Political Social Network Typology: The Case of Costa Rican 2016 Municipal Elections

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Abstract

By weighing data extracted during the 2016 municipal election in Costa Rica from local-level political parties’ Facebook pages, the research elaborates an analysis based on the mobilization—normalization theses. From that perspective, the paper identifies the traits that characterize each party’s communicational emphasis, specifically on whether such sites promote or limit deliberative behaviors amongst each page’s subscriber/follower. Thus, by analyzing posting frequency, content and overall response (likes, comments, sharing) trends, it is shown how the electoral success of some parties may be—partially—explained by their online activity. Also, by identifying and classifying the types of contents posted, the study focuses on generating a content typology (e.g., photo posts, text statuses, video posts, etc.). This content taxonomy displays the kind of traits each content type signifies in terms of political (and digital) engagement. This typology presents three major categories: Informative parties, Self-promotional parties and Interactive-driven parties. Although the three categories aren’t entirely exclusive, they imply specific characteristics.

1. Introduction

This paper is based on the research conducted in the Universidad de Costa Rica’s Knowledge and Information Society Program (PROSIC— in Spanish). It focuses on the implications, limitations and possibilities for information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the context of political processes, emphatically electoral campaigns. Subsequently, the paper addresses the role which political parties and candidates assign to ICTs, especially in the form of Internet-based communications. This approach parts from a critical perspective that views Internet and, consequently, social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, as means for a mobilizing citizens into a more (pro)active civic engagement and participation. Thus, the research draws upon literature analyzing the political uses of Internet and sites like Facebook in socio-political contexts similar to the Costa Rican. In doing so, the research parts from an empirical basis that aims at understanding the dynamics of online political participation, notwithstanding the specific traits that affect a particular context (economic stratification, social polarization and, mostly, digital divides), especially the Costa Rican.

In that manner, by weighing data extracted during the 2016 municipal election in Costa Rica, from local-level political parties’ Facebook pages, the research builds an analysis based on the mobilization—normalization theses. From that perspective, the goal is to identify the traits that characterize each party’s communicational emphasis; specifically on assessing the promotion or limitation of deliberative behaviors amongst each page’s subscriber/followers. Thus, by analyzing trends regarding posting frequency, content and overall response (likes, comments, sharing), the research shows how the electoral success of some parties may be—partially—explained by their online activity. This sets a dialogue between the existing literature of deliberative politics, Internet and Web 2.0, and the actual political capabilities of SNS during electoral campaigns. Such intersection allows to understand the political process as a communicative framework, in which Internet plays a substantial role, mediated by structural social phenomena.

2. Context

2.1. Municipal Politics in Costa Rica

This research focuses on the diverse and multidimensional nature of municipal governments in Costa Rica. The complex traits of this administrative instance are given by the fact that there are 474 districts, within 81 municipalities (comprised into 7 provinces) in the Costa Rican territory. That means that elections are to be held in all 474 districts in order to elect 81 mayors and a broader number of city officials. Such political bodies are conformed by a Mayor and a collegiate body defined as the City Council. Both Mayors and Councilors are elected for 4-year periods, during which the Mayors are subject to public scrutiny, and even to revocatory processes.

However, this wasn’t always the case; Costa Rican municipalities have had the right to democratically elect their mayors only since 2002 (but it was only in 2009 when such disposition took effect), when the Electoral Code was reformed—along with a number of policies intended to decentralize the national-level power of the State. Nevertheless, despite the reforms and political transformation occurred, municipalities still lack sufficient and effective power and autonomy in front...
of the national government. The right to choose the local representatives is just a small step towards a much larger process of decentralization that has yet to develop in Costa Rica. Such conditions have constituted fertile ground for social discomfort towards the local governments. These conditions reflect on the perceived level of confidence that citizens have on their local governments, as well as their intention to partake in collective and local actions, as noted by several political surveys conducted by the Center for Political Research [1].

