



The Faces of Political Seduction



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The forthcoming U.S. presidential election night promises to be just as never-ending as the previous one, four years ago. Hardly anything has changed except Ohio has joined Florida as a key swing state.

Two months ago, Senator John Kerry's campaign was floundering: too Waspish, too institutional, too intellectual. And Karl Rove, President George W. Bush's strategist, further demolished the democrat candidate with highly negative advertising. It was as though Kerry was becoming his own caricature, while the President's own Bushisms and Michael Moore's attacks failed to stick.

Then came the debate in Miami. Sixty-two million TV viewers – more than for the Oscars – followed by record voter registration rates.

With his performance, Kerry is back in the competition, and the polls are becoming contradictory. The stakes – Iraq or consumer confidence – fade behind the individuals. We discover that the real Kerry is superior to his caricature, and we rediscover with Bush what we disliked four years ago.

The game is on.

Jean-Marc Lech

Ipsos Co-Chairman

Bad Ads, and Ads that Change the Viewers' Worldview

By Thom Riehle

At their convention in Boston on July 26–29, Democrats nominated John Kerry for president based on his four-month record as a Navy fighter in Vietnam; rather, on his “electability” as a Democrat and a war hero, amidst a war-time election. Then, on August 9, Kerry stood on the rim of the Grand Canyon and told reporters that he would still vote in favor of the Iraq war resolution even knowing what he knows now. Many believe he would have done himself more good if he had jumped into the canyon that day. If he would still vote for the war today – if he is a so damned electable medal-bearing military vet – then why is he running against the war president?

Kerry's camp realized the blunder he'd committed in that interview. For that reason, he refused to answer any questions from reporters for the next five weeks: imagine, trying to unseat a sitting president without ever talking to the press! His advertising – almost one hundred million dollars worth of pro-Kerry and anti-Bush ads from March through the end of August – carried the message for the candidate instead.

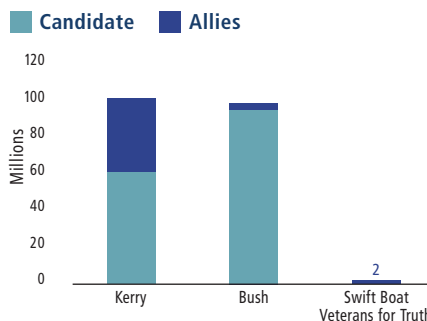
Kerry ran a challenger's version of what Americans call a “Rose Garden strategy” campaign – the kind of campaign that incumbent Presidents like to run, in which they stay in the White House Rose Garden to avoid answering questions from the press.

The Kerry advertisements were bad: a combination of sappy, sepia-colored memories of Kerry's Vietnam years and vague promises of new health care programs. Part of the Rose Garden strategy includes a refusal to attack one's opponent too much (it would not be “presidential” to do so), and Kerry would not attack Bush's main vulnerability – his war policies. Nonetheless, by mid-August, the conventional wisdom in the media and political circles was that “this is Kerry's race to lose.”

Ipsos Public Affairs polls conducted for the Associated Press found that Kerry fell from a three-point advantage the first week of August (48% Kerry, 45% Bush)

to an eight-point deficit the first week of September (51% Bush, 43% Kerry). The Rose Garden-style campaign cost Kerry 11 points net, and toppled Kerry from a solid position from which to wage a challenger's campaign to long-shot ranking.

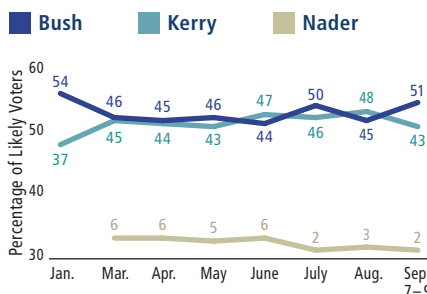
Advertising Spending, March – August



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Impact of Advertising Spending

Bush, Kerry and their allies spent \$200+ million in ads during this period, and the vote never changed much



