Agnieszka Turska-Kawa, Ph.D.
Institute of Political Sciences and Journalism
University of Silesia (Poland)
ul. Bankowa 11
40-007 Katowice
Poland
agnieszka.turska-kawa@us.edu.pl

Ph. D. lecturer at the Political Science and Journalism Institute of the Silesian University. Her academic interests focus mainly on political psychology, psychological aspects of mass communication, political marketing. She is the President of the Scientific Initiatives Association, board member of the regional branch of the Polish Political Science Association, co-editor of the "Political Preferences" journal. She is also the winner of the competition „Best 2010 Ph.D. thesis" organized by the Polish Communication Association.

Waldemar Wojtasik, Ph.D.
Institute of Political Sciences and Journalism
University of Silesia (Poland)
ul. Bankowa 11
40-007 Katowice
Poland
waldemar.wojtasik@us.edu.pl

Ph. D. lecturer at the Political Science and Journalism Institute of the Silesian University. His scientific interests touch mainly on the subjects of elections, political parties and party systems. He is the President of the board of the regional branch of the Polish Political Science Association and a co-editor of the "Political Preferences" journal, author and co-author of 5 monographic studies.

COMMUNICATION FUNCTION OF ELECTIONS

Agnieszka TURSKA-KAWA - Waldemar WOJTASIK

ABSTRACT:

The aim of the text is to describe one of the basic functions of the elections, executed at both normative and empirical levels - the communication function, in the context of changes in the structure of Western societies, changes in methods and strategies of political communication and evolution of forms of electoral participation. Nowadays, as the communication function is meant as the establishment of such an interaction between the actors of the electoral process, which by means of non-accidental messages and communication channels guide the decisions of voters. The authors also aim to describe the process of character transformation of the communication function of elections, resulting from changes in the political sphere and its axiological layer.

KEY WORDS:

communication, elections, functions of election, leadership

Introduction

One of the constitutive elements of democratic regimes, both the normative condition of their existence and a pragmatic appeal is to enable the participation of citizens in public life. Lack of political participation and representation reflects the non-existence of civil society and, consequently, may be indicative of lack of loyalty for the whole political system. The most commonly encountered methods of political participation are the elections and institutions of direct democracy – commonly though, elections are regarded as a precondition for considering a given political system as a democracy. Free, competitive and regularly help elections have become a key determinant of political liberalism. They are among the most common of modern political institutions, and the vote itself is very often the only act of political participation undertaken by citizens in most countries of the world.[1]

The aim of the text is to describe one of the basic functions of the elections, executed at both normative and empirical levels - the communication function, in the context of changes in the structure of Western societies, changes in methods and strategies of political communication and evolution of forms of electoral participation. Nowadays, as the communication function is meant the establishment of such an interaction between the actors of the electoral process, which by means of non-accidental messages and communication channels guide the decisions of voters. For the normative dimension, beyond the provision of guarantees for the free expression of political opinion by the voters, freedom to create and promote political programs for the parties, it is also important to create a level playing field for all actors competing for votes. The empirical dimension of the com-

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[1]   ROSE, R., MOSSAWIR, H.: Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis. "Political Studies" Vol. 15(2)/1967, p. 173. ISSN 1467-9248.

munication function of elections is to create such planes of electoral communication that provide citizens with the opportunity to cast their votes for the political formation and candidates that best correspond to their personal views and attitudes. The very process of changing the nature of the communication function of elections is also the result of the transformation of politics and changes in its axiological layer. Erosion of the main ideological platforms and their replacement with poorly institutionalized political entities reflects the transition of modern democracy in the direction of a „mosaic model", [2] determining changes in the ways the communication function of elections is being realized. Among the key factors of this evolution the following should be indicated: (1) weakening proscenic nature of the electoral process, which results in the reduction of social distance between the parties and candidates and voters, and the acquisition by the latter of wider opportunities to influence the candidates, (2) polisensory character of contemporary politics and consequently its increasing potential impact on voters, (3) interactivity of the electoral process, which already at the campaign design and implementation stage is subject to dynamic changes and ongoing re-shaping on the basis of identification of changing conditions.

