

Communicating Governments: A Three-Country Comparison of How Governments Communicate with Citizens

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Abstract

Various studies have attempted to conceptualize and assess professionalization of political communication from different perspectives. This article examines the professionalization of central government communication in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, applying a framework developed using indicators derived from the sociology of work and from the strategic planning and quality literature. Results show that there are clear indices of the development of formal rules governing the practice of policy- or information-related government communication, distinguishing it from more partisan, politicized communication. Although mechanisms are being introduced to improve the process of communication, practices are still far from being fully systematized. The analysis provides evidence that professionalization as indicated by the establishment of specialist education, of self-regulation, and of formal organization of communication processes can be found at varying speeds in the three countries. The article finally discusses whether the logic of professionalism is compatible with government communication that is manipulative.

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During the past fifteen years, *professionalization* has been one of the buzzwords in political communication, but theoretical discussion and empirical research have mainly referred to election campaigns and not so much to routine, day-to-day political communication. Nevertheless, the challenges posed by the modernization of societies and the changes in the political and the media systems are similar for all political actors. This is particularly the case for governments that need to address the public to gain both acceptance of their policies and democratic legitimation. However, systematic research on how successful governments are adapting to the new challenges and the way they communicate with the media and the citizens is sparse (see Sanders 2011).

Findings on the professionalization of election campaigning cannot be generalized to nonelectoral political communication. In election campaigns, politicians seek to obtain power and campaigners deploy all the resources at their command to winning over voters. Because the stakes may seem to be lower in day-to-day political communication processes, this might suggest that the professionalization of political communication proceeds at two speeds: it is accelerated in campaign communication, and slower in the routine processes of government communication (see Holtz-Bacha 2007, 77).

This study first explores the professionalization of central government communication. Because the number of cases per country is usually limited to one, only an international comparison can provide for variance. The comparison of communication structures and processes across countries allows for assessing general trends and national idiosyncrasies and relative degrees of professionalization. Therefore, this study examines government communication in three European democracies, namely, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom. These countries each represent an example of the models of the relation between media and political systems developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004): the northern European or democratic corporatist model (Germany), the Mediterranean or polarized pluralist model (Spain), and the North Atlantic or liberal model (the United Kingdom). While not without its limitations, this typology provides a useful framework for future critical analysis and hypothesis testing.

Even though professionalization has been a recurring diagnosis for electoral communication, models for the measurement of the professionalization process remain unsatisfactory and, as the following discussion will show, cannot be applied to communication beyond election campaigns. Therefore, in a first step toward a model of professionalization, this comparative study additionally draws on criteria derived from the strategic planning and quality literature. Second, in the closing discussion, it considers whether the logic of professionalism is compatible with government communication that is manipulative or more colloquially described as “spin.”

Professionalization and Political Communication

Originally, the professionalization concept derives from the sociology of work. According to Wilensky (1964), professionalization occurs through certain stages, from an occupation being performed full-time, to academization, the founding of professional organizations, the introduction of licensing or certification, and the development of professional standards laid down in a formal code of ethics. Wilensky emphasizes the relevance of autonomous expertise and the service ideal as major characteristics of professionalism, counting medicine and law among the classical professions.

It is unclear when exactly election campaigns were first diagnosed as becoming professionalized. The term *professionalization* probably emerged along with the increasing prominence of political consultants and the closer examination of their role in campaigns beginning in the 1980s. The term was used along with analyses of “the modern publicity process” (Blumler 1990) and the subsequent conviction that American-style campaigning was taking hold worldwide (Gurevitch and Blumler 1990, 311), a process that was frequently called “Americanization,” understood as a unilinear diffusion of political communication practices from the United States to other countries.

The inadequacy of the “Americanization” thesis as a way of accounting for the role of institutions and of media as political actors in different cultural settings (see Pfetsch and Esser 2004, 11) led some authors to search for other terms to describe the new style of electioneering.

Examining political communication more generally, the notion of “mediatization” also gained currency first as a term describing the adaptation of politics to the demands of contemporary media and, second, as describing the media’s role in the undermining of politics’ autonomy (see Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). This approach may be useful in thinking about developments in political communication, but we consider that more must be done to clarify the underlying concept. In a straightforward sense, it is clear that the conduct of politics has adapted to media demands. However, this may be a function of both modernization and professionalization and may obey just as much a “political” as a “media” logic, however we define these terms.

Modernization and *professionalization* are among those terms considered better suited to characterize what has been taking place in political communication (e.g., Holtz-Bacha 2000, 2002; Mancini and Swanson 1996; Schulz 1998). When the term *professionalization* first appeared in studies of modern election campaigning, little was retained from the sociological concept. Instead, professionalization was often used to describe U.S. campaigns and to declare those the model for modern electioneering in other countries. Scammell’s (1997) work on U.S. campaigning in the middle of the 1990s applied the sociological professionalization criteria to political consultants. She found that while professionalization was often treated as the hallmark of American-style modern campaigning, professionalization proved to be problematic

even in the United States. She discovered emerging signs of professionalization (such as the growth of a common identity, the development of specialist education, and the establishment of a code of conduct) but also found that the campaign business was predominantly influenced by folk wisdom. She concluded that political consultancy in the United States was characterized by economic imperatives rather than by professionalism.

