THE IMAGE OF PARTY LEADERS IN
CONTEMPORARY GREEK ELECTIONS

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Introduction

The intense use of image campaigning worldwide derives from the need of political parties to communicate their messages across using technologically advanced means that are at their disposal during certain periods of time. Characteristically, in the USA in 1900, William Jennings Bryan was the first candidate who used the phonogram to record his speeches, while in 1908 the public visited the cinema in order to watch speeches of the then presidential candidates. Inevitably, during the 1950s onwards, television drastically changed the nature of political campaigns. Similarly, there is nowadays a tendency for politicians to communicate with the public via the internet, with professionally designed websites, forums and email marketing.

In Greece, due to the sporadic absence of democratic processes particularly during the dictatorship of 1967-1974, the emergence of television broadcasting made its appearance at a later stage, imposing a slower start of the professionalization of political campaigns which emphasise the image of party leaders during election campaigns. However, the fast economic, cultural and political modernisation of the country since 1974, the mass popularity of television other than newspapers in Greece, as well as the emphasis given to party leaders during election campaigns, have allowed image campaigning to develop speedily, especially during the last decade.

This paper aims at presenting the image of party leaders in contemporary Greece using the 2004 election campaign as a case study, for the purpose of determining whether image campaigning in the country is Americanised or Modernised. The first part of the paper refers to the emergence of image based campaigns and the definitions of Americanisation and Modernisation which shall be used in the second part of the paper, for the purpose of analysing the political election processes in Greece and the image promoted by the leaders of the two large parties in the 2004 parliamentary election.
The shift from issue-based campaigns to image-based campaigns

On an international scale, academic analysts are witnessing the ascendancy of ‘image’ politics, the increased professionalization of political communication and the adoption of campaign style and practices that heavily rely on the mass media to appeal to voters. It has been observed that major changes in Americanized societies involve the weakening of political parties and citizens’ activism in the formal political process and the de-emphasis on major governing issues. By analysing the emphasis given on image formation and presentation of the candidate, it can be safely said that image in the past decades has been an important factor in election campaigning.

In recent years great importance has been attributed to personal image in several aspects of our lives. Politics have become more personal as personalisation is far more potent today than ever before. Forming the desirable image of a candidate is more difficult than it seems, as it involves considerable market research, the skills of experts and the ability to perform in public. The best image management leaves no traces and no fingertips of public relations professionalism. Thus the call to “let Reagan be Reagan”, or its equivalent, is often heard.

Image of the candidate includes not only appearances and charm, but also personal characteristics and abilities. The capability to perform in public is a key issue in public performance. The way a person communicates, performs and acts, can determine how skilful he or she is and how competent he or she can be, in a powerful position. The places a candidate chooses to visit and the pseudo-events that she chooses to organise also have a great effect upon her likeability. Images are formed by a number of means such as physical attractiveness, personal characteristics and abilities, as well as carefully chosen public appearances and messages.

The constant focus of television on party leaders sometimes causes the drift from ideology-based campaigns towards image-focused campaigns. The importance of image also increases with the growing number of the “chronic-know-nothing” voters; those are the voters who disregard the importance of politics and vote according to the candidate’s

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1 Yannas, P., “The role of image makers in the Greek Political scene”, *Journal of Political Marketing*, p.70, 2002
4 Pseudo-events are organized mainly by politicians to engage a certain audience’s attention.
external appearance, family background, personal acquaintances and hobbies. Voters in most societies seem to have little grasp over the details of party and candidate positions. As a rule people tend to vote according to their general perception of the personality and image of the candidates. Therefore, a candidate’s image and her perception among the public, is extremely important not only during elections but also in other public appearances in her daily life.

The formation of a specific image is more likely to attract voters that are weakly attached, or not at all attached, to a party. Ideologically-oriented voters tend to vote for the candidate of their party even if they feel that the specific person does not acquire the skills of a leader. It is in countries with a traditionally strong ideological basis, such as in Greece, that the development of image campaigning is only starting to show, as the shift of voters between parties has up to now been rare and difficult to emerge. As mentioned earlier, it appears that voters seem to have drifted away from the political parties; and that party politics have been replaced with “merchandised politics”.