Normative dimension of the communication function of elections

Elections are referred to as the driving force of democracy, because they generate public debate, shape the directions of policy, (s)elect political representatives and determine the distribution of power.[3] In this context, a vote is very much like the idea of two-way traffic, through which the reciprocal influence on each other of the ruling party and the citizens and governing elites and the masses,[4] and positions between the will of the public and policy directions are negotiated through bilateral interactions. Elections are a legally institutionalized way of manifesting opinion on a given matter, exerting direct pressure on the recipient of this opinion to follow through; and in this sense the electoral programs serve as points of reference in the space of political competition, defining the position of each player in the cross-party competition.[5]

A list of detailed, prescriptive rules required for the elections to be considered fair is very wide, and is composed of the conditions placed on three levels: procedural, communication and control level.[6] The desired realization of the communication function refers specifically to the need to ensure: (1) equal access of parties and candidates to the means of mass communication, (2) no possibility for the mass media to be influenced by the government, (3) unrestricted coverage of the campaign and the election by the media, (4) freedom of candidates to communicate with voters.[7] It is necessary to also ensure respect for civil liberties, political rights, and the rights of minorities, and to promote wide participation in the voting the proper functioning of civil society connecting citizens with the state is required, as well as free and pluralistic media that enable political communication. In the presented framework, Andrew Heywood sees the elections as a political communication channel that gives political operators the potential for mutually influencing each other and constructing political agendas and programs.[8] Elections therefore allow the parties to create a communication link between voters and the government, and the vote itself guarantees the possibility of replacing the old political leaders and representatives with new ones.[9]

Normative dimension of the communication function of elections assumes the creation of arenas of political competition, in which political disputes and conflicts and ways to resolve them are generated, and through which candidates and political parties communicate with the public. The most common form of such communication are wide political programs and their temporal, campaign versions. An important influence on the implementation of the communication function in this case are political parties that create political programs, referring to the represented system of values and its translation into the realm of abstract ideological concepts. Execution of the programming function by the parties involves the creation of political and electoral programs by parties, and their public dissemination, mainly in order to obtain social support and votes. The process occurs on at least two major planes. The first is to translate general principles and values represented by the parties into the demands for specific political action, and to obtain social approval for them. The second one, referring in part to the creational function of parties, is to disseminate the program to the public in order to gain members and supporters on its basis and to generate electoral support. Such a program, however, must meet the needs of the changing political situation, what requires the possibility of introducing ongoing adjustments to it. Research on electoral programs most often refers to the spatial theories of cross-party competition, which assume intensified political competition in areas perceived by the parties and electorates as important.

A political program is an attempt to describe the general shape of the postulated reality, assuming the possibility of influencing implemented policies to go in a given direction. This is a model approach only, as it uses wide-spread generalizations and simplifications in order to create, in line with the possessed abilities and knowledge, a comprehensive picture of social reality. The reality described is idealized, as the reference to the category of ideal types makes it possible to indicate the positive (for potential recipients of the program) aspects of the implementation of the proposed solutions. The program of a political party thus has some universal functions, which on one hand is forces its certain generality, and on the other - requires the possibility of introducing fairly frequent changes to adapt to rapidly changing conditions.[10] The underlying rule of all program modifications though is to retain certain fundamental provisions that are the pragmatic translation of the most important values. Such understanding of the program stability is one of the key factors in building relationships with voters and expectations of their loyalty to the party. Researchers differ as to the directionality of the process of creating political and electoral programs of political parties and the impact of this process on the diverse preferences of the electorate or the party elites.[11]

