

Election Campaigning in Switzerland, Great Britain and the US

How (un-)professional did the Swiss Political
Parties Campaign in the 1999 General Election?

by MARK BALSIGER

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ABSTRACT

A Breeze from Little Rock in Mountainous Switzerland?

In the good old times, candidates like George Washington stayed in dignified silence, awaiting the citizens' call. Nowadays, they "run" for elections. In doing so they hire advertising and public relations specialists, pollsters, media advisers and the like. Since the late 1950s, election campaigning has rapidly developed. In many democracies, the campaigns are major operations employing highly sophisticated techniques. Bill Clinton's 1992 Presidential campaign, for instance, masterminded from Little Rock, is said to have set new standards in professional campaigning.

This dissertation investigates the 1999 General Election in Switzerland and discusses the extent to which the political parties applied internationally well known campaign strategies and tactics. The professional model of Kavanagh et al. (1995), widely used in current literature, provides the framework for elaborating the state of campaigning in Switzerland. The 1999 General Election is described both through the campaigners' views and media coverage.

The central elements of this dissertation are the features of the professional model. Each of these eight features will be looked at individually and compared to the situation in the US and Britain. A large number of examples from all three countries is used to provide an insight into different political cultures.

Switzerland is known as a "deviant case", which mainly refers to its direct democratic instruments (popular initiative and referendum). Since the political system is distinctively different to all other countries, background information about politics, the electoral system, Swiss history as well as the media are provided. The author suggests that election campaigning is an additional deviant case. Swiss parties have not taken the same route as most others in the western world. This dissertation is, in fact, the first attempt in academic literature to shed some light on the current state of election campaigning in Switzerland.