Building on their party-centered theory of professionalized campaigning, Gibson and Römmele (2001, 2009) developed a more elaborate instrument to measure professionalization. Their thirty-point index was originally based on twelve observable campaign practices that they reduced to ten when applying the index to the German 2005 parliamentary election campaign. The index combines objectively measured variables, such as the use of telemarketing, direct mail, and an e-mail subscription newsletter. The subjectively measured variables refer to the hiring of public relations (PR)/media consultants and the use of computerized databases, opinion polling, and opposition research (Gibson and Römmele 2009). Strömbäck (2009) tested a more differentiated version of the index in the context of the 2006 Swedish election.

The major shortcoming of these instruments is that they are confined to election campaigns, which primarily have a persuasive function, and they are applied only to parties. In addition, the variables used in the index cannot be applied to personalized or candidate-centered campaigns or to political communication in general and government communication in particular. Moreover, the criteria, with their heavy emphasis on online communication, are time bound, and therefore the index cannot be used for longitudinal analyses and is not suited to capture the dynamics of professionalization as an ongoing process.

Professionalization and Government Communication

Developments in many Western democracies, including modernization of society (Holtz-Bacha 2002), the emergence of unpredictable voters where ties between parties and their voters have been weakening in a process also called *dealignment* (Dalton 2002), and the commercialization of the media market, pose a major challenge to the political system, which has been forced to adapt to the new conditions. Those who communicate politics to citizens and the media have to deal with social differentiation and make greater efforts to gain media attention. The professionalization of political communication can be regarded as an inevitable consequence of and a reaction to those trends. The focus on election campaigns—by political actors as well as by researchers—has led to a general neglect of routine political communication processes and the process of professionalization despite the wide consensus that professionalization is occurring across the field of political communication (e.g., Holtz-Bacha 2007, 63; Negrine 2008, 17). Furthermore, while there have been attempts to operationalize professionalization in relation to electoral campaigns, as we have seen, there is still considerable imprecision regarding the terms and contents of this process.

Table 1. Framework for the Analysis of Government Communication

Structure	Administration	Formal rules	Organizational charts Legislation Policies and guidance
	Human resources	Financial resources Skills Knowledge Values	Budgets. Reward systems Professional profiles. Training. Recruitment
Process	Communication	Information gathering and analysis	Research work (commissioned or internally undertaken) Coordination and planning mechanisms and routines
		Information dissemination	Briefings, meetings, press conferences. Digital media. Campaigns and advertising
		Information evaluation	Feedback mechanisms. Media analysis. Communication metrics (return-on-investment measures)

In order to develop a framework for the analysis of government communication, this study therefore additionally draws on the strategic planning and quality management literature (see Cutlip, Center, and Broom 2000; Gregory 2006; Vos 2006).¹ The strategic planning and quality management approaches nicely complement each other (see Canel and Sanders, forthcoming). They underline the importance of coherent and systematic thinking about and implementation of communication functions and objectives, which, as Gregory (2006) explained in the case of the training program developed for U.K. government communicators, resulted in a model focused on processes. A common approach in quality management is to survey three basic aspects of any organization, namely, structure, processes, and outcomes. Structure is the set of conditions in which an activity takes place, processes are the set of ordered actions oriented toward a specific outcome, and outcomes are the results or consequences of processes.

At this stage in government communication research, we lack sufficient published descriptive data of government communication to propose a full profile of structural categories, processes, and outcomes together with suggested accompanying sets of indicators necessary for developing what we might term an “index of professionalism.” However, this study proposes a preliminary analytical framework that will allow us to develop future hypotheses about government communication professionalization on the basis of the descriptive data we have gathered thus far (see Table 1). The framework includes structural elements related to two administrative organizational dimensions: the first covers formal rules (see Vogel 2010) and the second

relates to financial resources. Formal rules include all relevant legislation, policies, and guidance as well as organizational charts detailing communication roles. Financial resources include budgets and reward systems. Human resources are regarded as a separate structural element and include the skills, knowledge, and values of the communication workforce as detailed in professional profiles, training, and recruitment programs, together with the number of those employed in communication. The framework also profiles communication processes related to information gathering, analysis, and dissemination and, for future research and analysis, processes related to information evaluation.

Using this preliminary analytical framework, we respond to the question of the presence of professionalization in routine political communication found in central government communication. We explore how the development of professionalism is expressed in structures and processes in different countries. We particularly attempt to reply to the following question: Do structures and processes of government communication in the three countries analyzed show signs of professionalization (such as common identity, the establishment of specialist education, self regulation, and formal organization)?

