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Falafel and Apple Pie**American Consultants, Modernization and Americanization of
Electoral Campaigns in Israel***Dahlia Scheindlin and Israel Waismel-Manor¹***Introduction**

From its earliest days, Israel's electoral process has exhibited a lively, if somewhat frenetic character. With no final borders and no constitution, it is not surprising that Israel's political life is relatively unstable.

The country has held eighteen national electoral campaigns (seventeen for Parliament, and one special election for Prime Minister) and had thirty-one governments. After a period of one-party domination during the first half of its life (1948–1977), it has undergone numerous power transitions. The public tends to be highly engaged, and until the last few cycles voter turnout hovered near the 80% mark (it has declined sharply over the last three elections to roughly 63%). In short, Israel seems to relish the electoral process.

Americans have worked on Israeli campaigns early and often; since 1969, American campaign consultants have played a role, although their activity has not been contiguous. Their involvement in Israel highlights the main questions about campaigns: how and why do they professionalize? Are the changes the result of unidirectional “diffusion” of American culture?² Or does their presence reflect an endogenous process of modernization? Is there a combination of the two? What are the political and normative implications of these changes in general, and in Israel?

To answer these questions, we first lay out the theoretical groundwork contrasting modernization and Americanization. We then portray the changing nature of Israeli campaigns as background. Next we focus on American campaign consultants in this evolving context, starting with their earliest, low-profile days in 1969 through to the highly public, practically spectacle-style involvement from 1996 onward. Along the way we track the relevant political, institutional and structural developments in the political environment that contributed to these changes. Finally we seek to analyze the implications of the American consultants' presence and American-style campaign practices in Israeli elections.

American-Style Politics Goes Global

There is at present a lively debate over the adoption of American-style campaigning across the globe, or “new-style” campaigning.³ This style of campaigning is usually associated with broad reliance on television advertisements and their professional production; ever-shorter spots and





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the use of negative advertising; targeting, segmenting and tailoring messages to the electorate; heavy reliance on polls for such targeting and strategy development (as opposed to just reporting); personalization and the declining importance of parties, policy or ideology; consultant-centered campaigns; and an ideological move toward the center by larger parties.⁴

Different frames have been developed for making sense of these changes. The most common ones are Americanization (or globalization) and modernization. While both approaches agree on what has changed, they differ significantly on how the developments came about and the role American consultants had in the process.

The term "Americanization" has been largely used as a "shorthand description of global [electioneering] trends," in which "the US is the leading exporter and role model of campaigning."⁵ It is often understood to mean the diffusion of American practices.⁶ Michael Barnett and Kenneth Goldstein⁷ argue that the Americanization of campaign practices is driven on the one hand by the desire of American political consultants seeking foreign markets for professional and remunerative reasons,⁸ and on the other hand by political actors from abroad. As the latter face increasing competitiveness of campaigns, they may seek the most updated campaigns techniques that they have encountered either through institutions such as the International Association of Political Consultants or personal networks, which often leads to American models. Obviously, a "cultural match" between those countries and American culture helps,⁹ in addition often newly democratizing countries that lack entrenched campaign styles and traditions are often very open to American tactics with their global image of innovation and success.

In this view, Americanization is seen as a unidirectional (one-way) cultural dissemination process.¹⁰ This does not exclude the possibility that cultural diffusion takes other paths too (from Western to Eastern and Central Europe, for example, or a hybrid form in Latin American). However, since the United States is regarded as "the cutting edge of electioneering innovation,"¹¹ it is by far the most influential path of universal standardization and homogenization of campaign practices.¹²

An alternative, often competing, view is that campaign changes are mainly the result of modernization. The American style is not imported or imposed on campaigns from the outside, rather, the result of structural changes in politics, the economy, society and the media that affect campaigns in similar ways in other countries, as they did in America.¹³ Because these practices originated in the US, modernization may be mistaken for Americanization, but actually the changes are endogenous.¹⁴ In this view, the process is a non-directional convergence that independently drives all countries toward common political communication practices in a common global environment.¹⁵

Several forces may contribute to the modernization of campaigns. First, the decline of parties across all democratic regimes and the rise of non-allied independent and also "floating" (undecided) voters called for ever-stronger tools to mobilize those voters. Second, the rise of the electronic media and its rising cost, especially television, forced parties and candidates to hire individuals who can maximize this new medium. Last, natural competition in this environment drives all campaigns to seek the one tool that that will give them the electoral edge, which was less prominent in the pre-modern era of large party machines and traditional loyalties. Hence, they either develop better practices or improvements on previous ones.¹⁶