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Neither Kerry nor Bush's massive television advertisement campaigns from March through early August were successful: neither the vote nor the images of the candidates ever changed. Then a small group called Swift Boat Veterans for Truth conducted a tiny advertising campaign linked to a brilliant public relations campaign and turned the campaign upside down. There were three elements to the campaign:

1. A small advertising buy in three states, touting a book in which men who served on Swift boats with Kerry in Vietnam criticize his actions in Vietnam and as a war protestor when he returned to the U.S. The purchase of airtime came to less than \$400,000. (Production costs were only \$3,300! Of course, no money at all was spent on copy testing.) This ad buy, less than one percent of the total campaign advertising spending, had more impact than the other 99 percent of the money spent by Bush and Kerry and their allies.
2. A public relations campaign to shame a recalcitrant mainstream media into giving news coverage to the Swift Boat Veterans' charges, led by blogs (personal Web logs or Web journals that often provide commentary and opinion). Their efforts succeeded in pressing the mainstream media to give belated attention to the Swift Boat Veterans. Only about 5% of voters

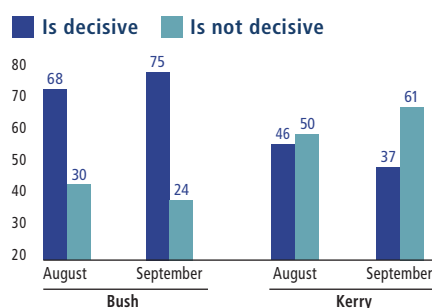
could possibly have seen the paid advertisements, but because of national news coverage, 60% said they had seen or heard about the ads, according to one poll. This was not a mere advertising campaign – it crashed through the barriers of advertising and into the consciousness of voters. (In September, blogs struck again when they exposed documents CBS News anchor Dan Rather offered as evidence that President Bush had not served honorably in the military reserves during Vietnam as a forgery. CBS and Rather eventually had to confess that the documents were a hoax.)

3. **Converting the Swift Boat Veterans' criticism of Kerry's Vietnam record – something most people do not care about – into a potent attack on Kerry's character at the Republican convention.** Kerry's advertisements and his convention presented him as a Vietnam War hero, but the Swift Boat Veterans said he was a liar about his war record and an opponent of the war when he returned home. So what? That was all 35 years ago. What was needed was an attack that translated the Swift Boat Veterans' arguments into an indictment of the kind of president Kerry would be. Bush's campaign acted like a challenger trying to chase Kerry out if his pretend Rose Garden. The Swift Boat Veterans had planted a seed of doubt by turning Kerry-the-War-Hero into Kerry-the-Medal-Seeker, then Kerry-the-War-Protestor.

A war hero is courageous and decisive in battle. By muddying Kerry's image, Kerry's attackers, including Bush, made him seem the opposite; someone who does not know his own mind, an opportunist, a flip-flopper.

No one wants an indecisive president, but that's exactly what Kerry seemed to be when the awful month of August was over for him. By September, twice as many voters felt Bush was decisive than felt that way about Kerry.

Is Bush Decisive? Is Kerry Decisive?



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Advertising must enter the lives of viewers and voters or it is a waste of money. One tiny advertising campaign, barely a blip on the screen, broke out of the bland box and shook up the campaign. After the damage was done, Kerry hired a new campaign staff, left the Rose Garden, and began to act like a challenger, putting himself forward rather than relying solely on advertising. Is it enough to turn things around?



First televised debate between Bush and Kerry, September 30, 2004.



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Triumph of Negative: The 2004 Canadian Federal Election

By Darrell Bricker

The 2004 federal election was perhaps the nastiest in Canada's history. It pitted a wounded governing party (the Liberals) with its new leader Paul Martin against a reconstituted national party of the right (the Conservatives) and its new leader Stephen Harper. Ultimately, the campaign showed that even when voters want a change, they can be made to "think twice, and vote once" through effective negative advertising.

The Liberal Dilemma

The dilemma confronting the Liberal Party during the campaign was that voters felt the party was undeserving of re-election. This was largely driven by questions about party and government ethics, a lacklustre and disappointing new leader, and the Liberal's

inability to provide Canadians with a convincing story about how they would better govern the country if they received another mandate.