The methods used include, apart from a review of relevant literature, revision of published documents referring to matters related to government communication, such as legislation, codes, reports, parliamentary proceedings, and research papers. Some additional information is used from interviews carried out with government spokespeople and journalists.

Government Communication in Western European Democracies

The three countries analyzed here, Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom, share several features of their political system and the media environment. They are parliamentary democracies, where the prime minister leads the government and is the most influential political figure, whereas the head of state (monarch in Spain and the United Kingdom, president in Germany) has a largely ceremonial function. Political life is dominated by parties, with the Socialist/Social Democratic and the Conservative/Christian Democratic parties traditionally being the strongest and which, according to the electoral outcome, take turns in appointing the prime minister. While the United Kingdom's majority voting system has usually led to a one-party government, the 2010 election resulted in the first coalition government since 1940. Germany's proportional voting system has made coalition governments the rule, leading only once to an absolute majority of an individual party. Governments in Spain have generally alternated, but from 2004, the country has had a Socialist government. Germany and Spain are characterized by federalism, where the sixteen states (*Länder*) and seventeen autonomous regions enjoy a high degree of self-government. The United Kingdom has a centralized political system.

The three countries have dual broadcasting systems, where public service broadcasting holds its ground in the competition with commercial stations. The newspaper

markets are characterized by the coexistence of some strong national and numerous regional and local papers. The United Kingdom is well known for the influential role and large readership of its populist, tabloid papers.

Germany

Certain features of the political system lead to specific constraints for government communication in Germany. The communication management of the government always has to take into account the concerns of the coalition partners in the government and the interests of the sixteen states' governments, particularly if there is a state election on the horizon, and must anticipate the ambitions of the ministers who want to do their own marketing and work on their image. Government communication thus becomes a delicate matter. On the one hand, it attempts to present the achievements and plans of the coalition government, making it difficult for the coalition partners to sharpen their individual profile. On the other hand, the government must seek support for its actions in the Parliament, and this often requires not only its own party's support but also that of the opposition and the states. These complex relations might suggest that clandestine coordination would be the norm, but in fact, more often than not, battles are fought out in the media. Several factors are at play here: One, of course, is the interest of all actors to present themselves to the electorate and to seek public support for their own stance and thus to strengthen their position vis-à-vis the other side. At least equally important, however, is the fact that Germany is a country literally involved in a permanent campaign, because at least on the *Länder* level, there is always an election just around the corner (see Pfetsch 2003, 74-75). Thus, government communication is much more than just the presentation and justification of government decisions in search of legitimation. Government communication also plays an important role in the preparation of political decisions and securing a majority for parliamentary votes.

The Institutional Background of Government Communication

Officially, the presentation of government decisions to the public is the task of the government's spokesperson. She or he holds the position of state secretary, a ministerial-level position, and is also the head of the Federal Press and Information Office (for recent descriptions, see Pfetsch 2003; Vogel 2010; or the office's homepage; Die Bundesregierung, 2011). The office is directly subordinate to the chancellor. The main tasks of the office are to inform the government and the president about worldwide news, to monitor public opinion as a basis for government decisions, to inform the public and the media about the political activities and objectives of the government, to provide information about Germany to other countries in cooperation with the foreign ministry, to coordinate PR activities of the office and of the ministries concerning activities of general political relevance, and to support German news services in Germany and abroad.

With a total of about 650 employees, the office is divided into four departments: Department I has administrative functions and is in charge of the technical realization of PR activities. Department II is in charge of media monitoring and analyzes German as well as foreign media. Department III takes care of the press and PR activities and is subdivided according to political areas. Department IV has various tasks, among which are interministerial coordination, opinion research, and Internet and audiovisual services. In previous years, PR for Germany in other countries was also carried out by the office but was transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Red-Green coalition (1998-2005).

In addition to the Federal Press and Information Office that represents the government as a whole, the individual ministries have their own press and PR departments. These are in charge of dealing with the more specific topics that fall within the scope of the respective ministry. To make sure that the government nevertheless speaks with one voice, the head of the Federal Press and Information Office is in regular contact with the spokespersons of the fourteen ministries.

In most cases, the spokesperson of the government and thus the head of the Federal Press and Information Office have been former journalists. Usually, the speaker belongs to the inner circle of the chancellor and takes part in the daily briefings in the chancellery.

The government spokesperson answers to the national press corps three times a week. Since 1949, the Berlin correspondents are registered as an association known as the Federal Press Conference. Any parliamentary journalist can be a member. At present, the Federal Press Conference has about nine hundred members. The press conferences are organized by the association and take place in its own building. Thus, the government spokesperson and all politicians, including the chancellor, appear before the press corps as guests of the association.

In addition to the Federal Press Conference, there are the so-called background circles. These are clubs of journalists who invite politicians or their spokespeople for a more informal exchange of information. The information offered in these circles is unofficial and not meant for direct publication but rather is to provide background for issues and strategies. These circles are organized according to political affiliation or type of media and can therefore also be used for strategic news management (Pfetsch 1998, 84).

