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MODERN CHALLENGES FOR DIGITALIZATION POLITICAL AND MEDIA SYSTEMS

REVIEW OF THE BOOK

**“DIGITALIZATION OF DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES IN EUROPE:
SOUTHERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE IN COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE”**

EDS. MAGDALENA MUSIAŁ-KARG, ÓSCAR G. LUENGO

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A technological leap that has been observed since the 1950s naturally impacts social and political structures, especially the functioning institutions of public administration and communication processes. A milestone in public governance occurred in the 1990s, when information and communication technology (ICT) was used to develop public services. Moreover, it can be considered as a turning point in building e-democracy and the idea of e-governance as a response to gradually decreasing participation in formal processes, e. g. elections (Macintosh 2008).

This matter became an object of scholars' interest, especially among political scientists and IT specialists (Päivärinta, Sæbø 2006; Aouragh, Alexander 2011; Chokoshvili 2011; Zarate 2017). The reviewed book *Digitalization of Democratic Processes in Europe: Southern and Central Europe in Comparative Perspective* continues and deepens the reflection on the issue of e-democracy and e-government. The authors invite media researchers to present the results of various studies on new forms of the communication process. Moreover, in the introduction, the editors point out “the diverse selection of research on new forms of democratization and communication processes across Europe” (Luengo, Musiał-Karg 2021: 7), which may be recognized as the main aim of this work. In accordance to that, they “critically investigate the current state of this burgeoning and important research field, and map out future directions” (ibidem). They achieve this by merging the efforts of scholars from from eight different universities and research institutes. This has allowed them to present readers with various topics, disciplinary angles, critical approaches and practices, methods and interpretations, emphases, and voices.

Coalescing efforts of scholars allow to “illustrate the diversity and complexity of this active and stimulating field, as well as the heightened attention to innovations in democratic issues and the accelerated transformation of politics via new media-oriented scholars” (ibidem). It is worth adding that this book was published in Springer's series *Studies*

in *Digital Politics and Governance*, which confirms that this work examines how and why digital technologies matter for democracy.

Before discussing each chapter's topic, it is necessary to point out the main advantages of Musiał-Karg and Luengo's book. Firstly, it consists of the international research community consists of political and media scientists and IT researchers, which ensures multi-faceted approaches. Secondly, the book presents research results (of meeting points of studies on ...) on the meeting point of studies on social and political structures and the progressive digitization of almost every sphere of public and private life: digital democracy, electronic voting, online participation, and civic engagement and electronic campaigning.

Despite these issues being discussed literature of the subject, this publication provides us with a comparative perspective. Authors present results of studies among two selected states: Poland and Spain. This selection was done on purpose – both of these states are members of the EU, and in their modern history, have experiences authoritarian regimes, which ended by political transitions during the “third way of democratization”. Moreover, both in Spain and Poland, in the second decade of the 21st century occurred, a new form of political contestation that used new technology occurred. Thanks to that, the authors were able to deliver conclusions for comparative reflection about the differences and similarities in developing e-participation in public life and the changes of political structures caused by e-democracy and e-government.

The reviewed publication consists of 13 chapters. After the introductory chapter, section 2 contains the authors' discussion of the NICT (New Information and Communication Technologies) and their influence on the electoral process based on Poland's case. They construct a general hypothesis that the impact of Internet usage on political participation differs across Europe – that it is derived from demographic factors (mainly education and age), but however it is a better predictor for non-electoral participation than for voting. Their research confirmed

that education is the most important predictor of electoral and non-electoral participation. At the same time they pointed out that “the usage of Internet is a better predictor for non-electoral participation than for voting, with the exceptions of Estonia, where the beta coefficients are similar, and Poland, where Internet usage is a better predictor for voting” (Kapsa, Luengo, Musiał-Karg 2021: 21).

In Chapter 3. Javier García-Marín focused on polarization in traditional media and YouTube referring to the Catalonia crisis in 2017. His very interesting research shows that information from social media triggered a higher level of polarization and more extremes than traditional media (García-Marín 2021: 38).

Next, Óscar G. Luengo and Belén Fernández-García discussed patterns of access to political and electoral information among voters based on experiences from the Spanish campaign for the general elections in April 2019. They pointed out a significant gap between voters of new (Vox, UP and Ciudadanos) and old (PP and PSOE) political parties in access to information and confirmed that television is still the most popular outlet for being up to date in regards to electoral news. Authors pay attention to replacing the position of newspapers and radio with social networks. Results of their research show a significant gap between voters of new parties and old parties: “The voters of new parties tend to consume less television and more social networks and the Internet than traditional parties. These mentioned differences were statistically significant” (Luengo, Fernández-García 2021: 53). The main contribution of their work is pointing *out the* differences in how voters of different political options access information about politics.