Functions of election programs in the implementation of the communication function of elections can be summarized as two main tasks: (1) gaining power, (2) serving as an agenda for future action. In the first approach, the key imperative of political activity is to gain power in order to achieve benefits from its redistribution. That is why more politicians formulate political programs in order to gain power rather than pursue politics in order to introduce these programs into effect.[12] The presented position assumes that programs of political parties are more a general indication of the direction of their future actions, than they are specific plans and real intentions. Implementation of the plans outlined in the program is dependent on many factors resulting from the situation after the election, many of which may be outside the scope of influence of the political party. A second approach presented by researchers, although aknowledges the processes of professionalization and mediatization of politics and their impact on the formulation of programs, understood as a product of political marketing,[13] it still views the process of formulating program objectives as a mechanism introducing order in the functioning of political parties and structuring of the space of political competition.[14]

2   TOFFLER A.: Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century. Westminster, Maryland: Bantam Books 1991, p. 346. ISBN 978-05-53292-15-2.
3   LEDUC L., NIEMI R.G., NORRIS P.: Introduction: Comparing Democratic Elections. In: LEDUC L., NIEMI R.G., NORRIS P. (eds..): Comparing Democracies 2. New Challenges in the Study of Elections and Voting. London: SAGE Publications, 2002, p. 1-3. ISBN 978-0761972235.
4   HEYWOOD, A.: Key Concepts in Politics, New York: Palgrave, 2000 s. 200. ISBN 978-0312233815
5   LAVER, M., HUNT, B.W.; Policy and Party Competition, New York – London : Routledge, 1992, p. 31. ISBN 978- 0415902199.
6   Declaration on Criteria for Free and Fair Elections, Unanimously adopted by the Inter-Parliamentary Council at its 154th Session (Paris, 26 March 1994). ISBN 92-9142-277-0.
7   GOODWIN-GILL, G.S.: Free and Fair Elections. New expanded edition, Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2006, p. 71–75. ISBN 92-9142-277-0.
8   HEYWOOD, A.: Politologia (Politics), Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2006, p. 286–287.
9   MAINWARING S., SCULLY T.R.: Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 21. ISBN 978-0804723053.

10   BUDGE, I.: The Internal Analysis of Election Programmes, In: I. BUDGE, D. ROBERTSON, D. HEARL (eds.), Ideology, Strategy, and Party Change: Spatial Analysis of Post-War Election Programmes in 19 Democracies, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 15–38. ISBN 978-0521056670.
11   WOJTASIK, W.: Funkcje wyborów w III Rzeczypospolitej. Teoria i praktyka (Functions of elections the Republic of Poland. Theory and practice), Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2012, p. 69-72. ISBN 978-83-61975-80-9.
12   DOWNS, A.: The Evolution of Democracy: How its Axioms and Institutional Forms Have Been Adapted to Changing Social Forces, "Daedalus" Vol. 116 (3)/1987, p. 119. ISSN 0011-5266.
13   PAGE B.I.: Elekcje i społeczne wybory: teoria a stan badań empirycznych (Elections and social choice: theory versus empirical research results), In: SZCZUPACZYŃSKI J.(eds.), Elity. Demokracja. Wybory (Elites. Democracy.Elections), Warszawa: Agencja Wydawnicza Scholar, 1993, p. 139. ISBN 83-85838-07-4.
14   KOLCZYŃSKI M.: Strategie komunikowania politycznego (Strategies of political Communications), Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2007, p. 268–271. ISBN 978-83-226-1656-7.

Criticism of the concept of the role of election programs in the implementation of the communication function stems from identification of other sources of citizens; uncertainty as to the direction of action after the election than intentional behavior of political parties. Among other determinants the ones mentioned most often are: (1) discrepancies between the implemented government program and the declared election-time programs, (2) intentional hiding by political parties and candidates of their real views and intentions. The difference between election programs and the government programs and policies may result from their natural direction - during the campaign, social promises and problems focusing public interest are emphasiez, and after the election the actions of the ruling pary, overall, focus on „governance engineering" and are marked by greater economic efficiency. The desire to hide true political views and plans during the campaign may for example be a function of knowledge of the preferences of the majority of voters and expertise as to the necessity of some future action. These factors may indicate non-programmatic determinants of voters' decisions.[15]

