

Elections in the Public Sphere: the Analysis of Lithuanian TV Debates “Lyderių forumas”

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Abstract. *The article analyses the information that spreads in the media during the election campaign. It looks at the aspect of promises made by politicians through an academic lens. The definition of a political promise is explained; some insights are devoted to an analysis of the reasons why some promises are more commonly fulfilled. The paper mostly concentrates on the role of the media, combining ideas of media theorists with the investigation of pre-election TV debates “Lyderių forumas”.*

Keywords: *campaign, objectivity, parliamentary elections, political communication, professionalism, promise, tv debates.*

Introduction

The article analyses the definition of political promise and ways these ideas are disseminated. This paper can be used to better understand the Lithuanian politics and its main figures, which is important for a non-Lithuanian reader. It is essential to understand what a promise itself is. The article also expands on the idea of how important the media is during the elections. German sociologist Jurgen Habermas defined the public sphere in 1962, stating that it is

“the debate of public issues, debate in which the players have to use valid arguments. (...) Habermas refers to it as a zone between the political sphere of the state’s institutions and the private sphere of the individual“ (Tarta, 2011). The third player that links the political and private spheres is the media.

The media needs politicians for information and politicians are willing to give what the media wants in order to get the attention of the audience. The link between the media and the government is obvious; however, it is complex and requires a lot of analysis to be understood. Political scientist Gadi Wolfdfeld from Hebrew University describes it as “a competitive symbiosis” and “[t]he reason the relationship is also competitive is that each wants to get the most from the other while “paying” as little as possible” (Wolfdfeld, 2011: 10). Even if they use each other for selfish reasons, the media and politics are also dependent on each other.

The media’s link to the audience is also mutual: the media needs the audience to survive and, as American scholars Charles E. Lindblom and Edward J. Woodhouse (1999: 16) believe, people do not have enough brainpower to understand the complexity of public politics on their own and “while some issues – particularly the economy – are quite important, voters remain confused and relatively uninfluenced by more complex and subtle issues” (Carmines, Stimson, 1980; cited from Oates, 2008: 92).

Lithuanian scholars agree with the aforementioned statement, when analyzing specific processes in Lithuanian public sphere. Political scientist Lauras Bielinis analyses the link between the media, government and the society. In his opinion, the media can make a difference in how the society sees the politics. “As the media, especially television, are becoming the main intermediate and instrument for communication between the government and the society, it becomes the real place for political actions” (Bielinis, 2005: 92). In further publication Bielinis (2010) states that the media becomes the main place where various political discussions and decisions can be protected

as „the further the more the politics cannot be imagined without the media“. Scholar Tomas Viluckas sees the media and the government as two powers that are confronting, but have strong links. He states: „Media is showing itself as it was being harm and had a vestal virgin aura, while the government demonstrate the line for the media not to cross, which makes them inevitable opposites. However, the restrictions are not the ones that threaten free word, it’s the conflict itself that masks much bigger problems“ (Viluckas, 2009). Vladimiras Laucius sees one more power that has an important influence on the others – the business. In his opinion, „the giant businesses is able to dictate the trends for politics and for the media, when it needs to“ (Laucius, 2005).

The definition of the public sphere by Habermas has not lost its actuality nowadays. However, it could be said that the borders of the public sphere are more difficult to define as with an introduction to the new media channels, the private sphere is becoming more and more available to the public. Thus, the amount and speed of news is increasing, which decreases the quality.

The elections are the time when the media (and the public) get the most political information. At the same time, it is the most difficult to stay objective when reporting. Wolfsfeld believes that the media is definitely biased when reporting on political questions; the only thing that varies is the extent of the bias (Wolfsfeld, 2011: 47).

The bias of the media is reasoned by a few aspects. One of them is the look at the news as a commodity: “Political media have become more audience-led they have been subject to processes of *marketisation, commercialization and commodification*” (McNair, 2000: 7). Also, besides the faster speed of news, instead of only reporting the facts, journalists tend to include their comments (McNair, 2000: 4). Thus, the bias is becoming more and more visible.

