



## Election Campaigning in the Television Age: The Case of Contemporary Greece

STYLIANOS PAPATHANASSOPOULOS

*This article explores the ways that Greek election campaigns have changed as a result of the development and growing dominance of private television. It sketches some of the reasons behind those changes and discusses the centrality of television in contemporary Greek election campaigning and politics. The main argument is that television has become a significant, if not indispensable, medium for politicians' public communication. Television's importance is the result of both institutional and cultural transformations, namely, the inability of political parties to maintain stable mechanisms for communicating with citizens and the weakening of previously strong partisan identities. A combination of political and media dynamics have therefore created a situation whereby the electronic media, principally television, have become central to contemporary political communication in Greece.*

**Keywords** campaign, political parties, political advertising, politicians, televised political debate, television

Contemporary Greece has been undergoing a series of social transformations that are creating a new socioeconomic framework. These changes are most obvious in the relationship between politics and the mass media, and most particularly in the field of political communication. In the wake of the deregulation and privatization of the television sector, television has become a significant, if not indispensable, medium for political parties and politicians to communicate with the public. Made-for-television choreographed precinct walks and nationwide tours are becoming common campaign routines, whereas crowded partisan gatherings, which historically were sacred political and media events in Greek campaigns, are now on the wane. Opinion polls, which first emerged in the 1970s, now flood newspapers, television newscasts, and current affairs programs. Professional advertising and political consulting, scarcely used before, have become indispensable to campaign strategy. Television has thus become central to electoral campaigning, and media analysts now accept that Greek election campaigning has become more "television centered" and more "modern."

Stylianos Papathanassopoulos is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Mass Media, National and Capodistrian University of Athens. The author thanks Dr. Ralph Negrine, Professor John Durham Peters, and the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

Address correspondence to Stylianos Papathanassopoulos, Department of Communication and Mass Media, National and Capodistrian University of Athens, 5 Stadiou Street, 10562 Athens, Greece.

Why have these changes come about? This article first explores the changes taking place in the role of television during the electoral campaigns of the 1990s. It then addresses some of the reasons behind these changes, and finally, it discusses the growing centrality of television in contemporary Greek election campaigning and politics.

The relevance of this article is not limited to Greece, however. The Greek experience may be regarded as a case study in which to test some generalizations that have been offered to describe the process of the “modernization” of politics. This is because Greece offers another example of how the changing structure of the media system is related to and at the same time affects the political system of a society. The Greek case also offers evidence of how the relationship between media institutions and the institutions of government and politics defines the character of national systems of political communication (Swanson, 1992, 1993, 1997). Furthermore, the case of Greece provides additional evidence for the argument that in the age of globalization, a nation’s political communication system can no longer remain unique and isolated. Growing similarities among different countries’ political systems and practices (Negrine, 1996) cast doubts on the supposed uniqueness of political systems. Although significant differences continue to exist, as in the case of Greece, many of the forms and the characteristics of the interactions that now take place between Greek politicians and the media are commonplace in other countries. In short, the case of Greece illustrates that in the age of globalization and Americanization, the similarities across political systems and practices are becoming greater than the differences.

## The Changing Media Environment

The “modernization” of the Greek media took place in the late 1980s with the deregulation of the broadcasting system and the development of a plethora of private television channels. In the contemporary broadcasting environment, seven national television channels and 140 local television channels operate alongside the state broadcaster’s (ERT) three national television channels. The explosion in the number of television channels and the decline in newspaper sales have made television the main provider of public information about politics and government (Table 1). Television ratings also indicate that the overwhelming majority of the Greek people get their daily information from the news programs on the private television channels rather than from the state channels. In 1996, for example, the market share of the news programs of the four main market leaders

**Table 1**  
Sources of daily information

Medium	Total (%)	Men (%)	Women (%)
Television	69	61	76
Evening press	15	17	11
Radio	11	12	10
Morning press	2	3	1
No answer	3	6	2

*Note.*  $N = 2,000$  (986 men, 1,014 women), national representative sample.  
*Source:* MRB Hellas (1992).