Specificity of the communication functions of the elections associated with the use of political programs assumes a conscious role of political parties in creating strategies of communication with voters. In this context, they must select a way to communicate with the electorate via the political program and agenda, which takes on the form of a well thought-out and executed strategy. Literature has identified three basic types of strategies implemented depending on the nature of the electorate: (1) undifferentiated, (2) differentiated and (3) focused.[16] The first of these is characterized by the absence of a precise determination of the recipient, is addressed to all voters. Parties may make use of universal planes of program competition in which other political groups are also present, but they can also create their own, original program slogans and concepts, trying to interest the voters in them. Electoral programs in this sense serve as milestones, defining the place of individual formations in the space of cross-party competition.[17] Thanks to them, voters receive messages that allow them to recognize the postion of a given party in this space. The differentiated strategy consists in presenting a separate program addressed to selected target groups (segments and niches). The risk associated with this strategy in electoral communication lies in the possibility of not-implementing the marketing concept of targeting and in its specific character, in which the agenda broadcasting is replaced by a quasi-marketing broadcasting.[18] This leads to a depreciation of the communication function of political programs in the social consciousness, and brings them down to only to the role of political marketing tools. The third type is focused on selecting a single segment (niche), to which a specialised political program is then directed. This is a strategy to the fullest extent proven faced with the ongoing process of progressive move away from the main ideological platforms, and their replacing with ephemeral political entities, components of the "mosaic democracy".

Empirical dimension of the communication function of elections

Through their communication function, elections are an important tool that allows recreation of the image of public opinion. They serve this purpose not only as a mechanism for translating public preferences into legitimization of power, but also by the opportunity to actively engage citizens in the processes of electing authorities and systemic channeling of their activity in this field. Elections build a map of significance of individual topics in the puiblic consciousness, and translate them into the realm of current policy, reflected in the attitudes and activities of political parties. By reflecting the image of the public opinion, elections transmit to the parties information about matters of interest to the society and prioritization of factors. Cyclical nature of the elections permits observation of possible dynamics of change in this regard, since both on the basis of the topics present in electoral discourse, as well as the focusing of voters' interest on specific demands, evolution in the public perception of politics can be observed.

In addition to the specific demands that are pragmatic and ideological axis of disputes in each campaign, one can also indicate more general factors helping in diagnosis of the public opinion. The politics itself uses such general categories as individual ideological formulas or concepts of left and right to illustrate important issues visible in the public discourse.[19] These abstracts ideas are used to show the crucial points of political differences, as well as to define the basic political options. Within the described framework, by carrying out the function of communication a vote serves to identify the most important issues, which by their social "carrying capacity" may influence decisions made by voters, and assignment of positions on each issue to the party options (left-right) and the voters. In addition, being a channel of political communication, elections should allow voters to identify further with the values represented by them, contributing to their linkage with the existing system of constitutional norms and values.[20]

The public opinion mirrored in the election result may be interpreted according to two basic models. In the first, specific one, citizens making an electoral decision address the specific issues that are the subject of pre-election discourse. The political system, through political parties, communicates the most vital elements of political dispute in the elections, and the voters order them in a hierarchy of importance. In the most popular approaches, attention is paid to the role of axiological and economic determinants as important elements shaping voting preferences. All elections are held in a different (sometimes very dramatically) socio-economic circumstance, what also very differently shapes the focal points of social interest. In periods of profound change and economic crises, social attention is focused on the economic issues. In times of economic stability and sustainable economic growth, the accents shift towards axiological matters, making the economic demands a less important platform for the political competition. This in turn may lead to the impression that the choice of representatives and determination of main policy directions in this situation is relatively less important.[21]

The second model of the public opinion reflected in the elections uses a certain generalization, in which the role of specific demands in the electoral discourse is replaced by ideological self-identification of the voters. Since the individuals describe their attitudes and their structuring employing generalized concepts, one can attempt to identify the position on the right – left scale. The result is a generalized image of the public opinion, in which the voters take into account the degree of consistency of their self-identification with the party dimension of left – right continuum rather than specific demands. In an indirect way, using tools based on the left – right scale, elections can be used to test identification with the elected representatives, which is a measure of the distance of the average citizen to the governing elite. The bigger the distance, the lower the identification, and, conversely - the smaller the distance, the greater the identification.[22] In the case of studies of distance to the ruling elite, two basic measuring units can be used. The first is the distance to a selected institution vested with legislative power, which may be a parliament or any other legislature. The second is the average distance to the party forming the national government or to the elected President (or other personalised part of the executive branch).