This has caused abstention to rise constantly since the end of the 1990’s, having peaked at the 2002 municipal election, where only 23% of the nation-wide registered voters turned to the polls. It’s within this scenario that many political parties have struggled in order to obtain votes, so public funding can then be claimed. Now, the 2016 municipal elections held throughout Costa Rica were the first of its kind in the sense that, since the 2009 reform, it was the first balloting in which all city councilors, mayors and other local government officials were to be elected all at once. Prior to that, City Councilors were elected in separate processes, while the Mayors were elected in a concurrent balloting alongside national members of Congress and President. In addition, the position of the Mayor has only existed for the past 18 years; before that, a political figure called the “municipal executive” was designated amongst the elected councilors, in the style of a prime minister. Table 1 shows the historical voting records for each municipal election held so far in Costa Rica; it sheds light into what does local politics mean for the citizens, and the relevance of addressing the issues of regional autonomy.

Table 1. Abstention levels in Costa Rican municipal elections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Election year</th>
<th>% Abstention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>77.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>76.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>72.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>64.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2.2. 2016 municipal elections

The 2016 municipal elections in Costa Rica also have the distinctiveness that they have been the most expensive and logistically demanding balloting process in the country’s electoral history. This is because a record 3,178,364 voters were registered (out of the 4.5 million population), to elect 6,069 local government officials amongst 35,000 candidates nation-wide. It also meant that the electoral body (called the Supreme Election Court – or TSE, in Spanish abbreviation) had to print over 10 million ballots, as Recio notes [2]. Now, there’s a detail to address; Costa Rican electoral politics are divided into three levels: national (presidential), regional (provinces) and local (municipalities). National-level parties are those which traditionally have won the presidency, and have a structural presence across the territory, thusly capable of nominating candidates at the next levels (regional and local). Regional parties are mainly formed to nominate candidates to the National Congress, whilst local parties are only allowed to compete for the mayoralty in their respective municipality.

Thus, there’s also a novel element that defined this election; historically, national-level parties have dominated the municipal political scenario. However, the 2016 election was characterized by the impressive outnumbering of traditional (national-level) parties by local ones. A record 57 local parties registered at the TSE in order to nominate candidates (although some of these parties only nominated candidates for council positions). Figure 1 shows how has the number of local parties increased over the past elections in Costa Rica, compared to national and regional (province-level) parties.

![Figure 1. Number of political parties in municipal elections in Costa Rica](image)

### 3. Concepts

Parting from the higher level of abstraction, the main concept addressed here must be taken into account: Democracy. Democracy is a global phenomenon, in which diverse social, economic and, from this perspective, technological aspects coincide. In this way, the development of new platforms that allow for the direct communication between people or groups sets the bases for what Castells calls a “network society” [3, 4]; a social structure determined by the multidirectional power, consumption and information relations. In other words, what Castells [4] and others as Papacharissi [5], also address as the “new sphere public” (though it differentiates itself from the habermasian construct.
of public sphere) is converted into a space of dialogue and dispute for individuals, social groups and democratic representatives and political organizations even.

Thus, Democracy literature, in the era of information and technology, condenses these concepts that Castells [3, 4] develops. I.e., the connection between the “globality” of a socio-political phenomenon that is affected directly by new interaction dynamics; and the interconnection between subjects that, supported and empowered by the affordances of virtual platforms as Facebook, have content and data at their disposal that, from the Internet’s democratization perspective, can motivate an intense debate civic. As van Dijk [6] summarizes, this idea of the Internet’s potential offers important benefits to democratic life. On the one hand, information supply increases exponentially every day, generating greater interest and critical awareness in users. That, in line with a more mature administrative exercise of Government, would represent the accomplishment of true digital Democracy.

However, as Chadwick [7] and others argue, this line of thought has ceased of being a headline and has been replaced by empirical evidence noting that, while that Internet has proven be an information source and access facilitator for an ever-growing number of people in the world, its social and political impact appears to be undercut by its very own affordances. Namely, Internet’s democratic-deliberative aspiration, as well as its transformative social potential [7] represent an ideal that seems incompatible with reality. Since Web 2.0 information production is arranged cooperatively, there’s an influx of dissonant opinions and positions, potentially becoming the cause for a disconnection between individuals, based fully in each subject’s own interests [8]. That is, Internet’s self-contained plurality directly affects its own transformative potential.

