and thus advertising revenues).

News organizations insisted that consultants be non-partisan during the campaign and this meant that some media consultants temporarily ceased providing strategic counsel to political parties. Although there was some competition in 2000 to see which media organization could commission the largest sample size, constituency campaigns were still largely ignored:

“I would almost say that, at this time, practice is to consider them almost irrelevant in the political process. It may sound harsh a little bit...just technically this would demand programming something that would have over a thousand names...almost no attention, if at all, is paid to the local candidate.”

(Media consultant)

Constituency Political Consultants

In the 1988 contest, volunteers were the source of most constituency campaign labour.⁵ But with over eighteen hundred candidates in the 2000 general election, and thirty-eight hopefuls in the May 2002 by-elections, perhaps nowadays there is a market for paid political expertise.

Although the tradition of appointing a campaign manager persists in Canadian constituency campaigns, the expectation of remuneration is common. In 2000 and 2002, campaign managers filled an essential organizational position in winnable campaigns and, like party consultants, saw themselves as “firefighters” tending to emergencies as they emerged. They are typically appointed by virtue of dedicated service to the party, by demonstrating candidate loyalty, and/or having worked on previous campaigns. Some of them are remunerated to offset lost wages or expected reward if the candidate is elected; others are volunteers who also donate to the campaign. While some managers hold political science degrees, and have participated in party or *Campaigns & Elections* training seminars, most marketing learning has been acquired through observation. In the words of one

⁵ R.K. Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies: A Local Perspective* (Ottawa: Royal Commission on Electoral Reform & Party Financing and Dundurn Press, 1991).

constituency campaigner, his skills were gained *via* “school of hard knocks, crash course, do or die.”

As was hinted at in the 1988 election, there is a tiny network of local political consultants in Canada.⁶ Although national consultants dismiss them as “mere hobbyists,” local professionals—who tend to be loyal to a party—are hired to provide expertise in ridings throughout the country on aspects such as campaign organization, fundraising, polling, communications, and candidate image. Some high-profile incumbents had searched for a capable consultant for months prior to the 2000 election. There is some belief among constituency campaigners that demand for political consultants will increase in the future because of the skill sets that consultants offer and because fewer experienced managers are willing to secure leave from their regular employer:

“There’s lots of people who say that they worked in a campaign, they were a caller or worked on Election Day or something like that, but there really weren’t very many people who were actually willing to go out and take a month off, and try to get somebody that they believe in elected. Most people, plain and simple, just don’t know how to do it.”
(Constituency campaign manager)

“I think that there is another trend developing though that political consultants are coming to the forefront. This whole campaign process is becoming much more electronic and is reaching voters in ways that they were never reached before...”
(Constituency campaign manager)

“Oh yeah, there’s a number of people who...actually have their own businesses like me. I know of about 10 or 15 folks who are doing the same type of thing... And it’s growing as well. There’s a lot of campaigns that headhunt and look for good campaign managers. Especially more high profile campaigns...”
(Constituency campaign manager)

At the other extreme, some candidates manage their own campaign. Winning is absolutely implausible for minor party candidates, for most independents, for major party candidates in certain regions, and usually for all candidates in another party’s safe seats.

⁶ A.M. Sayers, *Parties, Candidates, and Constituency Campaigns in Canadian Elections* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

Devoid of volunteers, inexperienced and untrained candidates sometimes manage their own campaigns, and organize literature drops at the end of their workday. This is especially common among minor parties, where inquiring volunteers are typically asked to be candidates, and whose leaders concurrently manage national affairs and their own constituency campaign. However, despite their sparse financial resources, some of these campaigns hire poster services to affix posters on telephone poles, and pay leaflet distribution companies to circulate campaign material.

3. CLASSIC POLITICAL MARKETING TOOLS

Despite an increasing presence of political consultants, all indications are that Canadian election promotional activities are relatively static. At the national level, this includes professionally produced television advertising; media relations experts who wage spin control; and planned events such as leader tours and televised debates. In the constituencies, the continued erosion of traditional promotional practices continues. Nowadays the canvassing of electors to identify supporters is often conducted by telephone instead of on the doorsteps, although advertising still typically includes signage, brochures, and community newspapers. Perhaps the most visible modernization in recent years has been parties' mediocre Websites that provide daily campaign updates and which are sometimes mirrored by candidates' amateurish online presence.

