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20-25 minutes

Thing to remember:

• Internet, social media are the centralities of election campaigns

Parties and Political Systems in Europe: Communication of the Actors

2.   Developments of political communication in Europe

We can talk about pol. comm. research and political communication as practice (that is examined by researchers).

Different periods of research on political communication

Political communication research has two periods.

Infancy – the early period of research, mostly from when the expression 'political communication' was not in use (from ancient time until the 1960s–1980s). The focus was set on:

- Rhetoric – can a speech be successful? Can it persuade the listeners? Ancient Greeks and Romans claimed that through rhetoric, people could be convinced. The analysis of rhetoric is one of the oldest (sub-)fields of political communication.

- Propaganda analysis – since the early press machines, it became possible to quickly spread political programs and slogans (think about Luther, who nailed his theses to the church's door in Wittenberg). However, the two world wars and the spread of radio emerged the

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modern propaganda analysis. Walter Lippmann and Harold Lasswell are the most known researchers, founders of modern political communication who made a significant contribution to this field and make distinctions between propaganda (non-democratic communication of political power-holders) and political communication (equal interaction between three actors).

- Attitudes changes – can media change the attitudes of citizens? This was one of the main questions of radio analysts in the interwar period. Paul Lazarsfeld and his team concluded that media is not successful in reaching the citizens' attitude changes. However, if combined with interpersonal persuasion, the media (radio) can be an essential intermediary.

- Voting and mobilization – in 'infancy' period, voting and mobilization strongly connect with the dilemmas mentioned under attitudes changes.

- Functional analysis and technological improvements – the media channel's political power analysis comes from the aforementioned fields. Can radio take over the function of a (political) leader? See Orwell's 1984. The novel was written in the 1940s when the radio was the leading medium. However, this is just one example of the functional analysis. More examples could include media effects and their consequences on political behavior, media's role in every day (political) lives, TV and its visual nature as a 'game changer', etc.

Adulthood – it is the second period of political communication research (after the 1960s–1980s). The focus is on:

- Electoral communication – to understand the voters, many school and theory was set-up. However, these directions seem like a 'never-ending story' for political communication.

- Political information – TV, the internet, and now social media are the most analyzed platforms for spreading/successful/new issues in(/etc.) political information.

- Populist political communication, political rhetoric – rhetoric is still essential, but it will be mostly analyzed through

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new developments of parties or candidates. In the 1990s, the far-right parties' new communication techniques were in focus, while since the 2010s, populism is more analyzed.

- Political attitudes and political behaviors – 'who is' the media today? Who can persuade the electorate? Is it still the traditional media? Or the influencers? Both? What do we know about them? What is the political system learning from them?

- Online political communication – coins together with the topics mentioned above. The field is also referred to as 'new' political communication or political communication '2.0'.

Development of political communication?

As a **field** for research, political communication has 4 periods (phases).

1. Since WWII to the Fifties

- Radio is the leading medium.

- The preeminence of the mass parties.

- Citizens strongly identified with parties (ideological voters).

- The number of independent voters is relatively low; therefore, partisan voters' mobilization is the election campaigns' primary goal.

2. From the Sixties to the Eighties

- Party identification fades away (or end of ideology).

- TV becomes the leading medium (public in Europe, commercial in the U.S.).

- Involvement of previously detached citizens (because of the TV).

- Professionalization of the election campaigning (TV ads, TV debates, to be reported in TV – night – news are important) – political actors are hiring marketing, communication and PR experts and companies. Mediatization starts to spread in politics.

3. From the Nineties to the mid-2000s

- TV is the leading medium, and the internet is growing fast.

- Spin doctors help the communication of parties and

politicians: professional management of the relationship with the public through opinion polls.

- Infotainment as a usual practice, mediatization is essential.

- Populism (as popular politics).

- Targeting (as it happens with ads e.g. on social media).

- Random exposition of the electorate to political messages.

4. Since the mid-2000s

- Social media is changing the media system.

- Non-monopolistic use of the ICT (Information and Communication Technology) due to the free access to the web.

- Everybody and from everywhere can become a 'journalist' (including politicians).

- Changing boundaries of citizenship.

- Internet, social media are the centralities of election campaigns.

- Self-mediatization becomes visible; attention-based politics (race with political and non-political actors for the voters' attention) prevails.

Thoughts about the 4th phase?

Such a digital environment has put a new face not only on the campaigns but also on political engagement. Our days' politicians have to think not only about such terminologies as 'nation', but new democratic-dictatorial institutions have emerged on the global level, too. One of these new institutions is Google Inc., which – in the traditional sense – does not have any offices all over the world. However, it is a transnational corporation, and if it is about its business matters, it would – without any problem – give away its users' data to China. Since it is in a market-leading position, it can hide specific sites in its search engine that seem not to be existing at all, as they cannot be found among the results. It is also possible that Google manipulates the order of the results according to its partners' amount of money. Therefore, it is essential to create a legal framework for transnational (internet) companies. However, as it is visible since 2016, these companies are committed to

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democratic values. They are working together with democratically elected governments to fight fake news, disinformation campaigns, and false information.

About the social media through American eyes:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Kd99IIWJUw

Questions

1. How many research period has political communication?
2. What can we find in the first research period?
3. What is in the second research period?
4. How did the research on rhetoric change throughout time?
5. How many phases have political communication? What are the periods for phases?
6. What contains the first phase?
7. What are the attributes of the second phase?
8. What characterizes the third phase of political communication?
9. What are the main developments in the fourth phase?
10. Should we be afraid of transnational companies in the fourth phase of political communication?

See:

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