Consequently, achieving a favourable image for a candidate is a key objective of modern campaigning. As Kavanagh observes, approval of the candidate is not based upon a reality, but it is a product of the particular chemistry between the voter and the image of the candidate. Image consultants are specialised in emphasising characteristics of candidates that will be able to attract voters. “It is their job to let the public get to know the real president. In truth, the job is to let the public believe they know the real man”.

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Defining Americanisation and Modernisation

When examining the development of political campaigns and image making, one can certainly observe common practices being used worldwide. These practices are largely based on the American model of campaigning. The United States has become a role model for other cultures, which are distinct from each other, because it represents an abundant society, the freedom to consume and more generally, what many people conceptualise as the “good life”. The influences of the American model on the political environment of several European countries have been observed extensively during the 1990s onwards.

The political parties, firstly in the USA and in some European countries later on, have been overshadowed by the political images that are produced by image consultants and other professionals. There is no doubt that the trend of image-making was introduced in America, along with most of the political communication techniques that are currently being put to practice worldwide.

Defining Americanization can be rather complicated and confusing as there have been several different interpretations of the word and its meaning in the past. The main characteristic of Americanisation in political elections, in which most scholars and professionals agree upon, is that “elections have become pure beauty contests, designed by handlers, spin-doctors, and professional image-makers, and packaged in ways that are easily communicated via mass media”.

For the purpose of this paper, Americanisation of election campaigns is held to be the process in which countries, regardless of their cultural, political and economic environment, copy without altering, American techniques that deal with the promotion of the candidate through the media with the engagement of election professionals.

Moving over to the concept of Modernisation within the context of political communication, there are considerable attempts to define the term as the “personalization of politics;

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adapting campaign practices to media logic and priorities; and employing technical experts to advise parties on public relations, opinion polling and marketing strategies".¹⁴

This paper considers that Modernisation of election campaigns is the process in which countries adopt new techniques for the promotion of candidates through the media with the help of election professionals while taking into consideration the cultural, political and economic environment and needs of their societies. In other words, Modernisation is a process of picking and choosing the tools you need from a tool box instead of taking everything that is being offered in it, which could describe the process of Americanisation.

Before analysing the existence, or lack, of Modernisation or Americanisation in Greek political election campaigns it is wise to get familiarised with the political scene of the country.

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The Greek political environment

Greek politics can be characterised as a ‘dynasty’. The 2004-elected Prime Minister of Greece, Kostas Karamanlis, is the nephew of former Prime Minister Konstantinos Karamanlis, while his opponent during the same election, George Papandreou, had a father (Andreas Papandreou) and a grandfather (Georgios Papandreou) who also served Greece from the post of Prime Minister. Furthermore, Dora Bakoyannis, a Minister of Foreign Affairs, is the daughter of yet another former Prime Minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis.

Talking in figures, around 70 candidates in the 2004 parliamentary election were sons, daughters or close relatives of sitting or former Members of the Parliament, while 12 per cent of all outgoing MPs had a politician parent. It is a fact that political career within the family is a very strong phenomenon in Greece whereas politics is exerted as a profession. It is evident that the family name in Greek politics plays a crucial role to the rise of individual politicians, while it also affects the voters’ perception on the politicians’ abilities and strengths.

Beyond the ‘dynasty’ factor, appearance and image of party leaders does play a substantial role in political elections in Greece. Greece, as explained above, had to overcome its difficulties after the dictatorships at a fast pace in order to achieve a political, economic and cultural modernisation. Television in Greece made its appearance in 1965 with the state-owned ERT. It was only after 1989 that the Greek Parliament passed a legislation legalizing private broadcasting in both radio and television media.

Televised news immediately demonstrated that a new era in politics was to emerge. One of the first comments on the image of the Prime Minister on Greek television was the affair Prime Minister Andreas Papandreou had with Dimitra Liani - who became his wife later on- and the Koskotas scandal, a major financial scandal involving Andreas Papandreou and members of his Government. These incidents played a crucial role for television broadcasting as well as for image perceptions of party leaders, as they enabled the public to reflect upon their Prime Minister, his personality (both as he appeared in his public and private life) and his suitability for the post.