So what is the Israeli story? Most of the literature on Israel adopts the view that Israeli campaigns have Americanized, not modernized. Myron Joel Aronoff takes campaign Americanization for granted and sees it as part of widespread Americanization of Israeli politics in general.¹⁷ Others, such as Dan Caspi, while giving some credit to standardization, still views these changes as part of a "universal trend toward mutual fertilization between cultures."¹⁸ Yet, presenting the Americanization of Israeli campaigns as a unidirectional process misses part of the story. In this chapter we illustrate what we believe to be an interplay between Americanization and modernization, as well as internal and external factors, in the changing campaigns of Israel.





The First Wave: Professionalization: Prior to 1977

For the first half of statehood (1948–1977), Israeli politics was an entrenched system of patronage. Mapai, forerunner to Labor, was the largest established party and it was linked to the Histadrut, or the central labor union, through which workers also received vital services such as health care. Much like the Democratic Party during the era of party bosses in the United States, local party branches and organizations had direct contact with voters and strong, traditional party loyalties; this has been described as an era of “absolute” politics in which the parties determined the voters’ political and ideological consciousness, rather than the other way around.¹⁹

As a result, voting behavior was notably stable for the first twenty-five years, or first eight electoral cycles: Mapai regularly won roughly one-third of the 120 Knesset seats and the General Zionists or Herut (forerunner to Likud) took between fifteen to twenty seats, creeping up through the 1960s.

Certain structural and institutional aspects served to reinforce the political status quo: radio advertising laws enacted in 1959, for example, gave free air time to parties with extra minutes for each member of Parliament (MP) represented in the outgoing Knesset—ensuring that the biggest existing parties got the largest exposure.

Two main developments contributed to a change in campaign styles. The first was an underlying shift in political electoral dynamics during the 1960s. Growing ethnic and class divisions led to increasing distrust of the establishment Labor party from a large, disenfranchised sector of the population, mainly immigrants from the Middle East and North Africa. This community began to wield its electoral clout against Mapai/Labor, which was blamed for their difficulties and was increasingly seen as elitist and corrupt. During this period the coalition of right-wing parties began gaining ground as the second largest party.

Disillusionment following the 1973 Yom Kippur war worsened the situation for Labor, bringing a deep failure on foreign affairs to its existing troubles on the domestic front. Both parties sensed that Labor was losing the traditional affinity of its voters, and altered their campaign tactics in response. Likud’s 1973 campaign attacked Prime Minister Golda Meir personally for failing to foresee or prevent the war. Labor ran on the defeatist slogan: “In spite of it, Labor.”

The second development was technical: the watershed caused by the introduction of Israeli television in 1967. Two years later, television entered political campaigns, ushering in an era of media politics. The parties rapidly grasped the power of this seemingly omnipotent new vehicle for reaching voters.

By all accounts the first television campaign in 1969 was predictably amateur. Relying solely on local television producers and camera crews, the ads were soporific, on-camera candidate talks that were long and smacked of lecturing.²⁰ In 1973 due to the trauma of the war, parties kept their budgets low and their campaigns understated,²¹ and the television ads remained primitive by modern standards.

Yet parties soon realized the power of television to reach voters far beyond their traditional base.²² Further, television led to a more populist and emotional approach, in which form is favored over content.²³

The American Presence

As Labor began growing weaker it made greater efforts to secure its edge. In 1969, Labor member of Knesset (MK) Yossi Sarid brought the first American consultant to work on the Labor campaign, but he made little impression and no headlines. Sarid said that with no experience running campaigns, he had been told Americans could bring greater know-how, and so he sought help. “But it turned out,” he said “that they didn’t understand [with relation to Israeli





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politics].²⁴ Although the 1973 elections showed the beginning of more personalized campaign strategies, there is no evidence that Americans were involved and promoting this.

By 1973 a number of endogenous processes were underway in Israel that are commonly linked to modernized campaign tactics. The major contextual ones involved the decline of organizational politics, presupposing direct contact with voters through participation in their organizations and branches, and ongoing loyalties—the main factors associated with increased need for sophisticated, modernizing campaigns.²⁵ Many of these changes recall those that occurred in American society and campaigns—roughly twenty years earlier.²⁶ Thus the impetus for modernization, or “Americanization,” of Israeli campaigns began prior to any significant American presence on the campaigns themselves, and thus with little or no help from American professionals.