In 2010, the Federal Press and Information Office had a budget of €16 million for its public relations activities (Schriftliche Fragen 2010, 2). The ministries have additional budgets available, with the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs disposing of the highest amount (€13 million) and the Ministry of Justice the lowest (€91,000).

Legal Background

In the early years of the federal republic, German governments, independent of their "color," repeatedly used the resources of the Federal Press and Information Office for activities that came close to or could definitely be regarded as electoral advertising.

The government, however, is not allowed to support party campaigns. The matter finally went to the Federal Constitutional Court. In its 1977 decision, the court not only acknowledged the right of the government to active public relations but also called government PR a necessity. The government as well as the legislative bodies should explain their activities and decisions to the public. The court argued that responsible political participation of individual citizens should be based on knowledge of the decisions and measures taken by state bodies. However, the court decided that government should abstain from advertising in favor of any of the competing parties and should even avoid the impression of an influence to the advantage of individual parties. Thus, government communication is not allowed to use public money to help the majority parties or to fight against the opposition parties. Government communication reaches its limits where electoral advertising begins.

The court made a distinction between what it called permitted communication activities of the government and inadmissible activities. At the same time, the court developed indicators to be used to determine whether communication activities of the government take on the character of electoral advertising and are thus inadmissible. These criteria include a temporal factor and the design and the frequency of these activities (see Schürmann 1992, 37–38; Schütz 2006).

Spain

Several factors make the analysis of Spanish government communication of specific interest. First, journalists' perceptions of role orientations are changing along with the evolution of the system (free democratic elections were established little more than forty years ago): although still a strong partisan press is the norm, journalists are moving from the partisan-ideological paradigm toward a more adversarial-nonpartisan one (Canel and Piqué 1998). Second, decentralization means central government communication competes with communication of local and regional governments.

Two main features characterize the situation of government communication in Spain: first, mechanisms for guarding government communication from partisanship and self-promotion have only recently been introduced; second, the approach of government communication is to some extent moving away from the model Kumar (2001, 609) calls the "advocate with the press." Kumar argues that unlike the strategist and planner models, where strategic planning lies at the heart of communication operations, in the advocate-with-the-press model, the director of communications focuses his or her role on dealing with the media.

An Evolutionary Structure for Government Communication²

The organizational chart for government communication has gone through different schema, with differences in the rank of the government spokesperson: this has varied from the spokesperson's occupying a top ministerial position, such as the vice presidency, to the spokesperson as a lower ranked "secretary of state."³ For

the past three governments, the government's spokesperson has been at the vice president level.

In Spain, there is no entity similar to the German Federal Press and Information Office or to the British Government Communication Network. Communication has never been dependent directly on the prime minister's office but on the Ministry for the Presidency.⁴ The communication structure is, generally speaking, as follows: Under the minister for the presidency, there is a secretary of state for communication to which *direcciones generales* belong (general director is the next rank down after secretary of state). Traditionally, there have been two *direcciones generales* (one for domestic information and another for foreign information). In 2004, a third *dirección general* was created for coordinating communication from the prime minister's office with ministerial departments' press offices (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2010). In the ministries, the person responsible for communication does not have the rank of general director but is only an advisor to the minister. However, the trend is to acknowledge the important role of communication and to consolidate positions at a high rank (Dircom 2007): two ministries have created a *dirección general*.⁵ Also, names for positions for ministerial offices are evolving from "press offices" to "communication offices."

The Law for Advertising and Institutional Communication was approved in 2005 both to improve distribution of governmental messages and to disassociate accurate and neutral information on public policies from political opinion and partisan messages. The scope of this law is advertising and communication campaigns, aiming at guaranteeing their "public usefulness, professionalization, transparency and institutional loyalty" (Ley de Publicidad y Comunicación Institucional 2005). This law includes a government Executive Committee as well as mechanisms for improving planning and coordination (every year, the government has to present a coordinated campaigns plan) and control (the law includes a Complaints Committee, which depends on the secretary of state for communication).

Prohibited content includes material that undermines public policies, is sexist, encourages violence, or promotes government achievements. Every year, the government has to send to Parliament a report on the aims, costs, tools used, and companies contracted for all its campaigns. The Complaints Committee (established just three years ago) has so far received several complaints, but none has been upheld.

Data about human resources, professional profiles, training, and recruitment show that there is some movement in Spain toward establishing more professional practices. Whereas the government's spokespeople have more a political profile (they are not communication professionals), the heads of ministerial departments' press offices are always journalists (mostly with journalism degrees) who have been in the media and have a personal relationship with the minister who hires him or her. There is no civil service system from which communication senior officials come. In 2007, a course in communication for civil servants was established.