The aim of this paper is to analyse the objectivity of the pre-election TV debates “Lyderių forumas” (“The Forum of the Leaders”) that were aired during the campaign of the parliamentary elections in

Lithuania in autumn 2012. These TV debates were chosen because of the active participation of the 5 (later – 6) leaders of the main parties and its structured format, which makes the analysis more objective.

Content analysis will be used to evaluate the objectivity of the debates. The analysis will be conducted using these criteria:

1. *the topics*. The analysis will determine whether there was a variety of areas being discussed during the debates. This can help to understand which areas were the most important, as well as, if all the problems were covered..
2. *the questions*. The formulation and types of questions asked by the host will be analysed. Whether the host prefers open or closed questions can reveal what kind of information he intended to obtain from the politicians. Also, it will be examined if a journalist follows-up the answer that is not complete or insufficient.
3. *the host*. The analysis will determine whether the host shared his personal views, whether he was biased or objective and it will also look into his ability to get the answers from the participants.
4. *the participants*. This criterion adds to the understanding if the politicians manage to use the given time. The analysis will include the background of the politicians, who attended the debates, their behaviour during the shows and the host's evaluation of the debates. It will also include an analysis of ideas expressed during the debates, and whether all the politicians had enough time to explain their goals. The general review will show the variety of opinions that appeared in the public sphere.

Actuality of the topic: as stated before, the bias is difficult to avoid when reporting on the media, however, the analysis can show how much of the bias occurs in the media. Although the paper analyses Lithuanian TV debates, the conclusions can be generalized to other democratic countries.

First of all, the literature about the elections and media reporting on it will be reviewed. Then the brief background of the main actors

in the parliamentary elections in Lithuania will be introduced in line with the political and economic situation in the country. It will be followed by the analysis of the TV debates and concluded with the results of the analysis.

Politics and the Media during Elections

Politics and its actors are always covered by the media, but they get special attention during the elections. It is the time “to judge future politics, and in the second to evaluate politicians’ past performance” (Naurin, 2011: 13–14). Party programmes are usually written for the formal reasons and for the academics to analyse, but the raw material of what the party will be trying to achieve is not the source for the citizens.

„Citizens in a democratic society have two main ways to get information about a party’s policy wishes: direct communications (such as reading what the party writes) and indirect communication” (Naurin, 2011: 16). Therefore, although there is a possibility of direct communication, people usually rely on what the media is reporting on the election matters.

British scientist Sara Oates provides a list of reasons why the role of the media during the elections is important: “The media matter because (i) they provide information to allow voters to match their preferences with particular candidates or parties; (ii) they give long-term political information that helps to socialize voters into particular party preferences; and (iii) in close elections or on critical issues when voters are confused or even angry, media coverage can sway an election” (Oates, 2008: 92). Thus, the coverage in the media has the power to influence the outcome of the elections by convincing their audience to vote for the party it favours. Not surprisingly, the audiences’ favour to a political party is resolved by the election pledges they make. Even though, according to the scholars, who have analysed the perceptions of voters, citizens do not believe that parties will manage to keep their

pre-election promises, people „are assumed to be motivated by government policies in line with their policy preferences. As a result of these motivations, parties formulate policy positions with a view to winning votes“ (Mansergh, Thomson, 2007: 311). Naturally, the media publishes the position of the party framed in the pledges for the audience. During the campaign election promises get extra attention in the media because they define the probable political direction for the future of the country.

Election Promises: What Are They?

First of all, the concept of an election pledge should be defined. The most commonly used one is by the American scholar Terry J. Royed and the scholars who follow her. An election promise here is “a commitment to carry out some action or produce some outcome, where an objective estimation can be made as to whether or not the action was indeed taken or the outcome produced” (Royed, 1996: 79; Royed, Borrelli, 1999:1 25, cited from Naurin, 2011: 53). Politics and Public Policy Researchers from Scotland Lucy Mansergh and Robert Thomson (2007) prove the importance of pledges during the elections by separating possible ways of promises’ assessments: „the number of pledges made, the substance of the pledges, their distribution across policy areas and themes, and the relationships among pledges made by different parties“ (Mansergh, Thomson, 2007: 313). When different parties have the same future goals, it is more believable that the promise is achievable, but more often the parties try to make their pledges look better compared to others.