The Second Wave: American Involvement 1977–1996

Political Background

In 1977 a political “earthquake” rocked the country. The electoral coup shocked commentators and lawmakers alike, and ousted Labor in Israel’s first transfer of political power. Likud’s victory symbolized the culmination of a political “dealignment” and “realignment,” in which core loyalties eroded and shifted. Since then, Likud developed a base at least as strong as Labor’s had once been and the country moved to a mainly two-party system.

While many of Labor’s wounds were long-term and self-inflicted, the campaign and political consultants, both American and Israeli, arguably take some credit. In 1977 was the first election in which an American consultant, David Garth, is reported to have played a significant role in the campaign.

In addition to the electoral and technical circumstances described in the first phase, three other factors created ripe conditions for the entry of American consultants and their practices.

First, in the twenty-eight years between Israel’s first elections and 1977, the eligible voter population more than quadrupled due to enormous immigration (from 506,567 in 1949 to 2,236,293 in 1977).²⁷ Parties that once depended on grassroots organization and direct voter contact became increasingly dependent on the new mass media of television to reach them.

A second structural change was the 1979 legislation separating mayoral elections from local council elections. Mayors now ran separately from their lists, placing a new focus on the candidate-centered campaign. This contributed to an increasingly personalized campaign style set by Menachem Begin’s campaign two years earlier.

The last factor is Israel’s transition from a socialist to a market orientation. Up until the 1970s the biggest difference between the two countries was America’s hallmark capitalist identity and Israel’s traditionally socialist orientation. Labor’s downfall triggered the beginning of its decline. The rise of capitalism slowly began to erode social conformism and group identities, and while individualism began to grow out of an increasingly thriving consumer culture. Traditional ideologies and political loyalties gave way to fragmentation and deep social chasms. The major social institutions were progressively de-linked from the parties. Smaller group identities led to political interest voting; a civic-society approach took hold that was much less dependent on parties.²⁸

Starting from its pre-state days, Israel has had an extraordinarily close relationship with the US due to America’s unwavering political and financial support over the years. American culture holds a special place of envy and almost fetishistic admiration in the Israeli mind. These changes only increased the cultural affinity among the two nations.

In the period between 1973 and 1981, television became entrenched in campaigns and professional production companies were hired. Starting in 1977, major efforts and financing were put into television campaigning, which went from primitive to “professionalized and effective.”²⁹





Unlike 1969, television was now a core part of campaigning, and unlike 1973, sentiments—and budgets—were open to harnessing its full power.

Negative advertising became more prominent during this period as well—starting in 1973, mainly from Likud, where the campaign was assessed as having projected image at the expense of substance.³⁰ The trend toward negative ads gathered momentum in 1977.³¹ The negative ads seemed to have begun in earnest on television, but carried over into print advertising.

By 1977 campaign advertising also took on what was considered an American tone: television spots became shorter and catchier, with music and jingles involved. This tone led some to view 1977 as a watershed marking a new era not only in politics but also in the general nature of campaigning in Israel.³² At this time, the thirty-second television spot was considered even in the US the “most controversial” aspect of electronic communication;³³ thus American aspects of Israeli campaign developments appeared quite early—if they did not quite pre-date American consultants, it seems unlikely that they were a direct result of their influence, which began in earnest only in 1977.

Other characteristics often credited to Americanization were evident in 1977. The Likud placed enormous focus on the personality of its candidate, party leader Menachem Begin. Strategists spent considerable effort creating and filming many different facets of his “image”: without his signature tie, younger than his years, a family man, a respectable figure. Alex Anski, an actor and production consultant to the campaign, concluded that “Menachem Begin was the most attractive electoral asset the party had.”³⁴ Print ads too, often focused exclusively on the personal figure of Begin and directly attacked his rival, Shimon Peres.³⁵

Many of these changes are attributed to local influences. Israeli professionals from outside politics were increasingly involved throughout the 1970s and quickly learned the transferability of their services; both Anski and the Dahaf advertising agencies worked for Labor in 1973, prior to working with Likud in 1977.³⁶ Local pollsters from advertising agencies and universities were hired to study the electoral market prior to the hiring of American pollsters. Some politicians were keenly aware of the need for outside professional consultants, in part to prove their own seriousness to the voters. Future president Ezer Weizman of the Likud, who ran the 1977 campaign, said:

This is going to be a very tough and very serious election dealing with the most important things . . . I am going to recruit the best people in the country to help and advise. If we don't find those people within, we'll go out to the market . . .³⁷

