

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

In the course of an electoral campaign, political parties compete for votes by means of referring to various arguments. They present their standpoints with regard to selected themes as well as make promises of particular changes to be introduced. They also try to convince voters that it is only their party and its representatives that are marked by positive traits, such as honesty, competence, constituting a united political force, or their leaders being charismatic. A lot of attention is also devoted to criticising political opponents, who should go down as incompetent, disorganised, and dishonest. In light of these facts, the aim of this project is to find out what the shape of electoral campaigns in European countries at the beginning of the twenty-first century depends on when it comes to references to non-programmatic traits of competing subjects, i.e. which candidates, when, and why speak more of their programme, and in what circumstances they focus on traits that are non-programmatic.

I have assumed that the arsenal of the means that are used in a campaign can depend on a variety of factors: the direction of a message, the traits of the party that runs the campaign, the characteristics of the electorate that the party addresses, as well as the social and economic contexts in which the electoral campaign is conducted. Past research connected with this subject area either had a rather limited geographical scope or referred only to factors influencing the occurrence of a negative campaign.

In the course of this project, hypotheses will be verified with regard to, among others, the impact of the fact of any previous participation in governments, the age of a party, the political forming of the electorate, the types of linkages between the electorate and political parties, as well as the legacy of the non-democratic past of a given country in the context of the style of running an electoral campaign. The analyses will be carried out with quantitative methods and will concern material comprising information on the behaviour of political parties during an electoral campaign, coded on the basis of press articles, as well as data on the content of the parties' pre-electoral manifestoes.

Engaging in a research subject outlined this way results from the need of studying electoral campaigns as the period that has an enormous influence on decisions made by the citizens at ballot boxes on the day of the election. These decisions are of central importance for the organisation of the state and the quality of our life. If a lot of attention during a campaign is devoted to image concerns, praising one's own personal traits and criticising that of the opponents, little space is left for debating the programme and comparing promises that individual groupings make. On the other hand, the selection of politicians that are marked by competence or honesty is a necessary condition for the state affairs to take the right direction. This is why determining whether the significance of non-programmatic characteristics of political parties and candidates in an electoral campaign depends on the traits of the party and its successes, or whether it is an attempt at taking advantage of the electorate's cognitive weakness, or whether, perhaps, it results from the legacy of the past, is an important task for a researcher of political phenomena.