In Chapter 5. Dorota Piontek and Szymon Ossowski analyzes the conditions of an extraordinary presidential campaign that took place in Poland during the period of a pandemic. Their research confirmed that the Internet became the basic platform for electoral rivalry. Reflection about the role of media during the presidential campaign in Poland continued by Anna Stoppel in section 6. Her study, based on presidential

campaigns from 1995 to 2015, pointed out that new media have failed to revolutionize political communication and created one of the most important areas of political competition.

Another topic is discussed in his paper by Marcin Rachwał, who analyzed the use of NICTs to implement the citizens' legislative initiative in Poland. He formulated conclusions that: "*individual* legislative proposals are not considered by representatives of specific political groups at the level of a normative model, understood as the design of the best practices from the point of view of the political system" (Rachwał 2021: 95). Moreover, the author delivers a pessimistic constatation that implementing NICT in citizens' legislative initiatives as a good solution is criticized because it does not serve party interests.

The reflection on the possibilities of implementing new solutions to political participation was continued in Chapter 8. Oliwia Kuban analyzed the possibilities of increasing political participation through online devices. She paid attention to 3 applications: DemocracyOS (Argentina), Democracy Deutschland (Deutschland), and Countable (US).

Returning to media issues, Weronika Dopierała focuses on the influence of the local media agenda on taking steps that stimulate journalists to produce news, based on the City of Poznań's case in Section 9. Weronika Dopierała's study confirmed that the city's website may significantly impact local media outlets, that release information which is very similar to the ones of the official media content.

Next, in Chapter 10. Ignacio-Jesús Serrano-Contreras analyses the growth of feminism on YouTube a phenomenon that has become popular on social networks in recent years. The author concluded his paper by stating that "feminism in Spanish on YouTube establishes two main forms: Liberal close to First Wave Feminism and Radical marked by the Second and Third Wave" (Serrano-Contreras 2021: 135).

Finally, in Section 11. Monika Jabłońska and Piotr Jabłoński present the conclusion from their study about using geolocation services in mobile devices. In analyzing access to private data, the authors proposed a solution for protecting personal data against deep profiling.

In the last part of the book, we find two chapters. Firstly, Michał Piekarski and Wojciech Kazanecki analyzed the experts on terrorism presence in media and pointed out that academic experts are less preoccupied with their use to promote themselves, despite the possibilities to themselves at scale. In the last chapter, Morten Meyerhoff Nielsen discussed the challenges of personal and co-created public services. After a quick review of the content of each section, the methodology is worth discussing. The reviewed paper dominated quantitative and qualitative analysis of sources (especially media content and legislative acts), but some authors used statistical analysis, comparative and institutional methods, and historical genetic methods. It shows that the author could triangulate different methods and approaches in political and media and communication sciences.

To sum up, the reviewed book delivers new inspiring ideas and a thesis about diffusion between new technologies and political and communication structures. It became possible by analyzing digital transformation, theoretical approach, new methodological approaches and digital media in political communication, from representative to digital democracy, and digital media to increase citizen participation. Although one insufficiency may be pointed out – the absence of analyzing a phenomenon in both Poland and Spain that could have been done by comparative studies. However, even without it, the authors presented clear verification of their thesis and conclusions, which allows the readers to answer questions about similarities and differences of the discussed topics. Reflection on adopting new technologies that are used to develop interactions in political and media structures that are presented in this book may be helpful for other subdisciplines, e.g., theory of political systems' trajectory.

The above-mentioned applications may be a very interesting contribution to studies on surviving modern democratic systems all around the world. One of the vivid cases is a renaissance of reflections about militant democracy (Capoccia 2001; Pfersmann 2004; Capoccia 2013; Kirshner 2014; Müller 2016; Rak, Bäcker 2022), a theoretical category introduced by German scholar Karl Loewenstein in the face of growing fascism movements in interwar Europe (Loewenstein 1937; Lerner 1938).

The legacy of militant democracy and experiences in transforming its means used by anti-democratic forces allow the assumption that the rapid creation of “cyber militant democracy” is necessary to protect the political system in the face of new, digital threats. The reviewed book delivers many interesting conclusions about the further character of means applied to combat enemies of democracy.

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