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Government communication in 15 countries: Themes and challenges

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Introduction

This study has provided accounts of developments in national, executive-level government communication in 15 sovereign states, positioning the analysis partially within a political communication system framework where actors and structures are related to each other and their environment but also employing theory and concepts developed within the public relations, corporate and strategic communication fields.

As explained in Chapter 1, we categorized the 15 countries analysed using democracy indicators taken from Freedom House's rankings of political and press freedom. These rankings assess systemic features of countries' legal, media and political regimes (electoral process, political plurality, freedom of expression, etc.) and provide broad-brush indicators that are given more flesh in individual country chapters. The 15 countries fall into 3 broadly defined groups (see Table 16.1). Group 1 countries have established democratic institutions and practices, although in the cases of Spain and Poland, recent democratic government dates only to 1977 and 1991 respectively. Group 2 countries have, in the case of Chile and South Africa, recent democratic pasts, with elected governments replacing authoritarian regimes in 1989 and 1999 respectively; India's first democratic elections took place in 1952 after British

colonial rule. Group 3 countries have a tradition of more authoritarian forms of government that compromise civil and political liberties and a lack of media freedom. Mexico's first internationally recognized, truly democratic elections took place in 2000 while Zimbabwe, despite 2008 elections, remains in the grip of Robert Mugabe. China and Singapore do not permit competitive elections and place numerous restrictions on media freedom.

TABLE 16.1 Freedom House indices, 2012

Countries	Political freedom rating[a]	Press freedom rating[b]	Group
Sweden	1 (F)	10 (F)	1
Germany	1 (F)	17 (F)	
United States	1 (F)	18 (F)	
United Kingdom	1 (F)	21 (F)	
Australia	1 (F)	21 (F)	
France	1 (F)	24 (F)	
Spain	1 (F)	24 (F)	
Poland	1 (F)	25 (F)	
Chile	1 (F)	31 (PF)	2
South Africa	2 (F)	34 (PF)	
India	2.5 (F)	37 (PF)	
Mexico	3 (PF)	62 (NF)	3
Singapore	4(PF)	67 (NF)	
China	6.5 (NF)	85 (NF)	
Zimbabwe	6.5 (NF)	80 (NF)	

Sources: Freedom House (2012). *Freedom in the World*. Freedom House: Washington, DC. Freedom House (2012). *Freedom of the Press*. Freedom House: Washington, DC.

[a] Countries are assessed on the average of the political rights and civil liberties ratings, the political freedom rating: Free (F) (1.0 to 2.5), Partly Free (PF) (3.0 to 5.0) or Not Free (NF) (5.5 to 7.0).

[b] Each country receives a numerical rating from 0 (the most free) to 100 (the least free). Countries considered Free (F) are rated from 0–30; Partly Free (PF) 31–60 and Not Free (NF) 61–97.

Full details of methodology can be found at www.freedomhouse.org

Using an assessment framework explained below (see Table 16.3), we examine differences and similarities within and between the three groups of countries with regards to the mesolevel data collected, examining whether the structure and activity of government communication bears some relation to systemic conditions. Finally, we explore some common themes and challenges for government communication research.

Developing an assessment framework for government communication

Chapter authors present vivid accounts of the increasing importance governments give to communicating with diverse constituents, chief among them the media and citizens. They invest significant resources in attempting to inform, understand, control, manage and/or engage with constituencies. They seek to develop 'effective communication' which depends on a number of factors including adequate *communicational structure and processes* guided by *communicational purposes* that take the citizen into account.

Communication structure and processes

Public relations and management scholars have identified two broad categories of communication structure (see Chapter 1) that describe the position occupied and the resources assigned to the communication function in an organization: a primarily tactical or technical structure or a primarily strategic one. Tactics and strategies are well-worn terms often used in the political communication lexicon to describe the activities executed by political actors to maintain power and/or seek control. Governments attempt to manage news and public opinion; parties and candidates want to win elections. As we saw in Chapter 1, political communication research usefully focuses attention on these questions of power and control which are, of course, at the heart of politics.