In this line, following the previous ideas van Dijk [6], present the idea that Internet-based deliberation stands as an unfulfilled premise, as well as its supposed effects on Democracy. However, the same authors defend the Internet, and Facebook -for this purpose, as a tool that has no doubt favoured the opening of data, content and information; making it more affordable and direct. If it’s seen from a network perspective [4] [5] [9], each node has access to more information from other nodes, but that doesn’t necessarily mean that the communication between these is really effective.

Additionally, within Luhmann’s [10] theoretical construction, the media mass system encompasses the digital interaction dynamic, given that it’s the cohesive element of the communicative phenomenon which, according to Luhmann, preserves the social system through the (re)generation of content. These contents, via the Internet, influence social subsystems, essentially the political, as it is the manifestation of the power relations in society. That’s to say, Democracy is currently configured over constant communicative processes through interconnected social structures that directly influence, and are influenced, by the community – following to Dahl [11]. However, as Klinger and Svensson [12] debate, however the vision that is presented here, Facebook doesn’t strictly represent a traditional mass media, since there is no clear (massive) transceiver structure supporting it. Even so, debating Luhmann’s ideas, it can be understood that the network nature of these types of sites also involves communication and coded flows altering the system itself, and the adjacent subsystems. Thus, returning to Chadwick’s [13] ideas –and in clear dialogue with Castells [5] and Papacharissi [5], the (new) public sphere is transformed through the transformation of the social (digital) space.

Now, Dahl [11] proposes a series of questions aimed at refining what has been mentioned, specifically from the Internet’s deliberative democracy perspective. From an epistemic and ontological point of view, following the analysis of democracy and the Internet, is worth to question who are the community? Who represent it? And, what factors influence its persistence or decline? Taking into account what has already been mentioned, one can understand that the (virtual) community is made up of connected individuals that, in their in the physical selves, represent the totality of society [14], but are only subjectively represented in the digital world. I.e., from a wisdom of the masses concept and political engagement [15] perspective, there’s a symbolic and effective social representation online; on the one hand, connected individuals present their preferences as a mean sum of society’s ones, while continuously asserting their own postures.

Then, it is argued that Internet politics, on Facebook specifically, has allowed the circulation of more information, free at the disposal of anyone who wants to access it. However, this information is permeated by attitudes and preferences of content generators (collective or individual - media or people) that constantly plot lines into the physical world: traditional media and their immediate context. This produces some fragmentation effects; polarization and volatilization [16]. These phenomena deepen the democratic gap [7] which can exist in societies with advanced use of technologies, such as the Costa Rican. That is, it allows behaviors and harmful axiological assumptions to tarnish any attempt of “informed” discussion that can be held digitally, lessening the value and potential of social networks as an alternative and transformative platform.

Democracy, therefore, led to the virtual dimension of Facebook doesn’t shun to problems
that it otherwise faces in the physical world. Although there is potential and alternatives to generate deliberative spaces that promote the effective exchange of information, practice seems to lead it onto a path that appears to be contrary. However, many of the studies presented here reinforce the idea that Internet itself represents a new space (new sphere public), that allows discussion [14] and promotes new ways to contextualize social and, from the perspective here presented, political events. Although what is or what is not is deliberative—for the interest of this research, isn’t fully or clearly defined, there’s an important contribution to the notion of the strategic transformation of political and electoral scenarios, since it’ll serve as a lens through which to look at the results analyzed later.

3.1. Research problem

Having briefly browsed the more notorious and relevant literature regarding the use of Internet in political contexts, the motivations for this research, from the point of view of promoting ICTs and the democratic-electoral phenomenon, have to be noted. This implies a change in the structures that shape thinking, notions and ideas held by politicians, elected officers and, of course, society. Internet does provide access and interaction globalized spaces to, and in respect of, information and virtually every topic of interest. I.e., it transform society into micro-communities defined by their connections and similarities. One of these similarities is the coincidental expression of support for political figures, public institutions or the Government in general.

