
Book Review

Eibl, Otto and Gregor, Miloš (eds.) (2019) *Thirty years of political campaigning in Central and Eastern Europe*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. 426 pages.

Modern political life cannot be understood without political marketing. While political campaigning in the western world has been widely studied and compared in political communication (Medvic, 2014; Thurber and Nelson, 2018; Potholm, 2003; Walter, 2013), this is not the case for countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). There have been multiple reasons for that. Analyzing the evolution of the political campaigning in the whole CEE, assuming that we can come to interesting conclusions about similarities (or a lack of them) between the countries and the regions inside this whole geographical area is a challenging task.

The characteristics of regions inside CEE are both similar and different. Besides having been part of the Communist bloc, on the one hand many regions of CEE share common features; some countries share the same languages or ethnic groups, others have the same allies or enemies or want to be part of the same international organizations. On the other hand, the countries show vast differences as well, in terms of the socio-political and economic development.

Thankfully, this Goliath was not too frightening for Otto Eibl and Miloš Gregor, who gave us a compelling and absorbing book on the evolution of political marketing in the last three decades in CEE, with the contribution of a team of well-known researchers. The book is part of the prestigious series on Political Campaigning and Communication, edited by Darren G. Lilleker. The result is a unique comparative analysis of the evolution of ex-communist countries' political campaigns and marketing techniques, which can help the reader understand the reasons behind the progress, regress, or the stagnation of these countries toward the path of building a consolidated democracy.

The book starts with a brief historical overview of political campaigning in modern democratic states, describing how it evolved during the twentieth century. Eibl and Gregor focus on the milestones which have shaped political campaigning and summarize some of the most well-known theories and concepts regarding this evolution. This chapter will be useful, especially for the upcoming chapters, where the reader can understand the direct influence of western democracies in shaping the way CEE countries understood political marketing.

The book is divided into five parts. The first four parts focus on four different regions in CEE grouped considering their mutual history: Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Central Europe (or Visegrad Group: Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia), Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, North Macedonia, Romania, Slovenia, Serbia); and Eastern Europe (Moldova, Ukraine, Russia). Each part comes with an introduction and a conclusion about the dedicated region. This structure facilitates the comparison between countries, and between regions of CEE.

Each chapter analyzes the evolution of political campaigning in each country throughout the general elections of the last three decades. Since most of the countries are parliamentary democracies, most of the data will come from parliamentary elections, but there are also cases (such as Lithuania, Poland etc.), where presidential elections are taken into consideration. In cases where there are presidential elections but are not considered relevant for political marketing, such as in the case of North Macedonia, the focus has remained solely on the parliamentary elections. Even if the reader does not know anything about a given country in CEE, the dedicated chapters are organized in a way to give them the most relevant information regarding its historical, political, and societal background of the last thirty years. Historical overview of campaigns, the legal framework related to the electoral and political campaigns, and the recent trends are presented with evidence in all of the cases.

The evolution of campaigning in each country is followed by sections that are easy to read and rich in data tables through which anybody can check the electoral system on each election, its essential campaign characteristics, the main campaign focus, campaign topics or information about the presence of external advisors (foreign and domestic). There are also tables where the reader can understand what type of communication is used, what type of campaign activities are in place, understand whether there is a use of polling and research techniques, what are the campaign spending limits, free airtime on public media, and whether there was a possibility to buy airtime for political purposes. Whenever relevant, there are simple notes that give further information in each table.

Another concept that is well-delivered throughout the book is the personalization of politics. A clear definition of the concept and a theoretical discussion about the phenomenon is presented at the beginning of the book. Each country has been analyzed regarding the presence or absence of the personalization of politics. The shift from parties and topics to people and politicians represents a crucial point in the evolution of political campaign, and it is worth paying attention whenever it is presented. Part V of the book, dedicated to the conclusions, is simply and well elaborated, and comes as a digression of all the conclusion summaries of the previous chapters.

