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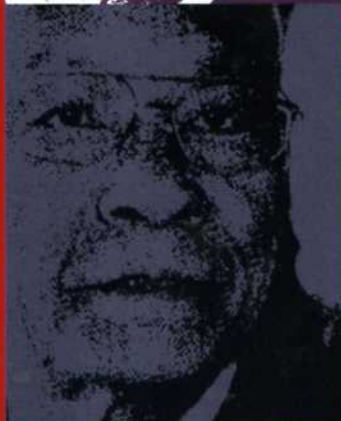
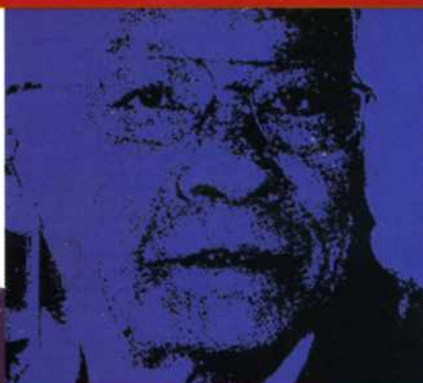
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What can we learn from U.S. election campaigns?

A Swiss political consultant has listed ten common facts about elections in democratic countries

BY LOUIS F. PERRON

People in politics around the globe are fascinated with U.S. election campaigns. As democracy spreads worldwide, U.S. political consultants increasingly offer their services outside of the U.S. – including in the Philippines. However, can American electoral campaigning techniques be transferred to a country with a different political culture than that of the USA? This article offers ten lessons.

1. Politics is already a global business

Today, there are about 3,000 political consulting companies in the United States. These companies offer services such as general strategy, fundraising, political polling, campaign management and opposition research. U.S. political consultants increasingly offer their services worldwide. American consultants have worked in more than 70 countries covering all continents.

The hot spot where most U.S. political consultants have worked seems to be Latin America. Within the region, many consultants have provided their services in Venezuela. Fewer U.S. consultants have worked in Asian countries. However, U.S. consultants have campaigned in the Philippines, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, Japan, Indonesia and Taiwan. Joseph Napolitan, Rick Davis and Mark Mellman are among the consultants who have worked in the Philippines. Several U.S. consultants and observers think that South-East Asia will be the fastest growing market for political consulting in a couple of years.

2. Foreign consultants can be a great source of ideas and know-how

Though a foreign consultant cannot - and should not - run a campaign, he can be an important source of fresh ideas and know-how about campaign techniques. A consultant can also offer the campaign a neutral view. Most campaign teams are very good at seeing the strengths of their candidate and the weaknesses of their opponent. However, key to drawing the battle lines is to identify the weaknesses of your own campaign as well as the strengths of your opponent.

3. Foreign consultants can help structure an election campaign

Veteran political consultant Joseph Napolitan explains that "there are three simple steps to winning every campaign: 1) decide what you are going to say; 2) decide how you are going to say it; and 3) say it." U.S. political consultants are mostly involved in the first step of a campaign when working abroad. Polling, message and strategy development, focus groups and targeting are the services that U.S. consultants provide most frequently to clients outside of the USA.

4. Message and Strategy Development is a winner

Whether a candidate runs for Sheriff in Tennessee or for President of the Philippines, the campaign needs to give voters a reason to vote for one side and not for the other. The reason should be simple, short, understandable and relevant to people's lives. The step by step process of developing that reason is what U.S. consultants call message and strategy



Liberal Philippines invited Louis F. Perron of Perron Campaigns Inc., to speak before the Liberal Campaign Coordinating Council (L3C) in one of its regular meetings in Makati City. He spoke before a distinguished audience that included Sen. Pres. Franklin Drilon, LP Chairman; Rep. Florencio Abad, Party President, Usec. Chito Gascon and the other members of the party's campaign core group. Here is a summary of the points he discussed during his presentation.

development. "I now have worked on all six continents," says political consultant Gary Nordlinger, "and the one thing that translates everywhere is research based message development".

5. Strategic polling and focus group research helps find out the message

Before spending millions of pesos on advertising, it is worth spending some money to make sure the advertisement conveys the right message. Many U.S. consultants have experienced that campaigners outside of the U.S. are focused on the horse race and do not always use polling to test messages and their rebuttals. Joseph Napolitan summarizes the experience of many others: "There is more to strategic message development than asking who you are going to vote for." Developing a coherent message and testing it by using the right questionnaire is a new concept in many campaigns – and can well make the difference on Election Day.

6. Television is often the best way to reach the outer wing of the electorate

Most people do not love their political leaders and do not attend party rallies. Many people even don't care about politics. Election campaigns are often won by reaching exactly those people and the best way to reach them is often through television. The growing importance of television and other mass media seems to be a trend in politics worldwide. As one consultant asks: "Why do people in the Philippines drink Coca Cola?" Simple—because of television and advertising.

7. A campaign needs to stay on message and make it credible

An important service of a foreign consultant is to help train the candidate and the campaign to find various ways of repeating the same message. A campaign needs to repeat the message until polls show that people start picking it up. In addition to repetition, a campaign needs to make a special effort to make the message credible. In many countries, voters are very frustrated by the way democracy actually works in practice. As a result, a campaign can no longer talk about things, but it needs to do something to make its promises credible. "For example, if the candidate says he will

fight for coffee pickers, then the campaign should spend a week picking coffee," says Peter Schechter, who has worked extensively abroad.

8. Candidate preparation and campaign training is the future

Running for office is a tough job! Candidates need to be prepared to have a sharp and coherent message. They need to be ready to make their point in thirty seconds and to go into a debate. Sometimes, the best people do not run for office anymore and the most qualified candidates do not win. In the future, the political consulting industry should focus on training candidates and campaign teams. This can ensure that the best people run and win – and it can make public service and democracy near perfect.

9. U.S. consultants do not have the monopoly on political consulting

U.S. consultants face competition with a flourishing Latin American and European market of political consultancy. Indeed, for historical reasons, Philippine politics are in some respects closer to Latin America than to the United States. For example, in Latin America as well as in the Philippines, traditional and modern campaign techniques co-exist. Key for a campaign is to use traditional campaign techniques, but to do them in a more systematic and up-

dated way. Rallies should be used to recruit volunteers and to get press coverage. Door to door canvassing should be done to gather data on voters and to identify supporters. Leaflets should contain targeted messages to certain voters the campaign wants to reach.

10. There are serious challenges with international political consulting

There are serious ethical, cultural and technical challenges when a U.S. consultant tries to transfer the American campaign style to other countries. Indeed, the political system, culture and history differ from country to country. It is therefore crucial that a foreign consultant spends enough time in a country and works together with local people.

Weak party organization and low party identification are factors that facilitate the transfer of American campaigning techniques to another country. Other factors that encourage the involvement of U.S. political consultants are the direct election of the President by the people and a political culture that is centered on the personality.

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