With the critical momentum of ICTs, society can more closely influence the decisions taken by their representatives, as they generate more direct and open spaces for dialogue and debate. In addition, from organized entities such as political parties, this new and growing interactive dynamic invades practically all areas of social life. Equally, Democracy’s institutional reflection—the State, is adapted to the changes occurring daily. The Government, in its territorial dimensions (national and local) and the powers that compose it, is also part of the technological expansion and theoretical debate that is presented; again, who are the community? Who represent it? And, what factors influence its survival or decay? [11].

This means that this research focuses on three relevant edges, following the common theme of ICTs and their incursion as a new social tool, leading to think of Democracy as a dynamic and evolving phenomenon (more later if this dynamic has really been evolutionary and what are its implications argue). In this way, this study aims to discuss and question, based on empirical evidence, the representativeness of the electoral politics in Costa Rica, the structural and organizational capacity of political parties involved, and the latent deliberative nature of society in Facebook. The central research problem is presented then accordingly:

- Political parties’ detachment from the new forms of social interaction (i.e. social networks on the Internet) has caused a shift away from society, a volatilization of the electorate and a weakening of traditional forms of electoral politics.

4. Analyzing Internet politics

Now, the main interests driving this research are to understand the various social and political factors that turn people to behave in a determined way over the past municipal elections; assess if traditional politics have any incidence in this conduct, and understand the role that new media, such as social networking sites (SNS) on Internet, plays in determining a (potential) shift in the way politics are played out in Costa Rica. In this case, the municipal electoral process analyzed delivers a number of interesting traits that will be listed and explained in the next sections.

To this end, the analytical exercise was carried out by examining the online activity of a determined number of local parties. This was achieved through a data mining technique that enabled the extraction and analyses of information from each party’s Facebook page. Such records contained data regarding posts, time, content and, particularly important, reaction (or engagement). The following sections will explain the steps taken to perform this study.

4.1. Case selection

As shown in Figure 2, there were a total of 74 sub-national political parties (local and regional—that is, municipal and province-level). However, not all parties have the same political weight (defined in terms of empiric influence), given that they’re too small or, even, don’t maintain a constant organization; this means that a given party could participate in one election and disband, regroup under a different name or form a coalition with other similar parties. That’s why a set of four criterions were established to determine the final list of parties to observe. These criteria, although not exclusive, are complementary as to exclude the parties that do not abide by the fundamental reason behind this research: to actively campaign via Facebook. So, the criteria are as follows:

- Participation in the 2010 municipal election. This acts as a primary filter in order to sort out the various parties that formed specifically to participate in the 2016 election. Nonetheless, an important value is assigned to the notion of tendency and historic record, as it eases the longitudinal analyses and
permits to draw primary inferences from the study. Five parties, however, were included despite the fact of not meeting this criterion, because their political importance (four were coalitions formed by numerous small local parties, and the fifth was a party alliance which nominated a much relevant political actor).

- Polling result (2010). Subsequently, this criterion was used as base of comparison to reflect the voting tendencies amongst parties, and amongst elections. It helps to demonstrate the shifts in the voters’ preferences.
- Facebook page. This is the most important element of all (due to the nature of the research carried out). It ultimately determines which parties are to be filtered out, as their participation in the past elections becomes secondary to the fact that, no matter the causes, they lack a digital platform to interact with their sympathizers.
- Polling result (2016). Lastly, in order to be methodologically coherent, this factor seeks to demonstrate the political outcomes of the election, from a comparative perspective; as well as to serve as empirical foundation for those parties who did not meet the first criterion. This means that all parties with a Facebook page, used to promote their programmatic projects or their candidates, which obtained votes in the 2016 elections, were included.