Anski reports that Weizman gave Eliezer Zorabin, a commercial advertising chief, total license over the daily communications, and often shifted strategy meetings to Dahaf offices rather than party headquarters. He told his staff: “They're professionals—and with all due respect, we're just amateurs.”³⁸ With an almost Machiavellian tone, Anski reports Weizman saying:

Let Eliezer sell and he'll sell you a car without an engine. That's his profession . . . [his people] don't care about platform-shmatform. If the platform brings votes, they'll use it. If not—they won't! . . . They can't afford to lose . . . it's their income and the measure of their professionalism . . . Eliezer is capable of doing tricks—I don't say tricks are bad, but to use tricks you need to know when and to be sure they will help. . . .³⁹

Still, some felt that the influence was mainly style over substance.⁴⁰ Yet the style was radically different, and Caspi himself stated that the Zorabin–Weizman chemistry led to “far-reaching changes in campaigning methods” which became “meager in content but rich in ‘easily-digestible’ slogans . . .”⁴¹ Anski reports that Zorabin pushed the introduction of debates, precisely because he knew that Israeli audiences would associate them with the prestige of American elections.⁴²





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Toward the end of this phase, the personalization of elections would take another leap forward. In 1992 Yitzhak Rabin introduced primaries for candidate selection to the Labor list, and Likud followed suit in 1996. With the two largest parties holding personal primaries, there was now far greater attention to the primary campaigns of individual candidates—further focusing attention on personalities rather than parties.

Early American Presence

In 1977 David Garth was involved in the Likud's campaign. Little is known about his influence; by most accounts it was minimal but probably still stronger than that of Sarid's 1969 American consultant. Many of the changes mentioned—increasing negative advertising, shorter ads and stronger focus on personality—were more prominent in the Likud's campaign, where he was involved.⁴³ However, some of these characteristics, such as negative advertising, had begun already in 1973 within the Likud, followed by Labor in 1977; perhaps only natural considering it was the first election when Labor finally felt the pressure of losing power.

In 1981 both the major parties hired American consultants for their campaigns and this is considered the first election in which they played a significant role. David Garth worked with the Likud again, bringing with him two, then less-known pollsters from New York mayor Edward Koch's campaign: Mark Penn and Douglas Schoen. David Sawyer, a Democratic consultant who would eventually be described as a pioneer of political consulting, and one of the first Americans to export the trade, served as a consultant to the Labor Party. He was also known to use polls as a main tool for analyzing the electorate.⁴⁴ By some accounts, he was not particularly influential on the 1981 campaign.⁴⁵

Mark Penn and Douglass Schoen claim to have introduced more concrete innovations. Their new technique of overnight polling, which they had developed during Koch's mayoral campaign, was "unheard of" at that time in Israel.⁴⁶ In addition, Peter Powell was part of Garth's team and he advised on media production. Powell observes that his own contribution was not extensive and the campaign in general was only partly influenced by the American team.⁴⁷

By contrast, Schoen describes extensive contact with incumbent Prime Minister Begin. He recounts how over the course of the campaign, certain figures such as Ariel Sharon came to understand how polls could be used for strategic decision making; Sharon, he says, used the polls to push Begin to promise to make him defense minister if re-elected.⁴⁸ While Schoen stops short of taking credit for Begin's narrow victory that year, he believes that their involvement "helped provide one of the first examples of how American consultants could aid foreign campaigns."⁴⁹

The American presence continued unbroken through the 1980s. Schoen and Penn were hired again in 1984 by Ezer Weizman as part of his efforts to form a new centrist party.⁵⁰ But most remained mainly behind the scenes and drew little attention.

Israeli Reactions to American Presence

Israeli politicians were reluctant to admit the Americans' influence,⁵¹ and the political figures on the campaign expressed ongoing suspicion of their effectiveness. Nevertheless, in the years to follow, they hired them regularly and rapidly adopted their methods.