Through the communication function of elections, the voters express their views as to the direction and the nature of the political process, visible in the electoral result. Voters, by casting a vote, reveal their political beliefs, and thus show support for the political program of a given party, while at the same time expecting the party to fulfill its promises. Excluded from this group of voters are those who do not show any interest in the sphere of politics and permanently and continuously opt for non-participation. These individuals show specific social

15   STOKES, S.C.: What do Policy Switches Tell Us about Democracy?, In: MANIN, B., PRZEWORSKI, A., STOKES, S.C. (eds.), Democracy, Accountability and Representation, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 102-103. ISBN 978-0521646161.
16   CICHOSZ, M.: Strategie aktorów politycznych i organizacja kampanii przed wyborami samorządowymi w 2006 r. (Strategies of political actors and campaign organisation in local elections of 2006), In: ALBERSKI, R. (eds.): Wybory samorządowe na Dolnym Śląsku w 2006 roku. Wzorce rywalizacji w lokalnych systemach politycznych (Local elections in Lower Silesia in 2006. Models of competition in local political systems) Wrocław 2008: Wydawnictwo „Profil", p. 112. ISBN 978-83- 914951-7-9.
17   LAVER, M., HUNT, B.W.:, Policy and Party Competition, p. 31.
18   KOLCZYŃSKI M.: Determinanty zachowań wyborczych w Polsce: między post-prlowską apatią a partyjnym spin doctoringiem (Determinants of electoral behaviour in Poland: between post-socialist apathy and party spin-doctoring), In: GLAJCAR R., WOJTASIK W. (eds.), Transformacja systemowa w Polsce 1989-2009. Próba bilansu (Systemic transformation in Poland 1989-2009. An attempt at a summary), Katowice: Wydawnictwo Remar 2009, p. 79-81. ISBN 978-83-61975-00-7.

19   NOEL A., THERIEN J.-P.: Left and Right in Global Politics, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008, p. 34. ISBN 9780521705837.
20   ROSE, R., MOSSAWIR, H.: Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis (op. cit.), p. 176.
21   ROSE, R., MOSSAWIR, H.: Voting and Elections: A Functional Analysis (op. cit.), p. 181.
22   BINGHAM POWELL, G.: Elections As Instruments of Democracy: Majoritarian and Proportional Visions New Heaven: Yale University Press, 2000, p. 187. ISBN 978-0300080162.

characteristics, as a consequence of which they do not see electoral participation as having any function, related to being a part of political community, relevant to them personally. Among the most common scientific models explaining the political activity of individuals are: (1) activity (engagement) resulting from the party identification of individuals, (2) the represented system of values, (3) sense of political alienation, (4) the level of anxiety.[23] As a condition of willingness to engage in politics, researchers indicate acknowledgement of this sphere as important and valuable to the individual. Through participation, a citizen may pursue personal goals and subjectively evaluate the extent to which his or her own political activity will be instrumental in achieving those objectives.[24] Engagement in political matters obtained by the participation leads to identification with the political community. Stein Rokkan likened voting in the election to a wedding ceremony (which connects individuals in relationships) through which individual preferences are changed into social engagement.[25]

Understanding the expression of will of the people in the communication function of the elections instrumentally, we may apply it to two situations: continuation of the current political option or its alternation. Elections may result in the renewal of the mandate for those previously in power, or in its revocation and granting of legitimacy to other formations. This is a simplification, as we frequently witness situations where the party losing the elections produces a new coalition system, which allows it to further co-rule, or vice versa, a party despite winning the elections has no real influence (it is isolated or a coalition of other groups is created against it). Similar is the situation in the case of elections where the number of office terms is limited, and after serving the prescribed number of terms, a politician can no longer be a candidate (for example, the presidential election). The change of incumbent of an elected office is then obvious, although the vote may be won once again by a candidate nominated by the political grouping supporting also the politician previously occupying the position.