This filtering leaves a total of 26 local political parties; these would compete for 24 municipalities, in regions representing 6 out of the 7 provinces that constitute the Costa Rican territory. However, it is worth noting that the majority of this group was composed of central, urban-area parties; leaving the rural areas underrepresented. This speaks loudly of the issues pertaining the digital divide and the specific traits is has on central-periphery (urban-rural) social, political and, even, economic relations.

Figure 2 shows the territorial distribution of the municipalities selected. The black dots point out those which were finally selected, whilst the white dots represent municipalities where parties didn’t meet all four criteria. Also to be noted is the fact that there is municipalities where more than one of the selected parties competed.

4.2. Successful cases

Out of the total 26 local parties selected to analyze, only five obtained the victory for their respective mayoralty. The same Figure 3 shows, highlighted, where these parties took such victories. Again, the majority of these were concentrated in a central, metropolitan area of the country. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that a local party obtained the win in a peripheral municipality, despite the intense, and resource-centered campaign, many traditional (national-level) parties have in such regions.

It is also notable, on a less optimistic basis, that two out of these five parties were established by political actors who, by distinct reasons, were banned from their participation in other traditional, national parties. This turns out to be of considerable relevance when understanding that these parties took advantage of the strong leadership built around the image of their candidates, as a clear sign of personalization of political power.

4.3. Facebook Analysis

The research is based on the data extracted from the public Facebook pages each party used to publish contents about their political programs or about their candidates. This information was “mined” utilizing an external, third-party application (app) that retrieves data such as total number of posts (made and received), likes, comments, time-stamping and contents. The app used is an open sourced tool called Netvizz1, developed by Rieder [17], which can be programmed to extract data sets from particular time frames and regarding specific information (v.g. just posts, or posts and comments, etc.).

The advantage that this tool brings is the ability to classify and filter data through the different categories shown. This also permits to analyze the information longitudinally and comparatively, facilitating the identification of trends and other behaviors. For example, Figure 3 displays the overall comportment of the campaign on Facebook (accounting for all selected parties). Given the facts stated before, about the low interest these elections arise in the citizens, it’s also evident that the low activity registered on Facebook was an indication of the same conduct occurring in the “real world”.

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1 Available in https://tools.digitalmethods.net
What Figure 3 also shows is a clear indication that parties do not grasp the added value of what a platform like Facebook may provide in these contexts, in a sense that it broadens the scope for what their strategic communication can achieve. This is evidenced in the graph, by showing a downwards tendency at the end of the year 2015, and a quick, and then explosive, growth towards the Election Day (in this case, Sunday, February 7th). That means that, virtually, all parties turned to the Internet on the last days of campaigning in search of persuading the most amount of undecided voters, up to the unravelling of the campaign where a boom of online activity appeared, mostly referring to each party or its sympathizers’ positive reinforcements.

Now, regarding what type of contents were posted, Figure 4 shows the total amount of published content, categorized by the nature of such. That is, it displays the number of posts that Facebook itself tags as “photos”, or “status”, and “video”, etc. This is a valuable input in terms of pre-defining the traits that characterize the communicative strategies parties assume for their campaigns. It means that, from a taxonomical standpoint—as is to be shown in the next sections, the type of content that a party publishes defines the style of communicative approach that ultimately defines it. This also highlights the parties’ intentions in regards of the manner they engage with followers, due to the specific ways a determined audio-visual content is “consumed”, and the repercussions it has on follower -political- engagement.

In addition to the last point, Figure 6 shows a graphic representation of the longitudinal behavior (response) that these parties’ followers gave to the overall sum of posts. Now, these responses are categorized into three very well-known classes: likes, comments and shares. This graph is closely related to Figure 4 in terms of assessing the temporal characteristics of how do parties and followers behave online, as well as the types of responses one generates from the other. The relevant factor in observing the longitudinal conduct of the aggregated response is knowing how and when do online followers tend to react more intensely. That is, managing to provide content that better suits a rapid—and effective reading (thus collecting more likes and exposure), or something that generates more interaction with Facebook users. In other words, any content that engages with its audience in terms of producing comments and replies or, on the other hand, favoring the sharing of such publication.