But, to what extent is American-style political marketing creeping into Canadian electioneering? Informants were asked about their use of five classic and five newer marketing techniques. Standard tactics such as comparative advertising, celebrity endorsements, and permanent campaigning were explored, while technological innovations such as Internet campaigning, robo-calls, and video imaging were also discussed so as to

provide an indication of the status of political marketing in Canada. (It should be clear that marketing communications is a highly sophisticated and democratic exercise. Some of the tools discussed here represent the darkest side of American political communications.)

Celebrity Endorsements

In commercial marketing, celebrities are paid to endorse products in an effort to transfer the celebrity's qualities.⁷ Similarly, American and British politicians regularly socialize with a range of entertainment stars, together choreographing photo-ops to augment each other's profile.⁸ During elections, Republican and Democratic campaigns are endorsed by a who's who list of Hollywood types, some of whom are actually Canadians, such as *Star Trek*'s William Shatner's recent involvement in an Ohio gubernatorial campaign.

However, celebrities have a low profile in Canadian federal elections. Perhaps the last time they were widely involved was during the failed 1992 Charlottetown Accord referendum where electors widely rejected elites.⁹ One respondent suggested that, since then, Canadian strategists believe that quasi-celebrities—such as bank CEOs—have only narrow appeal and can actually do more harm than good. As for Canadian entertainers, because so many achieve stardom only after they have left the country, it is considered difficult to secure the support of Hollywood-type celebrities. Consequently, as one party consultant put it, parties seek endorsements from “credible people who allow you to say that you have growth potential.”

⁷ B. Zafer Erdogan, “Celebrity Endorsement: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Marketing Management* 15 (1999): 291-314.

⁸ M. Rosenbaum, *From Soapbox to Soundbite: Party Political Campaigning in Britain Since 1945* (Hampshire: MacMillan Press, 1997); J. Street, *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001).

⁹ For example, R. Johnston, *The Challenge of Direct Democracy: The 1992 Canadian Referendum* (Kingston: McGill-Queen's UP, 1996).

It is quite the opposite in the constituencies where, in 2000 and 2002, candidates received endorsements from local musicians, athletes, politicians, and minority group leaders, as well electors fitting demographic profiles. The most famous endorsers are national or provincial politicians such as party leaders and cabinet ministers. These political celebrities leverage their media status in an attempt to raise the profile of the party's local candidate, to build morale among volunteers, and to generate local campaign momentum. They tend to only visit districts where there is an opportunity to win the seat, and participate in activities such as lending their voice to local radio ads, being available for media interviews, participating in walkabouts with the candidate, and timing a news conference in the riding.

Comparative Advertising

Malicious election advertising often explicitly targets the weaknesses of competing parties or candidates. These highly emotional broadcast ads accentuate issue and policy shortcomings, or attack the personal character of an opponent.¹⁰ They are *en vogue* among political consultants because, although electors say that they do not like the practice,¹¹ they are more likely to recall negative rather than positive messages.¹² Moreover, controversial

¹⁰ S. B. Cunningham, "The Theory and Use of Political Advertising," in W.I. Romanow et al., eds., *Television Advertising in Canadian Elections: The Attack Mode, 1993* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1999): 11-25; K.H. Jamieson, *Everything You Think You Know About Politics... And Why You're Wrong* (New York: Basic Books, 2000).

¹¹ B. Pinkleton, "Effects of print comparative political advertising on political decision-making and participation," *Journal of Communication* 48,4 (1998): 24-36; W.C. Soderland et al., "Quantitative assessment of advertising effects: Survey data," in W.I. Romanow et al., eds., *Television Advertising in Canadian Elections: The Attack Mode, 1993* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier UP, 1999): 117-131.