However, drawing on public relations, corporate and strategic communication literature, strategic communication can be characterized as a driver towards more effective communication. Typically it is coordinated and planned at senior management level with substantial development of specialized units that permit proactive dialogue with stakeholders to help shape organizational goals. A strategic communication structure has defined functions that facilitate an organized and integrated communication activity undertaken by skilled and knowledgeable professionals who occupy positions at every level of the organizational chart. Strategic communication encompasses mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the communication effort in terms of measurable

outcomes and employs digital technology to facilitate citizen interaction with government.

Tactical communication structures position communication at a lower organizational level oriented to the pursuit of short- or medium-term goals. Usually there is no overarching communication structure but a dispersal and fragmentation of communication activities throughout the organization with little or no internal coordination or definition of communication functions. Consequently communication is more fragmented and less aligned to the organization's long-term goals.

Communication purpose

Public relations theory can help scholars conceptualize strategic government communication in ways that position it not as part of a battle to win hearts and minds for solely party political motives (although politicians will surely hope this is a by-product of their activities) but also as a way of building fruitful relations with citizens that have longer-term beneficial effects including the generation of institutional credibility. Strategy becomes linked to communication purpose which, we argue below, in a citizen-centred model of government communication, seeks to inform and communicate in a way which seeks to encourage dialogue or public conversation.

We suggest here that communication that attends to citizens' rather than political party interests, will be characterized by elements that make it more rather than less transparent, provide participatory mechanisms and put in place rules to ensure its non-partisanship. Of course, government communication is always in some way political. However, we argue that a conceptual distinction can be drawn between partisan government communication, which takes advantage of incumbency to campaign for party goals, and government communication which is necessarily political, yet places the emphasis on explanation to achieve public understanding. Holtz-Bacha and Young provide examples in their chapters of cases where governing parties have been judged to have misused government resources for party political goals suggesting that, while difficult, a line can be drawn between unacceptable partisan government communication and appropriate political government communication.

Assessing communication structure and purpose

We realize that the framework set out below does not contain a complete list of the elements by which communication can be identified as showing more

tactical and/or strategic capacity or as being more party or citizen oriented. For example, assessing participation in communication processes only by the UN e-participation index is clearly too limited. The framework is, then, proposed as a modest, exploratory starting point, using data from chapters and surveys.

To assess government communication structure in terms of its strategic development, we identify eight elements each of which refers to a characteristic of strategic capacity (see Table 16.3). We have assessed these elements along a continuum that we have denominated 'A' which runs from tactical to strategic communication. For example, examining organizational structure (element A-1), the location of a country where there is limited or no development would be placed at one end of the continuum as most tactical and where there is extensive development as most strategic at the other end. Countries with some development of organizational structure would be placed at the midpoint of the continuum.

In order to assess communication purpose in terms of its orientation to more party political or to citizen-centred communication, we identified six elements, assessing them along a continuum we have called 'B' (see Table 16.3 Axis B), that indicate the presence or not of rules and processes encouraging the values of non-partisanship, transparency and participation in government communication. We assess the extent to which any given element has limited or no presence or development, has some presence or development or is extensively present or developed. In some cases (the e-participation index or the existence of transparency laws), the classifications are clear-cut. In others (the degree of communication specialization, for example), judgements are based on chapter data presented in disparate ways suggesting the need for further refinement of the questions asked of our authors.

In order to provide a first broad, rough and ready categorization of government communication, we have attached a numerical value to the limited presence or absence = 1, partial development or presence = 2 and extensive development or presence of each element = 3. Adding up these scores for every element in each country allows us to position its government communication in relation to categories along two continuous dimensions with one axis running from mainly tactical to mainly strategic communication and the second, running from party-oriented communication to citizen-oriented communication. We discuss the results and their implications later in the chapter.

Next, we examine in detail the data provided by the chapters (see Table 16.2) in order to situate countries as regards the strategic development of government communication and its orientation to citizens.