Now, in a more specific way, there’s another important element to consider when closely looking at these behavioral trends. Time of day is a valuable element to take into account, thus enabling to precisely know when any given post was made. This poses an interesting insight into the overall conduct of the segment of the population which is actively involved with political parties digitally. In a sense, it surpasses the extents of this very research as it speaks loudly on the consumer behavior that Costa Ricans appear to have on sites like Facebook. However, as an exploration on communicative strategies, it’s a critical aspects to address in order to shed light into the marketing-like behavior social media motivates. Figure 6, for example, shows a clear indication of a cyclical pattern of online activity. Such cycle acts in a wave-like manner, displaying a crest during the afternoons and late nights, then dropping to a near total inactivity during mid-morning periods. This information alone is sufficient to generate strategic communication...
campaigns and, if possible, framing the interests of the particular profiles of each party’s followers.

![Daily activity pattern for political parties on Facebook](image)

### 5. Towards a typology

The typology proposed in this paper parts from the data shown before, and is built upon the works of Cho and Moya [18], Wallace Buil, Chernatony and Hogan [19], and Fiebert [20]. Basically, this classification is based on the relation between the number of posts made on each party’s page and the response obtained from these. Also, in order to systematically get a more precise taxonomy, an important weight was assigned to the type of content of each publication (this is photo, video, status, etc.). So, as it was mentioned before, the type of content and the average response obtained defines the profile for a determined party.

The classification proposed here pre-defines three specific political party profiles; these represent an attempt to identify the preference of any given party towards a specific type of content, as well as to ponder about the implications this has on the way said content is consumed and/or interacted with. Therefore, the profiles are the following:

- **Informative.** The informational trait that defines this profile is given by the fact of a party’s preference for posting content that is focused on exposing programmatic content in the form of textual (could also be videos or links to other in-depth sections of what was posted) elements that exhibit facts or figures with the intention of generating some sort of knowledge transfer onto the consumer (follower).

- **Self-promotional.** Political parties characterized by a defined goal of expanding their reach and impact are catalogued as self-promotional. This profile focuses on those parties which are emphatic on exposing the image of the organization or candidate above all other intentions (inform, interact, etc.). According to the taxonomy proposed here, most parties that fall under this category are identifiable by the constant use of video publications. This medium is the one that most facilitates the exposure of the party’s image as it works as an advertisement-like medium, and due to the growing trend of this type of content on Facebook, it is a much utilized tool. Therefore, many parties are classified under this category.

- **Interactive.** This profile is defined by the emphasis put on content that enables followers to engage in a more dynamic manner with the party itself or the nominated candidate (through its Facebook page). Although real interaction is very difficult to observe – as it is to occur, parties that are characterized by this trait are defined by their use of more diverse content, especially that which signifies a call-to-action by the users/followers. A clear example of these content would be the events, as it requires a direct response by followers.

In this way, these profiles can also be matched with the type of response parties often obtain; for example, interactive parties would register more comments and shares than a self-promotional party, for which a grand amount of likes would suffice. The same applies to informative parties, as the more in-depth content published more than usually seeks the user/follower’s response.

