Chapter 8

The Rise of the Post-Modern Campaign?

To understand the implications of these developments, and the longer term changes in campaigning outlined in the previous chapter, we can turn to detailed case studies of American and British elections in the mid-1940s, just prior to the rise of television and opinion polls, compared with campaigns in the 1990s. The techniques of modern campaigning have probably been transformed most radically in America so a case study of US presidential elections highlights the extent of the changes and the outlines of the 'post-modern' campaign that is emerging. Comparisons can be drawn with Britain, a country sharing strong cultural bonds with America, with important similarities in party and electoral systems, and therefore perhaps one of the countries most strongly influenced by trans-Atlantic trends. The first section compares the party organization, news environment and electorate in the 1948 US and 1945 British elections as exemplars of pre-modern campaigning. The next goes on to compare the situation in the 1996 American presidential elections and the equivalent 1997 British general election, and then considers the implications of these changes.

The Pre-Modern American Campaign

The 1948 American presidential campaign represented the last hurrah for the old system. Truman and Dewey's campaign organization still relied heavily upon traditional, face-to-face retail politics for getting out the message, with whistle-stop railway tours across the country, meetings with party notables and ticker-tape parades in major cities, and keynote speeches before packed crowds[1]. Politics was very much a public spectacle, not a private event experienced in living rooms, although in the early twenties the incursion of radio already started to transform the process. In the United States the first mass-based party organizations developed in the Jacksonian era in the early 19th Century to mobilize support in states and cities like New York, Chicago and Boston[2]. In urban strongholds the Democratic machine continued to organize events and turned out supporters at local and state level. The Presidential candidates relied on only a handful of close advisors: Truman's train had an entourage of only about twenty campaign staff, including speech-writers, secretaries and security details, accompanied by a small group of about forty reporters. Dewey's campaign organization was similar in size, with about one hundred reporters accompanying his whistle-stop trains.

Newspapers, radio and movie newsreels provided the main sources of mediated news. America had about 1,800 daily newspapers, reaching about a third of the population every day, not including thousands of weekly papers and popular magazines. Early American newspapers were highly partisan, with editors seeing their job as serving as the mouthpiece for different political leaders and factions. The mid-19th Century saw the emergence of more commercially-oriented mass circulation tabloid newspapers, with greater political independent since their principle source of revenue was sales rather than government subsidies, but it was not until the 1920s, following Pulitzer, that journalism started to evolve towards the 'objective' model emphasizing standards

such as fairness, impartiality and the attempt to avoid direct partisan leanings[3]. By 1948 the partisan press had been in decline for many decades, but in their editorial support newspapers were clearly stacked to favour the GOP camp: 771 papers (65 percent of all papers) endorsed Dewey, compared with only 182 papers (15 percent), which supported Truman[4]. The Republican edge in terms of circulation figures was even greater, and this imbalance persisted in every election until the 1960s.

Yet newspaper partisanship received a counter-balance from the other media. The 1934 Communication Act regulating the airwaves ensured that equal opportunities for access to the airwaves were provided to all bona fide candidates for public office, forbade the censorship of political broadcasts on the radio, and regulated radio and television stations through the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Roosevelt's fireside chats on radio, and later Truman's, reached a national audience, with over 90 percent of households owning a radio set. Radio carried candidate speeches to a wide audience, as well as broadcasting paid ads and special political programs throughout the election. During the campaign two short 10-minute films of Truman and Dewey played in movie theatres throughout the country, at a time when about 65 million people went to the movies every week.

Television was only emerging into the political spotlight: in 1948 the party conventions were covered on TV for the first time, reaching audiences in New York and Washington DC, and this campaign also saw the first paid television appearances by presidential candidates. But the audience was limited: in 1950 only 9 percent of American households possessed a black-and-white television set flickering in the corner of the living room although the consumer boom of the fifties rapidly transformed this situation. For the few who watched TV, without cable, the three major networks monopolized the airwaves, each network broadcast providing only 15 minutes of news in the early evening. The balance between the print press and electronic media was already starting to shift as early as 1952: when people were asked by the NES about their main source of election information 39 percent reported following the campaign 'regularly' in newspapers, one third listened to 'a good many' radio speeches or discussions, but already one third watched 'a good many' programs about the campaign on television[5].