TABLE 16.2 Government communication data for 15 countries

		GROUP 1			
		1. Sweden	2. Germany	3. United States	4. United Kingdom
HUMAN RESOURCES	Number of government communicators	140 in central government (2010) (out of a total of 4,800 employees)	470 (2012) in the Federal Press and Information Office excluding ministry communication employees (370 in Berlin, 90 in Bonn)	No figures are given for federal government 15,540 (2010) in all local government communication categories	3,158 (2008) working for all central government ministries
	Spokespeoples' profile	Political appointees	Political appointees	Public servants Political appointees	Public servants
	Principal government communication structure	Non-ministerial Information and Communication Department (Information Rosenbad)	Federal Press and Information Office	Office of Communication Press Office Office of Public Engagement	Communication Delivery Board Government Communication Network

5. France	6. Australia	7. Spain	8. Poland
The Prime Minister's Communication office (SIG) includes 24 senior managers. Each ministry has its own communication department (2011)	Estimates of 3,000 communicators employed by federal and state governments (2010)	400 in central government communication office and ministries (out of 131,954 government employees)	32 employees at the Government Information Centre 200 employees at the ministries
Political appointees	Public servants Political appointees	Political appointees But members of the civil service and members of political cabinets take part in government communication	The government spokesperson is political appointee. The spokespersons of ministers and governors could be members of the civil service or members of political cabinets
Government Information Service	Press Office Communication Advice Branch Department of Finance and Deregulation Ministerial Liaison, Communications and Governance Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet Community Engagement Section Department of the Prime Minister	Communication State Office with the rank of a Secretariat of State (below a ministry)	Government Communication and Information System

TABLE 16.2 Continued

| | | GROUP 1 | | | |
		1. Sweden	2. Germany	3. United States	4. United Kingdom
HUMAN RSOURCES	Professional backgrounds	Journalists	Journalists	Diverse and varied backgrounds	Journalists Public relations/ Marketing
	Specialized training for civil servant communicators	No	No	Some programmes at federal level	Yes (from 2006)
	Designated chief executive spokesperson	No	No	Yes: political appointee	Yes: public servant
	Designated government spokesperson	No	Yes: junior minister	No	No
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	Advertising campaigns	Not available	Not available	Not available	US$862m (2010)
	Other communication costs	Budget for Non-ministerial Information and Communication Department US$3.42m (2010)	In 2010 the Federal Press and Information Office budget of US$20.6m for public relations. The ministries have communication budget; data on expenses are published	Not available	Staff costs: US$525.5m (2010)

5. France	6. Australia	7. Spain	8. Poland
Diverse and varied backgrounds	Journalists Public relations/ Marketing	Journalists Increasingly from corporate communication and public relations	Social Science Political Science Journalism Sociology Law Economics
No	No	Some courses began in 2008	No
Yes	No	No	Yes
Usually yes	No	Yes: senior minister	Yes
Not available	Federal government advertising in 2009–10 financial year was US$119.3m	US$104.3m (2010)	No systematic data available
Altogether, including polling, SIG budget was US$34.4m (2011)	Estimates of staff costs across federal, state and local governments of US$260m annually	Data not available	Only some data available. The costs of outsourcing of Government Information Centre in the Chancellery of the Prime Minister US$858,730

TABLE 16.2 Continued

		GROUP 1			
		1. Sweden	2. Germany	3. United States	4. United Kingdom
REGULATORY AND NORMATIVE FRAMEWORK	Communication, advertising, public relations legislation/ policies regarding non-partisanship	Policies and unwritten code of civil service neutrality	Court decisions (1977) (1983): right of the government to active public relations but communication must not be used for electoral purposes	The Hatch Act (1938): preventing partisan activities by government communicators	Civil Service Code (1996 and revised in 2006) and Propriety Guidance for government communicators. Code for Special Advisors (in 2010 it was established that they cannot instruct permanent civil servants) Communications Act (2003) includes provisions regarding government information campaigns that seek to maintain their non-political aims. Propriety and Ethics Team at the Cabinet Office (can be consulted about the interpretation of the guidance on communication matters)
	Access to information/ transparency legislation	Yes: Freedom of Information (FOI) Act (1766)	Yes: FOI Act (2005)	Yes: FOI Act and the Government Sunshine Act 1976	Yes: FOI Act (2005)

