

Not even Colin Firth's dashing good looks would have turned a stuttering King George VI into a leader. Yet, with Logue's help the King managed to make a moving radio address to the country after Britain declared war on Germany in 1939. Like a true leader. In his *History of Germany since 1789* Golo Mann writes about Bismark's *false* voice. A high-pitched, delicate, almost feminine voice, quite out of character with his 'bulky body'. With such a shrill, squeaky voice would the great diplomat have played the same crucial role in the geopolitical organisation of Europe had he been called to do so today?

Donatella Campus, Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna, interviewed in this Primo Piano Scala c issue, believes that although images are indeed important in our democratic society, a person's body, voice and manner of dress are not enough to make him or her a leader. Her research focuses on trying to find answers

to several key questions: in media-based democracies how important is leaders' style, the way they make and communicate decisions? To what extent does leaders' personality, motivation and ideological convictions affect their relationship with their supporters, the media and fellow citizens? What role does the institutional context play?

Are its constraints so strong that leaders have to learn to adapt or are heads of government able to impress their own personal style on the exercise of power? For both male and female politicians it's difficult to maintain a narrative *fil rouge* allowing them to make coherent decisions. A problematic dialogue with the country may have a disastrous impact on their popularity. In fact, it defines the leader's physiognomy in an age when events come thick and fast and there's no time to reflect. Being crushed or overwhelmed is a risk lurking around every corner.

At the same time, this rapid momentum makes memory transient, almost non-existent. So much so that with a few histrionic skills it's possible to reverse positions, ideas and statements that not so long ago were written in stone and rock-solid. Let's take back time; let's take back the possibility to vote based on our own independent, pondered judgement. In short, let's go back to being voters and not groupies! Let's wait with trepidation to see who will win, in the 2017 French political confrontation, between the *second couteau* Hollande and the *beau* Macron, the banker who wanted to be king.

Mariella Palazzolo  @Telosaes

Telos is a member of the [FIPRA](#) network

CAMPUS

VOTER OR GROUPIE?

“If these supporters are to become active citizens who will continue to participate regularly then other factors such as a political project and a value system have to enter the equation.”

Telos: Politics follows market logic: a candidate is created (and sold) as a product and citizens are treated like consumers of any other commercial commodity. How true is this statement?

Donatella Campus: Obviously politics is more than this, but it's true that we've imported certain commercial marketing techniques and now use the term political marketing. The idea is that a successful electoral campaign is based on identifying potential voters and their priorities. Increasingly professional resources are used to do this: polling experts, consultants, etc. As a result candidates' image is carefully crafted: efforts are made to highlight their good points and play down their weaknesses. That said, the image must always reflect the candidates' personality, otherwise they risk appearing fake, and that's extremely counterproductive. I'd add that this doesn't apply only to candidates, but also to governments. We live in an era of permanent campaigns. Even during their mandate, leaders must pay great attention to their image, exploit their political decisions to the full, and maintain consensus. In the past investing in communications appeared restricted primarily to electoral campaigns; now it's non stop.

Leaders and citizens' participation in politics. Is leaders' charisma the spark that wakes voters from their slumber and prompts them into active participation or is it something that consigns leaders to history?

Don't forget that the era of mass political parties is over and we are living in what the French political scientist Bernard Manin calls audience democracy. When political parties and ideologies have less grip over the electorate, the candidates that succeed in emerging thanks to their own personal charisma can certainly spark enthusiasm and trigger participation. During an election campaign this can really change the course of events. Perhaps the most astonishing example was in 2008 when Barack Obama succeeded in involving so many young people, youngsters who became his most convinced supporters. Bernie Sanders did the same thing this year and although he didn't beat Hillary Clinton in the race for the nomination, he did give her a run for her money. The right candidate can revive participation, especially during a favourable political context. For example, during primaries, outsiders who galvanise the electorate and take centre stage will emerge more easily. Nevertheless, other factors such as a political project and a value system