15 BBC News, Familiar feeling about Greek Elections, Richard Galpin, March 4th 2004
The first political television advertisements made their appearance in 1990 while later in the same decade they were transformed from party television advertisements to party leader television advertisements, promoting – in several instances - the future Prime Minister on a greater scale than the actual promotion of the political program of the parties.

This phenomenon of image campaigning in Greece did not occur overnight but evolved gradually, through the development of professional political campaigning, the involvement of political consultants in Greek elections and the increase in the use of technologically advanced means in promoting the messages of the candidates. It could be argued that the employment of foreign political consultants from Greek parties during parliamentary elections have caused the import of American ideas, techniques and strategies in the Greek political arena. However, it is in fact true that even some Greek political consultants and campaign experts, claim to have had considerable inspiration from American elections.\footnote{Yannas, P. “The role of image makers in the Greek Political scene” Journal of Political Marketing, Vol.1,(1), p.81, 2002}

In order to observe the promotion of the image of party leaders in Greece and their similarities - if any - with American campaigning, a closer look to the campaigns of the New Democracy party and of the Pan-Hellenic Socialist Party (PASOK) in the 2004 parliamentary elections must be analysed further.
The 2004 Parliamentary Election Campaigns

A crucial part of modern election campaigning is the television presentation of candidates, whether that is on televised debates, television news or paid advertisements. The most successful way of promoting one’s message is via paid advertisements, since the public receives the exact message that the party wants to communicate, without any external influences from the comments of journalists or political analysts.

The 2004 television advertisements of PASOK, although very professional in production, cannot be described as very powerful in terms of messages. In fact, there were very few references to the details of the political program of PASOK and its candidate for the premiership, George Papandreou. The messages promoted in these advertisements were vague and without any real substance. PASOK did not have one specific message in its television advertisements. Instead, it used different slogans in each advertisement. Some of these slogans were: “I HOPE - I DECIDE - I VOTE”, “TOGETHER IN VICTORY, TOGETHER IN A NEW AGE”, “WE UNITE GREEKS, WE CHANGE GREECE”, “WE GIVE A COMMAND- WE CHANGE THE ERA”, etc. Furthermore, the use of a different music theme in most of the advertisements showed no signs of a unified approach or a coherent structure in PASOK’s television campaigning.

Papandreou only appeared in the party’s television advertisements very late in the campaign. This can be attributed to the fact that he was elected as the president of PASOK only one month before the elections took place and there was a limited time for the preparations and the promotion of Papandreou as a leader and a possible future Prime Minister of the country.

The television advertisements, in which Papandreou took part in, exposed the lack of the candidate’s knowledge for the problems of the Greek people. Characteristically, in an advertisement in which he appears as a narrator he says: “I see happy faces, people who have a vision and strength and hope for the future. Let us change the era so that every Greek opens his road to the sun”. The advertisement showed pictures of farmers, working mothers, young people and villagers. Looking at their faces, there was nothing hopeful or happy about them. Instead watching them, created a feeling of dissatisfaction. This advertisement, although it aimed at giving people hope, it did not illustrate that Papandreou had a strong indication or an in-depth knowledge of the problems of the groups portrayed in
the advertisement. Instead, it showed that he was rather utopian with a lack of the realistic situation of the country’s population and their particular concerns.

Other advertisements demonstrated the positive steps that PASOK made during its time in Government, emphasizing the years of the Kostas Simitis administration. These advertisements showed buildings that were restored, bridges that were built and new constructions that took place during those years.

In another set of television spots, a historical background of PASOK was given, featuring previous leaders of the party and their achievements. This spot can be considered as a mistake on behalf of the PASOK leadership in that it promoted a political environment that was tiresome for the public due to its twenty years in government. Moreover, it was controversial to the party’s parallel campaign for a renewed PASOK with new people and new ideas in a new government. Some of the slogans used to promote this new PASOK in government were: “PASOK: MOVEMENT OF CHANGE” and “THE POWER OF CHANGE”. The promotion of change by PASOK was also misleading since in fact there would be no considerable change of policies and practices in government. The only difference would be that the people executing them would be somewhat different from the ones who were in power for the last twenty years.