It is easier to evaluate the pledges after the elections, when it is possible to see if politicians did what was promised. Naurin divides all pledges in three categories: fully fulfilled, partially fulfilled and broken (Naurin, 2011: 57). The scholar explains that a fulfilled promise is defined by whether action was taken. Sometimes it is not possible to achieve the intended goals because of the practice of

politics. Therefore, the pledge becomes partially fulfilled. Finally, “if no significant action is found, the promise is always considered broken. The notion of ‘significant action’ is here used to illustrate that symbolic or minor action is not considered enough for fulfilment” (Naurin, 2011: 60). Although the polls show that people do not believe in politicians keeping the pledges, the statistics analysed by Naurin (2011) show, that more politicians in various countries are more likely to carry on with the promised policy. Naurin (2011: 46) has also established when it can be predicted if politicians would fulfill the pledges they made. First in line to keep the promises are the parties that get the right to govern. The ability to keep the promise also depends on “[t]he societal context in which the party operates: in good economic times rather than in bad economic times” and, finally, the promise itself. If the pledges are commonly agreed upon and actions are promised, it is more likely that the politicians will do that.

Robert Thomson includes another factor that leads back to the media – it is how well the citizens are informed about the promises. The amount of information might not influence its fulfilment, but they have an effect on the point of view of the citizens. “Several studies have shown that the opinions and voting behaviour of well-informed citizens differ from those of poorly informed citizens. Larry M. Bartel’s (1996) study of voting behaviour in U.S. presidential elections found significant effects of information in three of the six elections examined” (Thomson, 2010: 190). Thus, people who have more information are more competent when evaluating the pledges.

Again, the most difficult job for the media is to avoid bias as much as possible by differentiating between populism and news, in order to keep the public well informed. American media scholar Brian McNair also writes about this issue: „The accounts of political reality provided by the media are complex constructions embodying the communicative work of both groups, which ideally should, but need not always meet the standards of information accuracy and objectivity expected of political communication in a liberal democracy“ (McNair,

2010: 1). Consequently, we will be looking whether the TV debates „Lyderių forumas“ manage to keep their audience objectively informed, question the promises made by politicians and if the participants use the opportunity to state their pledges.

The Analysis of TV Debates “Lyderių forumas”

There were eight shows of live TV political debates “Lyderių forumas,” aired on the channel “Lietuvos rytas television” from August 26th to October 12th (once every week). At the beginning of the first show the host states the goal – to answer the questions that arise from the citizens.

Every show of the debates had a specific topic and 5–6 questions. All the questions were made-up by the journalists from the teams of “Lietuvos rytas television” and “Baltic news service.” The audience also had a chance to send their questions. Prior to the show only the host of the debates knew the exact formulation of the questions.

At the beginning of each show, the leaders had to draw a number, whichever question he/ she would have to answer. He/ she had 90 seconds to deliver an answer and was then able to choose an expert who would have 60 seconds to complement it. After that, other leaders can join the debate. The attendance is asked to be still and not clap during the debate. After the show, the politicians and experts in economics were asked to evaluate the performance of the leaders and the reviews were published.

The Participants

The participants of the debates were the leaders of the most popular parties in the country. In the first five shows there were five participants, in the last three the number was increased to six, as the polls showed that the popularity of one more party has reached the fifthth place. Two of the leaders were in the government at the time of the debates, three parties were in opposition and one was a newcomer to politics.

