Book Reviews

The International Journal of Press/Politics
2017, Vol. 22(2) 264–270
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Daniel Kreiss

Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016. 306 pp. ISBN: 9780199350247 (hardcover) £99.00; ISBN: 9780199350254 (paperback) £18.99.

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DOI: 10.1177/1940161216688308

In his book *Prototype Politics: Technology-Intensive Campaigning and the Data of Democracy*, Daniel Kreiss develops a powerful framework for the analysis of organizational change and innovation in political parties. Kreiss applies theories from organizational sociology on innovation and organizational change to the context of political organizations and thus provides an exciting template for the field. Primarily, the book focuses on the question of how U.S. parties reacted to technological change between 1999 and 2014. But the conceptual backbone of Kreiss's book promises to be of use well beyond this specific topical area. This makes the book mandatory reading for anyone interested in the impact of technology on politics and the inner life of political organizations.

Kreiss starts with the question of why the two major parties in the United States, Democrats and Republicans, developed widely diverging approaches in their use of technology for campaigning. Over multiple campaign cycles, the Democrats developed an organizational and campaign culture that put the use of technology at its center. The party and its extended network developed tools and practices to increase the reach and effectiveness in the organization and running of campaigns. Contrast this with the Republicans, who focused on technology largely during and in the direct run-up to campaigns. They, therefore, did not benefit from a continuous multicycle process of technological development and organizational learning: for the most part, relegating technology and its potential benefits to the sidelines while Democrats put them front and center.

Kreiss deftly identifies the puzzle behind this pattern. Why do two parties and their extended networks given comparable resources and information react so differently while facing the same potential extension of their campaigning abilities through technological innovation? To Kreiss, the answer can be found in applying theories from organizational sociology to the study of political parties and campaign organizations.

Kreiss starts his argument by mapping the contemporary campaign environment which to him is increasingly characterized by the challenges and opportunities provided

by technological innovation for campaign organizations. In this “technological-intensive era,” political organizations are starting to “actively shape technological contexts” by “infrastructure building—the production of technologies, organizations, trained staffers, knowledge, and practices in between elections that affects the technology, digital media, data, and analytical resources that future campaigns can draw on” (p. 4). Kreiss’s account illustrates how U.S. parties diverged in their approach to this underlying challenge.

In explaining these different approaches, Kreiss turns to the sociology of organizations. Here, Kreiss focuses on studies centering on innovation in organizations. He shows that two concepts from this literature, network folding and prototyping, are central in explaining the different paths to the use of technology taken by Democrats and Republicans.

Network folding describes the process and degree with which professional networks centered on politics intersect with professional networks from other areas, such as software development and data analysis. To measure this process, Kreiss focuses on the careers of campaign staffers before and after their stint in campaigns as documented on their LinkedIn profiles. Here, Kreiss shows that networks emerging from Democratic campaign staffers are much more diverse and dynamic than networks emerging from the careers of Republican staffers.

The other element used by Kreiss to explain diverging approaches to technological innovation is the role of prototypes in inner-party innovation processes. Kreiss emphasizes the importance of critical events, such as elections that were lost against the perceived odds, for parties to start organizational meaning-making processes. As a result of these processes, organizations transform

particular campaigns . . . into “prototypes” for some actors, a model for future campaign practice, and a set of claims about the world that are actionable for campaign practice, and a set of claims about the world that are actionable for practitioners. (p. 16)

This emphasizes the contingency of innovation processes in parties on the outcomes of collective meaning-making processes and reactions to historical events.

From these elements, Kreiss develops a theory of innovation in parties:

Party networks and campaigns that are able to generate field crossing from the technology and other industries into politics give rise to innovations and new organizations. Organizational innovations and inventions trigger significant transformations in the technological capacity of party networks over time. Campaigns are, in part, the outcomes of party networks that change, or fail to, over time and produce particular types of staffers and organizations, shape the knowledge, skills, and strategies that are valued in electoral politics, and influence the structure and workings of campaigns. Extraordinary events, such as when a party loses an election people believe they should have won, can change the path of a party network and tip it in a new direction by changing perceptions as to what offers competitive electoral advantage. (p. 18)

Kreiss uses this framework to structure a deep narrative on technological change and innovation of the Democratic and Republican Party networks between 1999 and 2014.

This narrative is based on in-depth interviews with more than fifty-five campaign professionals, written documents, campaigns' internal lessons-learned evaluations, network data on the movement of staffers from campaigns to firms and back, and fieldwork during conventions. Accordingly, the book provides a fascinating history of contemporary campaigning in the United States.

Prototype Politics thus offers two central contributions. The first is a deep account of U.S. parties adapting to technological change during the turbulent phase of the Internet's commercialization and widespread popular adoption. This offers a vital piece of contemporary cultural and political history. The book's second contribution reaches even further. In explaining differential approaches to dealing with technological change, Kreiss develops a theoretical framework for analyzing innovation in political organizations. By adapting concepts from contemporary sociology of organization to the context of political organizations, Kreiss identifies a promising area of future research. *Prototype Politics* thus provides a fascinating and convincing answer to the question of why political organizations keep reacting to similar contexts differently and proposes a theoretical framework with high promise well beyond its direct application on technological innovation and adoption.