In case when the party in power remains unchanged, the results of the elections further emphasize the will of the voters as to maintaining of the political direction and methods used by the ruling party (parties). Voters express support for the way of "doing politics" proposed by the government and thus the politicians gain social legitimacy for their actions. Gaining support repeatedly, however, can not be equated with the maintenance of the status quo or even the lack of support for any changes. Even in case of renewal of the mandate, the voters may support changes to the existing policy, which during the campaign were suggested by the ruling formation(s). Therefore, a change (sometimes even radical) in the activities carried out by the ruling groups(s) may occur without any real alternation of power. Voters communicate in the election the need to identify new political priorities and ways to implement them, they do not need to simultaneously ask for the change in those who are to implement these demands.[26]

Evolution of the communication function of elections

Regardless of the definitions, attributed functions and the election results, the elections determine the overall quality of the democratic process. However, an evolution in their communication function can be observed, especially in conjunction with the changes that currently affect the societies of democratic states. In addition to trivializing the electoral act, seeing the elections as a ritual procedure of indicating the ruling party and the opposition, as the most negative consequence of elections can be considered the replacement of socially important areas of political discourse by topics which are purely the result of the electoral calculations of political parties. Where elections are an instrument of legitimization of power, in specific cases, the discourse on

programming and substantive political competition are replaced by areas of conflict artificially created to allow one of the competing parties to gain an advantage that will lead it to victory. Such an election, although meeting democratic standards, is not a mechanism conducive to the creation of a truly democratic community.

One of the areas that directly affect the changes in the communication function of elections is the evolution of political leadership. The search for determinants that predestinate a given person to being a leader, thus gaining them the mandate of the community and the right to exercise authority in a particular area, is one of the fundamental issues raised in the study of political leadership. In the European literature, researchers refer to two trends that have had an impact on the contemporary analysis and research of political leadership.[27]

The first of these – the subjective approach, predominated in the first half of the 20th century; its assumptions focused the attention of researchers on the person of a political leader – their qualities, motivations and other psychological characteristics that determine the effectiveness of the exercised function. Communication here is in a way „natural", based on the preferences of a given politician that decide on his or her potential. The method and form of communication with the surroundings flows directly from these personal predilections. The proscenic nature of the leader-voter relationship makes the communication method far from interactive. The communication is one-way only – legitimacy of leadership is based on the person, the subject, without reference to the socio-political situation and the voters. The communication function of election consists mostly in the communication generated by the politician / candidate who, through transmission of messages to voters in the fullest manner "advertises" his or her own person. Voters are not on an equal footing with party leaders as recipients of messages – they are the addressees, however, they do not directly influence their content.

The second approach, situational, has gained recognition in the 1950s, and pointed to the importance of context-specific conditions for the crystallization of political leadership.[28] According to this school, is it the „spirit of the times" (The Zeitgeist Theory) that decides that a given person becomes a political leader. Crystallization of leadership is thus a result of specific events and an individual need not possess specific pre-defined traits.[29] Communication is created by specific circumstances that force its direction and form. It is a direct response to the stimuli coming from the environment – a politician is treated here as an intermediary, not the initiator. It should also be noted that communication here is one-way; the communication function of the election does not permit for free expression of will of voters and allocation of votes to the formation that best reflect their views and attitudes; leadership is created in response to a particular climate, which, however, is often the result of changes to social expectations. In this sense, although the situational model is still highly proscenic, the social distance between the leader and the voters is smaller than in the case of the subjective model. Elections are, in this approach, a mechanism of establishing leadership in answer to a new situation, communicating to voters the need for change and legitimizing the change in turn by their participation.