As early as 1981, there was "no question that the slickness of American-style advertising has arrived in Israel." Likud (and some of the other parties) ran ads with strong emotional content. Menachem Begin again leveraged his "emotional oratory"; Labor's ads were less so.⁵² The highly personal tone employed by Begin led Peres to criticize him for "Beginization" of the elections, which was a "danger to democracy," and for creating a "cult of personality."⁵³

The media immediately identified a good story and began to cover the American involvement.⁵⁴ The concept of the press covering the consultants themselves in addition to (or possibly





at the expense of) the issues was noticed: at least one scholar railed against what he perceived as degradation of politics through sensationalization of its inner workings.⁵⁵ Still the notion of covering the campaign itself gathered strength and by the mid-1990s, campaign gossip became a central feature of press coverage.⁵⁶

While Judith N. Elizur concludes that during this period (covering the 1981 and 1984 elections), the influence of the foreign consultants was limited mainly to "tactics and execution," still, by this time the television campaigns (particularly the Likud's) reflected American stylistic influence.⁵⁷ This refers to the reliance on "appearance, sound-bites, slogans and image and its 'horse-race' aspects."⁵⁸ In addition, polls were being used increasingly for strategic purposes and targeting in general was becoming a central part of campaign strategy.⁵⁹ Likud hired a polling firm to work closely with its advertising consultants. The result of the increasingly sophisticated targeting and polling, says Jonathan Mendilow, were decreasingly sophisticated messages. He believes that in 1981 and 1984, the messages became largely indistinguishable; indeed in 1984 the elections were deadlocked, leading to a coalition government and an entrenched two-party system.

By this same time, a small cadre of home-grown Israeli political consultants had established themselves—mainly advertising professionals who began developing an expertise in political campaigning. Some would go on in later decades to become kingmakers: David Fogel, Arieh Rotenberg, Eliezer Zorabin and the now-legendary Reuven Adler.

Political campaigns continued developing their own spectacle-like character, with parties commonly employing entertainment groups and celebrities to appear on their behalf; commentators continued to complain of increasingly shallow, commercial and emotional aspects.⁶⁰

During the 1992 elections Labor ran and won its most personalized campaign yet, with a strategy focused almost exclusively on its leader Yitzhak Rabin, under the slogan "Israel is waiting for Rabin." The Likud, lacking a charismatic candidate of their own, ran a personal negative campaign, describing Rabin as someone who could not be trusted to deal with the pressure of the office, based on his nervous breakdown at the eve of the Six-Day war, when he served as commander in chief, and suggesting he has a drinking problem.

In sum, the period from 1977 to 1992 saw the most significant changes in the way elections are run in Israel. The advertising style, personalization, emotional and negative tone associated with American campaigns, together with the professionalization through the use of polls, focus groups, tailored messages and get-out-the-vote efforts were all American-style campaign innovations. Yet they were clearly driven as much by organic, endogenous modernization, local political and structural developments and Americanization alike, and it is virtually impossible to think of the electoral transformation in Israel without the interaction between them.

The Third Wave of American Involvement: 1996–Present

The 1996 elections saw the next real leap in explicit importation and influence of American practices, and personalities.

It is notoriously difficult to determine whether a campaign can take credit for electoral victory. But Benjamin Netanyahu's defeat of Shimon Peres in 1996 was a definite coup. Riding the wave of national sympathy following the trauma of the Rabin assassination in 1995, Peres was sure enough of his position to call early elections, as polls consistently showed him leading Netanyahu.⁶¹ Only after the Israeli public had famously "gone to bed," were the final counts tallied showing a razor-thin margin favoring Netanyahu.

The election took place following the third major structural change in the Israeli voting system since the establishment of the state: the introduction of direct elections for Prime Minister. Starting in 1996, voters cast two ballots on election day, one for their party and one for Prime





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Minister.⁶² This cemented the campaign focus on the candidates' personality aspects, taking focus away from both parties and issues in favor of "real-time" considerations. Both major parties directed the better part of their resources towards the candidate.⁶³ Instead of issues, most believe that Netanyahu won his campaign on the basis of emotional, largely fear-based appeals related to terrorism,⁶⁴ and a very personality-centered campaign.

In the increasingly personalized system, Shimon Peres attempted to maintain a party-centered campaign, both in terms of its management (by party member Haim Ramon) and its message. Meanwhile, Netanyahu ran wholeheartedly on his personality, winning his nomination in a personal party primary, and ignoring the party in the campaign.⁶⁵

In a high-profile move that was to change the way American consultants were viewed in Israeli politics, Netanyahu brought in American campaign guru Arthur Finkelstein (one of his many conservative clients was Jesse Helms of North Carolina). Already seen as mimicking American styles, Netanyahu became the quintessential "American" candidate, replete with a celebrity campaign advisor.

The strategy focused on comparing Netanyahu with Peres, highlighting Netanyahu's relative youth and his modern, "slick," global image. The effect was that Netanyahu's campaign added a past-future dimensions to the personality contest.

This focus on personality probably reflected an evolving American sense of individualism, materialism and consumerism now growing in Israel. Newer was inherently better, in a country eager to shed its shabby socialist image.