**Table 2**  
Average TV market share (%) of news programs:  
Private versus state channels, 1993–1996

Broadcasters	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96
Private channels			
Mega & Antenna	35.0	31.9	27.8
Sky & Star		11.5	12.8
State channels			
ET1 & ET2	7.5	5	4.6

*Source:* AGB Hellas (1994, 1995, 1996a).

(the private channels Mega, Antenna, Sky, and Star) was 40.8%, while that of the ERT's three channels was only 5% (Tables 2 and 3).

One of the main reasons most viewers prefer the private channels as sources of news is that the state broadcaster ERT is still believed to be under government influence, although to a lesser extent than in the days of the state broadcasting monopoly. In a recent study by the research agency PRC (1995a), Athenians—who constitute half of the total population of Greece—indicated that they trusted the private broadcasters more than the state broadcaster (Table 4).

The emergence of the private channels has not only removed the television broadcasting system from direct state control but also fostered a more commercial approach toward politics. As Manolis Paraschos has observed: “Despite the fact that many of the people who own or run these new media [the private channels] are the same as those running the print media, a fundamental change seems to be taking place: the attention is shifting away from the [political] parties and their leaders and towards the media consumer” (1995, p. 262). This new approach has made overt and close connections between media and political parties or ideological viewpoints “unprofitable,” since such connections do not help commercial media to attract large numbers of viewers from across the entire political spectrum.

The importance of television as a news source is also growing vis-à-vis newspapers. Between 1989 and 1996, sales of daily newspapers declined by about 40%. In

**Table 3**  
Percentage of news programs in the total air time of channels

Broadcasters	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96
Private channels			
Mega & Antenna	35.0	37.4	44.7
Sky & Star		33.3	49.5
State channels			
ET1 & ET2	27.5	29.5	33.4

*Source:* AGB Hellas (1994, 1995, 1996b).

**Table 4**  
TV channels and political news credibility (%)

Broadcasters	Total	Men	Women
Private channels			
Mega	31.8	30.8	32.6
Antenna	20.4	19.7	21.0
Sky	14.7	14.6	14.9
Star	5.5	5.8	5.2
State channels			
ET1	12.0	12.2	11.7
ET2	7.7	7.5	7.9
ET3	1.6	1.9	1.4
Other	3.1	3.8	2.4
I don't watch	2.8	3.2	2.5
None	0.2	0.1	0.2
I don't know	0.3	0.5	0.2
Total	100	100	100

*Note.* Percentages reflect rates of trustworthiness.  $N = 983$ , representative sample in the greater Athens region, May 2–9, 1995.

*Source:* PRC (1995a).

the recent elections, party leaders' interviews in newspapers received much less attention than their interviews on television. As one indication of the declining importance of newspapers in elections, newspapers' sales in September 1996, the month of the most recent elections, were about 10% less than in September 1995, when no election was taking place. This is in stark contrast to the past, when the circulation of the newspapers rose considerably during election campaign periods (Heretakis, 1993).

### The Changing Environment of Political Parties

In the last few years, political parties and politicians have lost many of their supporters and have faced considerable difficulties in getting their agendas placed before the public. For example, since the mid-1980s, accusations relating to scandals and corruption have become frequent issues on the public agenda, taking attention away from agendas advanced by the parties. In the past, political parties, which were based on a system of patronage, could not only create news items that were often incorporated into the national agenda but also mobilize strong constituencies ready to support their agendas (Charalambis, 1989; Charalambis & Demertzis, 1993; Kargiotis, 1992; Lyrintzis, 1987; Mouzelis, 1986, 1995; Tsoukalas, 1986).