The second half of the last century was a period of integration of the two approaches identified above, which resulted in finding a third way - the relational approach to political leadership that focuses on the relationships between the leader and his or her followers. Leadership is determined by the characteristics of the parties to this relationship. Each of the persons involved - political leader and the supporters (voters) - brings a specific personal input: own personality structure, individual needs, peculiar perception of socio-political reality, which to a large extent direct their behavior.

Building a leadership relationship in this context is the interaction of the parties. This personal contribution can also be described by certain psychological expectations of an individual, directed at the other party in the relation. The relationship should in a satisfactory manner meet the individual's needs, achieve the objectives determined by personal values, make the best use of the personality traits of the other party. An essential element of this process must be a more interactive leader-voters relationship, resulting in an indirect way also from

23   TURSKA-KAWA, A.: Psychologiczne uwarunkowania zachowań wyborczych (Psychological determinants of electoral behaviour), „Preferencje Polityczne" Vol. 1/2010, p. 102. ISSN 2083-327X.
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25   ROKKAN S.: Elections. In: SILLS D.L. (eds.), International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, New York 1968: MacMillan; Free Press, p. 5. ISBN 978-0-17-650042-9.
26   WOJTASIK, W.: Funkcje wyborów w III Rzeczypospolitej. Teoria i praktyka (Functions of elections the Republic of Poland. Theory and practice; op. cit.), p. 73.

27   More on approaches to political leadership in: TURSKA-KAWA, A.: Tradycyjne i współczesne podejścia do procesu wyłaniania się przywództwa politycznego (Traditional and modern approaches to crystallisation of political leadership), „Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne", in printing.
28   STERNBERG, R. J., ANTONAKIS, J., CIANCIOLO, A. T.: The Nature of Leadership, Londoon: SAGE, 2004, s. 148, ISBN 978-0-76-1927-150.
29   Among others:, JAKUBOWSKA U.: Przywództwo polityczne (Political leadership). In.: In: SKARŻYŃSKA K. (eds.), Podstawy psychologii politycznej (Introduction to political psychology, op.cit.), p. 91; ELMS, E.: Personality in politics, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1976, ISBN 978-0-15-5697-621 STONE, W.: The psychology of politics, New York: Springer-Verlag, 1974.

the reduced proscenic nature of this approach compared with previous leadership models. Communication function is expressed in the conforming of the leader to the „demands" articulated by potential voters. Each message aimed at winning electoral support must take into account the characteristics of recipients of this message, thus the very message in continuously being changed and adjusted, with the aim of gaining power.

The 21st century, that witnesses by far the most intensive marketization of politics, also initiated the processes shaping the fourth model, which can be called reactive. A political leader, according to this approach, not only shapes his or her role in interactions with the needs and expectations of potential voters, and modifies it to adapt to ongoing changes in these needs and expectations, but also seeks to actively stimulate the emerging of needs that he or she can satisfy better than the competitors in the election.

For this process to be possible, three conditions related to communication must be met: low proscenic level, high interactivity and strong polisensory nature of the leader-voter relationship. To a large extent the leader is treated as a product for which the fundamental task is to find consumers who are willing to „buy". In the context of polisensory communication, the crystallization takes place indirectly, mainly through the media, used by the leader to adjust his or her image to the changing public expectations.

Reactivity is thus an active process of management of the image of the leader, aligned to the evolving social preferences, which are actively created (or an attempt is made at such) by the politician. Therefore the reactive approach creates the broadest possibility of truly realizing the communication function of the elections. The leader adjusts to the wider environment through the adaptation of that function. Along with the increasing speed of information and the development of new information technologies, giving the media a broader opportunity to influence the public, the emergence of political leadership has taken on a new quality. Access to the mass media has offered the public the option of tracking the actions of leaders and at the same time of forming personal opinions on their personalities and actions they take.