The Liberal's lack of appeal was coupled with a new threat on the political right: for the first time since 1993, Canada's conservatives were able to put their bickering behind them long enough to unite behind a single leader. Together, these two forces – desire for change and a real alternative – put the Liberal's re-election in jeopardy.

The Conservative Vulnerability

Canada has a parliamentary system of government with "first past the post" constituency elections. The Prime Minister

is the head of the party that wins the most constituencies (ridings) in the election. Constituencies are distributed across the country based on population size, with Ontario, Canada's most densely populated province, having the most seats (about a third of the total). So, to win a national election, a party has to be competitive in Ontario.

Since 1993, the Conservatives have been unable to break through in Ontario. The Liberals, on the other hand, swept Ontario in the last three elections. Why did the Liberals win in Ontario, and the Conservatives lose? One simple word: intolerance. Since 1993, the Conservatives have been seen by a significant segment of Ontario voters (the suburban middle class) as being intolerant of ethnic, religious, and other minorities. Since 1993, it has been impossible for the federal parties of the right to win in Ontario without these voters.

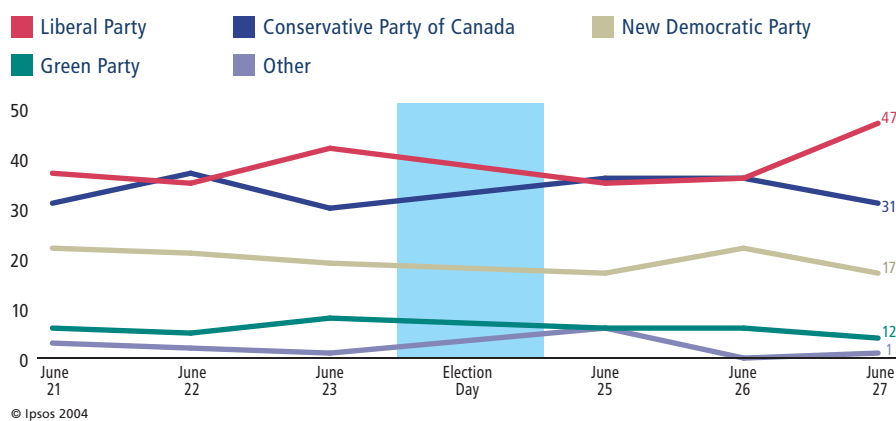
Under their new leader, the Conservative Party appeared moderate enough to voters in Ontario to have new appeal. But polling showed that a significant number of voters thought that the intolerant conservatism that they'd previously found so discomfiting was lurking just under the surface.

Going Negative

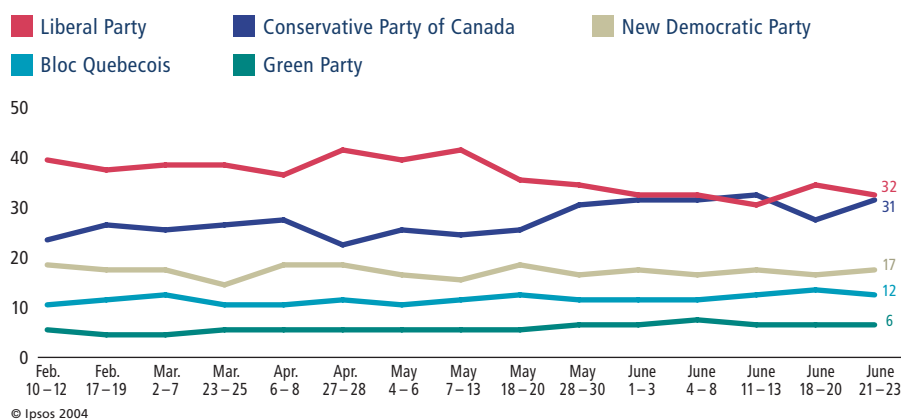
It became clear early in the election campaign (which lasts only 36 days) that positive messages about the Liberal Party were not effective with voters. Our tracking polls show that from the time the election was called on May 23, the Liberals and Conservatives started to move closer together in voter appeal. The magic number in federal politics is 40%: below that, it is very difficult for a party to form a comfortable majority.

