UNIVERSITY OF SZE... **Norbert Merkovity**	**25-30 minutes**	Thing to remember: "Going public."

Parties and Political Systems in Europe: Communication of the Actors

4. Media and political actors in political communication

We saw through mediatization that the media system has its effects on the political behavior of the actors. What about the media-politics relationship, and what else can we say about political actors according to that relationship?

Media-politics relationship

The interactions between the two actors are interesting here. Classifications can vary from the general level to the practice. Naturally, the practice gives broader explanations on the nature of the relationship, and it is changing from country to country. Therefore, we will stay on a general level because the starting point of any examination is hidden in the following four variables.

1. State control on the media

Many possible variations of state control could be observed throughout Europe. For instance, in the UK, state control is minimal; the media system mainly works through autonomous self-regulation (e.g. journalistic ethic codes).

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In other countries, most of them are in Eastern Europe. One can find strong regulations (legal acts or other kinds of legislative rules) with national authority institutions that will guard the regulations (basically the media's content) and even fine those who do not follow the rules. Who will be appointed as the head of such an institution is becoming a political issue where the political system can express its power over the media system. A more gentle way of state control is involving the financial (state) aids to media providers that can be direct (a state funds the media – typically the public broadcast media) or indirect (where will the government/state broadcast its ads – governments using adverts to communicate their successes; in many countries, these adverts are not considered as 'political adverts').

2. Media partisanship

The existing or non-existing media partisanship could be visible in many details, e.g. ownership, patronage, stable endorsement, shifting endorsement, neutrality. Five simple categories can be distinguished.

1 highest partisanship: a political party is the owner of a media outlet. We can find many examples in European history for this kind of relationship. For instance, social democratic and some Christian democratic parties used to have newspapers in many countries at the beginning of the 20th century. Today, we can still find such examples, but these outlets are not that relevant as their predecessors.

2 high partisanship: a political party is the direct funder of a media outlet. This kind of relationship is visible in many Eastern European countries, but in some Western, too. To operate, the outlet will use the funds and spread the opinion of the party. In many instances, the outlet owner is firmly attached to a party; therefore, partisanship is rooted in ownership.

3 moderate partisanship: a party could be the funder, but it is not decided in advance which outlets will be funded. It depends on the individual outlets' assessments of different political issues. On the other side, the media can decide how it wants to present political issues.

4 low partisanship: occasionally, a party will fund a media outlet, but this is not a rule. The media outlet can act autonomously, and journalists are

fighting for journalistic norms and not for political goals (media as the 4th branch of power).

5 zero partisanship: media as the 4th branch of power.

3. Integration between political and medial elites

Did the members of two elites socialized at the same time or even place? Or is it just similar? Or is there a real (e.g. generational) gap between the elites?

It happened in Europe that a media owner became prime minister (e.g. Silvio Berlusconi in Italy or Andrej Babiš in the Czech Republic). This fact warns us that the members of the two elites could merge.

4. Journalists' professional ethos

How do journalists see they work? Is it 'just a job'? Or is it a profession, a lifestyle where the search for the truth overwrites everything?

Pragmatists will see their work as a profession where the public (and naturally the economic) goals are primary. *Priesthood* journalists will have no problem to present an issue through the lenses of a political party.

Political actors

Political actors are partisan actors (e.g. parties and party leaders, candidates, interest groups) and institutional actors (e.g. government, parliament, and judiciary).

Each actor has a different strategy in political communication. As an example, let us see some of the actors' communicational nature.

Presidents

In presidential systems, the presidents usually have a limit of their power (usually the parliament). In order to overcome this limit, the president may "**go public**" by using rhetorical tools:

- Manipulation
- Media management
- Narrative

The president will use these strategies to create sound bites (**catchy lines from,**

e.g. a speech) for the media. Presidents in semi-presidential systems are doing something very similar, although they use the possibilities in public broadcast media. For example, the French presidents are using the French public broadcast media extensively to "go public".

Governments

Their communication is twofold. Public communication (official reports by the government's specialized departments) and political communication (directed towards media, coalition partners, and opposition parties) can be found. However, the governments are mixing/merging these communication styles lately.

Used strategies:

- Media management (not all the mediums considered the same)
- Information management (playing with information: from leaking to press conference)
- Image management (image of the leader through every platform should be unified)

These strategies are often embedded with proximity to media owners or journalists (in Mediterranean or Central and Eastern European democracies) or with spin (in Anglo-Saxon democracies).

Parliaments

- Institutional communication: parliamentary session, press conference, briefings, official reports…
- Informal communication: rumors and leaking received only by journalists.

Parties and political movements

The media report both interparty and intraparty communication. Parties are more attractive to the media than the parliament. Even the parliamentary factions are recognized through the parties by the media.

After many instances, Forza Italia proved in Europe that a medial-personal party could be successful, while the Five Star Movement proved that a party could be organized online.

The revolution of infocommunication technology and the increasing social media usage emphasized individual candidates over organizations and personalized politics.

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Funny side of parliament's communication:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f_Zh9KSVrFg

Questions

1. Through what can we classify the media - politics relationship? (On general level.)

2. How can we explain different forms of media partisanship?

3. Did it ever happen in Europe that the political and media elite merged?

4. What is the professional ethos of pragmatist journalists?

5. What means participatory journalism?

6. What are the available strategies of the presidents?

7. What are the sound bites in political communication?

8. What is the communication strategy of governments?

9. What are the two types of parties' communication? (The broadcast of their communication.)

10. What is the most recent trend in parties' communication?

See:

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