Donatella Campus is an Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Bologna where she teaches Political Communication and Political Science. She graduated at the Bocconi University and then received her Ph.D in Political and Social Sciences from the European Institute University. She has written several books including *Women Political Leaders and the Media* (Palgrave-MacMillan, 2013), *Comunicazione Politica: Le nuove frontiere* (Laterza 2008), *L'antipolitica al governo* (Il Mulino 2006, translated in 2010 by Hampton Press as *Antipolitics in Power*); *L'elettore pigro* (Il Mulino 2000). She has edited *L'immagine della donna leader* (Bononia University Press, 2010), *Masters of Political Science* (ECPR Press 2009) with G. Pasquino, and *Maestri of Political Science* (vol. II) (ECPR Press 2011) with M. Bull and G. Pasquino. Her publications appear in major international journals in the field of political communication such as *Political Communication*, *International Journal of Press and Politics*, *European Journal of Communication*. Other articles have been published in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies*, *European Journal of Women's Studies* and *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*. Her most recent work is *Lo Stile del Leader. Decidere e comunicare nelle democrazie contemporanee* (Il Mulino, 2016). Specialised in the field of political communication, she became interested in leadership because this topic requires an interdisciplinary approach allowing her to focus on psychological aspects, one of her favourite subjects. Of all the topics she has studied, female political leadership is the closest to her heart because she is convinced that an increasing number of women in power could bring about important changes in politics. Her Twitter account is @dcampus.

have to enter the equation if these supporters are to become active citizens who will then participate regularly. Not surprisingly, the most difficult task faced today by any leader is to maintain long term consensus. This is the real snag behind over-personalised politics. In fact, sometimes the so-called *honeymoon period*, in other words the period just after a leader has won an election by raising hopes and triggering expectations, can end all too soon, sometimes after a couple of months.

Leaders and the image cult. A topic that seems to propel us back to when a bare-chested Mussolini was portrayed harvesting crops. And yet, the young progressive Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Trudeau, lets himself be photographed in the *mayurasana* position, showing off his muscles, agility and the pacifism of yoga. Have politicians with a receding hairline, glasses and a paunch gone the way of the dodo?

This reference to Mussolini suggests that physicalness, the body of the boss has always been present in political propaganda. However I think that in today's world the attention awarded to leaders image, what they look like or how they dress, has more to do with so-called celebrity politics, in other words to the fact that politicians have become the protagonists of a sort of star system. Not surprisingly we often see them in the popular press, sometimes even in gossip magazines. Prime Minister Trudeau doing yoga, or any other image of a politician involved in a non-political activity – for example while they are on holiday or playing sports – becomes newsworthy for the popular press and other media. In fact, photographs of this kind are often printed in major national newspapers. If on the one hand politicians and what they do in their private lives tickles people's fancy and interests the press, on the other hand it doesn't mean that politicians won't use it to pass a political message. For example, dressing more informally is in line with the push to popularise politics. More and more often politicians want to tell us they are *like* us and the way they dress on many occasions backs up this message. To answer your last question, I think that although dressing well is a good calling card, I wouldn't go so far as to say that we've reached the stage when politicians have to necessarily be attractive. So the problem isn't balding heads and paunches. Instead we should emphasise that a really decisive, key quality is the ability to become an interesting person and, given the importance of television and the audiovisual dimension, to have a good *screen presence*. This non-verbal body language is extremely important: what you say is crucial, but how you say it is far more important.

The strategy of fear and Brexit. Did it fail this time?

If you're referring to the strategy of the leaders involved, then I think what didn't work was the ability of the Remain supporters to influence large parts of the electorate. The leaders of the two main parties, David Cameron and Jeremy Corbyn, appeared to be disconnected from their compatriots' mood. The day after the vote Prime Minister Cameron had to resign and Corbyn was harshly criticised by his own party. Then, even more unexpectedly and although the Leave faction had won, their victory didn't launch or relaunch the leadership of those who had been in the front lines. Boris Johnson declined to enter the race to replace Cameron and even more surprisingly Nigel Farage resigned as leader of UKIP. In this uncertain, confused state of affairs Theresa May's leadership emerged very quickly and she is now the new Prime Minister. The fact women take the helm during a crisis is not a new phenomenon. Just think of Margaret Thatcher and Angela Merkel, women who succeeded in consolidating their position and emerge as two of the most influential Prime Ministers in contemporary history. Let's see if Theresa May follows in their footsteps.