5. France	6. Australia	7. Spain	8. Poland
Various government decrees on expenditures and mandatory competition for contracting pollsters	Guidelines on Information and Advertising Campaigns (2010)	Law of Advertising and Institutional Communication (2005) to disassociate accurate and neutral information on public policies from political opinion and partisan messages	The Act on Civil Service (2008), The Act on Civil Service introducing the system of neutral members of the civil service corps adopted in 1996 The Act on employees of state offices (1982). The Ordinance of the Council of Ministers on the Organization and Tasks of Spokespersons in Offices of Government Administration Organs (2002)
Yes: Administrative Transparency Law (1978)	Yes: FOI Act (1982)	Proposed Transparency Law 2012	Yes: the Act on the Access to Public Information (2002)

TABLE 16.2 Continued

		GROUP 2		
		9. Chile	10. South Africa	11. India
HUMAN RESOURCES	Number of government communicators	About 600: 114 (2006) people employed in the Secretariat of Communication and estimated 500 employed in ministries and other government agencies in jobs related to communication activities	483 in Government and Information System	Data not available
	Spokespeoples' profile	Political appointees	Public servants Political appointees	Political appointees and civil servants
	Principal government communication structure	Ministry General Secretariat of Government Secretariat of Communication President's Press Office	Government Communication and Information System	Press Information Bureau, Ministry of Information & Broadcasting
	Professional backgrounds	Mainly journalists, sociologists and political scientists	Journalism Development studies Economics Marketing Political Science	Journalism Public Relations
	Specialized training for civil servant communicators	No	Yes	No
	Designated chief executive spokesperson	No	No	Yes
	Designated government spokesperson	Yes: political appointee	Yes: senior official with political ties to government	Yes: the same chief executive spokesperson

GROUP 3			
12. Mexico	13. Singapore	14. China	15. Zimbabwe
140 employees (2012)	Data not available	Data not available	90 in Information Ministry
Political appointees	Political appointees	Political appointees	Public servants Political appointees
The Social Communication Office	Ministry of Information, Communications and the Arts Prime Minister's Office	Politburo Standing Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the Propaganda Department of the CCP	Ministry of Media, Information and Publicity
Journalism Sociology Political Science Communication	No information available	Journalists and communication specialists	Mix of backgrounds but chiefly war veterans and military and intelligence backgrounds
No	No	Yes	No
Yes	No	No	No
Yes: the same chief executive spokesperson	Yes: minister or political appointee	Yes: senior minister and Communist Party member	Yes: senior minister appointed from ruling Zanu PF Party

TABLE 16.2 Continued

		GROUP 2		
		9. Chile	10. South Africa	11. India
FINANCIAL RESOURCES	Advertising campaigns	Total advertising expenditure: US$42m (2006)	Data not available	Data not available
	Other communication costs	Ministry Secretariat of the Government: US$22.5m (2006) Secretariat of Communication: US$1.5m (2006)	Department Communication and Information System staff costs US$49.3m (2011)	Annual budget published
REGULATORY FRAMEWORK	Communication, advertising, public relations legislation/ policies regarding non-partisanship	Non-partisanship in communication is hardly regulated. There is no formal regulation in terms of its definition and mechanisms of control.	No legislation, etc.	Citizen Charter
	Access to information/ transparency legislation	Yes: Law on Access to Publication (2009)	Yes: Promotion of Access to Information Act (2000)	Yes: Right to Information Act (2005)

Tactical and strategic communication

The chapter case studies provide abundant information about the structures of government communication including their legal, historical and regulatory context, financial and human resources, organizational structures and the roles and responsibilities of communicators which we next explore in relation to the presence of elements suggesting more strategic or more tactical communication capacities for each of the 15 countries (see Table 16.3).