As mentioned earlier, Paul Lasarsfeld and colleagues in the early 1940s carried out the first systematic studies of media use and voting behavior in American campaigns[6]. Lasarsfeld emphasized that the main function of the campaign was to reinforce those supporters who already had partisan leanings; the 'attentive public' who tuned into campaign speeches on the radio, followed the campaign in newspapers, and discussed politics with friends, were already the most committed partisans. The campaign provided information about Truman and Dewey that helped to crystallize voting decisions for Democrats and Republicans. In contrast the inattentive public, drawn from the less well educated and lower socioeconomic groups, were less exposed to the news media and less likely to vote.

Most commentators predicted that President Truman would be defeated. International problems of the post-war reconstruction led to

divisions among the Allies and the start of the Cold War. At home there were difficulties of demobilization. The conversion of the American economy to peacetime needs produced high taxes, labor strikes, and rising prices. Race was to cause more even deep-rooted divisions: Truman was sympathetic to black demands for civil rights to vote, and when the Democratic convention strongly endorsed this policy the party split three-ways, with Governor Strom Thurmond heading the States' Rights 'Dixiecrats' opposed to reform, while on the left former Vice President Henry Wallace led a new Progressive party of pacifists, reformers and New Dealers. When the Republicans, in the first convention covered on television, nominated Governor Dewey again almost everybody expected him to win. Fifty of the nation's top political writers picked Dewey as the winner. After the election, in the first nation-wide survey that eventually became the NES, two-thirds of the public expressed surprise at the outcome.

The conventional wisdom about the result was reinforced by the few available opinion polls. The first systematic opinion polls based on samples of the population were developed in the mid-thirties. But Truman disregarded the polls and relied instead on his close advisors and the crowds that greeted him at every campaign stop. Dewey was the first Presidential candidate to employ a pollster on his staff but this probably proved a source of unreliable advice; in 1948 the available surveys by George Gallup, Archibald Crossley and Elmo Roper confidently predicted a comfortable victory for Governor Thomas E. Dewey. Just before the election Life carried a big picture of Dewey with the caption "The next President of the United States" while the Chicago Tribune's premature headline was 'Dewey defeats Truman'. Elmo Roper even discontinued polling on 9th September 1948, when he predicted 52.2 percent for Dewey to 37.1 percent for Truman; since he regarded the result as so inevitable that 'no amount of electioneering' could alter the outcome. In the end the pollsters, press commentators, and editorial writers experienced a rout: Truman won about 50 percent of the popular vote, carried 28 states producing 303 electoral college votes, and the Democrats recaptured control of both houses of Congress.

The Pre-Modern British Campaign

If we compare the 1948 American campaign with its equivalent in Britain, the similarities are striking. The British general election in 1945 exemplified the premodern campaign with its decentralized, ad-hoc and uncoordinated organization, volunteer labour-force, and constituency focus[7]. The end of the wartime coalition government on 21st May 1945, and the dissolution of Parliament two days later, brought the first general election for a decade. The process of British campaigning gradually evolved in the mid-nineteenth century, following the Second Reform Act in 1867, which encouraged the development of mass party organizations registering and mobilizing the newly enfranchised electorate. In local constituencies most contact was on a face-to-face basis between candidates and voters, with campaign rallies, hustings, canvassing and party meetings, as well as coverage through local newspapers. Despite the introduction of wireless broadcasting in the 1920s, this pattern continued in recognizable form in Britain until at least the late fifties.

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

The grassroots organization of the local prospective parliamentary candidates assisted by voluntary helpers within each constituency remained the bedrock of the Labour, Conservative and Liberal campaigns. This reflected patterns of constituency party organization that developed in the mid-Victorian era. The British electorate was small in number prior to the First World War: there were about 900 votes per constituency in 1835, 3,500 in 1868, and 5,200 in 1900. With electorates of this size, candidates and their agents could manage local campaigns on a personal basis, contacting many supporters directly. The main work of Conservative Associations lay in maintaining the registration of supporters, and battling in the courts with the registration claims of opponents. The Corrupt Practices Act of 1883 put an end to the bribery and treating which had characterized election management. The 1918 Reform Act transformed the electorate, with the extension of the franchise to women voters over thirty, as well as the removal of complex property qualifications. The further expansion of the franchise to all women in 1928 saw a dramatic increase in numbers. By 1945 there were almost 40,000 voters per seat. Mobilizing support on this scale required an effective party organization within each constituency.