Some still resisted acknowledging the American influence, or its efficacy. Gadi Wolfsfeld said that since Israel is so literate, television was unlikely to influence voters much: "Unlike in America, spin doctors don't make a difference . . . here it's the events, and everything else is astrology."⁶⁶

Although 1999 would later be seen as the classic American consultant inter-party tête-à-tête, in fact Shimon Peres had American consultants on his campaign in 1996 as well. Mark Penn and Douglas Schoen returned to Israel for the first time since their brief stint with Ezer Weizman in the 1980s. They were hired to work with Rabin in 1995; following the assassination they continue polling for Peres. But there was a sharp contrast in the relationship between Netanyahu and Finkelstein, and the one between Peres and his Americans. Although they conducted extensive polling and advising, Schoen recalls fighting an uphill battle with Peres to have their advice taken seriously.

Peres apparently believed in their strategy, but, says Schoen, was unable to convince key Israeli advisors such as campaign manager Haim Ramon to do the same. In a poignant example of the internal strife that foreigners can sometimes cause in such charged settings, Schoen recounts giving a detailed strategic presentation, after which Peres said, "We should do everything Schoen is saying." He then turned to Ramon and said, "But, I know you're not going to do it." Ramon shook his head and said, "That's right."⁶⁷

The presence of Penn and Schoen had another unusual impact. Because at the time they were working for US President Bill Clinton, who openly supported Peres, they sometimes acted as his liaison between them. Schoen says that Peres tried to leverage his relationship with the wildly popular Clinton.

Penn and Schoen's presence remained discreet, and the colorful figure of Arthur Finkelstein became the star of the 1996 election. The campaign at first tried to hide his presence, fearing a backlash against over-American influence. But once the story came out, the Israeli press had a "field day."⁶⁸ This opened the door to an era of increasing media attention to American consultants.

Costas Panagopoulos argues that media attention to consultants can have important implications, such as increased public awareness of what happens behind the scenes, raising the profile of the profession and creating further demand for such services.⁶⁹ Barnett and Goldstein make the point that campaigns often recognize that the presence of a top-level consultant may earn them





political capital in itself. Professional consultants may bring a level of credibility, especially given Israel's unfettered passion for America.

Although Peres lost in 1996, the American involvement with Labor seems to have turned a corner. Some of the Israeli politicians from the 1996 campaign, including Haim Ramon, would work for Ehud Barak three years later, where there was a general celebratory welcome for the three celebrity consultants. It is possible that they now accepted, and actively sought, the psychological boost of American professional legitimacy for the new candidate.⁷⁰

In 1999 the American presence took on a new tone. The consultants were a visible and vital part of both campaigns of the two major parties. Dan Nimmo predicted in 1970 that in the future "campaigns may no longer be battles between candidates but between titans of the campaign industry working on behalf of those personalities."⁷¹ And indeed, some viewed the campaign as a face-off between the two high-profile American rivals: controversial James Carville and the flamboyant Arthur Finkelstein. In addition to Carville, the Labor party hired Robert Shrum and Stanley Greenberg in what became affectionately known as the "dream team." This campaign would seem to have been the ultimate manifestation of Nimmo's vision of Americanization, as this team also ran the successful campaigns of Tony Blair in Great Britain and Gerhard Schröder in Germany.

Cultural affinity played an important role. The three Labor consultants were virtually unknown in Israel prior to 1999. But they were associated with Bill Clinton's heady victory in the 1992 American presidential elections. His consultants therefore brought an independent set of emotional associations that probably included young, strong, future-oriented and Israel-supportive, to the largely untested candidacy of Ehud Barak.

The 1999 elections can even be seen as supersaturated by Americans. Ehud Barak hired several different "streams" of pollsters, and among them Douglas Schoen, although (to Schoen's chagrin) they were not part of the official campaign. Mark Mellman, another high-level American consultant and pollster associated with Democratic politics in the US, was reported to be working for Meimad, a small, moderate Orthodox party that joined with Labor (along with Gesher) to form One Israel.⁷²

By this time the American presence was fully open and drew increasing media attention. A political satire show (often significantly influential in Israel) showed the candidates debating each other while American consultants whispered in their ears.⁷³

Yet in the next two elections 2001 and 2003, the American consultants were not a top story. Although 2001 was another "face-off," with Finkelstein again working for Netanyahu and Greenberg and Shrum working again for Barak, there was little new about it this time. The elections were held under the pall of the rapidly escalating al-Aqsa Intifada, which kept the tone fearful and depressed, rather than splashy or gossipy. As an unprecedented special election for Prime Minister only, some voters learned the virtues of tuning out; turnout plunged to a record low and the television ratings for the ads were at a similar nadir—only 23% on the first night, and steadily declining rating throughout the campaign,⁷⁴ although those involved in the campaign observed ruefully that the ads were particularly polished and professional.