The Role of the Host

The host of the show, Edmundas Jakilaitis, also was the director of the “Lietuvos rytas television” at that time. He followed the rules of the debates as he stated at the beginning of each show. Jakilaitis did not interrupt the answers, but if they were not clear, he would ask the leader to answer more directly. For example, the leader of the Labour party, Viktoras Uspaskich, answered the question of how to decrease the unemployment by saying that the volume of production has to be increased. When asked how the Labour party aims to achieve this, Uspaskich answered “we will decrease the taxes.” The host thought the answer was too imprecise, he followed-up one more time asking which taxes exactly.

Moreover, Jakilaitis was ready to state the facts and data on all the questions he asked. He also corrected the participants when they stated incorrect facts in the process of answering the questions. However, there were times when Jakilaitis clearly showed his attitude towards some answers. When all the politicians started saying that they have never heard any references to bribes (the 5th show), although the statistics show the opposite, the host wondered if it is at all possible: “you are 50 years old and while all the polls indicate that the overall majority have bribed someone or have been bribed themselves, you managed to avoid this?” In addition, the host has asked the audience to be quite and not to clap for any leader (“It is not a circus or theater” – he said in the 6th show). He counted the time responsibly and if he needed to make a comment at an expense of a politician’s time, Jakilaitis expanded the time for the leader’s answer. Therefore, it could be said, that the host managed to stick to the format of the debates and tried to get as many direct answers as he could.

Representative of Conservative Party

Leader of the Conservative party Andrius Kubilius was the Prime Minister at the time. As the experts evaluated, “it was easier for him

because he was the Prime Minister and knew the facts the best” (BNS, 2012). The majority of his answers were backed up with facts; however, sometimes these facts were too difficult for the audience to understand. The editor of the news portal DELFI, Monika Garbačiauskaitė, thinks that Kubilius is unable to attract the electors; he was trying to reply to populism with facts, which does not appeal to most people (BNS, 2012). For example, when answering the question of how much the price of gas and electricity has increased and how the party is going to change the situation, he spilled all the numbers and concluded that it is difficult to decrease the price.

Politics analyst Kasparavičius believes that “in some cases the Prime Minister acted like a student who did not do his homework. He was apologizing for the things he did not do and promised to do them in the next term” (BNS, 2012). Therefore, even though people could hear a clear position of the party and statements backed up with numbers and data, there were little suggestions for solving the problems.

Representative of Liberals Party

The leader of the Liberals Eligijus Masiulis was the minister of Transport and Communications. Throughout the shows, the experts described the politician as being the most consistent and following liberal ideology (BNS, 2012). He, as well as Kubilius, was not afraid to tell the audience that a lot of opposition promises are unachievable at this economic situation.

Lithuanian economist Aušra Maldeikienė believes the Liberals have their electorate, however, when they talk, they fail to identify that their goals are oriented towards younger and wealthier people (BNS, Lrytas.lt, 2012). Although his rhetoric is quite solid, he is unable to avoid populism: “On some questions he could compete with Uspaskichas. (...) However, he kept the solidness at the end of the show,” said Algimantas Kasparavičius (BNS, 2012).

It is important to mention that Eligijus Masiulis was the only leader to acknowledge the fact that there were attempts to bribe

a politician. The experts were surprised that only one party was honest (*BNS, Lrytas.lt*, 2012). It was also easier for him as he was part of the government and his opinion in the debates was mostly supported by Andrius Kubilius.

Thus, Masiulis knew who he was talking to and although the statements he made were as unpopular as the ones from Kubilius, he included more suggestions and directed them to the people that he knows are possible electors of Liberals.

Representative of Social Democrats

Social democrats, led by Algirdas Butkevičius, opposed the main party. According to Kasparavičius, it was obvious the party felt ready to come back to the government. Furthermore, he thinks that they “looked like an energetic, professional and accurate team,” which not only pointed out the problems, but also suggested the solutions (*BNS*, 2012). However, other experts disagree by saying that the party was not concrete enough. Butkevičius made his mistakes in the 2nd show when he misinterpreted economic data and was corrected by Kubilius. “It is difficult to guess if factual mistakes about the economy appeared due to lack of competence or intentionally, trying to make the government look worse, but wrong facts and arguments do not look well,” said Nerijus Mačiulis (*BNS*, 2012).