The Conservative party organization had been allowed to fall into disrepair during the Second World War, it had been 'moth-balled' because partisan activity was seen as unpatriotic, and there was minimal coordination between its different branches. At grassroots level each of the 640 constituency associations functioned as an independent unit, with its own funds, officers, candidates and publicity staff. Above this loose structure were the Central Council and the Executive Committee of the National Union, which tried to coordinate the local party associations, mainly through persuasion. Central Office also produced a variety of pamphlets, handbills, posters, and material for speeches. Yet as Lord Wooten summarized the prevailing wisdom of the time, all politics was local: "Let there be no mistake about it; elections are won in the constituencies and not in the central or area offices. Elections are won on doorsteps of the land, not at great public meetings." Local parties were gradually transformed from small, informal groups of voters engaged as registration societies to mass membership organizations with regular meetings and a more bureaucratic structure of officers. Party membership reached its peak in the postwar era, reaching around 2.8 million in 1953 in the Conservative party and around one million in the Labour party, representing about one in ten voters given a total electorate of 33.7 million. Membership was mobilized during the campaign to leaflet the constituency, canvass voters, plan the local campaign, and activate supporters on Election Day. Candidates were often adopted just before the election, and they came home from the war to throw themselves enthusiastically into a hectic round of five or six public meetings a night, in village halls, with tours in speaker vans and leafleting during the day.

In 1945 the national campaign and the role of central party headquarters remained low-key for both major parties. Prior to the development of the tools of market research, the party leadership developed their party platform and campaign messages in the light of conference debates, political 'hunches', and informal feedback from

the constituencies, but without any input derived from the paraphernalia of survey research, focus groups, and political consultants. The Market Research Society was first organized in 1947, but it was not until 1962/3 that the major British political parties seriously considered these techniques. The few polls published by Gallup during the months leading up to the campaign pointed to a Labour victory, but they were largely ignored. Based on the leadership of Winston Churchill, at the zenith of his long career, the Conservatives remained confident of victory. Under Churchill's leadership Germany had surrendered and Japan was about to fall. The party leaders toured the country, addressing public meetings. Battle covered around seven or eight meetings a day around the country, driven by his wife, and accompanied by a single publicity officer who dealt with the press. The Labour leader made about seventy speeches in total, mostly extemporary with minimal notes. Winston Churchill went on a four-day whistle-stop tour around the country, in a special train, addressing six to eleven cities every day. Meetings within the constituency were the heart of the local campaign. Activity was reported to have declined with the use of radio broadcasts; nevertheless one study reported that in one city alone (Glasgow) over 600 school halls had been booked for public meetings during the 1950 campaign.

Media coverage of the campaign was limited compared with today. Although the BBC had restarted regular broadcasting in 1947, television played no role during, or after, the campaign. The first programmes about party politics appeared on television in 1951, but television news did not cover the campaign until 1959. Nevertheless the first revolution in the electronic media had already created a mass audience and the beginnings of a national campaign. The introduction of radio broadcasting in 1924 permanently altered the way elections were fought. Leadership speeches, which previously reached an audience of only a few thousand, were now heard night after night by millions. In the 1945 campaign BBC radio scheduled one (20-30 minute) free party political radio broadcast after the main evening news each weekday evening. By prior agreement, ten broadcasts were allocated to the Conservatives and Labour, four to the Liberals, one each to the Communists and the Common Wealth party. Labour broadcasts were more coordinated and thematic than the Conservatives. The opening broadcasts by the party leaders set the tone for the subsequent campaign. According to BBC audience research, the listenership was substantial: just under half the adult population heard each broadcast, with numbers rising towards polling day. Moreover, just as later television set the agenda for newspapers, so the radio broadcasts were reported at length in the printed press.

Newspaper readers had the weekday choice of the national tabloid *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Sketch*, or one of the seven broadsheet national morning newspapers, or one of the many daily regional or local papers. The print media were highly partisan, especially the popular press. Conservative-leaning national newspapers (the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Sketch* and the *Daily Telegraph*) had the highest circulation, selling about 6.8 million copies. But the Conservative edge in the national press was not great. The Labour-supporting Daily *Herald* and Daily *Mirror* enjoyed a combined circulation of 6.6 million, while the Liberals received the support of the News *Chronicle* and the *Manchester Guardian*, with a total circulation of 1.6 million. *The*

Times remained fairly independent, traditionally Conservative although anti-Churchill in this election. Much of the coverage consisted of 'straight' factual reporting, either the detail of constituency contests or of leadership speeches, with more partisan messages in the editorials.