Political parties are now less able to differentiate themselves from one another on the basis of their political programs. Since about the late 1980s, there has been a congruence among the leading political parties (New Democracy and PASOK) that hope to run the country. With the entry of Greece into the European Union (EU), the internationalization of the economy, and the changes in the international political order, political leaders in Greece have been obliged to adopt similar if not identical policies. The

two leading parties in the 1990s believe that, as an EU member state, Greece has no alternative but to follow the EU's economic developments and policies. In other words, the tasks of reducing severe and persistent macroeconomic imbalances and of improving a weak and inefficient economic structure "have to be carried out within the new policy framework and timetable called for by the process of European monetary union" (Papademos, 1993, p. 126). Broadly, then, Greece has to proceed toward the harmonization of its fiscal policies within the broader EU context of economic integration, thus obliging the two leading political parties to follow similar policies.

For example, Greece has to meet the basic criteria in order to take part in the European Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), a decision agreed to by all Greek political parties with the exception of the Communists. The party currently in power (PASOK) has had to adopt, as did its predecessor, the New Democracy government (1990–1993), austerity measures and neoliberal policies in order for Greece to meet the preconditions—in the form of structural reforms of the economy—for its entry into the EMU. The opposition does not dispute this policy objective; only the management of the policy is in dispute. Both parties accept the need for austerity and the privatization of the public sector: New Democracy seeks a speedier privatization process, while the PASOK government prefers to implement a more incremental approach.

Political parties also are seeing their base of support undermined by the decline of the traditional clientistic or patronage system. Since the establishment of the modern Greek state, politicians have used their political influence in the well known practice of *rousfeti*, that is, favoring their voters by, for example, finding them jobs in the public sector. This "patron-client" relationship, with its tendency to personalize offices and public institutions by rendering personal favors, resulted in an overcrowded, ineffective, and expensive public sector. As Sotiropoulos pointed out, "Parties have become legitimate dispensers of jobs in the public sector and this is linked to the growth of party membership in the last years" (1993, p. 53). However, with cutbacks in public spending required as a condition of entry into the EMU, Greek governments have had to retreat from these traditional practices.

In 1994, the government passed a law—the so-called "Peponis law," named after the minister of the interior and public administration—to restrict clientelist practices such as providing public jobs for supporters. In a period when austerity measures have contributed to higher unemployment (13.6% in 1998), this situation has affected party supporters: They and their families cannot easily find jobs. This affects young people in particular, as the level of unemployment among young people was around 30% in 1998. It may not be a coincidence that a study conducted by the KAPA research agency in 1995 found that half of the respondents still considered *rousfeti* as a "necessary evil" ("One of the Same," 1995). This finding reflects the traditional culture of paternalism and protectionism, which is closely associated with clientistic practices (Diamantouros, 1993, p. 21; Charalambis, 1989).

Also, as in other countries, the growing gap between what politicians and political parties promise and what they can deliver has led to a gradual erosion of the legitimacy of the political process as a whole. Greek citizens have become less supportive of the political parties, less trusting of the political system, and more likely to abstain from party membership. Research conducted by the ALKO research agency shows that, in the period 1990–1995, more and more voters came to believe that today's political parties neither "express their views" nor "have a vision" for the future. For example, according to ALKO's research, 70% of the 2,000 respondents in 1995 replied that the "present parties do not express their views," as compared with 55% who expressed this opinion

**Table 5**  
Attitudes toward politics: 1985–1995 (%)

Response	1985 <sup>a</sup>	1995 <sup>b</sup>
Enthusiasm	11.8	2.8
Wish for participation	24.0	5.5
Appeal	59.4	17.8
Indifference	17.9	24.7
Mistrust	31.7	31.7
Disappointment		43.7
Disgust	8.2	15.2

*Note.* The following question was asked: When we speak about politics some things come to mind first. How do you feel about politics? (up to 2 answers).

<sup>a</sup>*N* = 2,000, representative sample, June 2–18, 1995 (*Source:* EKKE, 1985).