So, what did the Liberals do to reverse the trend? They made the strategic decision that if they couldn't drive up their own positives; they had to drive up their main opponent's negatives. To do this, they launched a massive multi-media (radio, television, and Internet) broadside of negative advertising against the Conservatives unprecedented in Canadian political history.

End of Campaign Shifts in Support



Party Support Through the Campaign



Continued...



Darrell Bricker is President and COO of Ipsos Public Affairs in North America. He joined the company in 1989 after holding increasingly senior research positions, including director of public opinion research in the Office of the Prime Minister of Canada. Darrell is often called on by the media to comment on the major issues of the day, particularly federal and international politics and election campaigns. He is the author of several books, including *Searching for Certainty* (Doubleday Canada). Contact: darrell.bricker@ipsos-na.com.

But, the Liberal attack would not have been as effective without the assistance of the Conservatives themselves. The Liberal's main message of the Conservatives being too intolerant and extreme to be trusted in government was underscored by statements from over-confident Conservative backbenchers about the need to restrict access to abortion, reduce bilingualism in the public service, and repeal the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. All of a sudden, it wasn't just the Liberal ads saying the Conservatives were extreme, the Conservatives were saying it themselves.

What really sealed the Conservative's fate was a decision in the last week of the campaign to leave the battleground of Ontario and go back to do a whistle-stop bus tour with their strongest supporters in Alberta. It appears that they did this because they wanted to finish the campaign looking like a front-runner. What it amounted to was abandoning the critical jurisdiction in the election to their opponents.

The Impact

The combination of the Liberal's advertising broadside and the Conservative retreat lead to a subtle shift in votes (3.8%) in the last weekend of the campaign, which handed the Liberals a minority victory in the face of certain defeat. And the shift was most dramatic in Ontario. In fact, the shift in Ontario didn't take place until the last day of the campaign.

My co-presenter on CTV's national election broadcast confirmed the reason for the last-minute shift in votes. Just before going on air, she confided in me that this was the single hardest vote she had ever had to make. She said, "I didn't want to vote the Liberals back in, but I was worried about what the Conservatives might do if they formed the government." That's the sound of negative advertising that works.

Five Rules of Negative Political Advertising:

- It works!
- If you're shot at, fire back immediately with deadly force
- The high road may be a nicer trip, but the low road leads to victory
- If you can't push up your own positives, drive your opponents negatives
- Save something for the sprint to the finish line

Why French Politics Needs the Return of Advertising

By Pierre Giacometti



Montage of political advertising campaigns in France prior to the prohibition of advertising in 1986. From *La Politique à l'affiche* by Jean-Marc Lech et Jean-Marc Benoît (Editions du May, 1986).

Modern political advertising began where political propaganda left off; that is, after the Second World War. All major democracies use political advertising today, with the notable exception of France. The birthplace of advertising-based protest, France is now a country where the ruling class holds serious misgivings towards political advertising. These old anti-ad and anti-polling sentiments echo the French political elite's deep-seated wariness of—in no particular order—money, business, the common people, and the United States.

When it comes to regulating political life, French officials often go against the grain. In 1977, a ban on publishing poll results during the last week of election campaigns was designed to minimise influence on voters. A quarter of a century later, in 2002, legislators finally recognised the evolution in voters' information consumption habits and abolished the practice.

For the past ten years, political advertising has been banned in France. The ban has been reaffirmed in recent discussions as a means to stamp out fraudulent political financing, but this desire to clean up politics has only marginalised them further from the everyday life of the French people. Will we have to wait another 15 years for the French political set to realise that the evolution in the relationship between the French people and politics demands that the tools of persuasion used to influence the behaviour of citizens and consumers be allowed to return?

The French Anomaly

Once again proving the exception, France is now one of the rare democracies that limits political advertising, despite having one of the most personalised political systems in the Western world. When we compare the tone of the latest French election campaigns to those of our nearest neighbours, what do we observe? The street, the main meeting place of French citizens, has become a political "no man's land." Political billboards have been banned. The lack of visibility of election campaigns furthers the sense that politics is increasingly confined to a closed space or one reserved for political and media elites. This phenomenon encourages low voter turnout. While anyone travelling through Greece or Spain in 2004 could hardly ignore that major and minor elections were being held (campaigns are omnipresent and a focal point in all public spaces), politically aware visitors to France could easily be forgiven for failing to notice that the country was twice in the midst of elections!