In other shows Butkevičius was well prepared, knew the statistics, but his answers were direct and stated the pledge as well as criticised the actions of the government for the last 4 years (To the question ‘what threats does Russia pose to Lithuania’, he answered: “I do not see any, but I do not remember the last time the government had a discussion with Russian politicians”). Monika Garbačiauskaitė thinks that the intention to disagree with all the arguments of the government was illogical (*BNS*, 2012).

Butkevičius, Kubilius, Masiulis were the three politicians who were not asked to specify their answers throughout all the debates.

Representatives of “Order and Justice”

The leader of the “Order and Justice” party Rolandas Paksas was the president of Lithuania from 2003–2004. He was removed from the position after suspicions of his links to the criminals. From 2009 he was a member of the European Parliament. As later there were discussions if the electoral committee can let him be the candidate, from the 4th show he was replaced by the “Order and Justice” leader in the Parliament, Valentinas Mazuronis.

The first thing the leader of “Order and Justice” Paksas said in the debates was “if you squeeze out the toothpaste, it is difficult to put it back in the package, but everything is possible.” He used various slogans, for example, his 3 step plan to improve the economy was “control, control, control, as Lithuania without control is Lithuania without the future.” Performances of the “Order and Justice” party were criticised by all the experts, saying that their leader was too abstract when answering the questions (BNS, 2012). According to Ramūnas Vilpišauskas, Paksas can be distinguished for the talks about emigration, dignity, justice and this is his way of appealing to the voters who do not analyse the link between the reasons and outcomes (BNS, 2012). Also, he was called a populist by other leaders in the 2nd show, which did not make him look better.

From the 3rd show, the leader of the party was replaced by Mazuronis, who reacted to the questions more actively than Paksas. However, Kasparavičius believes that he lacked charisma, besides, he is lesser known than Paksas, therefore, “Order and Justice” suffered from this change. Although the tone of the party became more constructive after the change of the participant and more closed questions were answered directly (yes or no, following with explanation), the party did not use their time to state their pledges. The most commonly repeated phrase was that “life should become easier for the people.” When the host asked if the party was going to increase the financing for defense (3rd show), their answer was too blank and the host asked to revise it.

Representatives of Labour Party

Leader of the Labour party Viktoras Uspaskich started his political career in 2000 as the member of the Parliament, later as a Minister of Economic Affairs. In 2006 he was suspected of income violations and tried the consequences by using the juridical immunity as the member of European Parliament. Therefore, because of the ongoing processes of eliminating the juridical immunity, his party members Vytautas Gapys and Artūras Paulauskas took his place in the 5th show.

The leader of the Labour party Uspaskich can be distinguished from others by his rhetoric. Vilpišauskas said that Uspaskich was trying to “appeal to electorate’s emotions, to those who earn less and probably do not analyse economy” (BNS, 2012). For example, in the first show he said that because he has a traditional family, rights of homosexuals are not his area, besides, nobody should doubt his religiousness, because he built two churches.

Uspaskich promised the most, however, some pledges were not logical. For example, he said that his party would be able to completely get rid of the unemployment. Economist Mačiulis later commented: “There is no country in history that managed to decrease unemployment to 0 per cent. (...) It is populism, trying to convince uneducated electors (BNS, 2012). Other expert Kasparavičius compared the politician to “Santa Claus who easily gives various recipes and promises. I think he talked more like a businessman than a politician” (BNS, 2012).

On the 5th show a party colleague Vytautas Gapys debated instead of Uspaskich. Even though the experts believe that the new participant managed to show clear and determined position (BNS, 2012), Gapys is not the face of the party, therefore, it is more difficult for the audience to associate him with Uspaskich. Thus, although the Labour party used every possibility to declare their pledges, they did not manage to be convincing.

Representative of “The Way of Bravery”

Neringa Venckienė, who joined the debates from the 6th show, created a party “The Way of Bravery” after the pedophilia scandal where her niece was considered a victim. She was a judge in a regional court before going into politics.