¹² R.R. Lau and L. Sigelman, "Effectiveness of negative political advertising," in J.A. Thurber et al., eds., *Crowded Airwaves: Campaign Advertising in Elections* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2000): 10-43; W. Fletcher, "Why does political advertising rely so much on the negative?," *Marketing Magazine* 26 (Apr. 2001): 25.

ads can also attract news coverage, and “going negative” is often thought necessary to effectively counter an opponent’s negativity.

Canadian elections have a history of hosting negative advertising. In the 1935 general election, the Conservative party hired actors to anonymously depict radio characters such as “Mr. Sage” who slandered prominent Liberals.¹³ In recent years, the parties’ television advertising has been the subject of considerable attention. The Progressive Conservatives infamously mocked Liberal leader Jean Chrétien’s face paralysis in their 1993 ads and, in 1997, the Reform Party’s advertising sneered at Quebec politicians. Despite the public debate that followed, the 2000 campaign saw the PCs label the Liberals as liars, while the Liberal party was busy slagging the “hidden agenda” of the leader of the Canadian Alliance. Negativity even found its way into cyberspace.¹⁴

So, what do Canadian election campaign strategists have to say about the practice? Although some of them are responsible for recent mudslinging they remain wary of comparative advertising and say that they learned from the PCs’ 1993 ads that Canadians do not tolerate personal attacks. Comparative advertising is believed to be effective so long as its claims are verifiable. The ads must be moral and fair because they seek to expose an opponent’s untruths or lack of credibility; to do otherwise, as the PCs found out in 1993, runs the risk of the ad’s sponsor being branded as less trustworthy than the target of the ad. One party consultant argued that truthful comparative advertising keeps politicians accountable; in his words, “Governments that get elected and don’t keep promises, damage the brand more

¹³ I. Ward, “The early use of radio for political communication in Australia and Canada,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 45,3 (1999): 311-330.

¹⁴ P. Attallah and A. Burton, “Television, the internet, and the Canadian federal election of 2000,” in J.H. Pammett and C. Dornan, eds., *The Canadian General Election of 2000* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2001): 215-241.

than me putting a spotlight on what they've done." Media consultants concurred insofar that they do not feel that political advertising needs to be regulated, because the threat of elector backlash necessitates self-regulation by politicians. However, one pollster was concerned that the hostile nature of Canadian politics has become "absolutely disgraceful" and reasoned that it is unsustainable:

"If I were trying to gain market share for Pepsi, I would take out ads saying that Coca-Cola had shards of glass, that they keep Coke in glasses and cans and that a disgruntled employee spits into the glasses before selling them, and I would move the needle... My growth would be better, and I would have greater market share—until Coca-Cola would come back and say that Pepsi is owned by the Columbian drug cartel, and there's dead cockroaches and mouse droppings in the liquid. After initially moving the numbers, what it would do after a while is the brand values would be dead, and the product category would be completely trashed, and nobody would ever buy another cola. But they wouldn't do that because they're too smart. They're in it for a long time, but in politics you hear this every day."

(Party consultant)

Whatever its national presence, comparative advertising is restrained at the constituency level. This is thought to be linked to the expense and imprecision of television advertising. When local comparative messages are used, they are intended to provide material for journalists to investigate, or are part of a national party strategy. By-election campaigns are believed to be forums for candidates to attack the governing party, whereas governing party by-election candidates tread delicately for fear of being branded as arrogant. Nevertheless, some constituency campaigners are resigned to the potential usefulness of negative messages (e.g., "I don't know anybody who doesn't express some distain for it, and yet it works.").

Direct Mail Stealth Campaigns

Stealth or phantom campaigns are designed to go unnoticed by journalists, the general public, and especially opponents. These under-the-radar activities involve lobbying elected officials, soliciting of contributions from wealthy donors, and phoning supporters without alerting opponents' supporters. Stealth campaigning characterized the 1980 American

presidential election¹⁵ and information mailed directly to American electors in a campaign's final days continues to be used. Sometimes this direct mail attacks opponents with harsh language and provides an adversary with no time or precision ability to respond.¹⁶

Direct mail stealth campaigns exist in Canada but without the severe messages that have become notorious in the United States. Last-minute direct mail is seen to be a time-tested tactic although often used by chance rather than purposeful timing; a newer twist is to use polling data to improve direct mail targeting. Direct mail is thought to be used by constituency campaigns generally only for fundraising, the firming of candidate partisans, and post-campaign thank-you letters. One respondent, however, captured the views held about direct mail by hopeless constituency campaigns: "I wish we could afford it!"