Organizational structure and chart

As communication channels and objectives have become more complex, including – for example – the development of social media and citizen

GROUP 3			
12. Mexico	13. Singapore	14. China	15. Zimbabwe
US$350.9m (2010)	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
US$11.9m (2010)	Data not available	Data not available	Data not available
Federal Code of Political Institutions and electoral procedures reformed in 2007	No legislation, etc.	No legislation, etc.	No legislation, etc.
Yes: Transparency Law (2003)	No	Yes: FOI Act (2007)	Yes: Access to Information and Privacy Act (2002) but used more to suppress information in the name of privacy

engagement goals, so governments' organizational structure has become more specialized in a number of countries. This organizational specialization is especially apparent in the United States, Britain and Australia, Group 1 countries and South Africa: communication activity is not circumscribed to developing messaging but includes carrying out citizen insight research for engagement (see Table 16.3, element A-1). Activities are distributed in various secretariats or offices headed by mid-ranking ministers or senior public officials. The units tend to be centrally located within government with communicators assigned specific tasks; for areas such as media relations and public information campaigns, their functions may be distributed throughout ministries. In Britain, for example, a communication delivery board located in the central coordinating ministry, headed by a civil servant executive director, organizes communicators transversally across ministries in themed clusters to work on communication campaigns.

TABLE 16.3 Assessment of government communication in 15 countries

AXIS A

TACTICAL ◄──────────────────────────► STRATEGIC

STRUCTURE

Human resources

		Limited development of specialized communication units (mainly media briefing and information publication)	**Some development of specialized communication units (e.g. social media, corporate relations, opinion research)**	**Extensive development of specialized communication units (e.g. public/digital engagement, citizens' insight research)**
A-1	**Organizational structure**	Zimbabwe	Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Poland Chile, India Mexico, Singapore China	United States, United Kingdom, Australia South Africa
		Position is not defined in organizational chart	**Position is defined in organizational chart but its status changes**	**Position is defined and fixed in organizational chart**
A-2	**Organizational chart: chief executive or government spokesperson position**	Sweden, Australia	France, Spain Chile Mexico, Singapore	Germany, United States, United Kingdom, Poland South Africa, India China, Zimbabwe

		Recruitment profiles mainly of those with journalism backgrounds	Broader range of recruitment profiles including those with social science/communication backgrounds	Specialized recruitment profiles from broad range of communication backgrounds (public relations, marketing, digital, IT, journalism, etc.)
A-3	Recruitment	Sweden, Germany, Spain Zimbabwe	France, Poland Chile, South Africa, India Mexico, Singapore	United States, United Kingdom, Australia China
		No development of specific/specialized training	Some development of specific/specialized training	More development of specific/specialized training
A-4	Training	Sweden, Germany, France, Australia, Poland Chile, India Mexico, Singapore, Zimbabwe	Spain South Africa China	United States, United Kingdom
Rules regarding government communication functions				
		No legislation, policies and conventions	Limited legislation, policies and conventions	Extensive legislation, policies and conventions
A-5	Legislation, policies and conventions regarding government communication functions	Singapore, China, Zimbabwe	Chile, South Africa, India Mexico	Sweden, Germany, United States, United Kingdom, France, Australia, Spain Poland

AXIS A

TACTICAL ────────────▶ STRATEGIC

Technical infrastructure

A-6	Limited development (Ranked from 101 –184)	Some development (Ranked from 31–100)	High degree of development (Ranked from 1–30)
E-government development[a]	India (125) Zimbabwe (129)	Poland (45) Chile (34), South Africa (97) Mexico (56), China (72)	Sweden (12), Germany (15), United States (2), United Kingdom (4), France (10), Australia (8), Spain (9) Singapore (11)

PROCESS

A-7	**Tactical tasks, mainly limited to media relations**	**Some strategic planning at managerial level including media relations, public relations and campaigns**	**Managerial tasks are developed including strategic planning, research and assessment**
Practices	Zimbabwe	Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Poland Chile, South Africa, India Mexico, Singapore, China	United States, United Kingdom, Australia

A-8	Coordination of government communication	No coordination function or structure	Coordination is defined as a function/role/task	There is a coordination structure(s)
			Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Poland Chile, India Mexico, Singapore Zimbabwe	United States, United Kingdom, Australia South Africa China

[a] This element is based on the rankings for e-government development provided by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010) *United Nations E-Government Survey*. New York: United Nations. See main text for details of the survey methodology. A total of 184 countries were surveyed. Those ranked from 1 to 30 are considered highly developed, 31 to 100 somewhat developed and 101 to 184 are considered to have limited development.