In this part, we can see that the more countries are democratic or politically and economically stabilized the easiest is to talk about the evolution of political marketing and their willingness to mirror the Western way of doing political campaigning. Countries engaged in internal or external fights (especially concerning their ethnic groups) have demonstrated a more complicated picture regarding the professionalization of the campaigns due to the direct affiliation of the citizens to one particular party or group. The relationship between CEE countries and the EU, NATO, Russia, the United States or other key players in the region, has also played its part in the speed in which each country has adopted new political marketing techniques. The whole segment dedicated to the conclusions serves as a testament of what this book has achieved, which is a clear understanding of the path of CEE political parties toward electoral communication modernization.

One of the limitations of the book is the absence of the analysis of other types of elections besides parliamentary or presidential ones. There are many countries where municipal elections have also been hard-fought battles, which have had their relevance on the way political marketing has developed afterwards. Referendums or presidential elections in countries where the President's role is not an influential one have not been analyzed in many cases. However, they may represent a crucial moment in a particular country to understand the development of political marketing.

Permanent campaigning, a concept widely discussed in political communication, can also determine the evolution of campaigning. While the book gives space to the presence of permanent campaigning (especially in the Baltic states), we have not much information on the real impact of permanent campaigning and its role in the evolution of political marketing in the case studies of different countries. Eibl and Gregor are well aware of this limitation of the book, which they mention in their conclusions: 'We were not able to cover a fully detailed development in every single country. With our aim of covering eighteen countries, we were limited by the extent of one book' (p. vii). Nevertheless, the edited volume is a lightning guide on the way the political parties in CEE countries have changed drastically with the scope of creating winning campaigns, and through their metamorphosis, we can better understand the societal, cultural and media changes in each country.

Whilst the regional outlook of the book is welcome, readers might wonder about the justification for the country selection. It is surprising to see that some states are missing from the list, such as Belarus, Kosovo and Montenegro. The last two are mentioned at various moments, especially in the chapter dedicated to Serbia or in the summary of the characteristics of the Balkans, so the reader would have naturally presumed to find dedicated chapters for these countries as well, and of course, they would have helped make the Balkan part more compact. Eibl and Gregor explain this decision by stating that 'some former Yugoslavian successors from the Balkans are missing because of their formation and independence years after the first wave at the turn of the 1980s' (p. vii). Overall the book would of course have benefited if these countries would also have been taken into consideration despite the difficulties.

It would have also been valuable to see whether countries in the same region have influenced each other through the way they organized their political campaigns. There are many cases in different regions where countries share the same language or are influenced directly by the trends of other countries neighboring them. This relationship is somehow missing or not fully developed even in the cases where it is mentioned.

The impact of social media is well elaborated in each chapter, and the summary of the recent trends are quite helpful for an understanding of the current situation in political marketing in the CEE countries. The current strategies of political campaigning are also briefly described and could be used as a good starting point for new researches. While concepts such as populism, fake news, big data, are presented in many cases, other relevant issues like post-truth and algorithmization do not find their proper space in the volume. Particularly, the

assessment of the emotions in campaigning is painfully missing throughout the book. It would have made the book even more impressive if the affective dimensions of the campaign culture in politics had been registered and analyzed. It is a well-known phenomenon by the international literature on political marketing that the politicians attempt to build an emotive relationship with voters on the ‘accumulation of memories, emotions, personal narratives, and expectations’ (Banet-Weiser, 2012: 8; Serazio, 2017). If we would agree with researchers such as Weber, that ‘emotions are a vital characteristic to consider when describing the consequences of political campaigns’ (Weber, 2012: 414), then we need further reflections on their role in the political marketing evolution of the selected countries.

Overall the book can be considered a thorough coverage of the subject of political campaigning in Central and Eastern Europe. Besides its limitations, it fulfils its promise to give a clear understanding of the most significant developments in political marketing in the area. The book will be of great benefit to researchers and professionals in political campaigning in all the 18 countries taken into consideration, but also to researchers and professionals from outside this area, to better understand how the different political and the historical context of countries influences the outcome in political marketing.

The book would be of great help also to future studies which will want to draw a comparison between Western and Eastern Europe in political campaigning, or even between CEE and other regions of the world. Finally, the book can be helpful also to journalists, media analysts, and students of political science, media studies, political communication and similar disciplines.

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