The Process of Communication: Between Political Constraints and the Wish for More Professional Practices

Coordination has become more systematized since the establishment of a *dirección general* for this purpose. There are weekly personal meetings and ministries send their events schedule every week. Weekly meetings with the government spokesperson, the head of the government party parliamentary group, and the government party secretary for organization are also maintained to coordinate the government message with the party. However, coordination is still referred to by official communicators as one of the most important challenges.

The prime minister has a strong influence on the decision-making process. First, he or she is the most important factor for the media (see Álvarez and Pascual 2002, 267–68). Second, communication structure and resources are highly dependent upon the prime minister's sensitivity to communication matters: it is he or she who decides priority of ranks and resources, and the personal relationship between official communicators and the prime minister is determinant for decision making in communication matters.

As interviews show, public officials do not undertake much strategic work; plans for crisis communication are still scarce, as shown in research case studies looking at government communication related to terrorist attacks and media scandals (see Canel and Sanders 2006, 2010). Lack of strategy is due partly to a poorly systematized decision-making process, to lack of resources, and to lack of strategic and planning skills. Interviews also show that there is, however, an awareness of the need to transfer the knowledge and strategic skills common in election campaigns to government communication.

Information Dissemination

The main tasks developed by government communicators are related to media relations management and news operations. Government communication campaigns also use advertising (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009). In 2009, there were a total of one hundred government communication campaigns (costing €95,296,027) (Ministerio de la Presidencia 2009).

The government's spokesperson meets the press every Friday, after the meeting of the Council of Ministers. There are no daily briefings by the government spokesperson or of the ministerial departments; additional press conferences are called unsystematically. The weight of media exposure is very much on the leaders (the prime minister and the ministers) since they do not have a spokesperson. In fact, the directors of communication for ministerial departments do not brief the press; they manage the ministers' media encounters.

In sum, little strategic planning, problems with coordination, impromptu performance, and scarce evaluation of the coverage and of public perceptions certainly

add up to a reactive and advocate-with-the-press model for Spanish government communication. But it should be added that both interviews with public officials as well as published analyses and reports (Canel 2007; Dircom 2007) show several recent changes (such as those analyzed above: new degrees in organizational and corporate communication, new regulations for controlling government communication, modifications to the organizational chart, changes in names of positions from “press office” to “communication office”, new courses for civil servants, etc.) that allow us to say that government communication in Spain may be moving toward a more systematized structure. Further specific research should test whether these structural changes operate in favor of a more systematized and professional practical performance.

The United Kingdom⁶

Britain’s political system has permitted a degree of pragmatic flexibility in the development of government communication functions that has often occasioned controversy about government public relations, especially the case during the Thatcher and Blair governments. The highly respected BBC was drawn into government communication controversies, most notably in relation to the Blair government’s communication about the Iraq war during 2002-3 (see Sanders 2009). A number of major independent and parliamentary inquiries into government communication were undertaken from 1997. In particular, the 2004 Phillis report (Phillis, 2004) and the corresponding reorganization of government communication had, as we shall see, a significant impact on its professionalization in the United Kingdom.

Organizational Structure of Government Communication

In order to safeguard the British civil service’s ethos of political neutrality and the credibility of the communication of government policy, broadly speaking, a dual government communication system has developed.⁷ Political appointees known as “special advisers” may brief journalists and advise ministers on communication issues in a party political way. Communication activities related to the realization of government policy aims are carried out by civil servants. In Britain, civil servants are expected to serve governments of all political stripes, providing advice and analysis on how best to achieve their policy goals.

Consequently, each ministerial department has a civil servant (director of communication) who leads a team charged with policy communication operations as well as one or more special advisers who, among other tasks, advise on communication matters from a party political perspective. The civil servants belong to the Government Communication Network and are headed by a permanent secretary of government communicators, who is based in the Cabinet Office. They can contract the services of the Central Office of Information (COI), a government body for which the Cabinet

Office has ministerial responsibility, for all communication and marketing planning and procurement, although it is not compulsory to do so. In 2009, this amounted to an expenditure of £532 million (€612 million) on all communication activities of which £211 million (€243 million) was spent on traditional advertising (COI 2010). In addition, the government is, in the words of the 2010 head of the Government Communication Network, “a huge consumer of market research, insight work, focus group work” used to shape communication strategy (Health Policy Insight 2010).

Parliamentary, public, and media concern about the integrity and effectiveness of government communication, distinguishing it from manipulative communication or “spin,” gave rise to the Phillis (2004) review, an independent inquiry established by the Blair government. Its recommendations were partially responsible for developments in government communication in the period between 2004 and 2010, which include the appointment in 2005 of a top civil servant to head the newly created Government Communication Network; the strengthening of the civil service Propriety Guidance for government communicators in 2006; the reissuing of the Code for Special Advisors in 2010 after its first publication in 2006, clarifying that they cannot instruct permanent civil servants (a development that occurred when a political figure was appointed prime minister’s spokesman in 1997); and the creation of the U.K. Statistics Authority in 2008 as an independent source of information about government statistics.