As with comparative television advertising, the room for error in an attack mail campaign is thought to be low. Direct mail messages must be credible because unfounded accusations will see the sponsor publicly reprimanded. One strategist reasoned that, whereas American candidates worry only about their personal integrity, in Canada worries about the party's brand image take precedence, and thus it was considered unlikely that attack mail will ever become popular in this country.

Oppo

Serious campaigns perform opposition research to gain intelligence for comparative advertising and to publicly embarrass opponents. Scrutinizing opponents' qualifications—commonly known as oppo—can involve campaign personnel engaging in somewhat

¹⁵ A.E.W. Stone, "Stealth campaigning: Winning under the radar," in D.D. Perlmutter, ed., *The Manship School Guide to Political Communication* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999): 147-151.

¹⁶ V. Kamber, *Poison Politics: Are Negative Campaigns Destroying Democracy?* (New York: Plenum Press, 1997); E. Sherman, "Direct marketing: How does it work for political campaigns?" in B.I. Newman, ed., *Handbook of Political Marketing* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999): 365-388.

unscrupulous searches of news media archives, legislative voting records, public position statements, personal lives, military service records, and campaign finance records. American oppo is reportedly so competitive that it can involve the hiring of “spies,” private investigators, and “dumpster divers” who root through trash.¹⁷ Sometimes these campaigns investigate their own candidate to prepare for an opposition attack.

There have been references to the use of oppo in modern Canadian elections.¹⁸ Personal information is readily available¹⁹ and a decrease in newsroom staff has meant that journalists sometimes use campaigns’ opposition intelligence as the basis for news segments.²⁰ There has also been some indication that private investigators are hired. For example, in April 2001 Canadian Alliance leader Stockwell Day confirmed that he met with a detective who was to investigate opponents. The fact that Day later denied that this occurred demonstrates the public sensitivity of the matter.

Conversations with campaign strategists indicated that “above-board” oppo is a staple of the major parties’ campaigns for both advertising and earned media purposes. Statements by party leaders are tested in focus groups; researchers scrutinize party policies, candidates’ curriculum vitas, and lists of donors filed with Elections Canada; and oppo findings are regularly leaked to friendly journalists:

¹⁷ C. Varoga and M. Rice, “Only the facts: Professional research and message development,” in B.I. Newman, ed., *Handbook of Political Marketing* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1999): 243-256; J. Bovée, “Opposition research,” in D.D. Perlmutter, ed., *The Manship School Guide to Political Communication* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1999): 107-113.

¹⁸ For example, see W. Kinsella, *Kicking Ass in Canadian Politics* (USA: Random House Canada, 2001).

¹⁹ R. Shields, “Publicly available personal information and Canada’s Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act.” [Online]. Paper prepared by McCarthy Tétrault for Industry Canada, Ottawa, 2000. Available: http://e-com.ic.gc.ca/english/privacy/doc/regs_doc.pdf [29 Oct. 2002].

²⁰ M. Bourrie, “Kinsella’s the lead Liberal hitman in war room,” *The Hill Times* (13 Nov. 2000): 1.

“There’s always research done on your opponent. There is a fairly close examination. What does a person stand for? What are they actually like? How do they conduct their personal affairs? Are their personal affairs going to wash out into the public arena? I think there’s always a level of that kind of scrutiny done, and I think it’s almost prudent for one candidate to know what the other one is all about.”

(Constituency campaign manager)

Independent private investigators are believed to perform only a trivial and sporadic role. However, when pressed on the topic, a national political consultant and a constituency campaign manager both confessed to having hired detectives. This was seen to be a useful tool, but performed at great risk that the investigators would alert the news media of their involvement:

“An investigator was hired to check out some rumours that were floating around on a candidate that was running against this particular individual. The investigator determined many of the rumours to be true, plus a few others, and that information was then gathered in a fashionable way, and presented to appropriate sources.”

