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BOOK REVIEW

FELDMAN, O. & ZMERLI, S. (EDS.) (2019), THE PSYCHOLOGY OF POLITICAL COMMUNICATORS: HOW POLITICIANS, CULTURE, AND MEDIA CONSTRUCT AND SHAPE PUBLIC DISCOURSE, NY: ROUTLEDGE

The collection of research essays *The Psychology of Political Communicators: How Politicians, Culture and Media Construct and Shape Public Discourse* (2019) emphasizes the role and importance of psychological theory in the domain of contemporary politics, contributing to the field of political communication as an attractive multidisciplinary field of study. The editors, Ofer Feldman, an Israeli Japanese professor of political psychology and behaviour, and Sonia Zmerli, a professor of political science at the University of Grenoble, and their team of experts embark upon a theoretical and empirical analysis of the multiple ways communication affects political behaviour and attitudes. This book is thus a useful manual for both students and researchers who are interested in the psychological aspects of political communication.

Using comparative research examples from the United States of America, Great Britain, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, Israel and Japan, this 252 page-book focuses on the challenges faced by liberal democratic societies in the process of constituting public discourse, as an essential ingredient in the process of strengthening the relationship between the state and citizens. Applying psychological theories to pol-

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itics, the book aims to study how political communication affects the perception of political reality, behaviour, opinions, attitudes, and finally the very act of political activism.

The book consists of 12 chapters which investigate three major areas of discourse analysis: political figures, populist communication and negative campaigning, and media discourse.

In the introduction, the editors claim the role of readers' guides through the many layers of political communication. They argue that the effectiveness of the format in which the message is conveyed to the audience, and its interaction with a political subject, are inextricably linked with the social and cultural context, the chosen rhetoric, and the values that are nurtured in a society. Politicians are seen as political communicators, who, regardless of their leadership powers and political ideas, must demonstrate desirable rhetorical skills and thus, by choosing the right words, win over the voters. Considerable attention is also devoted to the media, presented not only as primary mediators in the communication between politicians and the electorate, but also as creators and interpreters of reality.

In the first part of the book, "Discourse of Political Leaders", the first chapter deals with the analysis of Donald Trump's political language in 2016, when he won the US presidential elections. The essay reveals the background of this unexpected success in political communication at a particular time in history. Trump was running a campaign like a reality show: he was being crude and aggressive, blunt, emotionally volatile in public. His campaign framed his xenophobic, racist, and sexist speeches as a counterweight to political correctness and lauded his supposed authenticity as a trait that distinguished him from previous leaders. In this way, Trump was framed as a solution to the USA's problems of the time.

The second chapter describes the political and cultural landscape of Japan, discussing a quantitative study on whether political TV interviews are subject to control. The last chapter of the first part discusses how political leaders frame the public understanding of international political issues. Using a comparative analysis of the discourse of Japanese and American leaders, the authors argue that the international status of a leader has a powerful impact on political discourse, in addition

to many other social, cultural and individual factors which shape the differences in political discourse.

In Part II of the book, the authors focus on the rise of populism in Europe and the USA. This phenomenon, they argue, is the result of populist discourse which has the power to shape people's opinions and behaviours, and also the outcome of negative campaigning. The authors conclude that media outlets deliberately encourage the candidates to spread negative news, and then, in order to get media attention, politicians produce conflicts and make controversial statements, which ultimately take on the form of negative campaigning.

The first chapter of Part II gives an account of the situation in the Netherlands, where the printed media still resist the populist discourse, while the online media outlets are rife with it. The second chapter examines the resurgence of populist parties in Italy during the 2013 election campaign. According to the authors, the press is the main culprit for the rise of populism in Italy. The third chapter takes us back to 2015, at the time of the UK elections, focusing on the effects of negative campaigning waged via the press, which proved to be an influential but out-of-control communication channel.

The third part of the book, which focuses on media discourse, warrants closer examination. This part, being the most detailed, includes compelling examples of media discourse that demonstrate how political communication is grounded in psychological findings. The first chapter offers an assessment of the power of political discourse in televised debates, especially in cases when this assessment is made by another medium – the press. Examining the first USA televised debate in 1956, the essay shows how television made it easier for politicians to establish a closer relationship with potential voters, transforming the entire electoral process. A study which examined televised debates during election campaigns in Spain (1993), the USA (2000) and the UK (2010) has shown that the press in these countries have different attitudes about the effectiveness of this format. The Spanish, for instance, place more value on belligerent rhetoric and are impressed when political leaders make use of statistics and facts in their speeches. In the UK, meanwhile, it is candidates' rhetorical skills, facial expressions (e.g., smiling) and

body language that come under scrutiny. Lastly, in the USA, the candidates' ability to appear humble and resemble a "typical" American voter is highly valued. The authors note that the newspaper reports can be used to rectify candidates' behaviour during a TV debate, making it seem better than it really was. This in turn creates an opportunity for the candidate to be more successful in the next TV debate, the next voting round or in new elections. However, the study also shows most candidates are reluctant to modify their chosen strategy once it has been presented to the voters. Therefore, it would be necessary to further research of the impact of political communication on the public discourse through the lens of psychology.

The second and third chapter discuss the causes and consequences of gender bias in media framing of female politicians. Studies have shown that news items involving female politicians receive less coverage than those involving their male counterparts. Even if they receive equal coverage as men, female politicians are often framed by using stereotypes and emphasizing their outward appearance (e.g., feminine clothing, high heels, make up) or their sexuality, age, or weight. This type of framing is also evident in media presentation of female politicians in the traditional role of a mother, wife, and housewife, identifying them with "women's sectors" (education, health care, women's rights), which are markedly different from "men's sectors" (economy, security, foreign policy). The study about Israeli female politicians has showed that the media framing of female politicians need not always be dichotomous and binary. It depends on the situation, cultural context, various *ad hoc* factors, as well as the professional norms of the media. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, for instance, managed to defy the false dichotomy between a woman and a political leader. Some experts have argued that Merkel's unwillingness to play the gender card was her ticket to success.

In the following chapter, the authors argue that different media outlets create different frameworks for different types of surveys, which represents a specific presentation pattern. The last chapter focuses on the issue of media ownership structure and media framing. Popular media do this by using emotional language, light topics, big and bombastic headlines, and eye-catching images. In "quality" media, the headlines are shorter, and the colours subdued, to reflect the seriousness of the

reporting. The role of the media in shaping public discourse and political communication is further emphasized, which provides opportunities for further research. This book focuses on the connection between psychological theory and applied politics from many different aspects, providing food for thought for experts in the field of politics, psychology, media and cultural theory. The authors' findings will undoubtedly prove as a solid basis for further research.

The study stresses the importance of the application of psychology in the field of politics and political communication, as a multidisciplinary field of study that will become indispensable in the near future. The book's value lies in using creative, multiple methodology, predominantly content analysis to obtain interesting results. The chapter on gender media framing is especially relevant. On the other hand, with the overwhelming influence of social networks in the shaping and perception of reality, it becomes necessary to include the "new media" (which have become a serious threat to the traditional media) into the analysis of psychological aspects of political communication. Ignoring the rising influence of social media in favour of the printed media diminishes the value of this study. The book also lacks a more detailed examination of the audience as the recipients of messages. The book would have gained even more relevance had the analysis included societies that are not liberal democracies, because such a comparison would provide a deeper insight into the process and background of shaping public discourse. It is to be hoped that these elements will be included in the book's sequel, which is currently being written.