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DELEGITIMIZATION OF ELECTORAL DEMOCRACY: THE EFFECTS OF MODERN POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

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This article is an attempt to analyze the reasons for negative effects of political communication modernization on contemporary electoral democracy. The analysis makes it evident that one of the main problems of the democracy nowadays is the contradiction between modernization of politics in contemporary world and challenges that this modernization poses to the democratic legitimacy. Also, there was demonstrated that and poor functioning of political institutions is a consequence of current political modernization, which is not capable of the adequate response to the challenges of the radical social changes.

Keywords: democracy, political modernization, political communication, political campaigns, electoral process, elections, political institutions.

У статті аналізуються причини негативного впливу модернізації політичної комунікації на сучасну електоральну демократію. Показано, що однією з головних проблем демократії в наші дні є протиріччя між модернізацією політичних інститутів і політичних процесів та її впливом на легітимність демократичних інститутів. Також продемонстровано, що незадовільне функціонування сучасної політичної системи є наслідком поточної політичної модернізації, що не забезпечує адекватної відповіді на виклики швидких соціальних змін.

Ключові слова: демократія, політична модернізація, політична комунікація, політичні кампанії, електоральний процес, політичні інститути.

В статье анализируются причины негативного воздействия модернизации политической коммуникации на современную электоральную демократию. Показано, что одной из главных проблем демократии в наши дни является противоречие между модернизацией политических институтов и политических процессов и её воздействием на легитимность демократических институтов. Также продемонстрировано, что неудовлетворительное функционирование современной политической системы есть следствие текущей политической модернизации, которая не обеспечивает адекватного ответа на вызовы быстрых социальных изменений.

Ключевые слова: демократия, политическая модернизация, политическая коммуникация, политические кампании, электоральный процесс, политические институты.

The most basic and far-reaching attribute of the modernization process is steadily increasing social complexity. Increasing social complexity leads to a series of radical social changes, including changes in the forms and practices of democratic government. Contemporary democracies are marked by growing numbers of groups and organizations that participate to advance their interests and their competition for public resources and social capital. This takes the form of establishing increasing numbers of structures that act as intermediaries between citizens and the political system, structures to which citizens entrust responsibility for advancing their private interests. As a result, more powers compete with each other for political influence and are in conflict than in previous forms of society. At the same time, direct participation by citizens in the political process may decline as citizens deputize intermediary organizations and structures to act as their agents in influencing the political system. The form of democracy that arises in this situation has been described by Dahl (1956, 1971) as “polyarchy,” an arena where different groups, not of a strictly political nature (interest groups, media organizations, etc.), confront and struggle with each other. In this arena, the mass media system undertakes socialization functions, which previously were performed by the political parties.

The assumption is that the politics is about the representation of fixed identities, primarily through mass political parties, territorial and sometimes functional representation. Particular claims (e.g. those based on ethnicity, class, religion or region) were legitimated through their willingness to accede to the rules of the game and through their commitment to a regulated pluralism. Political change occurred mainly through incremental shifts in the enfranchisement of different sections of the population, through the impact of various social factors

on political allegiance, and from the dislocating effects of periodic critical elections. In certain circumstances the change was born through major social and economic shifts and was revolutionary rather than incremental.

The fixedness of this style of politics is now being eroded. In the last few decades, and particularly since the collapse of socialism, there has been a growing conviction that modern politics is being superseded. Typically this is being explained on the basis of the decline of the territorial state, the redundancy of the usual Left versus Right framework of politics and the appearance of "anti-political" phenomena. For Geoff Mulgan, the ultimate point of collapse in modern politics has been reached and the world of modern politics has "the feel of something archaic: a set of rituals, a container of tensions, a symbolic link with the past rather than a dynamic force in the present"[1]. Most scholars are agreed that in the period of transformation from industrial to post-industrial societies, the main victims are the social structures and the class politics and the meaning systems that they formed. Anthony Giddens (1994) talks of a period of "manufactured uncertainty" and systemic risk, where modern politics is being displaced by a politics that is much less centered – a politics of lifestyles, of consumption rather than production, and a politics of shifting identities [2].

Modern politics were labeled by some observers as "postmodern" or "antipolitics" [3]. In contemporary social sciences there is a perception of crisis in politics. Political dissatisfaction is often named as one of the reasons for this phenomenon. As Western electorates exhibit increasing cynicism towards their political elites and are less tending to vote, there has been widespread concern about the character of contemporary democracy and suggestions of its decline.