All the experts agreed that the clear losers of the debates were the newcomers to politics “The Way of the Bravery.” She was constantly pointing out the mistakes of other politicians and emphasizing that her party is a new force ready to make changes. However, future plans of the party were not mentioned in the debates. Venckienė avoided answering questions directly. For example, when asked if it was a right decision to nationalize one of the Lithuania’s banks, she answered: “we are forgetting that the government of Kubilius has taken billions of loans (...) However, there is too little information about the bank to comment.” And after the host explained the known facts, Venckienė was still unable to answer the question. Furthermore, when asked about the future plans to introduce a particular percent for progressive tax, which was one of the opportunities to state a pledge, the former judge stated that she does not have any specific number in mind.

Even though, as Maldeikienė said, “it would not be correct to compare her to the prime minister” (BNS, 2012), Venckienė did not give the audience any solutions to the problems her party mentioned in the debates.

The Topics and Questions of the Debates

All eight shows of “Lyderių forumas” included different topics and each had five or six questions about the main topic. The analysis will determine if the chosen topics cover the main areas of the country. We will also look into the questions raised during the show, their formulation and conformity to the main topic.

The first show focused on societal problems. Leaders were asked about the retirement money (two questions), parenthood benefits,

accumulative fund and one about homosexuals' rights. Even though the lack of tolerance towards homosexuals is a relevant question, it stands out from the other four. Therefore, it can be doubted if this question belongs in the show. The formulation of the first question, which asked if it is possible to decrease social security payments and at the same time increase retirement benefits, is faulty. First of all, as it is a closed question, the direct answer can only be "yes" or "no", but a blunt answer would be economically incorrect, because it is necessary to consider more factors that influence social security payments. However, this question is followed by another one about the retirement ("Do people retire too early and what retirement age would you set?"). Thus, the leaders had a chance to explain their attitude in more depth. The last question on the first show was about saving for the future ("What is the future of accumulative funds? What payment proportion would you set?"). The formulation is objective.

Third question turned the discussion to a completely different direction. It was asked if homosexuals are being discriminated and whether politicians are going to legalize homosexual partnership or marriage. This question is objective as it requires leaders to express their straightforward opinion on one of the most discussed and controversial subjects in the country.

After exploring the non-traditional relationships, the discussion went back to social problems: "are parenthood benefits too high or holidays too long? What are you planning to change?" First part of this question prompts the answer: the leader has to choose which benefit to decrease, as there is no third option asking if benefits have to be changed at all. Although "why?" and "how?" questions are not included in the questions, it is indented that the leaders explain their attitude towards the matter in more detail.

The topic of the second "Lyderių forumas" show was economy and the creation of new job. All the questions matched the topic: they were about the ways to stimulate the economy, unemployment and responsibility of the government. At first, everyone had to suggest

three ways to stimulate the economy, which seems like a legitimate question, requiring a straightforward answer. The first part of the second question (“Do you agree that every third litas comes from the grey economy? How are you going to change this?”) sounds like a statement and the second part only proves that it is a fact. The next three questions are stated as follows: “Unemployment is 12-13%. How are you going to decrease it?”; “Does the government have to regulate the prices? Which and why?”; “Does the government have too much responsibility? What else needs to be privatized?” They are formulated correctly and ask for the opinion of the leaders, therefore, can be considered objective. Moreover, they all flow well one after the other.

The topic about the foreign policy and national minorities was discussed in the third week of the debates. The questions included relationships with neighboring countries: Belarus (1st question), Poland (3rd) and Russia (5th) and were parted by more general matters about finances and the division of the power. The first question requires choosing the more important option from the two (democracy in Belarus or Belarusian cargos to Lithuanian port), although there might be more than two answers to the Lithuania’s relationship with Belarus. The last question of the debate (“What threats does Russia pose to Lithuania? Specify the prospective relationship”) implied that Russia is a threat to the country and answering the second part of the question, leaders had to give their suggestions on how to reduce these threats. The most specific question about relationships was about Poland – how to improve the relationship with the country in three steps? The other questions asked about the politicians’ future plans: if they are going to increase the financing of defence next year and if they approve of giving more power to the EU. Therefore, it could be said that the set of questions was balanced as it tried to find out both – the plans and the attitude of the leaders.