In Greece, passion and enthusiasm for politics have taken over airport lounges where billboards for the main candidates in the PASOK and the New Democracy parties are in full view. In Spain, communications strategists at the PSOE called upon a brand creation specialist more accustomed to the marketing world, running with the risky, and now famous "ZP" (Zapatero Presidente) banner. In doing so, they created a sense of friendliness and energy around a candidate who, prior to the campaign, appeared aloof and dull.

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Why French Politics Needs the Return of Advertising

Reconnecting with Voters

France is not there yet. Given the crisis of confidence in the country, which has not been curbed by an absence of advertising, French politics needs to reclaim the empty spaces. It needs to become part of the everyday life of the French people. In order to reach the least politicised voters more effectively, it must adapt to the times with professionalised advertising, a decline of political militancy, the emergence of a new political language, and the appearance and rapid increase in new, interactive means of communication. Re-establishing the legality of political advertising means recognising that politics must create new and lasting relations with citizens and accept, once and for all, the rules of an opinion-based democracy. The Fifth Republic laid down the rules for a political landscape that puts public opinion at its heart, unlike anywhere else outside the United States. Paradoxically, however, it has created the conditions for the dangerous marginalisation of public opinion.

Public Support

The current state of public opinion allows for a welcome return to political advertising: the French people are not hostile to it. Half of French citizens are in favour of political advertising, a particularly revealing fact given the current hostility towards advertising and politics separately. Indeed, opinions on the appropriateness of re-introducing political advertising or not during elections are very balanced: 46% of French citizens are in favour and 48% are against, according to a survey conducted by Ipsos Public Affairs France. A fairly clear generational split is also apparent, with the under-35s much more tolerant than their elders. While the return of political advertising is also a little better among the right wing than it is by the left, acceptance is visibly highest among the working classes. The opinions expressed by the youngest and working class categories are very interesting: it is useful to remember that these two voter contingents have most often chosen to avoid the ballot box over the past 20 years. Their point of view

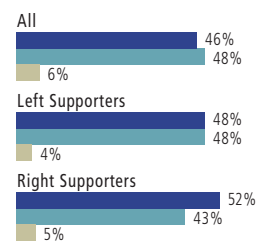
shines through. Faced with these popular sentiments, the French political set can no longer be content with waiting for “their voters” – who no longer belong to anyone – to return. On the contrary, they need to take the opposite path, setting out to meet them with arms wide open!

The French and Political Advertising

Question: Would you be in favour of or opposed to the reintroduction of political advertising during electoral campaigns (billboards, television, radio, and written press)?

In Favour **Opposed** **No Comment**

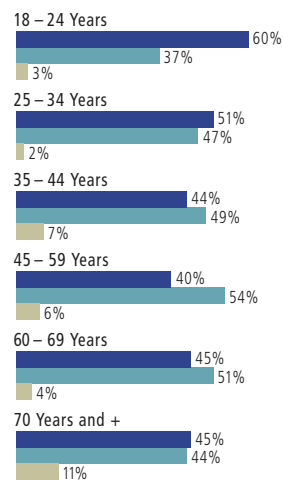
Response by political affiliation



September 10–11, 2004

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Response by age group

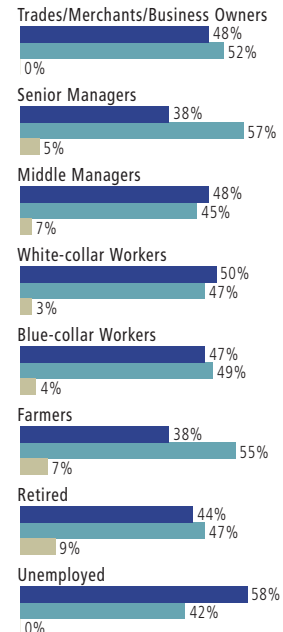


September 10–11, 2004

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In Favour **Opposed** **No Comment**

Response by socio-professional category



September 10–11, 2004

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Pierre Giacometti is one of Europe's leading public opinion and political research analysts, and is a frequent commentator in the media on public affairs and election campaign issues. Now CEO of Ipsos in France, he joined the company in 1995 leading its effort to launch pan-European and global public opinion research studies. Along with Darrell Bricker, he leads the company's global public affairs, issues, and crisis management division. You can reach him at pierre.giacometti@ipsos.com.