In 2003 Ariel Sharon as head of Likud beat the diminutive former mayor of Haifa Amram Mitzna, who did not employ American consultants, in a victory largely attributed to the man who was by this time perceived as Israel's own political svengali, Reuven Adler. While Adler's political campaign experience was limited, he had been Sharon's friend and personal advisor for over two decades and Sharon trusted him immensely.⁷⁵

By 2006, Israelis associated with the campaign for Kadima and Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, suggested that American consultants were hardly necessary anymore, because their techniques had been thoroughly internalized. This can be seen as the final triumph of Americanization.⁷⁶ Yet clearly the expertise Americans bring, perhaps simply from the great volume of campaigns they run, was still sought by others in 2006. Finkelstein shifted his services to the hard-line





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former Soviet immigrant Avigdor Lieberman's party. With the highly catchy campaign slogan "Nyet, nyet, Da!," for which Finkelstein's team takes credit,⁷⁷ the party moved from four seats in the outgoing Knesset to eleven in the 2006 elections. Penn and Schoen had some minimal contact with Ehud Olmert, so quietly that journalists never knew.

Amir Peretz, the Labor candidate whose initial boost following his upset victory in the primaries was fast waning, returned to the now-traditional Labor consultant Stanley Greenberg (without the rest of the 1999 "dream team"). The Peretz story highlights what seems to have become a central role of American consultants. In an early and significant blunder, he delivered a speech in embarrassingly poor, broken English, raising fears that he was not capable either as a national or international leader. Just weeks later, Greenberg's services were requested, largely at the urging of internal party political figures and despite Peretz' natural suspicion of outsiders. The political team hoped that Greenberg's presence would be viewed as a sign of professionalism and seriousness on the part of the flagging campaign. A press conference was called to announce his involvement as pollster, and his partner's role as general campaign advisor. Media commentators immediately caught this spirit: "Should Peretz be able to acquire Greenberg's services, he would be adding a definite asset to his team."⁷⁸

It thus appeared that after the English blunder and a flurry of rumors that made his team look frivolous, the campaign sought outside legitimization. And even if their tactics had been internalized over three-odd decades of professional involvement, apparently the notion that Americans bode well for the campaign turns the consultants into a symbol in themselves.

Conclusions

In summary, American consulting in Israel over the years has followed a progressive trajectory: in the "first wave," from 1969 to 1977 elections, their presence was minimal, not visible, and considered insignificant. At the same time political, social and technology changes led to the initial campaign modernization processes from within Israel. During the "second wave," from 1977 to 1996, the cultural and national affinity for the US was conducive to their more active and influential presence, although the insider/outsider dynamic still kept their roles somewhat circumscribed and invisible to the general public.

During this time Israel's own social and electoral processes changed in ways that were conducive to American-style changes in campaigns. The rise of television, the declining importance of the large parties, and the shift to a market-oriented culture were the major hallmarks of this phase. They gave rise to a professional group of mass media and marketing experts whose skills were rapidly sought in the political realm. These changes were endogenous, but as they led to more American-style campaigns, it was logical that Israelis would seek guidance from the experts.

The 1990s brought further personalization of elections due to several changes within the electoral system (mainly party primaries in the two large parties and personal elections for Prime Minister), as well as the general waning of the large parties. This also made the political environment conducive to American techniques which themselves had evolved to a different level. Thus 1996 saw a new, far more public type involvement in this "third wave" of American consultants, which probably some would view more in terms of a barbarian invasion.⁷⁹ In this wave, American consultants became part of the story themselves, bringing attention and legitimacy to a campaign.

With the third phase, American consultants became not just general advice-givers but actually executed work at all levels of the campaign. The trend of deep, hands-on decision-making and execution of campaign work continued through the last elections in 2006. The partial retreat in 2003 and 2006 could be either an aberration, or could actually indicate increasing internalization of American campaign lessons, making their presence less vital.





Because the conditions that created a desire or need for American consultants preceded their involvement, we do not view this as a unidirectional Americanization of campaigns. Rather, there has been an interplay of forces from inside and outside of Israel; alongside the interplay between modernization (technological, structural, institutional) and the cultural, consumer and market-driven aspects of Americanization.