The New Democracy (ND) television campaign focused more on getting its message across rather than the leader’s image. The first advertisement that made its appearance on television was one where picturesque sites of Greece paraded along with the message “The places we loved need a new vision”. The specific advertisement was characterized as a touristic advertisement rather than a political one\textsuperscript{18}, which is not a completely invalid point. However, and in contrast to PASOK’s spots, the rest of the ND advertisements that followed illustrated specific solutions to identified problems that the public was facing. Spots talked in figures, putting forward the political program of the party and consequently its candidate for the premiership, Kostas Karamanlis.

The slogans used in the advertisements of ND were precise and were repeated regularly. Specifically, the slogans used were: “FOR ALL GREEKS” and “THE COUNTRY NEEDS POLITICAL CHANGE”. The face of ND’s leader and premiership candidate Karamanlis appeared in all television advertisements at the end of the spot along with the slogan.

Although Karamanlis could get involved in negative campaigning against Papandreou, he was obviously advised not to, in order to absorb the voters of PASOK that were not satisfied

\textsuperscript{18} «Χαλαρή η προσέγγιση μέσω των διαφημίσεων», article in Kathimerini newspaper, 6 March 2004.
with the PASOK government and consequently would not vote for Papandreou. It is understandable that if he was to get caught up in negative campaigning he would most likely push away those voters. In fact, the ND campaign concentrated on limited negative campaigning aiming at the outgoing government and the people’s dissatisfaction from its performance. Specifically, they used lines such as “PASOK offered what it had to offer during its twenty years in government. It is now time for a new government”.

The lack of extensive negative campaigning from ND managed to promote a suitable image for Karamanlis in his pursuit of the premiership, as he appeared to be superior to previous candidates since he did not need to accuse anyone in order to get elected. Instead, he successfully presented his political program and convinced the public that the actions he was about to take from the position of prime minister were strong enough to get him elected. PASOK’s negative campaigning was also limited to promoting ND as a party of the radical right, while trying to portray itself as more of a centre party rather than a socialist party.

PASOK was successful in getting the media’s attention through the large rallies that were organized. In fact, Papandreou toured around Greece speaking publicly and exhibiting, via the media, that PASOK was powerful and popular enough in every corner of the country. On the other hand, Karamanlis concentrated on his messages instead of the mass rallies. While touring across the country he promoted that it was time for the people to trust their government and that he was ready to listen to the public’s views, problems and suggestions. The only instance in which Karamanlis appeared to handle the power of the media much better than Papandreou was when very bad weather conditions occurred in Athens and its suburbs. While both leaders visited places that were affected badly by the extreme weather conditions, only Karamanlis visited nearby places that were also accessible to television crews. On the contrary, Papandreou only managed to have phone conversations with the televised media since he went to more isolated areas.

After achieving a high concentration of their members, both parties, aimed at attracting the 12 per cent of voters that claimed to be undecided. The difference in their approach to these groups of people was once again the messages that were communicated to them. Karamanlis managed to reach the people that were dissatisfied with the PASOK Government (the farmers, working mothers and young people) and remind them of the mistakes of the PASOK government, while also demonstrating the new measures that were

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19 «Εντός των Τείχων», article in Kathimerini newspaper, 1 February 2004.
20 Article of Kostas Karamanlis during the election campaign of 2004 www.e-logos.gr
21 «Τι ελπίζουν, τι φοβούνται ΠΑΣΟΚ και ΝΔ», article in To Vima newspaper, 15 February 2004
22 «Στις ειδικές ομάδες στοχεύει ο Καραμανλής» article in Kathimerini newspaper, 15 February 2004
proposed by ND and Karamanlis for their specific needs. On the contrary, PASOK did not make any distinctions between specific characteristics of these groups and talked to them generally, in a vague manner and without any substance.

The use of the Internet was extensive on behalf of PASOK and of Papandreou in particular through his personal website. PASOK’s website contained all the promotional material produced for the purpose of the 2004 campaign. The visitor could watch the television spots and listen to the radio spots of the campaign online, while it was feasible to print the leaflets of the campaign and read the speeches of the party leader from the comfort of his home. The actual political program was also available to every visitor. ND’s use of the Internet was much more restricted, its website not being up to the standards of PASOK’s equivalent.