Italy: Berlusconi's Political Communication Strategy

By Nando Pagnoncelli



Television plays a key role in Italy, particularly if one considers the low penetration of newspapers in the country. Newspapers sell less than five million copies per day; a number that has decreased by ten percent from ten years ago. And it is well known within Europe that Italian television is an anomaly: the Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, controls the majority of Italian terrestrial television (that is, non-satellite networks). Berlusconi personally owns three private TV networks, and the government, via the Ministry of Economy, owns the three public TV networks.

This situation engenders a unique set of circumstances, as media control is also a key weapon in an electoral campaign and, in general, a tool for creating the climate of opinion and defining the political agenda. Berlusconi's near-monopolistic control of television and his political power thus extends criticism well beyond allegations of a mere conflict of interest. Acutely aware of the power of television, it is not simply coincidence that Berlusconi recently challenged the *par condicio* law, which limits access to TV media and governs the participation of politicians in TV programmes during electoral campaigns.

The victory of the Berlusconi's centre-right coalition in the 2001 election was largely determined by the success of certain key communication themes:

1. The end of sacrifices

In the 90s, Italy experienced dire economic difficulties and paid the price for a huge increase in the public debt. The remedial measures were often heavy, particularly in 1992. The efforts to be included in the European Union and abide by Maastricht's parameters were managed by representatives of the centre-left, specifically Carlo Azeglio Ciampi, Giuliano Amato, and Romano Prodi. Berlusconi stated to the electorate that the period was over, and that the coming years would be characterised by development, consumer recovery, and tax cuts.

2. Anti-politics

Italians' distrust in parties and politics is deeply rooted: only 20% of Italians declare they trust political parties. Berlusconi presented himself as the anti-politician par excellence, and proposed his entrepreneurial model of a winning, self-made man as the alternative to inconclusive, bureaucratized, and dishonest politics.

3. Anticommunism

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Berlusconi has taken a strong anticommunist tack. In his most recent campaign, he argued that communists continue to be a threat to the country and to a free market economy (which, not incidentally, is required for his continued control of Italy's TV media).

By combining these communication assets, Berlusconi built a straightforward relationship with the electorate, communicating directly to Italians, without any political, organisational, or bureaucratic philtre.

Berlusconi embodies this political approach. Even after his electoral success, the institutional role of the prime minister is always in the background, secondary to his charisma. This is emphasised by frequent examples of his attitude: his rude gesture in the official picture of an international summit (he extended his first and fourth finger); the use of private residences as venues for official meetings (even during the Fiat crisis, he met the managers of the company outside official premises); and his informal appearance (the suede jacket he wore at his meeting with Bush, or the bandana worn in August at his meeting with Blair in his villa in Sardinia). These incidences convey an image very different than that of the traditional politician: Berlusconi is a successful businessman who proposes himself as a model to all Italians. On many occasions, this posturing is used – often very effectively – to capture the media's attention, thus dampening criticisms and hiding deficiencies.

Yet this communication model has lost efficacy over the last few years. Italians consider the increasingly apparent inflation crisis to be much worse than what the official data shows, inciting a change in mood. As the belief in the country's decline takes ground, Italians are demanding reasonable solutions and are putting less trust in promises of miraculous growth. All this weighs on the electorate's perception