<sup>b</sup>*N* = 3,000, representative sample, May 1985 (*Source:* PRC, 1995b).

in 1993 and 40% in 1990. Moreover, 65% of respondents in 1995 replied that “the present political parties do not have a vision,” as compared with 42% in 1990 (ALKO, 1995). One outcome of this degree of disillusionment has been abstention from politics, which is an indication of widespread distrust and lack of effectiveness of political parties and politicians (Table 5).

### Media and Political Parties in a New Kind of Relationship

The changes documented thus far have brought about a new kind of relationship between the media and politics in Greece. In effect, the media have moved to center stage in election campaigning, and they have also gradually assumed a central role in the day-to-day practice of government.

#### *The Media at the Center of the Contemporary Election Campaign*

There are many features of modern-day election campaigning in Greece that have long been common elsewhere. Their introduction into the Greek political system shows the growing importance of television as a medium of political communication for Greek political parties.

One of these features is parties' use of experts in television communication. Since 1990, foreign and Greek communication experts have been invited by the political parties—mostly *incognito*—to teach courses on the basics of television campaigning. Some of these experts have been American, such as James Carville for New Democracy; others have been European, such as the Briton Harvey Thomas for New Democracy and the Frenchman Jacques Seguela for PASOK. The extent to which these experts have had an impact on the strategies of the parties is unclear, although it soon became obvious that politicians were becoming increasingly comfortable with television routines. As a result, politics saturated television coverage before and during electoral campaigns.

In the 1990 Greek national elections, New Democracy's campaign left an indelible mark on the history of Greek campaigning. The incorporation of professionally produced television advertising, opinion surveys, and television expertise into an election campaign was seen as a critical element in New Democracy's successful campaign. It is widely believed that the party's use of modern campaigning practices helped it achieve victory. Since then, new developments have become legitimized as indispensable weapons for campaigning.

In the 1993 general elections, "telepolitics" was widely implemented, and political parties have focused their campaigns on television news programs, television political advertising, television debates, and television appearances by candidates on talk shows ever since. By 1996, television had moved center stage: Those national elections were dubbed the "TV elections" and "the elections on the couch."

One can see the growing importance of television in a number of ways. The number of opinion surveys commissioned by the media has increased. In the last 30 days of the 1990 campaign, 6 polls were commissioned, as compared with 8 in 1993 and 11 in 1996. Similarly, the number of commercials broadcast on television has increased. In the last 30 days of the 1990 campaign, 259 commercials were broadcast (242 for New Democracy, 10 for PASOK, and 7 for the Left Coalition Party). In the 1993 campaign, 3,777 political commercials were broadcast (1,489 for New Democracy, 1,357 for PASOK, and 931 for the other parties). In the last 25 days of the 1996 campaign, 3,594 political commercials were aired (1,665 for PASOK, 1,365 for New Democracy, and 564 for the other parties) (Table 6).

Even against this backdrop, some features of the 1996 general elections were novel. The first is that the 1996 election saw the replacement of the old campaign styles with new forms of campaigning. In the 1996 elections, the Prime Minister and Socialist Party (PASOK) leader, Costas Simitis, announced publicly at the start of his campaign that "we say no to chicken fights, false promises, meaningless rallies . . . we do not plan a campaign with plastic flags, fake portraits or expensive artificial gatherings." Instead, he announced that PASOK's campaign would rest on a nationwide "bus tour" (the "victory express"), precinct walks, televised debates with the main opposition leader, television

**Table 6**  
Political advertisements in the general elections of 1993 and 1996

	PASOK	New Democracy	Politiki Anixi	Communist Party	Synaspismos	Total
Number of ads, 1993	49	27	6	4	21	107
Number of ads, 1996	37	26	9	2	7	81
Total air time, 1993 <sup>a</sup> (hours)	14.5	18.31	2.1	0.1	0.4	39.5
Total air time, 1996 <sup>bc</sup> (hours)	19.5	11.7	2.1	0.2	0.8	34.2

<sup>a</sup>Mega Channel, *Megaline*, October 1993, No. 3, p. 2.