Karamanlis suggested to Papandreou, on the day he was elected President of PASOK, to arrange four televised debates during the election campaigns. Three of these debates would be between the two leaders and one between all five leaders of the parties that took part in the campaign. Papandreou agreed to a head to head debate that would take place on the 26th of February 2004. However, Papandreou was pressured from members of his party, not to take part in this debate as there was a risk he would not be able to exceed the rhetoric of Karamanlis. One day before the debate, Papandreou announced that it was not fair to the other three party leaders not to be included in the election debate and although it seemed that the debate was about to be cancelled the other party leaders accepted the offer and the debate took place as planned.

In the debate, Papandreou was asked to explain some of the controversial elements and actions of the Simitis Government. Instead of appearing ready to account for some of the omissions made on behalf of his party while in power, he struggled to emphasize that party members were renewed and that central policies of the current Government would be altered in a new PASOK Government under himself. Furthermore, he seemed rather nervous and stressed, often looking at his notes carefully before answering any questions. Karamanlis seemed more confident and eager to give answers to the questions raised to him. Overall, Karamanlis successfully communicated an image of being a more suitable and better prepared candidate than his opponent for the Prime Minister’s post.

23 «Ο κ. Κ. Καραμανλής αλλάζει σελίδα», article in To Vima newspaper, 8 February 2004.
At the elections of March 7th, 2004, Karamanlis and ND won with a percentage of 46.40 of the total votes, while Papandreou and PASOK acquired 41.48 per cent of the votes.
The two larger parties in Greece managed to conduct election campaigns which on the one hand maintained numerous differences between them, while on the other hand they shared some fundamental similarities. Emphasis was given to the personal image of both party leaders running for the premiership. However, it is doubtful that any political communication professional can claim that either campaign was Americanised or entirely Modernised. This can be explained when looking closely to the two campaigns, what they aimed and what they finally achieved overall.

Papandreou and PASOK attempted to run a campaign that revolved around the image of the candidate for the premiership. Their campaign had little to do with the party’s ideologies and issues while it distinguished the party from the candidate to a large extend. Of course this was done strategically, in order to promote their slogans for ‘effective change’ and ‘a new era’ from the PASOK Government.

The messages promoting the campaign of Papandreou were very vague, they lacked in substance and included very limited references to figures and specific measures of his suggested political program. The participation of new people in the leadership of PASOK struggled to promote an overall renewal and modernisation of the party’s management that would consequently result in an entirely fresh PASOK administration in the event of Papandreou’s election.

Furthermore, the Papandreou campaign used limited negative campaigning which proved to be wise, considering the likeability of his opponent among the voters. He used negative campaigning verbally and not on any printed or electronic media. Moreover, he made excellent use of the technologies available to him, since he had a very comprehensive and interactive website with all the information a voter needed.

One of Papandreou’s crucial mistakes was the fact that he made tremendous efforts in order to separate his own image from PASOK’s. Everything around his campaign demonstrated major changes that were about to take place with a possible Papandreou government. However, Papandreou as a Minister of Foreign Affairs of the outgoing PASOK Government was held accountable for many of the mistakes made while his party was in power. In other words, he struggled between promoting his own new vision for the country and apologising for the errors and misjudgements of his party’s administration.
In the opposing field, Karamanlis managed to conduct a much more balanced campaign with the use of messages and issues being the campaign’s priorities, while his image was employed as a complimentary element to the campaign. The campaign carried out by ND included, among other things, the deployment of comprehensive messages, detailed explanations of the political program of the candidate and frequent interaction with the public. The very limited negative campaigning conducted by ND revolved around the PASOK administration instead against Papandreou himself. This tactic enhanced Karamanlis’ positive image by demonstrating that he was able to win the elections based on his own innovative ideas and fresh vision for the country.

Karamanlis’ campaign seemed to be lacking in terms of technologically advanced means. He did not manage to use the Internet effectively in order to promote his messages and political program on that level as well. Furthermore, ND’s own website was not as competent as PASOK’s online portal and therefore less accessible and of a lower appeal to voters.

A positive aspect of Karamanlis’ campaign is the fact that he managed to sustain a harmonic inter-relationship between the issues and his image, the party and himself and ND’s ideology in relation to his messages. In this sense, he managed to make it both an ND campaign as well as a Karamanlis campaign, whereas something similar was not observed vividly in the Papandreou campaign.