Our goal in this article is to analyze the essence of modern electoral democracy and show the contradiction between modernization of politics in contemporary world and challenges that this modernization poses to the democratic legitimacy.

Many scholars noticed that political parties and political elites are currently losing so much credibility and trust among the population, not only in old and established Western polities but also in post-socialist societies [1,2].

Comparative research of democracies encounters a multiplicity of critical, apathetic or even anomic attitudes, which all suggest the conclusion that democracies in general have to fight with a growing lack of support. This has been evident from a broad range of different indicators during last 20 years. Until now, general and plausible reasons for this development have not been found. The often used "normalization" thesis, according to which democracies will – after all – adapt to American standards, can not be applied to the post-socialist polities. Contrary to conventional wisdom, the democratization process in these countries has not been accompanied by adequate levels of satisfaction with emerging democratic institutions. We are observing here the "global divergence of democracies" described in Larry Diamond's and Mark F. Plattner's seminal work (2001) as the fact that "democracies increasingly diverge among themselves, not only in the nature of their institutional structures, but in the quality and depth of their democracy, and hence in their progress toward consolidation"[4].

On the other hand, many scholars are talking about the global convergence of democracies warning about the spread of American electoral campaign techniques and the negative impact these techniques have on emerging and evolving democracies.

Under the conditions of democracy, elections as a major mean of regime legitimization are seemingly free from coercive components. Citizens get the possibility of "free" choice. First of all, they can choose to participate in elections or abstain them. The question regarding to what leads to such decisions is one of the unsolved in political sociology. Even more difficult is defining why citizens vote in certain fashion.

The system of political representation existing in the West, based on social and ideological groups, undertakes evolutionary transformation gradually creating a more complex context of pluralistic social and political environment. The socialist social and political environment disintegrated rapidly and left the ideological and institutional vacuum that was rapidly filled with the new ideas and institutions. The assumption is that the citizens of modern post-industrial societies are gradually abandoning their sense of certain social and ideological identity, which used to be the main regulator of political behavior. As a result of this "release" and destruction of former social links, individuals today have either multiple identities or are being left one-to-one with the society as a whole. These multi-identity or "no-identity" individuals become the "free buyers" acting at the political market.

Thus, the traditional systems of political communication in Western democracies are being destabilized by changes in late modern society. On the one hand, the channels by which political communication comes to be are multiplying in a process that is becoming more diverse, fragmented, and complex. And, on the other hand, power relations among key message providers and receivers are being rearranged, the culture of political journalism is being transformed; and conventional meanings of 'democracy', 'citizenship' and of the role of the media as democratic actors are being questioned and rethought [4,5,6, 7]. These changes in the landscape of the political communication resonance socio-cultural and political transformations that the traditional structure of modern societies have undergone since several decades. With regard to electoral politics, declining levels of party attachment of voters, and the withdrawal of parties from society, have weakened the core vote for traditional political parties [8; 9]. As a consequence of social differentiation and of the deregulation of the media markets, political parties can no

longer count on the support of affiliated newspapers to get their messages across; instead they compete for coverage through the increasingly differentiated broadcasting media. By emphasizing the end of key building blocks of electoral politics made out of parties, organized interests and media outlets, and by drawing power away from the formal political arena, these processes have led to discussions on the poor health of democracy [10].

However, other trends also related to those processes, such as the increase in political voices and new modes of political engagement, may suggest that dispersions and openings can lead to democratic gains. A peculiar characteristic of the "postmodern" campaign environment is the emergence of "non-party actors" in electoral politics [5, 11]. In addition to the fragmentation and diversification of the media landscape, an increasing number of interest groups and of ordinary and unorganized citizens are voicing their interests and concerns in the political arena. As a result of those interrelated trends, political campaigns have regained interest among political analysts. As a matter of fact, volatility has become one of the main characteristics of Western electorates, and an increasing number of voters are deciding for whom to cast their ballot during the election campaign [12].

In modern democracies, where elections are the key institution, political campaigns are the most intense time for interaction between political elites and citizens over matters of public policy [13]. However, modern voters often struggle to define their own ideological orientations as well as being uncertain of the policy stances of the parties who compete for their votes. At the same time, research shows that issues and policy considerations have become more important for voters in the same period they have been de-emphasized by political parties in Europe and beyond [6, 10, 12, 13]. The voter's task is made even more difficult by the proliferation of new parties across the European party systems and, the corresponding decline in the popularity of traditional parties, which has transformed the national sphere in many countries into a fragmented and multi-faceted political landscape. This growth in the numbers of electorally viable parties leaves voters facing a problem of information overload.