<sup>b</sup>Nielsen.

<sup>c</sup>AGB Hellas.

interviews, and only one major rally in Athens. He went on to say that the “people must be informed which party has proposals . . . which party has the necessary solutions to create a modern Greece.” He concluded, “We hope that this campaign will raise the quality of our political life.” All of this was in sharp contrast with the style of the late Andreas Papandreou, PASOK’s founder. Papandreou, whom Simitis had succeeded a few months earlier, had based much of his campaign activity on the traditional practice of fiery speeches before hundreds of thousands of flag-waving supporters in many Greek cities. This was often seen as the truest, most genuine form of political communication, a form that did not rely on electronic means.

The second new feature of the 1996 campaign was the growing regulation of the many forms of broadcast political communication. Before 1996, political talk shows during the election campaign period were more or less totally unregulated. In the 1996 elections, however, the main political parties were preoccupied with the “quest for the magic formula” that would secure all candidates and political parties equal time and access on television, including the talk shows, without upsetting the ratings of private channels. Discussions between the parties produced a set of guidelines for both state and private television channels under which every party would receive 7.5 hours of free air time on state channels and 5.5 hours on private channels. However, the private channels objected to these guidelines, and, in practice, they were never applied.

The main objective was to control individual candidates and their personal appearances in a bid to ensure that a handful of popular or “telegenic” candidates would not get the “lion’s share” of television coverage. During these elections, politicians maneuvered relentlessly to obtain coverage, and complaints about not getting enough attention were continuous. While television channels expanded their news bulletins during the elections, smaller parties complained that television was offering only a “biparty” dialogue among the candidates of the main political parties. According to *Media View* magazine, during the 1996 election campaign the politicians of PASOK appeared 263 times on the television channels, while the politicians of New Democracy appeared 203 times (“Teledemocracy,” 1996). In contrast, the politicians of Synaspismos (Left Coalition) had 51 appearances on television in the same period, while the politicians of the Communist Party had 48 appearances, the Politiki Anixi (Political Spring) 51 appearances and DIKKI (Dimocratico Kinima [Democratic Movement]) 42 appearances (“Teledemocracy,” 1996).

Most of the programs on which politicians appeared were produced especially for the campaign period, and many of them were called “Elections 1996.” Although the politicians who appeared on these shows and on television news bulletins made great efforts to defend and support their parties’ positions, there were many suspicions that their real goal was to increase their personal visibility so as to attract more votes. This is because in parliamentary elections Greek voters may vote not only for parties but also directly for individual candidates for deputy of the party they have chosen. This phenomenon shows the rise in Greece of the personalization that has been associated with contemporary campaigning in many countries.

The third new feature of the 1996 campaign was the introduction of televised debates. PASOK’s founder Papandreou had refused to participate in televised debates with his opponents, citing personal dislike for them, although alternative televised debates among lesser politicians did take place. The first televised debate between party leaders—Simitis for PASOK and Evert for the conservative New Democracy Party—took place in the 1996 elections. This debate signaled a certain change in election style by a new generation of Greek politicians.



The debate, broadcast live from the state television studio, lasted 90 minutes and was simultaneously broadcast on most private channels. The debate was preceded by tough bargaining between party representatives over the format of the debate. Most stations organized postdebate analyses and call-in shows to gauge "the winner." They invited an impressive succession of politicians, entertainers, analysts, media editors, and intellectuals to comment on the debate. On one channel (Mega), the whole effort was also backed by a special "cyberballot" on the Internet where viewers could send their comments. According to AGB Hellas (1996a), the television ratings research company, the debate was seen by 35.8% of television households. However, men and women 45–54 years old were more attracted by the debate (45.6%) than younger viewers (23.1%).

