



CHALLENGES TO DEMOCRACY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

**POLITICAL COMMUNICATION IN
DIRECT DEMOCRATIC CAMPAIGNS**

ENLIGHTENING OR MANIPULATING?

EDITED BY HANSPETER KRIESI

Political Communication in Direct Democratic Campaigns

Enlightening or Manipulating?

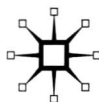
Edited by

Hanspeter Kriesi

*Chair in Comparative Politics, Department of Political Science,
University of Zurich, Switzerland*



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Preface and Acknowledgements

This book is the result of a joint project of three groups of researchers at the University of Zurich – two groups of communication scientists and a group of political scientists. The three cooperated together in the framework of the Swiss research program on the Challenges of Democracy in the 21st Century. As all those who have already tried it know, interdisciplinary research is not easy, even if the researchers involved come from neighbouring disciplines as did our three teams. Each discipline has its own concepts, approaches and disciplinary culture, which not only influence the way its practitioners prefer to work, but also affect such details as the way they present their results. Political communication is an area of research located at the crossroads of political science and communication science, and it is quite obvious that its study should give rise to the kind of cooperation as the one this book is based upon. However, more often than not, even in this particular field, studies remain confined by disciplinary boundaries. It was the Swiss research program on democracy – the National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) Democracy – which made this interdisciplinary effort possible. It provided the opportunity for us to develop an integrated approach to political communication – a common language and a common approach to its study, which we hope will be of some interest to the students of political communication from different disciplinary origins.

This book is a study of political communication in Swiss direct-democratic campaigns. It is predicated on the assumption that direct-democratic campaigns constitute an especially useful setting for studying political communication. Compared to electoral choices, direct-democratic choices have the considerable advantage that the object of the choice is closely circumscribed. It is an issue-specific choice, which is presented to the voters in a binary format; that is, the voters' attention is focused on a straightforward task. Given its binary format, a direct-democratic campaign usually pits two coalitions against each other. Moreover, such a campaign usually has a clear beginning, and typically ends with the vote, and it consists of a narrowly circumscribed time interval, which is characterized by an exceptional intensification of political communication. In other words, a direct-democratic campaign comes close to a natural experiment in a quasi-laboratory setting. Swiss direct democratic campaigns are of particular relevance because, apart from providing a quasi-experimental setting for the study of political communication, they have the additional advantage that the Swiss setting constitutes the paradigmatic case for direct democratic votes – the setting that is currently emulated by an ever-increasing number of countries.

In its 1996 Christmas issue, the *Economist* had this vision: 'The coming century could see, at last, the full flowering of the idea of democracy.' It suggested that the 'half-finished thing' of democracy in the twentieth century could grow to its full height; it could grow to include the people in the political decision-making process. We believe that, in many ways, such a development could benefit from the experience of the Swiss with direct-democratic procedures, and we think that it is of particular relevance to learn how political communication works in this paradigmatic case.

Our research and the preparation of this book have benefited from the support of many colleagues. In the framework of NCCR Democracy, we have been closely supervised by a group of experts who provided constructive criticism and support. In particular, we would like to thank Robert Entman and Adrienne Héritier for their helpful advice. At different occasions, we have presented our ideas and preliminary results to colleagues who provided us with their comments and critiques. Among them are the group of colleagues around Christopher Green-Pedersen at the University of Aarhus (Rune Slothus, Rune Stubager, and Peter Mortensen), James Druckman, Hans Mathias Kepplinger, Jan Kleinnijenhuis, and Paul Sniderman. We are also very grateful to all the politicians, campaign managers, public officials, journalists, and newspaper editors who were willing to give us some of their precious time to answer our questions. We would like to thank the Swiss Federal Chancellor, Oswald Sigg, for the support he lent to our study. We are equally grateful to the members of our three survey samples who have been willing to answer our detailed questions in up to three panel waves. The cooperation of all these people has allowed us to put together a truly exceptional data set, without which we would not have been able to implement our integrated approach. Last but certainly not least, we would like to thank the Swiss National Science Foundation and the University of Zurich, who jointly finance NCCR Democracy, of which this study is a part.

Contributors

Laurent Bernhard is a postdoctoral researcher at NCCR Democracy. He received his PhD in political science from the University of Zurich. His main research interests are direct democracy and comparative political economy. He is currently working in a research project on the debates about the issue of unemployment in six Western European countries.

Heinz Bonfadelli is a full professor at the Institute for Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich. His research interests are in the fields of media effects and knowledge gap research.

Urs Dahinden works as a full professor for Communication and Media Science at the University of Applied Sciences in Chur and as a senior lecturer at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His research interests are in the field of health communication, political communication, new information and communication technology and empirical research methods. Recent publications focus on the effectiveness of health campaigns in mass media and in online media.

Thomas N. Friemel is a senior teaching and research associate at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research at the University of Zurich. His research focuses on media use, media effects, interpersonal communication and the application of social network analysis in communication science.

Matthias A. Gerth is a PhD student at the University of Zurich, IPMZ-Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, and project assistant at NCCR Democracy. His recent work focuses on issues of media management, media marketing, local media markets and political news coverage.

Regula Hänggli is a senior research associate at NCCR Democracy and a head assistant in comparative politics at the University of Zurich. Her current research deals with framing, political communication and opinion formation, topics on which she has recently published in *Political Communication* and *European Political Science Review*.

Hanspeter Kriesi holds the Chair in Comparative Politics at the Department of Political Science of the University of Zurich. Previously he has taught at the universities of Amsterdam and Geneva. His wide-ranging research interests include the study of direct democracy, social movements, political parties and interest groups, public opinion, the public sphere and the media. He is the director of NCCR Democracy.

Rinaldo Kühne is a PhD student at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zürich. His research focuses on the process of public opinion formation, effects of emotions, media effects and empirical methods.

Jörg Matthes is Assistant Professor in Political Communication and Political Behaviour at NCCR Democracy and the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zurich. His research focuses on public opinion formation, political communication effects, media content, advertising research and empirical methods. He is section chair of the Methods division of the German Communication Association and associate editor of *Communication Methods and Measures*.

Patrick Rademacher is a research consultant in a strategy consulting firm specialized in the content industries. Earlier he was a post-doc and PhD student at the IPMZ-Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research of the University of Zurich, and project assistant at NCCR Democracy. His work focuses on issues of media management, online economics, media brands and political news coverage.

Christian Schemer is a post-doc at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zürich. His research focuses on the process of public opinion formation, effects of emotions, media effects and empirical methods.

Gabriele Siegart is Professor of Communication Science and Media Economics at the University of Zurich, Director of the IPMZ-Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research and Vice-Dean of the Faculty of Arts. Her research focuses on media economics, media management and advertising. Recent publications deal with the comparison of advertising markets, commercial audience research or media brands.

Werner Wirth is Professor of Communication and Empirical Media Research at the Institute of Mass Communication and Media Research, University of Zürich. His research focuses on media effects, entertainment, media and emotions, interactive media and empirical methods.

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