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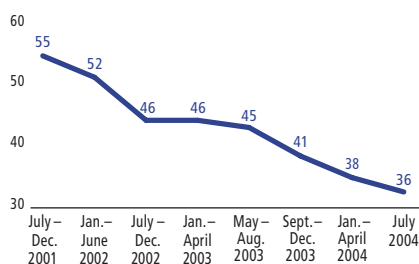
Nando Pagnoncelli is CEO and General Manager of Ipsos Public Affairs in Italy. He has over fifteen years of experience in research analysis and general management, and has held senior positions including Managing Director of the Sofres Group in Italy. Nando is the Vice-President of Assirm (Italy's market research institute), serves on the science board of several leading Italian associations, and has published political essays. He also teaches at Università Cattolica in Milan. Contact: nando.pagnoncelli@ipsos-explorer.com.



much more heavily than any conflict of interest or even threats to democracy. Hence Berlusconi's image has declined since autumn 2002, when Italians first became aware of the critical economic situation and increase in inflation. Further, quarrels within the centre-right coalition and the prime minister's difficulties in settling internal conflicts clash with the image he wants to convey. The need for mediation belongs to past politics and is dulling Berlusconi's model.

In such a climate, the European elections marked a defeat for Forza Italia (that is, for Berlusconi, given the high level of identification of the party with its leader), which lost more than eight points since the general election in 2001, or around four million votes. And losses were particularly acute within his primary electorate: those who voted Forza Italia in 2004 tended to be the elderly, people with a low level of education, and housewives. Whereas the prime minister, who knows marketing techniques and the criteria for segmenting the population, identified his primary electoral target in 2001 as working class people with a medium to low level of education (especially people holding only secondary school diplomas), housewives, pensioners, self-employed people, and small and micro entrepreneurs.

Berlusconi's Approval Rating



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Yet Berlusconi insists on a communication strategy focused on his personality. At first, this appears a serious mistake: the obvious strategy would be to change the composition of the party, to reinforce the coalition's image, to underline the need for a group effort facing the crisis, and to re-launch institutional relations. This is clearly Berlusconi's challenge: to recover votes by relying only on himself. And as the Italian electoral history has shown, the polls are not easily permeable; Italian voters rarely change coalitions, but rather they move their votes around within the same coalition or they abstain. It is not for certain yet that this challenge will be lost.

Predictive Communications

By Jean-Marc Lech

It's an old joke: "There are three ways in which you can lose your money: women, gambling, and engineers..." I'll spare you the punchline, as well as my response, as I'd rather ask another question: What's the best way to anticipate, and therefore predict, the outcome of an election? More specifically, the upcoming American presidential election: Bush or Kerry? Three indicators are at play: the voting intentions of registered voters, consumer confidence, and the impact and appeal of the candidates' advertising.

Political analysts and other public opinion specialists are squaring off. For the (vast) majority of them, polls are snapshots; they have no predictive value. My position is the opposite. When viewed as forecasts, voting intentions become just that due to their impact on the minds of voters. The very credibility of the polls is what turns them into forecasts, and it is because these forecasts of the results are reliable that voters sometimes refute them! This is the paradox of polls, which, because they predict accurately, sometimes turn out to be wrong! The more polls indicate that Bush will easily win, the more voters may hold him back.

Consumer confidence is a more qualitative tool. Can you vote for an outgoing president if you are pessimistic about your own future, the future of the region where you live, of the country in which you vote? The answer is yes – if the issues of the day give way to other priorities. Americans have come to see the war on terror as a greater priority than their economic and financial well-being. Consumer confidence thus becomes a secondary indicator.

One might say of American advertising that it costs far too much money for what it provides, since the level of abstention is stable while investments are on the rise! That may be so, but the millions of dollars spent serve to create atmosphere; the candidate whose ads are judged as more effective and better than the other guy's ads has every chance of winning.

And for what? After all, Kerry is right behind Bush in anticipated votes, consumer confidence is highly so-so, and ultra-negative advertising too has chosen its winner. It will be completely baffling should John Kerry win. Darn!



Jean-Marc Lech started his career as a researcher in the Institut Français d'Opinion Publique – IFOP – and became President and CEO of the company in 1980. He joined Ipsos in 1982 as Co-President with Didier Truchot. As a specialist of opinion research, he has published several books on French society and political life, such as *La Politique à l'affiche* and *Sondages privés*. Contact: jean-marc.lech@ipsos.com.