(Constituency campaign manager)

Pre-Campaigning

It is commonly believed that political marketing has contributed to the prevalence of pre-election campaigning.²¹ For example, the ongoing involvement of political consultants spurs the need to fundraise “war chests” and to communicate with electors well before an election. By the time the official campaign begins, the cumulative effects of political communications are now thought to overpower short-term influences during the campaign itself.²²

Permanent campaigning has long been a feature of Canadian politics²³ and there is an incentive to pre-campaign to circumvent Elections Canada expenditure restrictions.

²¹ M. Scammell, *Designer Politics* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995); N.J. Ornstein and T.E. Mann, “The permanent campaign and the future of American democracy,” in N. Ornstein and T. Mann, eds., *The Permanent Campaign and Its Future* (Washington D.C.: American Enterprise Institute, 2000): 219-234.

²² P. Norris et al., *On Message: Communicating the Campaign* (London: Sage Publications, 1999).

²³ For example, see H.B. Ames, “The organization of political parties in Canada,” *Proceedings of the American Political Science Association*, Eighth Annual Meeting, 8 (1911): 181-188.

However, the dynamics of pre-campaigning are different in a parliamentary system where the governing party's leader sets the election date and has the resources of government communications. In 2000, Prime Minister Chrétien called a snap election, and, in April 2002, two future Senators resigned their jobs as MPs two days before a by-election announcement. Election preparedness in Canada hinges as much on the campaign's organizational competence as the ability to successfully predict when the election will be held.

For national political consultants, the period surrounding the beginning of the 2000 campaign was full of activity. Continuous light tracking opinion polling had been conducted throughout the parliamentary session but it was only upon signs of an election call that party pollsters began to isolate issues. Campaign messages were tested, language was developed, and insights for an electoral platform were shared with the party executive. Campaign packages were prepared for the executive, which bundled insights into the party's strengths and weaknesses, election scenarios, and support levels for the party, its leader, and key caucus members. In some cases, advertising was pre-tested before it was launched. Campaign managers for the major parties had mainly organizational duties during the pre-campaign. These included coordinating media buys; developing the party platform; overseeing provincial chairs to encourage candidate nominations and vibrant riding associations; assembling a campaign team; selecting a campaign headquarters; securing computers; arranging transportation for the leader's tour; and providing input into media and electoral strategies. For all but most Liberal strategists, the end of Summer 2000 was a rush to prepare for an imminent election campaign, and the time for pre-campaign communications had passed by undetected.

Media pollsters also continually monitor the electoral environment. During the parliamentary session, they periodically release opinion data but may also quietly provide insights to a party on its communications, policy, and platform development. Once an election is imminent, a polling schedule is prepared with the media client(s) that includes the aim of publicizing electors' vote intentions soon after the writ drop. Media consultants then assume a role of explaining survey data to the public, particularly in the period surrounding the leaders' debates. When they are not commenting on the campaign they tend to other clients' needs.

By comparison, election readiness varies greatly at the constituency level.²⁴ This depends on the perceived winnability of the seat, the vibrancy of a riding association, whether a competitive party nomination is held, the type of candidate, and whether the campaign is part of a general election or by-election:

“It came as a bit of a shock... So we were not completely prepared. The election strategy that I had put together had anticipated a two-year lead time. So we had to quickly move things up.”

(Constituency campaign manager)

In 2000, the most prepared constituency campaigns had hired a consultant to begin strategic analysis a year in advance and had a campaign plan six months prior to the writ being dropped. Those that were moderately prepared had held periodic election planning meetings with the riding association executive or had hosted party nominations. When the candidate is identified prior to the election call, a campaign team may already be assembled, baseline opinion surveys conducted, a location for campaign headquarters chosen, and promotional materials already printed and distributed. Somewhat less organized campaigns initiate candidate recruitment, begin fundraising, and search for volunteers only when it is

²⁴ Carty, *Canadian Political Parties in the Constituencies: A Local Perspective*.

obvious that Parliament will be dissolved. The least prepared campaigns are those with a handful of party members (or even just the candidate) who come together once the writ has been dropped. For these teams, the first half of the campaign proper can be spent selecting a candidate, collecting the 100 nomination signatures required for official candidacy, appointing an auditor, initiating fundraising, ordering signs, and assigning volunteer responsibilities.