The only newspaper with a systematic opinion poll was the *News Chronicle*, which published the British Institute of Public Opinion, later known as Social Surveys (Gallup Poll) Ltd. These polls showed a twenty-point Labour lead over the Conservatives in February and April 1945. The Gallup survey taken closest to polling day, with fieldwork between 24 and 27th June in 195 constituencies, showed a smaller gap between the parties, with 47 per cent voting Labour, 41 per cent voting Conservative, and 10 per cent Liberal. Nevertheless most journalistic commentators expected a close result or a Conservative victory, as did contemporary observers, based largely on Churchill's personal popularity and international stature.

Prior to the first national election surveys little systematic information is available about the attitudes and values of the British electorate but the data available at constituency level, as well as from the earliest Gallup polls, suggests that class was the preeminent cleavage in British politics, the foundation of the two-party system. The period between the Second Reform Act and the First World War was characterised by a principle cleavage along the religious divide between supporters of the established church and non-conformists, reinforced and overlaid by divisions over Irish Home Rule versus Unionism, and a regional cleavage between core and periphery. Studies suggest that the critical shift moving the party system from the politics of religion to the politics of class occurred after the First World War[8]. The earliest systematic analysis of voting behavior based on the series of British election studies (BES), by Butler and Stokes, stressed that in the mid-1960s the electorate was anchored for long periods of time, perhaps for their lifetime, to the Labour or Conservative parties through sectoral cleavages and party loyalties, produced by socialization within the family, school, workplace and local community, reinforced by the messages of the partisan press[9].

There was a three-week hiatus between the end of polling day and the announcement of the results, occasioned by the need to collect and count the votes of three million troops abroad. When declared, the results of the 1945 general election proved remarkable in nearly all regards - the largest two-party swing in votes since 1918, the substantial Labour landslide, the size of the Conservative defeat. On 5 July 1945, Labour received 48.3 percent of the vote, the best result they have ever received, before or since. The number of Labour MPs more than doubled overnight, from 154 to 393. Labour had held two minority administrations in 1924 and 1929 but this was the first Labour government with a comfortable overall majority (of 147 seats), with prospects of a full term in office to implement plans for radical economic and social change. Conservative seats were decimated, from 585 in 1935 to 213 in 1945. The first post-war election can be regarded as a 'critical election', producing a long-term shift in the balance of partisan forces, developing and consolidating a new policy agenda, and establishing the basis for 'normal' two-party politics for successive

decades. The 1945 election was a watershed in British politics, producing the birth of the Westminster two-party system.

The Evolution of the Post-Modern American Campaign

The extent of the revolution in political communications is striking if we contrast the typical postwar campaigns in America and Britain with the situation that has developed by the mid-1990s. One of the major consequences of developments in the late sixties and early seventies was the 'nationalization' of the American presidential campaign, with network news programs broadcasting candidate speeches, party conventions, and election events across the country, unifying America in a common experience[10]. During this period, coverage on CBS, *NBC* and *ABC*, and the *New York Times, Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal*, provided the focus for the presidential campaign, with anchors, broadcast journalist and reporters for the major papers as figures of unchallenged authority. There was a well-established hierarchy among and within news organizations, and a clear sense of professional identity and standards among journalists. Yet the 'golden days' of network news was not to last, producing anxieties about the proliferation of media outlets and messages. The networks in 1970 had no rivals: only 10 percent of American homes had cable. By 1980, penetration by this service had only reached 20 percent of households. But by the late 1990s almost three-quarters had cable or satellite (72 percent) and VCRs (77 percent). As mentioned earlier, not surprisingly, given these developments, network audience share plummeted from 93 percent in 1977 to less than half today[11]. We have seen how the readership for American newspapers has experienced a steady hemorrhage for decades, which shows no signs of being staunched.

As discussed in the last two chapters, competition for viewers has become far more intense, with the fragmentation of the television market into narrower and narrower segments. Partial deregulation of the television industry, the growth of cable television systems, satellite services, the rise of new networks, videotape recorders, and communication via the Internet has splintered the competition for news in the marketplace. The development of digital and broadband technology multiplying television channels, and new sources of Internet information, seem likely to accelerate these developments. The growth of 'narrow-casting' means that more and more news sources are reaching increasingly specialized audiences. While a small group of political aficionados can find ever more detailed information about government, public policy and campaigns through these sources, simultaneously surfing the web and watching CNN and C-SPAN during the election, many others may find it easier to tune out of political information by watching MTV, HBO and Monday Night Football. The multiplicity of news outlets, stories and channels has undermined the sense that the network news today can ever sign off with the classic Walter Cronkite phrase, "That's the way it is." The familiar authorities have gone, replaced by multiple realities.