Prime Minister’s Communication

Within the Cabinet Office, the central coordinating ministry, nonpartisan government communication functions are located in two units: the Prime Minister’s Office and the Government Communication Group. The prime minister’s official spokesperson (PMOS), a civil servant, is one of three directors of the Prime Minister’s Office and is responsible for briefing the media on behalf of the prime minister and for managing Downing Street civil servants engaged in communication tasks.

The permanent secretary for government communication is head of the Government Communication Group. His or her role is to provide professional oversight of all government communicators and to play a key part in coordination of communication across government, particularly where Downing Street is involved.

The prime minister also has a political director of communication appointed as a special adviser who is responsible for strategic advice in relation to the media and for overseeing a small team of media advisors.

When Parliament is sitting, twice daily, untelevised, on the record, press briefings are held by the PMOS. The PMOS provides information to and answers questions from journalists who are members of the Lobby, an association to which membership is restricted to around 170 senior U.K. political journalists given privileged access to areas of the House of Commons. Briefing transcripts are placed on the 10 Downing Street website. Tony Blair initiated the monthly practice of a televised press conference

open not only to the Lobby but also to foreign correspondents. From 2008, 10 Downing Street began to use more fully the tools of digital media, including “Ask the PM” and Twitter.

Legal and Regulatory Context

The Civil Service Code, introduced in 1996 to govern the work of civil servants, was revised in 2006 (Civil Service 2009). It was supplemented by the Propriety Guidance (Cabinet Office, n.d.), which sets out the expected standards of behavior for civil servants working in government communication to safeguard impartiality.

Special advisers, who are temporary civil servants and paid for out of the public purse, are bound by the Code of Conduct for Special Advisors issued by the government in June 2010 as well as by the general provisions covering permanent civil servants. They “are able to represent Ministers’ views on Government policy to the media with a degree of political commitment that would not be possible for the permanent Civil Service” (Cabinet Office 2010).

Political advertising in general is covered by the 2003 Communications Act and is regulated by the Office of Communications (Ofcom), a nongovernmental regulatory body. The Communications Act includes provisions regarding government information campaigns that seek to maintain their nonpolitical aims.

The Cabinet Office has a Propriety and Ethics Team, which can be consulted about the interpretation of the guidance on communication matters. In terms of general legislative requirements, government communicators must ensure that they conform to the principles of the Data Protection Act, deliver information to meet the requirements of people with disabilities, and be aware of the Freedom of Information Act.

Training and Support for Government Communicators

The civil servant head of the Government Communication Network is responsible for establishing standards of excellence and training for the civil service corps engaged in communication. For this purpose, the civil service launched two training and development programs, Engage and Evolve, in 2006 and 2007.

Civil servants working in government communication may come from a journalistic background, but this is not necessarily the case. However, civil servants with a communication background have not tended to reach the most senior positions in the civil service (see Tee 2010). Conversely, the civil servants appointed as prime minister’s spokespeople have all had backgrounds as top-level policy specialists rather than as communication professionals.

As government communication demands have increased, so have the number of those employed in these tasks. The head of the Government Communication Network estimated that there were around 1,300 government communicators across both government and government-related departments, an increase of around 100 percent from 1998 (Tee 2010).

Professionalization and Professionalism

Our initial research question addresses the issue of professionalization of government communication, exploring how the development of professionalism is expressed in structures and processes in different countries.

As shown in Table 2, taking first structure, there are clear indices in the three countries of the development of formal rules governing the practice of policy- or information-related government communication, distinguishing it from more partisan, politicized communication. Spain and Germany have both introduced legislation demarcating these frontiers. The United Kingdom has adopted a largely nonstatutory approach, enshrining principles of good practice in codes and guidelines, although there is legislation with regard to the neutrality of information campaigns. It has also given institutional weight to the distinction between impartial and partisan government information through the use of civil servant communicators and prime minister's spokespeople and the creation of the U.K. Statistics Authority in 2008. Spain's legislative provisions follow similar principles to those in Germany and relate to safeguards regarding government information/policy campaigns. They are not, however, reflected in institutional arrangements concerning the roles of senior government communicators communicating with the media on a routine basis. In the case of Germany, political journalists have developed significant institutional power through the role of the Federal Press Conference.

With regard to financial resources, budgets for government information campaigns are allocated for ministries in the United Kingdom and Spain, although figures are not easily available regarding the total slice of ministerial budgets consumed by other communication functions. In Germany, ministerial communication budgets vary considerably, and the Federal Press and Information Office is provided with separate financial resources. Reward systems for government communicators have been slow to develop in each of the three countries. Attempts have been made in the United Kingdom to create a career structure through the founding of the Government Communication Network, but senior positions in the civil service (including that of prime minister's spokesperson) have yet to be occupied by career communicators. German and Spanish senior government communicators are all political appointees. In sum, the establishment of professional profiles, training, and recruitment can be found in various degrees of development in each of the three countries, with perhaps the United Kingdom most advanced along this route.

