

Emotions and populist communication

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Summary: populist communication style

Populist communication style

main features:

- It reflects populist main ideological elements: anti-elitism, people centricism, exclusion of an out-group, Manichean perception of world, etc.
- moral appeal, expressive wording, emotionality
- Emphasis on the crisis, blaming others

>> populist communication is “inherently emotional” <<

Are emotions important in political science?

Emotions and politics

- Is the voter really rational? (Downs 1957)
- Emotions as key player in decision making-process (Zajonc 1985, Damasio 1994)
- Cognition is a complex process in which the affective and cognitive components cannot be clearly separated.

Emotions and politics

- **Affective Intelligence Theory** by George Marcus, Russell Neuman, and Michael MacKuen (2000): the disposition vs. surveillance system
- **Appraisal theory**: each emotions have different “appraisal dimensions” that affect our behaviour (valence, certainty, responsibility and efficacy) (Lazarus 1991, Lerner, Keltner, 2000)

Emotions and political behaviour:

- Different emotions have different effect on our political behaviour > emotions as influential tool in political campaigning
- Brader (2006): political challengers use more fear appeals than incumbents, who tend rely more on enthusiasm. **Why?**

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- Brader (2006): political challengers use more fear appeals than incumbents, who tend rely more on enthusiasm.
- **1) enthusiasm motivates participation and activates existing loyalties**
- **2) fear stimulates vigilance, ncreases interest in new information, and facilitates persuasion (Brader 2005)**

Why are emotions important for populist parties?

**What is behind the
success of populism?**



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- Globalization and social-economic changes?
- Immigration and cultural changes?
- Unemployment?



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>> subjective „sense“ of perceptions of threat and vulnerability, identity loss



Emotions and affect as key motivators to support populist movements

How?

Populist political communication (in Wirz 2018)

- Reference to the monolithic group of people
- Stressing the people's virtues and achievements
- Demonstrating closeness to the people demanding sovereignty for the people
Excluding and discrediting others
- **Blaming the elite**
- Denying sovereignty to the elite
- **Emphasis on the crisis**
- Emotions as "secret ingredient"



Emotionalized blame attribution (Hameleers et al., 2017, 2018)

- populist messages are often characterized by assigning blame to elites in an emotionalized way
- emotionalized blame attributions can influence blame perceptions and populist attitudes.
- Highly emotionalized blame attribution: anger and fear toward threatening political elites



The populist communication, “*emphasises agitation, spectacular acts, exaggeration, calculated provocations, and the intended breach of political and socio-cultural taboos*” (Heinisch [2003](#),94) >> communication based on provocations, offensive language, aggressiveness, and negative emotionality

Examples??

SPD AI generated campaign

Říkají,
ať chodíme do školy,
ale naši to mají
na háku...

„Podpora pouze pro rodiny,
kde děti plní školní docházku!“



**ČESKO PROTI
DRAHOTĚ**

SPD **A TĚHLE BOJUJÍ S NÁMI** TRIKOLORA **PRO**

Zadavatel: SPD, Trikolóra, PRO / Zpracovatel: Praha Na Václavě 00 s.r.o.

Nedostatky
ve zdravotnictví **nevyřeší**
„chirurgové“ z dovozu.

CENSORED

„Stop Migračnímu paktu EU!“



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Emotionality of populist communication

- the instrumentalization of emotions in society by populists as one of the key driving mechanisms behind the success of populist political parties
- populist parties use significantly more negative emotional appeals: anger, fear, disgust, sadness)
- less positive emotional appeals (joy, enthusiasm, pride, hope) than mainstream parties
- populist campaigns are 15% more negative and contain 11% of more character attacks and 8% more fear messages than campaigns of non-populist candidates (Nai 2021)

What emotions? With what effect?

Negative emotions

- populist parties use significantly more negative emotional appeals: anger and fear

Populists are often outside of the political establishment; they identity and image is rooted in “anti-attitude”:

- ANGER and RESENTMENT as emotion of protest moral disagreement and blame: anti-elitism and easy solutions

Ex. After Parisian terror attacks anger was associated with voting for the French far-right party Front National (Vasilopoulos, Marcus, Valentino, et al. 2018) .

- FEAR and ANXIETY: from information seeking and less tolerance to acceptance of conservative ideology: repressive politics, patriotism, increased support for the head of state, resistance to an "unconventional" lifestyle, and support for protectionist policies

Ex: (The case of Parisien atacs) Fear significantly increase authoritarian policy preferences—yet, among left-wing individuals (Vasilopoulos, Marcus, & Foucault, [2018](#)). + Anxiety has been found to cause conspiracy thinking about minorities and to make individuals more likely to **search for, remember, and agree with threatening pieces of news about immigrant** (Grzesiak-Feldman, 2013)



Positive emotions

- Populist as part of the “People”, protectors and saviors
- Enthusiasm, joy, pride: emotions of certainty.
- Associated to qualities of the people, nationalism or achievements of the candidate
- Hope: emotion oriented toward future. Connected to uncertainty > increasing interest in communicated issues



Further literature

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