As a result of these developments political leaders face greater difficulties in connecting with voters in a news system characterized

by increased fragmentation. Candidates have to run up the down escalator simply to stay in place.   In order to do this, America has experienced the evolution of the permanent campaign. The techniques for monitoring the pulse of the public, including focus groups, daily tracking polls, and 'electronic town meetings', have gradually moved beyond the campaign to become an integral part of governing. Starting with John Kennedy, but developed particularly under Richard Nixon, the White House's sensitivity to public opinion became an enduring institutional feature of the modern presidency. Opinion polling, once fairly ad hoc, became centralized within the White House and organized around routine procedures for monitoring public support[12]. More recent developments have seen changes in the techniques commonly used to measure public opinion, and greater sensitivity to the results in framing and communicating public policy options. These developments happened first within the presidency, but have subsequently expanded throughout all levels of government so that the techniques for winning elections have become increasingly central to the techniques for governing, and the policy debate in Washington has become part of the permanent campaign.

The professionalization of political consultant and the growth of the political marketing industry in the United States is a phenomenon that has been widely documented[13]. Many aspects are not particularly novel to American politics, after all Joe McGinniss wrote his classic book, *The Selling of the President*[14], three decades ago. The use of market research on an extensive scale started with campaigns in the early 1960s. By the mid-1970s pollsters were already dividing the electorate into segmented groups and regions for targeted messages. The 1980 campaign saw the emergence of several marketing tools that became widely adopted, including hard-hitting negative advertising, direct mail, the rising availability of funds from PACs, and sophisticated strategic campaign planning. The 1992 campaign was marked mostly by two main innovations. Focus groups and rolling tracking polls were used extensively to monitor public reactions to the campaign on a day-by-day basis, keeping a finger on the pulse of public opinion. And the forums for political debate widened beyond the old media, like *Meet the Press*, to live talk shows on television and radio, like *Larry King Live*. With the mass audience deserting the network evening news, candidates searched elsewhere for voters. Today political consulting has grown to such an extent that the major networking organization, the American Association of Political Consultants, established in 1969, now claims 800 active members and a billion dollar industry. Whether the industry can now legitimately be called a profession, in the strictest meaning of the term, can be questioned. Campaign consultants more commonly base their skills on experience, craft and 'folk wisdom' rather than on a body of well-developed scientific knowledge and expertise that can be easily exported to other contexts, and the industry lacks training qualifications and an enforceable code of ethics[15]. Nevertheless the sheer size of the US industry in political consultancy makes it a model for many other countries.

In terms of campaigning the 1996 presidential election was marked less by innovation than by consolidation, since the Clinton and Dole campaigns drew on all of these techniques[16]. After the excitement generated by Clinton's first victory in 1992, and the turmoil

associated with the Gingrich revolution in 1994, the 1996 election proved a more low-key affair. By far the most important developments in campaign communications concerned the growing political use of the internet. As Hill and Hughes remarked: "In 1994, if a political party or interest group had even a rudimentary Web site, it was a pioneer in the Information Age. ..In 1996, if a candidate for president had a Web site, he would likely give out the address for it during televised appearances…By 1997, if a party or interest group still did not have a Web site, it was run by a bunch of idiots." [17] By 1996 the major parties had fairly sophisticated web sites, as did the presidential candidates, along with the sites for traditional news media like CNN, ABCNews and the New York Times, but in this race the Web was still a novelty rather than integral to the campaign strategy. Use of the internet by political organizations proliferated so that by the time of the 1998 elections almost all gubernatorial candidates, almost three-quarters of all Democrat and Republican Senate candidates, and just over half the candidates for the House of Representatives had sites, equally divided between the major parties[18].