Table 2 shows also that mechanisms are being introduced to improve information gathering, analysis, and dissemination, but still, practices are far from being fully systematized. In each country, there is a coordinating body to ensure communication coherence across government ministries. News distribution systems and news media relations are routinized. Specialization and expertise have been developed in the United Kingdom's media and PR activities through the work of the Central Office of Information and in Germany through the Federal Press and Information Office.

In conclusion, the study's framework analyzes structures and processes of government communication, dimensions of professionalization that are not well captured in

Table 2. Government Communication in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom

Country	Structure			Process: Communication	
	Administration: Formal rules and financial resources	Human resources: Skills, knowledge, and values	Information gathering and analysis	Information dissemination	
	<p>Legislation policies and guidance</p> <p>Financial resources</p>	<p>Professional profiles, training, and recruitment</p>	<p>Research work, coordination and planning, mechanisms and routines</p>		
Germany	<p>Government's spokesperson is a state secretary, also head of Federal Press and Information Office. Press Association registered since 1949. It organizes the national press corps.</p> <p>Legislation policies and guidance</p> <p>Financial resources</p>	<p>Government communicators have journalist background. No specific education. Trend for journalism. Political appointment (the PM). Ministries' spokespeople come from parties or civil service.</p>	<p>A unit for coordination.</p>	<p>The government spokesperson meets the press three times a week. The Federal Press Association hosts meetings with the media; politicians are guests. Administrative functions, media monitoring, press/PR activities, coordination and opinion research.</p>	
Spain	<p>Government's spokesperson tends to be the vice president (deputy prime minister).</p> <p>Law of Advertising and Institutional Communication (2005) to disassociate</p> <p>In 2009, the central government carried out a total of 100</p>	<p>Spokesperson: Political profile. Ministerial press officers; Education</p>	<p>Recent establishment of a <i>dirección general</i> for coordination, which is</p>	<p>The government spokesperson meets the press once a week. Press conferences</p>	

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

		Structure		Process: Communication	
Country	Organizational chart	Legislation policies and guidance	Financial resources	Information gathering and analysis	Information dissemination
	Ministries have press officers (directors of communication) appointed at advisory level.	accurate and neutral information on public policies from political opinion and partisan messages.	advertising campaigns. No data are available for the expenses of the press offices of ministerial departments.	Research work, coordination and planning, mechanisms and routines	Briefings, meetings, press conferences, digital media, campaigns, and advertising
	Names for ministerial offices are evolving from "press offices" to "communication offices" to include other activities distinct from management of relations with the media.	in journalism. Trend for education in PR and organizational communication. They are not civil servants. Political appointments. There is no civil service from which communication senior officials come. An official course on communication for civil servants established (2007).		improving systematization. Little strategic planning due partly to lack of processes systematization.	are hosted at the government seat. Directors of communication departments do not brief the press; they manage relationships with the media for the leader's encounters. Main tasks are confined to relations with the media. Little strategic planning. About 100 public advertising campaigns a year.
	Administration: Formal rules and financial resources	Professional profiles, training, and recruitment			

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Country	Structure			Process: Communication	
	Administration: Formal rules and financial resources	Legislation policies and guidance	Financial resources	Information gathering and analysis	Information dissemination
United Kingdom	<p>PM's spokesperson is a top-ranking civil servant.</p> <p>Top civil servant is head of the Government Communication Network.</p> <p>PM's director of communication is political appointment.</p> <p>Ministerial departments' communication teams are civil servants.</p> <p>Ministers have political special advisers who can advise on communication.</p>	<p>Civil Service Code (1996 and revised in 2006) and Propriety Guidance for government communicators.</p> <p>Code for special advisers (in 2010, it was established that they cannot instruct permanent civil servants).</p> <p>Communications Act (2003) includes provisions regarding government</p>	<p>£532m spent on all communication activities, of which £211m was spent on traditional advertising.</p> <p>PM's spokespeople have backgrounds as top-level policy specialists rather than as communication professionals.</p> <p>Civil servants may come from a journalistic background, but it is not necessarily the case.</p>	<p>The permanent secretary for government communication coordinates communication across government.</p>	<p>Briefings twice a day.</p> <p>News Distribution Service: Regional news service.</p> <p>Central Office of Information: A government body for all communication, marketing, planning, and procurement, including for government communication campaigns.</p>

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Country	Structure		Process: Communication	
	Administration: Formal rules and financial resources	Legislation and guidance	Information gathering and analysis	Information dissemination
	<p>Organizational chart</p> <p>Financial resources</p>	<p>Human resources: Skills, knowledge, and values</p> <p>Professional profiles, training, and recruitment</p>	<p>Research work, coordination and planning, mechanisms and routines</p>	<p>Briefings, meetings, press conferences, digital media, campaigns, and advertising</p>
	<p>information campaigns that seek to maintain their nonpolitical aims.</p> <p>Propriety and Ethics Team at the Cabinet Office (can be consulted about the interpretation of the guidance on communication matters)</p>	<p>Government Communication Network programs for permanent training: Engage (2005) and Evolve (2007).</p>		