Implications

The weakening of the parties across the globe, together with the rise of the individual candidate and the arrival of the mass media have professionalized campaigns in many countries. Campaigns have transformed from amateur, local affairs directed at party partisans and loyalists, to permanent marketing campaigns directed at the general electorate.⁸⁰

Many⁸¹ see pernicious implications of the involvement of American consultants. Mark P. Petracca thinks they contribute to less direct civic political participation. The harshest criticism is that consultants have hijacked the democratic process from the parties and have replaced it with a spectator sport,⁸² leading to voter alienation and possibly lower turnout. Israeli observers too link the Americanized campaign to consumerism and populism;⁸³ while in general some note the increasingly manipulative aspect of campaigns.⁸⁴

In Israel, voter turnout dropped sharply starting in 2001. But if linked to campaigns, the drop might have been expected earlier, as the American styles are now several decades old. It is likely that Israeli voters are alienated by other factors too: the salience of government corruption, despair over the peace process, disillusionment with specific politicians, and the birth of a new cohort that feels less affinity to parties in particular and politics in general.

When it comes to Americanization, it seems that a fairly normative, often one-sided and usually negative view prevails. To balance this impression, we suggest that there may be some potentially constructive aspects related to the Americanized techniques as well, regardless of who introduced them.

One such argument is that the stronger focus on personality may have led to a greater sense of accountability of politicians to voters. The party primaries, for example, could lead to greater accountability among individual list candidates.⁸⁵

It could be that the American presence and techniques have moved Israel to the front line of modern campaigning. This is important because Israel is already in the front line of other technological developments, such as having one of the highest rates of mobile phones per capita in the world and a vibrant Internet culture—especially among young people who are significantly less likely to vote. Perhaps Israel's facility with modern campaign techniques and its symbiosis with the American example will help it harness these new tools to help engage this group. Indeed, in the US, consultants have also been seen as the opposite of their Machiavellian image. Some view them as the ones who filled the void left by the declining parties, helping candidates, and eventually the parties, re-energize campaigns and make them vital.⁸⁶

Some might argue that prior to Americanization, consumerism and modernization, Israel's electoral system was healthier. But this indicates a longing for a mythical past, when many more Israelis cast their vote based on habit and uncritical loyalties, rather than weighing or critiquing agendas. Now candidates and parties must earn their votes. The uphill battle they face for attention can be attributed to many factors, but ought not to be reduced solely to the impact of consultants. To do so seems to evade the partial responsibility of politicians themselves for alienating voters through poor performance. Consultants may be one of the factors still able to bring voters back because, for better or for worse, it is their job to be connected to regular people and their language of communication. David A. Dulio writes:





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Consultants have helped parties become more efficient and effective in assisting candidates win elections, they help candidates fight through an already cluttered field of communications by focusing their message on things potential voters care about, and they are in a position to help voters by sharpening the debate between candidates.⁸⁷

Will the next phase be a new “wave” of Americanization, or a global convergence of post-modern ideas fitting in multiple directions, through multiple information channels? Fortunately or not, Israelis won’t have to wait too long to find out, since they rarely have the patience to wait for the official election day to run elections. There are some things even Americans can’t change.

Notes

- 1 The names of the authors appear in alphabetical order. This chapter is in every way a collaborative enterprise.
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- 3 Daniel M. Shea and Michael J. Burton, *Campaign Craft: The Strategies, Tactics, and Art of Political Campaign Management* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2001).
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- 12 Camille Elebash, “The Americanization of British Political Communications,” *Journal of Advertising* 13 (3) (Fall 1984): 50–59; Plasser, “American Campaign Techniques Worldwide,” 50. For an alternative perspective that views political professionalization as part of a greater process of “global economic actors, namely the translational corporate executive class, [that has] largely expropriated the political process,” see Gerald Sussman and Lawrence Galizio, “The Global Reproduction of American Politics,” *Political Communication* 20 (3) (2003): 309–28, 310.
- 13 Ralph Negrine et al., “Political Communication in the Era of Professionalisation,” in *The Professionalisation of Political Communication*, ed. Ralph Negrine et al., (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 9–28; Paolo Mancini, “New Frontiers in Political Professionalism,” *Political Communication* 16 (3) (July





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- 26 Some have argued that even during this period the story is one of Americanization, a “mutual fertilization between cultures” (Caspi, “Electoral Rhetoric and Political Polarization,” 175). However, we found no evidence in their work or any other that supports this argument prior to 1977.
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