However, there is a clarification to be made; despite the profile assigned to each party, meaning that some parties accounted for more video, links or text posts than others, there is an important offset regarding photo posts. This means that every single party focused heavily on this type of content, causing an unbalance. For this reason, the photo content was not considered as the primary criterion for assigning a profile to each party. Table 1 shows a detailed disaggregation of the typology profiles, by type of content posted.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>P&quot;</th>
<th>T&quot;</th>
<th>V&quot;</th>
<th>L&quot;</th>
<th>E&quot;</th>
<th>N&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interactive</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Auténtico Siqueirano</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genie Montes de Oca</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Social network party typology, by content*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sel-promotional</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movimiento</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Continued
incorporated digital practices into their organizational and structural mindsets. This is supported by the lack of registered activity during most of the campaign; then again, it also evidences the fact that there still a predominant attachment on traditional means, such as resource intensive campaigns where patronage and political clientelism are common and known. These issues enter a direct dialogue with the research problem stated in the former pages of this paper. Political organizations have lost touch with the majority of society, therefore diminishing their own chances to succeed in a playing field that seems overcrowded with options. Thus, civic attitudes towards politics have sunk, particularly in the municipal context analyzed here. Additionally, these entities haven’t been able to (truly) adopt the affordances of Web 2.0 and social media. In the same manner, there’s an understated value in recognizing the patterns, trends and behaviors shown before as strategic information that could benefit parties and candidates. That’s why digital campaigning, especially in the local context, is done naively and unprofessionally, due in part to the financial scarcity parties have to manage, and partly because of the ignorance of analytical tools available at virtually no cost. All of these elements are quite contradictory in a context where mobile and fixed telecommunication services are booming, and Internet –particularly Facebook, are regularly and intensively used by citizens, particularly those in the ages 18-34, which is are the most political and technologically demanding social group.

As for the elements pertaining to the typology presented here, there are indications that the majority of parties prefer –or rather tend to assimilate informative profiles. This is, the usage of more static contents to convey programmatic material, trying to give their followers more facts and figures about their candidate or party. Additionally, the second most noticeable profile is the self-promotional. This is understandable, as common advertisements are transposed into digital platforms in the forms of photographic material and/or video composites. These elements do not need to convey much information as their main purpose is to direct the consumer’s (follower/user) attention towards the party image. Most of the parties classified under this category have a distinct socio-political factor in common: they were all competing in municipalities where big traditional parties have more power.

The last profile, which is certainly the least identifiable amongst the parties, is the interactive. As stated before, the type of party catalogued under this category is best characterized for using agile means, which engage the user from a ubiquitous point-of-view, such as events and videos. It is also understandable that most parties do not seek to be interactive as the cost of opportunity of doing so

6. Discussion

Now, having observed the nuances and specific traits of this election, as well as the data gathered from each political party’s Facebook pages, it stands out clearly that most parties have not fully

| o Avance Santo Domingo |  |  |  |  |
| Renovación Cartago | 107 | 8 | 36 | 12 |
| Ecólogico Comunal Costarricense | 230 | 25 | 32 | 43 |
| Alianza por San José | 139 | 24 | 30 | 9 |
| Pueblo Garabito | 50 | 3 | 26 | 2 |
| Viva Puntarenas | 51 | 1 | 23 | 3 |
| Liga Ramonense | 39 | 17 | 23 | 19 |
| Del Sol | 62 | 4 | 22 | 4 |
| Somos Tibás | 135 | 17 | 19 | 16 |
| Auténtico Labrador de Coronado | 140 | 12 | 18 | 6 |
| Parrita Independiente | 44 | 4 | 2 | 6 |

**Highlighted rows indicate a winning party.**

As a cautionary note, given the fast and ever-changing dynamic in Facebook’s publishing trends, video seems to be in for a greater expansion in its use. So, for future reference and replication, video posts would need to be pondered in order to reassess its classification.
increases exponentially parallel to the growth in followers. Therefore, more effort is needed in order to address this element, which thusly translates into resources that local parties lack of.

Finally, there’s no clear indication that a particular profile is “more successful” than others. This is because the 2016 election showed that the winning parties fell, evenly distributed, under the three categories. Albeit, it could be argued that self-promotional parties present fewer chances to win. Conclusively, the data and information here could be an indication of a new political configuration taking place (where there’s a political landscape to be aware of and conscious about, defined by the sum of more parties, more voters and Internet political usage). Although, it must be noted that there are still many practices and citizen behaviours that are deeply rooted in traditional media and traditional parties, making it only rougher for local-level, small political parties to successfully run a proper campaign. Nonetheless, as a civic institution, it’s their responsibility to push society towards a shift of its mind-set, and really take advantage of ICTs for this matter.

7. References


