

THE ROLE OF FOCUS GROUPS IN POLITICAL CAMPAIGNS

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Abstract

The last decade the role of the focus groups in preparing the strategy of the electoral campaign increased significantly. Communication experts use often different voters to test their political commercials before broadcasting them. The literature of political campaigns rarely investigated the role of the focus groups in the electoral campaign. Through seven focus groups we reveal the changes of political campaigns in the light of professionalism. The role of the party is diminished and the communication experts became key players in the political races between candidates. Results show that there is a significant level of personalization from the candidates. The focus groups data points out that in post-authoritarian countries like Albania voters are very interested in the candidate life beside his or her political plan. The participants distinguished the level of modernization in Albanian electoral campaign during the last decade. The participant told that they are inclined to vote on favor of the candidate which they liked personally. Especially if they have a reply from the candidate through social media it can be a new personal connection between voters and candidate. The participants felt that they now have a voice that goes directly to the candidates without the bureaucracies obstacles. The candidates can open a virtual debate for ideas or specific issues where voters might have the chance to give their feedback and arguments. This is a very important element the participants felt as part of the campaign modernization. Thus the candidates have the chance to explain their plans and re-explain the details that might sound vague to his potential voters.

The participants of the focus groups point out also the importance of focusing in target groups and online social networks.

Keywords: Focus groups, Personalization, Politics, Albania, 2013 Elections, Modernization.