As in most cases of televised debates, neither candidate scored the desired "knock-out" punch. Most of the questions focused on policy issues, especially foreign policy and the economy. In the daily press on the day of the debate, all attention was firmly focused on the upcoming event. On the following day, most papers devoted their entire front page to the debate and to the question of who had "won." Their assessment depended, by and large, on which party each newspaper supported. Little mention was made of the fact that many basic issues had not been addressed, or that leaders of the four other main parties contesting the 1996 elections (Political Spring, Coalition of the Left, DIKKI, Communist Party) were not invited to participate. The liberal papers unanimously declared PASOK's candidate (Simitis) the "winner," while the conservative papers regarded New Democracy's candidate (Evert) as the winner.

Overall, the press declared that the TV debate "was a good beginning for the upgrading of political life and political dialogue" ("The Professor and the Mayor," 1996; "The TV Debate," 1996). However, the procedural imperfections cannot be overlooked: The debate was limited to the majority parties; its format restricted answers to a monologue; and it disarmed journalists' ability to probe issues in a serious way.

The fourth new feature of the 1996 campaign was the increase in negative political advertising. Jay Blumler notes (1990, p. 109) that the modern publicity process may be promoting an increased circulation of negative messages about political actors, events, and decisions, a striking example being the heavy use of negative advertising. In Greece, as in other countries that have left public rallies and pamphlet scattering behind, negative political television advertising has become a key feature of elections. Since the 1993 election, a major part of campaign strategy has been based not merely on political advertisements but particularly on negative "pollspots" (or "black advertisements" or "black propaganda," as these became known in Greece). These were also in evidence in the 1996 elections (Bastea, 1996; Papathanassopoulos, 1996). For example, less than 2 hours after Prime Minister Costas Simitis called "snap elections" for September 1996, the main opposition New Democracy party's first campaign commercial aired on television. The commercial, a compilation of clips of Simitis rejecting the notion of early elections, ended with a voice-over asking: "Elections on September 22. Can you trust him?" The message echoed the theme pursued by conservative officials in public statements and on talk shows that both the premier and the ruling PASOK party have lost credibility by calling elections despite earlier claims that they intended to serve out their 4-year term of office. In effect, both parties were accusing each other of being unable to run the country and of not being trustworthy.

The fifth and final novel attribute of the 1996 elections was the confirmation of television as the main medium for campaigning. As Table 7 shows, television has been disproportionately the main recipient of campaign funds since 1990.

In fact, it is the substantial growth of campaign funds allocated to television that

**Table 7**  
 Percentage of parties' advertising expenditure,  
 by medium, in recent election campaigns

Medium	1990 general national elections	1993 general national elections	1994 European Union elections	1996 general national elections
Television	28.6	89.1	86.0	83.0
Press	38.2	2.1	2.5	5.6
Radio	31.2	8.6	8.8	10.6

*Source:* Media Services S.A.

primarily accounts for the significant rise in total electoral expenses during the last decade. Rising television expenditures are perhaps the best symbol of the shift in Greek politics from campaigns traditionally based on efforts made by party organizations and prospective deputies to more professional mass media centered practices. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the government passed legislation setting an upper limit of expenditure on parties contesting the elections just a few months before the 1996 election.

In adopting television-centered campaigning, the parties have moved away from the traditional emphases on public rallies and personal contacts with party workers, thus lessening opportunities for citizens to participate directly in campaigns and further distancing the parties from voters. In the past, public rallies in major cities were significant events, but today it is the television debate that is the main media and political event. For example, the main PASOK rally in Athens during the 1996 elections had the lowest participation of any of the previous elections. New Democracy's leader decided to cancel his party's mass rally in Athens, preferring instead to give a television-press interview. Little wonder, then, that *Avriani*, a populist newspaper sympathetic to PASOK, declared on its front page, "You can't win elections on the couch," and pleaded that "all PASOK officials should take to the streets and deal with the people's problems first hand" ("You Can't Win," 1996, p. 1).

