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Political Branding in Cities

Branding is ubiquitous, yet its workings in politics are still untheorized. Drawing on the experiences of three cities on three continents, Eleonora Pasotti fills the gap by showing how cities suffering for decades from poor government, entrenched patronage, lack of development, and social conflict made a transition to a new form of governance: brand politics. Facilitated by the joint presence of direct elections, low party discipline, and high rates of municipal fiscal self-reliance, brand politics breaks a vicious cycle of skepticism and inertia and opens the window for a broad set of reforms. The theory of brand politics shows mayors emulating marketing mavericks: in commerce, consumers aspire to become different people by acquiring products; in politics, citizens support mayors' brands because they seek to become carriers of the same values. Voting and buying have thus become increasingly synonymous in citizens' primal search for a means of expressing their identities.

Eleonora Pasotti is Assistant Professor of Politics at the University of California, Santa Cruz. She holds a BSc in economics and a master's degree in philosophy of the social sciences from the London School of Economics, and a PhD in political science from Columbia University. Her research in comparative urban politics focuses on institutional change, the transformation of patronage politics, and representation.

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ELEONORA PASOTTI

University of California, Santa Cruz

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Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

List of Figures *page* ix
List of Tables xi
Acknowledgments xiii

1 BRANDS AS A SOLUTION TO THE MOBILIZATION DILEMMA 1
From Exchange to Persuasion 1
A Perception-Sensitive Approach to Politics 7
The Logic of Brands 13
Overview 26

2 CATALYSTS OF MACHINE DEMISE 28
Clientelism in Naples, Bogotá, and Chicago 28
Naples's Velvet Revolution 32
Bogotá's Institutional Transformation 45
Chicago's Social Evolution 54
Conclusion 62

3 POLITICAL CAMPAIGNING IN THE WAKE OF THE MACHINE 65
Political Competition as Brand Promotion 65
Naples's Production of the Catchall Leader 66
Bogotá and the Entry of Independent Mayors 74
Chicago's Stepwise Transition 89
Conclusion 99

4 CHANGING PUBLIC MINDS 103
Persuasion and Public Opinion Mobilization in Post-Machine Politics 103

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76205-2 - Political Branding in Cities: The Decline of Machine Politics in Bogota, Naples, and Chicago
Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

	Naples and the Strength of Support through Pride	105
	Bogotá: Daring to Dream	117
	Chicago and Discourse Adaptations across Mayoralties	135
	Conclusion	141
5	BRANDS AND MEGAPROJECTS	143
	Policy Making in Brand Politics	143
	Naples's Propagating Frames	145
	Bogotá's Megaprojects	161
	Policy Making in the Windy City	182
	Conclusion	198
6	ELUSIVE REPRESENTATION	199
	Democratic Dilemmas in Post-Machine Regimes	199
	Naples's Limits to Public Opinion Mobilization	201
	Bogotá's Institutional Impact	211
	Chicago's Controversy	222
	Conclusion	226
7	BRAND POLITICS IN GLOBAL CONTEXT	228
	Municipal Governments in Comparative Perspective	231
	Theoretical Implications of Brand Politics: Emotions and Rationality	242
References		257
Index		275

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Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76205-2 - Political Branding in Cities: The Decline of Machine Politics in Bogota, Naples, and Chicago
Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

Figures

1.1 Countries in Europe and Latin America that introduced direct mayoral elections and expanded mayoral powers in the 1980s and 1990s *page* 2
2.1 Naples town hall employees, 1986–2002 34
2.2 Recommended capital expenditure in Naples's budget by destination, 1983–1990 36
2.3 Yearly revenues in Naples's budget by source, 1984–1988 and 1994–1998 38
2.4 Mobilization cost functions 44
2.5 Cartoon by Vladdo illustrating Jaime Castro's unpopularity after the Estatuto Orgánico was passed in Bogotá 52
2.6 Employee benefit budget in Chicago, 1981–1987 58
3.1 Support for Antonio Bassolino in the 1993 (first and second round) and 1997 elections by locality, ordered according to socioeconomic status 73
3.2 Leading party in Neapolitan neighborhoods in municipal elections, 1952–1997 75
3.3 Support for winning mayoral candidates in Bogotá's elections, 1988–1994, by percentage in fifteen most populous localities, ordered according to socioeconomic status 86
3.4 Support for winning mayoral candidates in Bogotá's elections, 1997–2003, by percentage in fifteen most populous localities, ordered according to socioeconomic status 87

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978-0-521-76205-2 - Political Branding in Cities: The Decline of Machine Politics in Bogota, Naples, and Chicago
Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

3.5 Support for Richard M. Daley in Chicago's mayoral elections, 1989–2007, in majority black, Hispanic, and white wards 99
4.1 Number of theater and music productions in Naples, 1980–2003 112
4.2 Traffic cards in Bogotá 124
4.3 Mimes directing traffic in Bogotá 124
4.4 Policeman on bicycle and the new paths and walkways in Bogotá 127
4.5 Homicide rates per 100,000 inhabitants in Bogotá and Colombia 128
4.6 Antanas Mockus and the media at one of the stars traced on the asphalt to mark traffic victims in Bogotá 129
5.1 Plebiscito Square in Naples before the restoration work in 1993 146
5.2 Plebiscito Square in Naples after the restoration work in 1993 146
5.3 Museum visitors in Naples, 1984–2004 157
5.4 Hotel arrivals in Naples, 1976–2004 157
5.5 Antonio Bassolino as a nativity statue in Naples 159
5.6 Cumulative revenues of the Central Administration of Bogotá, 1988–2002 163
5.7 Consumption taxes in Bogotá, 1988–2002 164
5.8 Private transportation taxes in Bogotá, 1988–2002 164
5.9 Approved total expenditures for the Central Administration of Bogotá, 1988–2000 165
5.10 A Transmilenio stop in Bogotá 168
5.11 Evolution of functional changes in transportation modes during rush hour in Bogotá, 1998–2003 170
5.12 Reduction in deaths due to traffic accidents in Bogotá, 1991–2003 170
5.13 A poster for Transmilenio in Bogotá 171
5.14 Revenue sources in Chicago budgets, 1987–2003 183
5.15 Expenditures in human relations in Chicago budgets, 1984–2002 187
5.16 Crown Fountain in Millennium Park, Chicago 190

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76205-2 - Political Branding in Cities: The Decline of Machine Politics in Bogota, Naples, and Chicago
Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

Tables

1.1 Public opinion mobilization versus clientelistic mobilization *page* 11

6.1 Evolution of citizens' behavior and respect for laws in Bogotá in 2001 and 2003 217

7.1 Types of mayoral regimes 236

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978-0-521-76205-2 - Political Branding in Cities: The Decline of Machine Politics in Bogota, Naples, and Chicago
Eleonora Pasotti
Frontmatter
More information

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Frontmatter
More information

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More information

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