4. EMERGING POLITICAL MARKETING TOOLS

Internet Campaigning

The Internet's economical integration of interactive visuals, sound, and data suggests that it may revolutionize election campaigning. Presently, many American campaigns purchase banner advertising on popular Websites, send unsolicited electronic mail to electors, and use e-commerce software to accept donations online.

In Canadian politics, the Internet is used to displace otherwise costly communications,²⁵ and is starting to be used for get-out-the-vote efforts.²⁶ However, the lack of an online presence by any of the political parties during the 2000 election campaign is indicative of Canadian electioneers' scepticism about the World Wide Web. Banner advertising was used only somewhat by two parties, e-mail had an almost exclusive internal office function, and online donations were an afterthought.²⁷ Despite considerable technological changes, Canadian parties' use of the Internet in 2000 was not much different

²⁵ G. Kippen, *The Use of New Information Technologies by a Political Party: A Case Study of the Liberal Party in the 1993 and 1997 Federal Elections* (Vancouver: SFU-UBC Centre for the Study of Government and Business, 2000); R.K. Carty et al., *Rebuilding Canadian Party Politics* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000).

²⁶ M. Scandiffio, "Quebec Liberal MP Discepolo develops high-tech vote tracking system," *Hill Times* 554 (11 Sept. 2000): 2.

²⁷ J.H. Pammett and C. Dornan, eds., *The Canadian General Election of 2000* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2001).

from the 1997 campaign, although by comparison news media Websites stored substantial content.

National strategists do not place much credence in Websites, believing that not enough undecided electors use them. Although some consultants believe that banner ads will have more appeal once greater bandwidth allows digital video, overall they remain uninterested in the Internet due to the perceived lack of impact, exposure, or general effectiveness. One party strategist believes that his party's Website has been "nothing more than a way of developing a mailing list" for his party's supporters. This internal function was evident in the parties' election use of an Intranet during the campaign to facilitate communications between the centre and constituency branches. (It was also an opportunity for more centralized control over franchise units. Candidates were encouraged to access party information in advance of the news media so that they could then communicate a consistent message across the country. As one party manager explained, "You try to localize it just because national headquarters can't deal with 301 ridings.")

In stark contrast, the under-funded minor parties stress the policy and discussion material on their Websites. For them, electronic mail greatly facilitates long-distance communications with party supporters, candidates, electors, and organizations (as do flat rate long distance telephone fees). Constituency campaigners also emphasize the Internet although a lack of organization and resources inhibited a strong online presence:

"We did have somebody looking after the Internet but I don't think it played a big part in our campaign. We had the traditional Website if you wanted to see something and I don't think many people did. Most people phoned us or wrote us."

(Constituency campaign manager)

“D’abord pour une problème d’organisation et aussi pour une problème—bain, une raison—de cout. Parce que vous savez que nous devons faire suspendre une système d’Internet et aussi de garder à jour. Ça prend quelqu’un, question permanance pour le maintenir, sourtout au période électorale où les actualités changes de jour en jour. Donc, on n’a pas access a une système là.”

(Constituency campaign manager)

In 2000, candidate sites were still basically online brochures²⁸ and, by 2002, electronic commerce was still not thought to exist at the local level. However, candidates’ sites are viewed as a means to incorporate young electors and those not answering their door or phone. E-mail continues to be used primarily for internal purposes such as nomination campaigns and fundraising, and external communications are inhibited because e-mail addresses are not publicized. Fortunately, this alleviates a special problem experienced in party leaders’ constituency campaigns, where responding to e-mails significantly adds to the campaign managers’ workload.