On a personal level, Papandreou aimed at promoting himself as an athletic person and a good husband. He attempted to demonstrate his close links to foreign politicians by emphasising his performance as a Minister of Foreign Affairs. Overall, Papandreou did not manage to display that he was indeed capable of being perceptive of the public’s concerns nor did he suggest viable and specific solutions to their problems. It can be argued that he underestimated the public’s perceptions and expectations and that he made wrong judgements of what the people really look forward to from a candidate for the premiership. Furthermore, he seemed unprepared for the campaign he was conducting as if he rushed into it at the very last minute. Although Papandreou has been involved in parliamentary politics longer that Karamanlis, in the duration of the 2004 campaign he revealed a political immaturity, through a series of mistakes that could either be due to unsuccessful organisational skills or due to the misjudgement over the public’s desires.

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26 George Papandreou was elected Member of the Parliament for the first time in 1981, while Kostas Karamanlis was elected Member of the Parliament for the first time in 1989.
Karamanlis revealed a stronger candidacy, with firm views and precise suggestions. He appeared to be facing the public with respect and avoided miscalculations of their potential as a society, a workforce and voters. He seemed to be much more prepared for this battle than his opponent was, while he also emerged very confident in his public speeches and appearances. Karamanlis dealt with issues as most opposition leaders would: he understood what the public looked for and raised the focus of his political program towards their needs and expectations in a coherent and persuasive manner.

It is of course important to remember that the 2004 parliamentary elections were the second for Karamanlis as a party leader and candidate for the premiership, having lost in 2000 to his opponent and 2004’s outgoing Prime Minister, Kostas Simitis. Since the summer of 2003, Karamanlis’ political advisors and campaign planners must have had certain expectations of the changes that were about to occur in PASOK regarding the leadership transition just before the election. Such calculations could certainly have given them a head start as to the planning of the campaign, while enabling them to adopt techniques that would promote Karamanlis and employ their – arguably limited - negative campaigning against the then PASOK Government instead of Papandreou. ND was given an advantage that proved to be valuable for the better development of the strategies and campaign techniques of the parliamentary elections of 2004.

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Conclusion

Greece enjoyed advancement in the professionalization of its election campaigns during the last decade. The campaigns of 2004 in particular, concentrated on both the image of the candidates and the issues raised by their parties. Both candidates for the premiership ran competent campaigns while being under the guidance of campaign experts.

Overall, the campaigns of both Greek parties examined in this paper do not demonstrate any similarities to campaigns conducted in American elections were the campaigns are mainly image-based. On the contrary, party politics play a crucial role in the Greek political scene. Moreover, Greece has a very stable voting behaviour with large numbers of the public being closely affiliated to political parties in the country.

Additionally, Greek political parties demonstrate signs of modern election campaigning with the use of balanced campaigns promoting both the image and personality of the leader as well as the issues that are supported by the parties. All the messages are promoted by party officials, via both traditional methods such as public rallies and radio interviews and modern methods such as television advertisements, colourful posters and magazine advertisements. Furthermore, the employment of Internet websites and online forums are signs of further advancement of the election campaigns in the Greek political environment.

As a result, Greek election campaigns cannot be described as Americanised in any way since they do not illustrate any signs of copying identical techniques in image campaigning from the ones conducted in the USA. On the contrary, Greek parties follow the modernised image campaign model, in which they adopt specific techniques that suit the political, economic and cultural environment of the country.

Conclusively, Karamanlis managed to acquire the trust of the voting public to a reasonably high degree by outlining in detail his policies and proposals regarding their major problems. Papandreou on the other hand, based his campaign more on his image, something that admittedly proved fruitful regarding the increase of the party’s percentage in the final election result compared to the opinion polls conducted during the period of the election campaign examined in the present paper. However, PASOK did not manage to win the election and came second by a five per cent difference of total votes from ND. Papandreou had a clear
disadvantage: that of the broad dissatisfaction over the Simitis administration and the public's desire for radical change in the state of the country.

It is worth reflecting upon the possibility of whether an image campaign of Papandreou would have resulted differently if the public was not as dissatisfied with the outgoing Simitis administration. Indeed, it would have been a phenomenal transition for Greece to elect a head of government who would structure his campaign primarily around his image. That would have definitely been an indication of Americanisation's emergence in the Greek political scene.
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