In the past, party workers mobilized citizens and sympathizers to attend the rallies, from which the parties could also gauge the popularity of their leaders. With the dominance of television, such political gatherings are on the wane, and journalists now look to television ratings to see which politicians attract the most viewers.

The loss of contact with electors resulting from reliance on television has also affected party membership. According to data provided by various studies, membership in political parties declined between 1985 and 1995 to about 42% (EKKE, 1985; PRC, 1995b). It has also made it difficult for parties to mobilize grassroots help. In the past, people came to the parties spontaneously and generously offered their time, as political parties enjoyed considerable respect and trust. But as parties have evolved, they have also suffered a dramatic decline in legitimacy and lost much of the capacity for channeling political participation that they had demonstrated during the *metapolitefse* (the period after the reestablishment of the Parliament) (Lyrintzis & Nicolakopoulos, 1990). Decreasing party alignment, diminishing participation in party events, and the fact that the electorate has become more volatile all highlight the decline of parties as mechanisms for political organization.

### ***The Media and the Day-to-Day Practice of Government***

The media have also assumed a central role in the day-to-day practice of government. Through the 1990s, members of the Parliament and other politicians have attached increasing importance to enhancing their visibility by appearing on television. At the same time, the standing of traditional governmental institutions—the Parliament and the Presidency of the Republic—has declined. The status of the Hellenic Parliament, whose sessions at one time attracted the interest of the nation, has now been downgraded. Images of the empty seats of ministers and deputies emphasize this change. President of the Republic, Costis Stephanopoulos has observed that the members of the Parliament prefer television cameras to Parliament as their chief forum of political communication. According to the deputy leader of the New Democracy party, Yannis Varvitsiotis, the reason is that:

a new Member of Parliament used to become known through his work there. Nowadays, no young Member of Parliament bothers. Instead, they prefer to become widely known by adopting an heretical point of view on TV. Proposals made in Parliament sessions can only be read by 300,000 readers, the total sales of Greek newspapers. A dissident view becomes widely known to the three million viewers of the television channels. (“The Media Promote Heretic Views,” 1995, p. 4).

As in other countries with modern models of the relationship between politics and the media, Greek media have begun to fight with the politicians for control of the political agenda and have started to make themselves heard in the process of political communication with a constant stream of criticism of politicians and the actions of the parties (Demertzis & Kafetzis, 1996; Komninou, 1996). The rise of the commercial media may have precipitated this trend and created a situation where, today, Greek citizens can watch an endless stream of negative stories about political scandals, rivalry, conflict, and self-interest. And, as with the media in other liberal democratic countries, the Greek media have tried to create stories about political conflict by giving particular attention to politicians who hold controversial views or who oppose the actions of the government.

In other words, the intervention of the media in the political process may be part of a growing feeling among journalists that they have the right to strongly criticize or even to ridicule politicians. Journalists and media claim that they perform a watchdog function, acting on behalf of the people as an independent check on elite behavior, and in carrying out this function they make politicians, bureaucrats, and private interests more accountable to the public.

### **Greek Politics and Media in the Era of Modernization**

The case of contemporary Greece illustrates changes in both media and politics, which have often been described as part of a process of “modernization” (see, for example, Mancini & Swanson, 1996). Modernization, in its Weberian perspective, is seen as a total process that implies not only a gradual move from tradition to modernity but also a movement toward a functionally integrated national or even supranational political system (Mouzelis, 1986). What we see in the Greek case, therefore, is not only a move away from traditional forms of election campaigning to more modern ways and means but also changes within the political system where traditional practices (e.g., *rousfeti*,

are under severe pressure to change in the modern international economy. These individual examples of change can be treated perhaps as symptomatic of the process of “modernization.”