Phone Banks

The erosion of volunteer labour is affecting telephone canvassing in Canadian elections. In response, constituency campaigns are hiring private calling centres or asking the party centre to coordinate phone calls in-house. These phone banks involve paid callers operating on a quota system and have time/cost advantages such as predictive dialing that filters out unusable telephone numbers. A fee per completed call is negotiated, potential respondents are targeted, and collected information may be provided in an electronic database that is compatible with a campaign’s canvassing software program.

²⁸ S. Clarkson, “The Liberal threepeat: The multi-system party in the multi-party system,” in J.H. Pammett and C. Dornan, eds., *The Canadian General Election of 2000* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2001): 13-57.

Just a decade ago, political telemarketing was gaining popularity in Canada, in part because of the high proportions of telephone canvass volunteers not showing up.²⁹ In 2000 and again in 2002, the presence of centralized phone banks and local telemarketers was unmistakable. As constituency campaigns hire telemarketers, it is possible that they become increasingly susceptible to commissioning opinion research, because there were indications of attempts by campaigns to mistake canvassing data for survey research. Moreover, because telephone canvassing is subject to campaigns' legal expenditure limits (ranging between \$51,850 and \$83,650 in 2000) but opinion research is not, the pairing of telephone canvass and research allows campaigns to circumvent the spirit of finance regulations. However, because telemarketers were not always located in the same electoral district or province as the electors that they were contacting, there were obstacles such as a lack of caller enthusiasm, the candidate's name being mispronounced, and limited qualitative feedback on elector views. Nevertheless, many respondents believed that phone banks have become a permanent fixture in Canadian elections because of the number of calls that can be completed.

Push Polls

Another American tactic is the use of push or pseudo polls. These surveys in disguise use unscientific questionnaires to thrust electors towards a response and to intentionally collect faulty data. Exaggerated candidate support is then communicated to the public to aid in fundraising efforts.³⁰ The worst kind of push polls are "suppression" polls, which slander a

²⁹ T. Brook, *Getting Elected in Canada* (Stanford, Ontario: The Mercury Press, 1991); Sayers, *Parties, Candidates, and Constituency Campaigns in Canadian Elections*.

³⁰ Kamber, *Poison Politics: Are Negative Campaigns Destroying Democracy?*

candidate with the specific objective of discouraging turnout.³¹ Alternatively, electors are provided with false information about a candidate in order to see how it impacts upon respondent views.

There is no consensus among political consultants about the presence of push polling in Canadian elections. A number of them paid notice to the incident of a Canadian Alliance strategist who questioned electors in the 1999 Ontario election campaign about whether they would support the son of a Jewish Holocaust survivor. This is seen by some as evidence of push polls' existence in Canada but by others as an example of the undue alarm surrounding their use. There is also some belief that irregular polling data were released by a news organization during the 2000 campaign to alleviate pressure on the party it unofficially supported. Although there is no evidence of suppression polls in Canada there is considerable alarm among Canadian pollsters about the potential of the practice to damage their industry. At the local level, there are suggestions that some riding associations present inflated polling data to prospective candidates to convince them of their electability. However, overall the belief prevails that push polls are rare in Canada.

Robo-Calls

Many American campaigns are delivering pre-recorded messages from candidates, celebrities, or campaign workers to electors using automated phone calls.³² A single telephone computerized auto-dialer can contact up to eighty electors per hour. These robot calls provide advance notice of a direct mailing, remind supporters about early voting options, encourage electors to turn out to vote, and generally target messages to specific

³¹ K.F. Warren, *In Defense of Public Opinion Polling* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2001).

³² Sherman, "Direct marketing: How does it work for political campaigns?"

groups. In some extreme cases, negative messages respond to an opponent's broadcast advertising attack.