Moreover the size of the internet user community has been growing exponentially and becoming mainstream. The Pew survey in May 1998 estimated that the percentage of Americans regularly getting *news* from the Internet (where 'regularly' is defined as at least once a week) more than tripled in the past two years, rising from 11 to 36 million users, or 20 percent of all Americans[19]. Similar figures are evident for those who regularly go online to communicate with others via discussion lists and chat groups, while slightly fewer go online for entertainment news (14 percent) or financial information (10 percent). Within the space of just a few years, the regular audience for online news has become larger than many traditional media such as for mainstream news magazines like *Time* and *Newsweek* (15 percent), listeners to talk radio (13 percent), let alone viewers of minority outlets like PBS *Newshour* or *C-Span* (4 percent). This pattern was particularly marked among the younger generation; the Pew survey in May 1998 found that among 18-29 year old Americans more went online the previous day (38 percent) than read a newspaper (28 percent) or magazine (35 percent). It is true that the online users of news and political web sites proved most likely to see the Internet as a supplementary rather than a new source of information, since this group were already more likely to pay attention to politics in the traditional news media[20]. Nevertheless the rapid expansion of the Internet in the United States, and its increasing convergence with the traditional media of radio, television and newspapers, seems likely to add another layer of complexity to the political communication process within the next decade.

The Evolution of the Post-Modern British Campaign?

British parties have also been transformed by the gradual evolution of the permanent campaign where the techniques of spin-doctors, opinion polls, and professional media management are increasingly applied to routine everyday politics. Nevertheless although the professionalization of British party communications has increased in recent years, as has fragmentation of the news media, neither have not yet reached the

levels evident in the United States. In Britain a few trusted experts in polling and political marketing are influential during the campaign in each party, such as Maurice Saatchi, Tim Bell and Gordon Reece at Conservative Central Office, but this role continues to be as part-time outside advisors, not integral to the process of government, nor even to campaigning which is still essentially run by politicians. Unlike in the United States, the political marketing industry has been limited, mainly because the only major clients are the Labour and Conservative party leaderships: the minor parties have modest resources, while parliamentary candidates run retail campaigns based on shoe leather, grassroots helpers, and tight budgets. But the effect of television during has been to shift the primary focus of the campaign from unpaid volunteers and local candidates towards the central party leadership flanked by paid, although not necessarily full-time, professionals[21].

Labour's election machine in 1997 was commonly regarded as widely effective[22]. The high-tech developments in media management at Millbank Tower were widely discussed in the press. Supposedly modeled on the war room in the Clinton campaign, the Millbank organization had a tight inner core, including Peter Mandelson, Gordon Brown, the press secretary Alastair Campbell, the pollster Philip Gould, Blair's personal assistant Anji Hunter, Lord Irvine of Lairg and Jonathan Powell. The interior circle was surrounded by about 200 staffers connecting via fax, modem and pagers to key shadow spokespersons and candidates in marginal constituencies. Briefings were sent out nightly, sometimes twice a day. The Labour party included a rebuttal unit ready for a rapid response to anticipated attacks.

After 1992 Labour realized that elections are not usually won or lost in the official campaign, and they subsequently designed their strategy for the long haul. For two years before polling day a Labour task force was designed to switch 5000 voters in each of 90 target marginals. Those identified as potential Labour coverts in these seats were contacted by teams of volunteers on the doorstep, and by a canvassing operation run from twenty telephone banks around the country, coordinated from Millbank during the campaign. In January 1997 get out the vote letters were sent to each type of target voter, and young people received a video of Tony Blair. Information from the canvassing operation, especially issues of concern raised by voters, was also fed back to Philip Gould, to help shape Labour's presentations. All the major parties maintained Web sites, providing information about activities and policies, as well as how to join, although few of the features were truly interactive[23].

Opinion polling was carried out regularly from late 1993, and Philip Gould and Deborah Mattinson conducted a programme of focus group research to monitor reaction to Labour's policies. Strategy meetings were conducted almost daily from late 1994, tackling Labour's weaknesses on taxation, trade unions, and crime well before the official campaign came close. The manifesto, New Labour: Because Britain Deserves Better was designed to focus on specific pledges. The main theme of Labour's advertising was "Britain Deserves Better", fairly bland and safe, if unmemorable. To highlight the message, Tony Blair visited 60 constituencies, travelling about 10,000 miles by road, rail and air, and providing controlled photo-opportunities rather than press conferences

for the media. The membership drive launched by Blair was also part of this long-term strategy, increasing grassroots membership by almost two-thirds, up from 261,000 in 1991 to a peak of 405,000 in January 1998.