Note: PM = prime minister; PR = public relations.

the indices applied to measure professionalization in election communication, and provides evidence that professionalization as indicated by the establishment of specialist education, of self-regulation, and of formal organization of communication processes can be found at varying speeds in the three countries. Performance evaluation and definition and measurement of goals and their relationship to structures and processes are areas that require further research. In the future, the development of case studies of, for example, specific government campaigns, crisis management situations, or routine ministerial communication could be extremely helpful in furthering our understanding of the professionalization of government communication.

The factors that drive the professionalization of government communication, however, place governments in a difficult situation. Governments have to communicate with their citizens. Because there are few opportunities to address the people directly, their communication activities are mostly oriented toward the media, which play an intermediate role in the relation between political actors and citizens and therefore act as an "intervening variable." The mediatization process (e.g., see Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999) that has led to communicators' being increasingly dependent on the media has also made the media a central and powerful factor in public communication.

Professionalized government communication reacts to these challenges by, among other things, relying on communication experts (e.g., from PR, advertising, marketing, and opinion polling) and takes up the instruments and strategies that have proven their worth in persuasive communication but that often lead to charges of manipulation and "spin."

Some political communication scholars, such as Hamelink (2007) and Wring (2005), have suggested that disempowerment of citizens is a possible if not probable consequence of the professionalization of political communication. Hamelink, for example, suggests that the professionalization of political communication further widens the inequality between politicians and citizens because of the former's ability to control messages and perceptions. On this analysis, professional political communicators contribute to a situation of democracy without citizens.

While acknowledging that the application of more sophisticated techniques and practices can lead to citizen disempowerment, we would also argue that to describe these practices as "professional," without referring them to an overarching regulative ideal, is fundamentally to misunderstand what is meant by this term. The professions are usually governed by codes of practice. These codes typically contain generic statements suggesting that those working within a particular profession should, for example, act in the interests of both the people they serve and the wider general public, promote good practice within their profession, keep up to date with their continuing professional development, and behave with integrity. These kinds of specifications of professional practice (and therefore of what professionalization entails) necessitate, we would argue, a prior concept of what the profession is, of what are its defining goals. The development of appropriate indicators for the evaluation of the structures, processes, and outcomes of government communication could act as effective tools for promoting professional government communication. They could be

used to drive practices that enhance civic communication as a means of achieving the common public good.⁸

Notes

1. The strategic planning approach was used in the establishment of a training and development framework for U.K. government communicators known as Evolve (see Gregory 2006), and Dutch researchers have formulated instruments inspired by Kaplan and Norton's "balanced scorecard" or the European Foundation for Quality Control to help government organizations to communicate more effectively with their citizens (Vos 2006, 250).
2. As explained earlier, the article is mainly based on a revision of the evolution of organizational charts, published analysis, and existing legal texts. However, given the paucity of material published on the structure and development of government communication in Spain, this section draws on information taken from an ongoing research project based upon in-depth interviews with Spanish government spokespeople from the establishment of democracy (1975) until the present day. Information from six interviews has been used here: three were with the highest rank of government spokespeople and three with secretaries of state for communication. People interviewed cover all governments since 1993: two are from the last Felipe González government, one from each of José María Aznar's governments, and one from each of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero's governments. Interviews were conducted between 2008 and 2009. Interviews with other government spokespeople are still being conducted, and full analysis of this material will be reported in future research.
3. In Spain, the vice president is the deputy prime minister (in Spain, the prime minister is called "president").
4. The Ministerio de la Presidencia supports the prime minister and coordinates matters of constitutional relevance: relations between the government and parliament, governmental committees, coordination for the cabinet meetings, and so on. Apart from the secretary of state for communication, the government official bulletin, the national institute for public opinion research, the national heritage (Patrimonio), and the center for constitutional studies are also under this ministry.
5. There are the Ministry of Defence (this DG for communication was suppressed though in 2010) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. For the specific organization of the communication of the Ministry of Defence, see Campos (2010).
6. In late spring 2011, the UK's Coalition government announced sweeping changes to government communication structures including the closure of the Central Office of Information (see text). This section charts developments up to that point.
7. See Seymour Ure (2003) and Franklin (2004) for accounts of the development of U.K. government communication prior to 2005.
8. *Civic communication* and *common public good* are, of course, contested terms, and it would require another article to discuss them fully. However, we suggest that shared understandings of *civic* (neither exclusively private nor identified with purely with the state), *communication* (as opposed to propaganda, lies, or manipulation), and *common public good* (related to ideas of autonomy, sovereignty, and shared goods) can be achieved.

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