Mediatization of Politics: A Threat to Democracy?

Monitoring Media Content and Journalistic Output
MLFZ Cologne, 20.11.10
Agenda

- The Situation: Decreasing Support for Democracy
- Trends in Political Coverage
- Example EU
- Scandalization
- Summary
A Crisis of our Democracy?

Two Questions:

● How do the media frame democracy at work? or: “Do the people see themselves represented in their diversity or is reporting on politics focussing only on those in power?”

● Popper defined democracy as option to ‘vote out’ – to do so alternatives need visibility.
The “Vanishing Voter” in Germany…

Source: http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wahlbeteiligung
Support for Democracy

Voter Turnout in European Elections 1979-2009

… and in European Elections

Voter Turnout - EU Average

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Turnout</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>62.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>58.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>49.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>43.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Rising Discontent with the German System

Poll: Support for the social market economy

- **Media Tone**
  - 0%
  - 20%
  - 40%
  - 60%
  - 80%
  - 100%

- **1994 - 2010**
  - 2001
  - 2002
  - 2003
  - 2004
  - 2005
  - 2006
  - 2007
  - 2008
  - 2009
  - 2010

- **negative**
- **no clear rating**
- **positive**
- **Poll**

**Basis:** 533 reports about the situation in Germany with regard to the value of “Soziale Marktwirtschaft” in ARD and ZDF news

https://shop.bankenverband.de/shop/ods/fuhrung-verantwortung-vertrauen/fuhrung-verantwortung-vertrauen/download
New Opportunities or New Risks?
Trends in political coverage
Media Tenor’s Methodology

Our Analysis: Continuous and Comprehensive

- All news stories in print or broadcast media (TV News Shows, TV Magazines) are analyzed on the story level for the main topics and protagonists. Analysis of political coverage is based on the individual information units in the story.

- The information is evaluated on the statement level. All information given about the party or the politician is coded as a new individual statement.

- Each coded statement contains: a person/party, the party unit, topic, +/- rating and source of the statement/rating. As data is analyzed, if any part of a statement changes (i.e. the topic) a new statement has to be coded.

- Data are checked through tests, coders are trained daily.

select
understand
code
Decreasing Awareness for Political Protagonists

ARD and ZDF news

RTL, SAT.1 and ProSieben news

100%: all news reports about Germany

Basis: a total of 179,780 news reports about Germany (*: 1/1 – 6/10/2007)
Governments in the Focus – Parliaments in the Margin

ARD and ZDF news

RTL, SAT.1 and ProSieben news

Federal Administration
Federal Parliaments

100%: all news reports about Germany

Basis: a total of 17,000 news reports about these protagonists in Germany (*: 1/1 – 6/10/2007)
Trends in political coverage
Protagonist Structure in Foreign News / Share of all Stories 03/2006-02/2007

... and Even Less Visible in International Perspective

*: including armed forces/police and courts

- Government/authorities
- Parliament
- Supranational organisations/EU
- other protagonists
- Political parties

Basis: 9,720 / 9,614 / 21,670 / 33,270 news stories in foreign TV coverage in the respective countries
Trends in political coverage
Share of governing coalition and opposition parties in German TV 2001 – 2007*

Less Room for Opposition Parties

ARD and ZDF news
RTL, SAT.1 and ProSieben news

Federal administration plus coalition parties
opposition parties

100%: all news reports about Germany

Basis: a total of 27,602 news reports about these protagonists in Germany (*: 1/1 – 6/10/2007)
Negativism in the News: Merkel 2.0

- Kohl 1994/95
- Schröder 1998/99
- Schröder 2002/03
- Merkel 2005/06
- Merkel 2009/10

Media Tone: Share of all statements

Basis: 2,443 / 18,512 / 16,255 / 14,296 / 16,395 statements in ARD, ZDF, RTL und SAT.1 news
Negativism in the Long View

TV Tone (surplus of +/- statements)

Basis: 110,705 stories on politicians, 25,416 reports about managers, 10,095 stories about religions/religious leaders in German, UK and US TV news
Trends in political coverage

British politics in UK TV News – Share of Reporting 01.10.09 - 11.04.10

Focus on Big Players is an International Phenomenon

Share of reporting (%)

- Cameron: 22.2%
- Brown: 49.9%
- Blair: 24.9%
- Clegg: 3.0%
- Cons.: 9.8%
- Labour: 78.9%
- Lib Dems: 4.2%
- Others: 7.1%

Others= SNP, Sinn Féin, BNP, UKIP, Ulster Unionists, Plaid Cymru, Green party, Respect etc

Scandalization as a Strategy Option for Small Parties

**Top reported issues for UKIP**
- Party situation
- EU structure
- Immigration
- Party tendency
- Party PR
- Elections, votes
- Elections in general
- British EU policy
- EU elections
- Home affairs

**Top reported issues for the BNP**
- Party PR
- Party tendency
- Party situation
- Elections, votes
- Elections in general
- Justice
- Immigration
- Home affairs
- Domestic security

Little Awareness of the European Union

- Europe: 1.4% (EU), 0.3% (other)
- Switzerland: 1.1% (EU), 0.1% (other)

Basis: 46,382/25,862/7,908/24,316 news stories in 16 TV news shows
Example EU

Again: Focus on the Executive

Basis: 92,630 / 4,713
Ignorance Supports Prejudices

Basis: 408 statements on Islam in 3 TV news programs and Weltwoche weekly
Selection of Sources Shapes Perception

Basis: 408 statements on Islam in 3 TV news programs and Weltwoche weekly
Scandalization
Salience of Integration/religious issues in French TV news 2007-2010

French News Follows the Swiss Pattern

Salience of integration related topics in French political coverage TF 1

Basis: 1,331 statements on Islam/religious dialog/integration of foreigner in TF1 political coverage
Salience of integration related topics in French political coverage TF 1

And Politicians Adjust their Strategies
Mediatization of Politics: A Feedback Loop?

**Media:**
- News values
  - Conflict
  - Drama
  - Damage
  - Personality

**Political Protagonists:**
- Strategies
  - Going Negative
  - Staging/Events
  - Spin
  - Focus on Leaders
  - Following trends
Results

- Parliaments and opposition parties lose out to governments and governing parties in terms of visibility.
- European politics is framed in a national perspective – leaving little room for transnational European protagonists.
- Negativism in political coverage is driven by the “competitive frame” and the selection of sources. Scandalization drives political sentiment.
- Media coverage of political activities fuels distrust towards politics and politicians and aggravates disenchantment with politics. New forms of political activity may pose serious threats to social cohesion and political stability.
The Role of Communication Science

- **Disconnect**: The findings are there – but they do not get across to the protagonists: Journalists do not care about communication science and academics do not reach out to the media.

- **Relevance**: Do communication scientists care about the impact of mediatization on our society?

- **Responsibility**: Does communication science live up to its duty to contribute to the improvement of society?
What Can be Done?

- We need to agree on certain standards of reporting on politics – as it was done in the Czech Republic.
- We need to monitor these standards and publish the results regularly in time – to assure transparency.
- We need to come together regularly debating these results – with all parties involved: journalists, scientists, politicians, NGOS.
- Communication science has shown the writing on the wall long time ago – like Tom Patterson’s “Out of Order”. 2011 might be a good point to start to start a new effort.
12th International Agenda Setting Conference

Once a year Media Tenor invites academics from various fields, including communication science and media analysis, to engage politicians, managers and journalists on the impact of media on public opinion, based on Media Tenor’s international research. Additionally we announce the Media Tenor Awards in different categories.