In Britain the major parties used to be able to campaign assured of a largely sympathetic coverage by newspapers with a traditional Labour or Conservative leaning. Hence in an election Labour could always campaign counting upon fairly favourable coverage in the popular *Daily Mirror* while the Conservatives could be assured of positive editorials in *The Daily Mail*. But in the 1997 campaign both major parties experienced weakening of press-party linkages, not just among the Conservative press. Content analysis of the front pages of six major national newspapers during the April 1997 campaign found that compared with 1992 more coverage fell into the 'mixed' category, neither favourable nor unfavourable to any of the three major parties[24]. Therefore trends in Britain seem to have followed those in many other European countries which used to have a strongly partisan press, like the Netherlands, but where political coverage is now driven more strongly by an autonomous 'media logic' in the fierce competition for readers rather than by traditional allegiances or the politics of their proprietors. "Modern media are more powerful, more independent, and more determined to pursue their own interests through a professional culture of their own making."[25] Press-party dealignment has increased the complexity and uncertainty of media management for parties, who can no longer rely on getting their message out through a few sympathetic sources.

The electronic media have not yet fragmented as much in Britain as in the US. In the 1997 campaign the major flagship news programmes on British television continued to be BBC1's 6 O'clock and 9 O'clock News, ITN's News at Ten, Channel 4's 7pm news, and BBC2's 10.20 Newsnight, along with weekly current affairs programmes like Panorama. Nevertheless cable, satellite and the Internet have started to make inroads into this process and the new digital and broadband channels that will be available by the time of the next general election will exacerbate this process further. The first satellite services became available in Britain from Sky TV in February 1989, followed by BSB the following year. By 1992, about 3 percent of homes had access to cable TV, while 10 percent had a satellite dish. In contrast by 1997 almost a fifth of all households could tune into over fifty channels on satellite and cable. In these homes, more than a third of all viewing was on these channels. During the campaign, between 10-15 percent of the audience usually watched cable and satellite programmes every evening. Occasionally when there was wall-to-wall election on the terrestrial channels, like on Thursday 24th April 1997, a week before the election, the proportion of cable and satellite viewers jumped to almost a quarter of the audience. Moreover, *Sky News, CNN, News 24, Channel 5*, and BBC Radio's *Five Live*, have altered the pace of news, to brief headlines on the hour every hour.

The Internet also promises to transform news habits. In 1997 the availability of the BBC's Election '97, ITN Online, the online headlines from the Press Association and Reuters, party home pages, as well as electronic versions of The Times and The Telegraph, dramatically accelerated the news cycle. BBC's Online, with easy access to RealAudio broadcasts of its major political programmes and live parliamentary coverage, promises the shape of things to come[26]. With 24-hour coverage,

the acceleration of the news cycle has dramatically increased the need for parties to respond, or get knocked off their feet, by a suddenly shifting agenda. By spring 1998 one fifth of all British citizens had access to the Internet (see Table 5.7). Therefore the national news media continue to prove far more important in Britain than America. The major parties all try to get their message out via the major national television news programmes and the national newspapers. Yet the fragmentation of the electronic media does seem likely to increase in Britain, as well as in the rest of Europe.

Moreover major changes have also become evident among the electorate. The most comprehensive study of the 1997 election, based on the series of British Election Surveys, concluded that the 1997 election revealed a more instrumental electorate[27]. Voters proved to be less closely tied to many of the traditional bedrocks of party support, mainly because of political developments and the way that Labour moved towards the center ground of British politics. The most consistent evidence suggests a pattern of continuing secular dealignment in the British electorate. In particular, in response to Labour's center shift, class voting reached its lowest level since the BES series began in the early 1960s. Regional cleavages also weakened, with the further closure of the North-South divide. And strong partisan loyalties, already eroded in a series of elections during the 1970s, fell further. The 'old' politics of ideological divisions over the virtues of the market v. public ownership declined in importance for Labour voting, while the 'new' issues of Europe increasingly crosscut these patterns of voting behaviour. The weakening of partisan identities and the increased instrumentality of voting characteristic of late 20th Century electorates makes all electoral groups more open to competitive appeals. As a result the potential impact of political communications to influence the electorate becomes greater although at the same time if all the major parties professionalize their campaign communications then, rather like a high-tech star wars, developments in one party are likely to be neutralized as other adopt similar strategies.