The forth topic of the debates – energy – did not ask for the opinion, but required a lot of knowledge from the politicians. First of all, they

had to tell what the increase in price for gas and electricity was and suggest how to change the situation. After that, the leaders were asked to express their opinion towards building a new nuclear plant. Also, they had to propose a method how to lower the heating price, as well as decide what tax concession should be applied to heating. Lastly, suggestions were put forward for a building renovation model. This could show the audience if politicians know enough to solve the energy problems.

The fifth topic of “Lyderių forumas” was justice and corruption and pointed to the personal matters “who did you give a bribe to? Did you receive a suggestion yourself?” The first part of this question sets a biased position that the leader took a bribe at some point. However, the situation becomes more balanced after the second question that is a follow-up: “how are you going to decrease the corruption of politicians?” After the straightforward questions if juridical immunity is a necessity for parliament members and if disobedience of court decisions can be excused in some cases, the subject of bribery is brought back again. Thus, although the questions matched the topic, there is a lack of continuity.

The topic of the sixth show referred to finances and taxes, but the questions were comparable to those raised in the fourth show (about energy). All the questions (except one) were closed and required a direct answer, whether various taxes will be lowered when the leaders are in power. On one hand, this lets the audience see the plans of the politicians. On the other hand, they are too narrow and do not seek a lot of explanation, therefore, leave a perspective for populism.

The seventh show discussed two topics that are too different to be combined – healthcare and education. However, both topics received equal attention. The first question asked if a doctor, who is being bribed, is a victim of the system or bribe-taker and how to decrease corruption in the healthcare system. Here, the option to say that the doctor is a part of the system proposes that he can be excused

for taking the bribe, which does not make it legal. Other two questions about healthcare (“Does the number of hospitals have to be reduced?” and “How are you going to lower the prices for medication?”) can be held objective, asking for opinion and future plans.

Questions about education counted on both levels: school (“Only 1 child in 4 is involved in the after school activities – how to increase this number?”), university (“Will you pursue the education reform?”). As other questions ask for the pledges of the party, the last one prompts to answer the question by agreeing (“Isn’t a 16 year old too young to choose the direction of the studies?”).

The last show had a different format: the debates did not have a topic as the questions were formulated by six citizens who were undecided who to vote for. People cared to ask how young families can afford reality, how to increase the minimal wage, reduce emigration and unemployment, also, specify one area that politicians plan to concentrate on the most and if they are pro e-voting. However, the formulation of the questions cannot be judged as these citizens were not part of the media.

All the questions asked in the debates can be divided into three categories according to what they were asking for: general point of view, attitude backed by more knowledge, future plans (promises) of the leaders in a specific sector. When answering the first type questions, the leaders had to express their opinion towards a problem. If they were asked the second type questions, it was expected that they show the knowledge by stating the facts and describing the current situation as well as sharing their opinion. Finally, the politicians were given an opportunity to state their pledges by answering the questions about the future plans. The line between the types of questions was thin as in most of the cases politicians promised change after explaining their position (it will be discussed in the next chapter).

There were seven closed questions followed by analytical (why or how?) questions and thirteen (out of forty-three) completely closed questions, only requiring a “yes” or “no” answer. Therefore, these

thirteen questions could have formed preconceptions that lead the answer. Another twenty-three questions were open.

Overall, the questions could be evaluated as satisfactory. Economists who analysed the performance of the leaders described the questions as actual, important and pragmatic (BNS, 2012). Most of the questions were complex and they covered all the important areas of the country.