As in many other liberal democracies, developments in Greece reflect not only a changing media environment but also changes in the standing of the political parties within the political system as a whole. More important, perhaps, these changes reflect a convergence of developments in both institutions. These changes lend support to many of the statements made by Mancini and Swanson (1996), among others, regarding the growing similarities in election practices across many countries “despite great differences in political cultures, histories, and institutions of the countries in which they have occurred” (p. 2). Such similarities include the use of political commercials (“pollisspots”), candidates being selected in part for the appealing image they project on television, the employment of technical experts to advise parties on strategies, the professionalization of campaign communication, and the like. These and the increased expenditure on strategies aimed at the medium of television show just how far television has moved to the center of elections, even in Greece.

But the Greek case illustrates only some, not all, of the elements that have been identified as constituting “modernized” or “media-centered democracy” (Blumler, 1990, 1997; Mancini, 1991; Mancini & Swanson, 1996; Negrine, 1996; Scammel, 1995; Swanson, 1993). As we have seen, there has been an increased use of “experts,” an increased and more professional use of television and media practices, a personalization of politics, a detachment of parties from citizens, more political spectacle, and a more autonomous role for the media (Mancini & Swanson, 1996). But Greece continues to contrast in some key ways with the political communication process elsewhere, especially in the United States, but much less with other democracies such as Britain. In Greece, as in Britain, for example, voters choose between different political parties and not between individual candidates for president or prime minister as in the United States and France. In Greece, a candidate for prime Minister cannot appear suddenly out of nowhere and progress far without extensive party support. To a greater or lesser extent, candidates tend to be known figures before they stand for election. The Greek public knew both Simitis and Evert from their previous service as ministers when their parties were in office before they sought the premiership. Nevertheless, they both relied heavily on modern campaign practices, which is a real indication of the similarities across diverse countries.

In this process of change, political parties and politicians have had to reassess their role in the political system. Although political parties remain important, public support for them is weakening. As we have seen, sociopolitical changes have created difficulties for the political parties. For example, political parties and their leaders have become disconnected from the stable societal sectors that formerly were the basis of their representation and support. They have also progressively lost the organizational strength and vitality that they had during the heyday of the transition to democracy.

At the same time that these changes have been taking place, the political parties and their leaders have had to confront a media system that increasingly values its independence. This has become a feature of the Greek “political-media complex” (Swanson, 1992) which places the media and politics in a complicated and sometimes antagonistic relationship. As Swanson has written, “within this complex, particular institutional interests often conflict with each other in the battle to control the public’s perceptions, but mutual cooperation is required for each institution to achieve its aims” (1992, p. 399). In recent years, Greek politicians have been ready to criticize the media and to threaten

them with a law that would place the media under Parliament's supervision. This is an attempt by Greek politicians to muzzle the media, although these threats have never been carried out. Finally, and as elsewhere, the rise of a "modernized" relationship between the media and politics is not seen as making a positive contribution to the health of Greek democracy. The public now regards both the media and politicians as dysfunctional and untrustworthy. In a recent study by the research company PRC (1995a), 53.3% of 983 respondents in the greater Athens region reported that they trust neither politicians nor journalists.

An era of media expansion, political and social crisis, economic inefficiency, and related insecurity provided the media with what they need to assume the "modernized" role seen in so many other democracies. The media focus on contradictions and color them with drama, since both elements seem to appeal to the public. It is not the media, and television in particular, that have changed politics, it is the whole political arena which is in a transitional stage with the media taking advantage of the situation. As Negrine has noted (1996, p. 180), politicians and the media claim to be speaking on behalf of the public and the citizen, yet both are pursuing their own "institutional needs." "Both," as Negrine points out, "are part of the problem, of a lack of accountability in democratic systems, of a disillusioned citizenry, and of a host of other ills which critics can reel off." In fact, in "media-centered democracies," the "modern publicity process" and the "political commercials" continue to treat the public as an audience rather than a real participant in the democratic process.

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