The immediate effect of this change is the greater emphasis put on image creation techniques.[30] The process of forming the relationship between a leader and his or her followers, as a result of which the leader gains their liking, support, and consequently – a vote in the election is not mandatory for either party. Politicians are increasingly aware, however, that their presence in the media is often an integral part of the struggle for power. They stage a performance before the intended audience-the voters- to gain their support, which is equivalent to gaining power.[31]

The performed analyzes clearly show the process by which each of the consecutive, more mature and more systemic approaches to political leadership offers an increasingly comprehensive possibility of realizing the communication function of elections, and makes this function increasingly visible. At the same time it should be noted that the media offer more and more opportunities of technologically and socially influencing the audience, they cease to be a means of transmitting information only, and shift towards the role of creating the media message. In the process of building a relationship between the politician and his/her supporters, the role of factual competence and abilities of an individual is reduced, while originally they played a significant role in achieving leadership roles. Simultaneously, new attributes are gaining in importance.

Among them, in the foreground stand those that determine a positive relationship of a given politician with the prevailing mass media: media attractiveness (physical accessibility, public speaking skills) and ability to influence the media, in order to steer their impact on voting behavior of viewers in a desired direction. This visible direction of change can be summarized by the words of Manuel Castells, who stated that every power passes through the media.[32]

30   LILLEKER, D.G.: Key Concepts in Political Communication, London: Sage, 2006, pp. 30 and following., ISBN 978-1-41-2918-312.
31   CWALINA, W., FALKOWSKI, A.: Marketing polityczny. Perspektywa Psychologiczna (Political Marketing. A psychological approach), Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, 2006, p. 147, ISBN 978-83-895-7476-3.
32   DYBEL, P., WRÓBEL Sz.: Granice polityczności (Boundaries of politics), Warsaw: Aletheia, 2008, p. 67, ISBN 978-83-8937-234-5.

Conclusion

In the previous century, elections in democratic countries were a form of political integration of society around main ideological and programming platforms, and an institutional confirmation of the legitimacy of political leadership. Currently, one can observe signs of shift in the direction of their impact towards articulation of individualized demands and values, and creation of leadership based on the legitimizing mechanism. As consumerism in contemporary economics has been to some extent replaced by pro-sumerism, so does democracy in the 20th century change the social (and to some extent the systemic) significance of the elections, at the same time affecting the functional redefinition of the role of the electorate. The modern voter has far more opportunities to influence the realm of politics than was possible before. Undoubtedly, the factors conducive to the current change were the phasing out of the proscenic nature of electoral process, combined with its new interactive and polisensory character. Nowadays, a voter does not have to be confined to the ballot only to influence (or at least have the impression of influencing) the political reality. The evolution of communication function of the election towards wide use of political marketing tools made some of the voters lose interest in trying to influence the sphere of politics. The tendency is strengthened by other interactive tools used by citizens in communication with the political sphere, especially in the context of the possibility of exerting permanent influence (as opposed to temporary, term-long impact of the election). The social distance between the electorate and its representatives was reduced, which in the public mind may result in reducing the public perception of importance of the election as the key institution of democratic regimes. Instead of casting a vote every few years, voters may want to more often and more effectively influence the political process, for example by means of social communication and the possibilities they bring (such as the Internet, the blogosphere, social networking sites, etc.).

Communication via the election does not guarantee a quick, direct and immediate impact on the political process - and the present times are characterized by taking action calculated to bring results in increasingly shorter lengths of time. Alvin Toffler writes about the replacement of traditional political movements by the ad hoc interest groups, the most important feature of which is the instability of the institutional entities. He calls this process a departure from a mass democracy towards „a mosaic democracy".[33] In the presented circumstances, the several hundred years old classical idea of elections in democratic regimes seems to lose at least some of its relevance in the 21st century. One of the dimensions it seems to be shedding is certainly the communication function, currently subject to profound evolution. However, despite the ongoing changes described in the present text, communicating through the elections seems also to be losing its systemic relevance, as evidenced by the multitude of new forms of political communication. The attractiveness of these new forms stems both from the speed of information transfer, as well as their interactive nature and the possibility of focusing on much smaller groups of recipients. The generality of the act of electoral communication used to be one of the key factors in creating perceived importance of elections in society - today it seems an indicator of the diminishing significance of the elections.

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33   TOFFLER A.: Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century (op. cit.), p. 346.

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