Thus, our assumption is that modern politics is being influenced by a number of developments:

1. The emergence of a "new" politics identity in which a growing number of claims are articulated, whether from individuals, groups and movements previously on the periphery of usual politics, or else from complete outsiders.
2. The greater mutability of established social and political institutions and a decline in the power of established normative and cultural factors defining identities, phenomena caused in part by:
 - a) the stretching of social and economic relations across time and space through the processes of globalization;
 - b) the "commodification" or "marketization" of everyday life and politics.

As a result of these changes the individuals lose social and ideological identifications and emerge as pseudo-free customers (buyers). This eventually leads to a formation of mass "free" markets of electorate.

Thus far, we have theorized that a general process of modernization, proceeding by different rates in different countries, leads to profound changes in the political and other domains of life. These changes, in turn, are reflected in how election campaigns are conducted.

As Western electorates exhibit increasing cynicism towards their political elites and are less tending to vote, there has been widespread concern about the character of contemporary democracy and suggestions of its decline. Sensitive of these tendencies, some scholars have focused attention upon the role of formal politics, as well as social and economic forces (such as globalization) in accounting for a current "democratic dissatisfaction". Others have attributed this to, among other things, changes in the demographic makeup of the citizenry; the effect of the media; the decline of social capital as the public engage increasingly with the media rather than with politics; the increase in spin and media management techniques used by politicians; and the existence of a postdemocracy.

Underlying all this, however, has been a profound shift in the way politics is both conceived of and practiced. Politics, as both elite-level activity and the dissemination of this to the public, has predominantly become a process of marketing. *One of the central arguments of this article is that this use of marketing has played a key role in contributing to the existence of a certain delegitimization of modern electoral democracy as marketing both subverts the democratic process and disconnects the public from politics.*

Modern campaign methods are both cause and effect of the modern condition of politics and communications and are also rooted in the underlying process of modernization from which those modern conditions emerge. It is possible to identify some general consequences that seem to be strongly associated with modern campaign approaches almost everywhere they are practiced. Modern techniques continue to spread and to become the dominant way in which political institutions interact with the media and the public and present consequences of the modern model can reveal something about what the future of democratic politics may be like.

Meanwhile, the political sphere of democratic societies is being rapidly transformed and requires certain re-thinking. Obviously, in the process of such rethinking we have to be careful not to make this theory absolute. However, being aware of the limitations of this conceptual scheme, we, nevertheless, have to interpret social

reality in adequate terms. Even if our analysis tends to uncover just parts of this reality, this could eventually help us to understand its holistic nature.

Virtually all electoral campaigns in post-socialist countries showed enormous capabilities of "new electoral technologies." The selling of the political product to the electorate based on political marketing strategies brings incredible results almost independently from the quality of the "raw" material and societal context. Indeed, errors in marketing practice lead usually to serious failures. The leaders attempting to create a "civic political party" according to the classical pattern inevitably lose the competition with more pragmatic politicians. In fact, in Russia and Ukraine only communists can afford to be mass parties minimally engaged in political marketing practice. In most post-socialist countries, because of a lack of democratic traditions, marketization of political sphere goes much faster than in the West. Political markets functioning in Eastern Europe and FSU are much more cynical.

The only thing that prevents those political markets from taking its complete form is the above noted institutional mimicry trying to resemble Western blueprints. Perhaps, it would be more reasonable for the scholars and politicians to pay more attention to the newest trends and dangers for socio-political development of post-socialist countries instead of trying to reproduce in many ways unique Western models.

As we saw earlier, "marketization" and "mediatization" have become important elements of such democratic institutions as general elections.

The difference between what was promised to the customer-voter in symbolic sense and what he gets in the sense of actual policy depends on the socio-political context of the particular country, including its historical legacy. But the modern political marketing techniques allow creating a big difference between the image of the political power (especially during the elections) and its real appearance. To prevent the erosion of the image of democracy one would have to think about the mechanisms of the minimization of the negative effects of modern conditions of power functioning.

Modern democratic systems cannot exist without exerting persuasive influence on their citizens. However, such persuasion is a propaganda action of the elites aimed at manipulating citizens. It poses a threat to the society as well as to the stability of democracy [14; 15]. Therefore, learning and developing strategies to help citizens to defend themselves from the manipulations of the ruling and those fighting for power is an important challenge for not only journalists and educators but also for sociologists and political scientists.

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