Conclusions: The Consequences of the Modernization Process

Based on this comparison we can conclude that, despite major differences in their political systems, the campaigns in Britain and the United States share many common features. In the post-war era, if Truman had campaigned in Britain, or Attlee in America, they would have encountered a familiar environment. By the end of the twentieth century certain common trends have affected both American and British practices. Elections have become increasingly professionalized in both countries, for example Tony Blair's Labour party adopted many of the techniques common in the Clinton campaign, like a campaign 'war room', rapid response unit, and daily focus groups. There was also considerable interchange of campaign advisors and politicians between both camps, as pollsters like Philip Gould visited the Clinton team while Stan Greenberg polled for Tony Blair[28]. The news media remains more nationalized in Britain than in the US, but due to satellite,

digital and broadband stations the British electronic media are already heading down the path towards greater fragmentation of outlets and levels. And the electorate has clearly become more dealigned from traditional party and social loyalties in both countries.

This does not mean, however, that British campaigns have become 'Americanized', as some claim, in terms of the role of money or an increase in negative political coverage. Considerable contrasts remain because of legal regulations and structural constraints. During the last forty years, the US has experienced the rise of the candidate–centered campaign[29], characteristically capital-intensive, heavily television-driven, run by an industry of full-time campaign consultants. In contrast, although British general elections have adopted some off-the-shelf American techniques, Britain still exemplifies the party-centered campaign, along with most European democracies. Politicians remain in the driving seat, assisted by their advisors. The party leadership may have become more visible within the campaign, due to the rise of television, but this does not mean that parliamentary candidates have followed suit. America has experienced the rise of the candidate-centered campaign but in Britain the contest is essentially about party; for example, in the 1997 election half the electorate could not name a single candidate correctly[30]. In both countries the heart of the election campaign is the battle to dominate the news headlines. But the structure and ethos of British television means that election coverage is far more balanced and extensive than in America. British newspapers, despite dealignment, remain more partisan than those in the United States. Above all, capital-intensive television advertising, the mother's milk of American politics, remains unknown in Britain. We can therefore conclude that modernization has transformed the process of electioneering in both countries. The defining features of post-modern campaigns in both countries are the professionalization of campaign consultants, the fragmentation of the news media, and the dealignment of the electorate. But differences in structural conditions means that many of the features commonly regarded as characteristic of American campaigns are absent in Britain.

What are the consequences of modernization process for the linkages between parties and citizens in a democracy? Post-modern campaigns can be seen to represent a new openness and tolerance for alternative views, and multiple forms of understanding, as well as a source of anxiety and disorientation as the familiar standards are swept away. As a result of the fragmentation of the news media, politicians seem to be struggling ever harder to retain control of their messages, through the older channels, while the familiar ground is shifting under their feet, producing a pervasive mood of angst. Some regarded the fragmentation of the media as a positive development, increasing the plurality of outlets and alternative avenues available for politicians and voters to communicate with each other. Rather than being locked into the ideological blinkers of one or two partisan newspapers, or being limited to the evening news on one or two television channels, many voters now have greater opportunities to access different channels, styles and formats of news in the electronic media. Focus groups and opinion polls can be seen as an effective way that parties can stay in touch with public opinion, and one which is more representative of the general electorate than reliance upon the opinions of local party

activists.

Alternatively, the evolution of modern and post-modern campaigns can be seen as threatening the democratic process, widening the gap between citizens and their representatives. If parties and candidates adopt whatever message seems most likely to resonate with focus groups, if pollsters, consultants and advertisers rather than politicians come to determine the content of campaigns, and if 'spin' outweighs 'substance', then the serious business of government may be replaced by the superficial manipulation of images. "Packaging politics", Bob Franklin argues, "impoverishes political debate by oversimplifying and trivializing political communications."[31]. This process may thereby exacerbate public cynicism about the electoral process and undermine the democratic legitimacy of representative bodies. Some fear that the shift in campaign techniques may have a direct impact on civic engagement; if voters have become passive spectators of symbolic events staged in television studios rather than active participants in local party meetings and community campaigns[32]. As discussed earlier, the most common concern in that post-modern campaigns turn off voters due the decline of face-to-face communications and the rise of practices such as negative news highly adversarial to government, horse-race journalism, and trivialization of campaign discourse. These criticisms are heard most commonly concerning developments in the United States, but similar concerns are increasingly expressed elsewhere. To evaluate these alternative interpretations, the next section of the book goes on to examine the consequences of political communications on citizens.

Chapter from Pippa Norris "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Post-Industrial Societies." (NY: Cambridge University Press, Fall 2000)

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