Robo-calls are used in Canadian elections, however, the messages are thought to frustrate recipients ("People don't like being barked at by inanimate objects at the end of a telephone," said one party manager). Consequently, the technology is applied almost exclusively for internal party purposes. Nationally, they have found a niche in leadership campaigns whereas they are used locally to inform party members of meetings. A surprisingly common type of robo-call in constituency campaigns is voicemail messaging, whereby electors subscribing to phone companies' answering machine services (e.g., "Message Manager") receive campaign messages overnight without their phone ringing:

"The night before the campaign we retained a very sophisticated telephone technology company...[all party supporters] who had a Bell Canada telephone answering system... had a voicemail saying, 'Hi. It's [candidate name]. Sorry I missed you. I'd just like you to know that it's really important that you get out and vote, the election is tomorrow, I'm really counting on your support.' A personal call...8,000 people. Press of a button. And the cost was not prohibitive...And we had all kinds of feedback saying they couldn't believe [candidate name] had called them."

(Constituency campaign manager)

"You can't go to every door; we know that. The use of the new technologies like computers and dialing systems enables you to contact voters that you would never be able to get. That was employed to the fullest and quite successful."

(Constituency campaign manager)

There are also some indications of deceitful calls using this technology. One interviewee claimed that an auto-dialer in an "abandoned factory" had circulated messages with the impostored voice of former Prime Minister Brian Mulroney endorsing the local PC candidate as "one of the boys."

Video Imaging

In the 1860 U.S. presidential election, Abraham Lincoln's campaign altered his portrait to make him look younger with a shorter neck. Today, images can be manipulated using graphic design software, and computer-generated images can be electronically inserted

into television broadcasts and pictures.³³ Although graphic design software is usually used to produce print materials, video imaging remains quite uncommon in Canadian federal elections. Interest in the technology is said to have waned since the backlash associated with the 1993 Chrétien ad because, as one media consultant explained, the risk of a video-imaged ad being perceived as a lie would mean that the sponsor would be “dead meat.” However, using desktop publishing software to clean up photographs, such as removing unwanted background images from brochure photography, is common at both the national and local level.

5. CONCLUSION

Several conclusions can be drawn for further research. First, Canadian political consultants work for either a party or a media organization. They are the norm in party headquarters and there is a growing demand for party consultants in constituencies. With them comes the potential for tension between old-style organizational campaigners and new-age political strategists. However, unlike the United States, there is not a large pool of hired-gun consultants, no doubt largely because of the infrequency of elections in Canada’s parliamentary system.

Second, the five classic political marketing tools examined have only a mixed application in Canada. Celebrities are heavily involved in American and British campaigns but in Canada, other than community notables, currently only political celebrities are sought out. Comparative advertising is recognized to be a problem but it is believed to be effective if used properly, particularly if oppo intelligence can be communicated through journalists. While there is every indication that its negativity will continue, the public backlash against

³³ Kamber, *Poison Politics: Are Negative Campaigns Destroying Democracy?*

the Conservatives in 1993 means that Canadian political strategists are hesitant to engage in the personal character affronts that are so common south of the border. For the same reason, direct mail stealth campaigns have thus far only a mild application. Nevertheless, negativity has been a long time fixture of electioneering, as has pre-campaigning, although in Canada the resources of the governing party magnify the advantage it holds of being able to unilaterally decide the election date.

Similarly, only some of the emerging American-style tactics examined have been integrated into Canadian elections. Not only was Internet campaigning limited in the 2000 general election but, among the major parties, there also remains considerable pessimism towards its usefulness. There are concerns among pollsters that push polling will secure a place in Canada but, for the moment, there is little evidence of its use. Video imagery is generally only used to enhance photos without deceiving electors, however, the combination of fewer volunteers, security concerns of the general public, and the physical size of so many ridings has seemingly led Canadian campaigners to embrace telephone technologies. Private-sector telemarketers are now regularly hired to perform canvass operations and predictive dialers are used to issue friendly pre-recorded messages to identified supporters.

Overall, there is some indication that in a multiparty parliamentary system, the governing party's marketing advantages are heightened and the weakest parties' marketing resources are inadequate. This electoral environment profoundly impacts constituency campaigns, most of which are feeble due to regional concentrations of party support or the involvement of fringe candidates. The absence of financial resources or skilled labour reinforces the security that weakest campaigns feel for staying with tried-and-true methods, while wealthier campaigns are selective of the American-style practices that they adopt.