Conclusions

The host of the show Jakilaitis managed to stay objective throughout the debates. He always obeyed the rules of the debates, and did not allow any of the politicians to speak longer than the fixed time. Jakilaitis had analysed the facts concerning every topic in advance and was able to correct the leaders, if they stated inaccurate numbers. Although in some cases, his personal opinion was obvious, Jakilaitis was not in favour of any party. Therefore, the performance of the host can be evaluated positively.

The topics covered reflected the problems in the country and the questions were closely connected to the main topic. As most of the questions were open, they asked for a debate, not just a yes or no answer. The questions were also constructed to fuel the search for new perspectives on current problems as well as to illustrate the politicians' level of awareness and to explore their plans on how to solve them, if they come to power. Thus, the participants had an opportunity to show the audience all aspects of their politics in all the areas.

Most participants failed to express their intentions during the debates. All of the leaders received negative remarks about their rhetoric. The prime minister did not show oratorical skills, only stated dry facts, while the leader of opposition Butkevičius kept criticizing everything Kubilius said and did not spend enough time explaining how to change the situation he is dissatisfied with. Liberals leader had only concentrated on a small part of the audience. The leaders of "Order and Justice", "The Way of The Bravery" and the Labour party were called populists. The only one who repeated the promises was

the leader of the Labour party. However, his pledges were evaluated by experts as outright unachievable.

Overall, it could be said that the debates “Lyderių forumas” offered a platform with an objective format for politicians to express their ideas to the public. However, the politicians did not succeed in using the opportunity to the fullest.

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Rinkimai viešojoje erdvėje: lietuviškų televizijos debatų „Lyderių forumas“ analizė

Aistė Valiauskaitė

Santrauka

Moksliniame darbe „Rinkimai viešojoje erdvėje: Lietuvos televizijos debatų „Lyderių forumas“ analizė“ nagrinėjama, kas yra politinis pažadas ir kaip visuomenei per žiniasklaidą skleidžiamos politikų idėjos. Darbe bandoma atskleisti žiniasklaidos prasmę per rinkimus. Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti, ar priešrinkiminiai TV debatai „Lyderių forumas“ buvo objektyvi laida.

Debatai analizei pasirinkti dėl itin aiškios savo struktūros, leidžiančios laidą analizuoti objektyviai. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama, kokios temos buvo aptartos debatuose, kokie klausimai nuskambėjo laidoje. Taip pat atkreiptas dėmesys, kaip laidos vedėjas (Edmundas Jakilaitis) reaguoja į politikų atsakymus. Be to, aiškintasi ir ar sėkmingai žurnalistas gavo atsakymus į visus užduotus klausimus, ar kuriai nors partijai parodė palankumą. Paskutinis analizės kriterijus buvo debatų dalyviai. Kiekvienoje laidoje dalyvavo po vieną atstovą iš pagrindinių Lietuvos partijų (konservatorių, liberalų, socialdemokratų, „Tvarkos ir Teisingumo“, Darbo partijos). Analizuota, ar jie sėkmingai sugebėjo išnaudoti jiems debatuose skirtą laiką.

Šis straipsnis aktualus, nes galima apibendrinti žiniasklaidos reikšmę svarbių politinių pasikeitimų laikotarpiu. Padaryta išvada, kad laidos vedėjas

sugebėjo likti objektyvus, o jo parinktos temos atspindėjo pagrindines šalies aktualijas.

Vis dėlto dauguma laidos dalyvių per debatus nesugebėjo paaiškinti, kokius sprendimus priimtų ateityje. Vietoj to buvo pasirinkta kitus politikus menkinanti retorika. Taigi sėkmingai išnaudoti debatams suteiktos erdvės politikams išnaudoti nepavyko.

Esminiai žodžiai: kampanija, objektyvumas, Parlamento rinkimai, pažadas, politinė komunikacija, profesionalumas, tv debatai.

About the author

Aistė Valiauskaitė holds a bachelors degree in journalism from the Vilnius University. In 2013 she has graduated City University London in 2013, completing her master's degree with a thesis on "The Promisors" of "Real Life". She is now a practising journalist.