AXIS B

PARTY-CENTRED ← ——————————————————→ CITIZEN-CENTRED

		Non-partisanship		
B-1	**Legislation, policies and conventions specifically regarding non-partisanship in government communication**[a]	No legislation, policies and conventions	Legislation, policies and conventions limited to specific issues, e.g. the use of public resources for electoral campaign activities	Wide-ranging legislation, policies and conventions, e.g. the UK Propriety Guidance for government communicators
		India Singapore, China, Zimbabwe	United States, France, Australia, Spain, Poland, Chile, South Africa Mexico	Sweden, Germany, United Kingdom,
B-2	**Profile of government spokespeople**	**Political appointees**	**Both political appointees and civil servants**	**Only civil servants**
		Sweden, Germany, France, Australia, Spain Chile, Mexico, Singapore, China, Zimbabwe	United States, Poland South Africa, India	United Kingdom

Transparency

	No or very limited information	Some systematic information	Extensive systematic information
B-3 **Reporting of financial resources dedicated to communication activities**	United States Singapore, China, Zimbabwe	Sweden, France, Spain, Poland Chile, India Mexico	Germany, United Kingdom, Australia South Africa
	No information available	**Some data available and staff categories defined**	**Data available and staff categories defined**
B-4 **Reporting of staff numbers**	China	Sweden, Germany, United States, France, Spain, Poland Chile, South Africa, India Mexico, Singapore, Zimbabwe	United Kingdom, Australia
	Little or no documented commitment and evidence of transparency	**Documented commitment and evidence of transparency**	**Extensive documented commitment and evidence of transparency**
B-5 **Transparency laws and evidence of effectiveness**[b]	Singapore, Zimbabwe	Germany, France, Australia, Spain, Poland Chile, South Africa, India Mexico, China	Sweden, United States, United Kingdom

Participation

	Government has very limited mechanisms to seek feedback from citizens/society (Ranked from 101–184)	Government has some mechanisms to seek feedback from citizens/society (Ranked from 31–100)	Government has extensive mechanisms to seek feedback from citizens/society (Ranked from 1–30)
B-6			
E-participation[c]	Zimbabwe (144)	Poland (51) Chile (34), South Africa (64), India (58) Mexico (32), China (32)	Sweden (23), Germany (14), United States (6), United Kingdom (4), France (15), Australia (2), Spain (3) Singapore (9)

Sources: Chapters' data for elements 1–5, 7 and 8 on axis A and 1–5 for axis B; United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010) *United Nations E-Government Survey*, New York: United Nations for element 6 on axis A and element 5 on axis B; Banisar, D. (2006) *Freedom of Information around the world*, London: Privacy International and United States Department of State (2010) *2010 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*, retrieved on 10 September 2012 from www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4da56d8ba5.html; United States Department of State (2011) *2011 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices – Chile*, 24 May 2012, retrieved on 6 October 2012 from www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4fc75aaec.html

[a] Most countries have statutory regulation regarding the requirement for public servants to observe neutrality and/or non-partisanship in the execution of their duties. However, this factor refers to specific regulation, policies and/or guidance regarding the requirement to observe neutrality and/or non-partisanship in government communication.

[b] This element is assessed by (1) whether the country has access to information or transparency legislation and (2) reports on its effectiveness by the *Freedom of Information Survey* (2006) and the US Department of State's (2010, 2011) *Country Human Rights' Reports*.

[c] This element is assessed by the United Nations' e-participation index, provided by the United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010). See main text for details of the survey methodology. A total of 184 countries were surveyed. Those ranked from 1 to 30 are considered highly developed, 31 to 100 somewhat developed and 101 to 184 are considered to have limited development. The index assesses the following three factors: Does the national government facilitate information for citizens (e-information sharing)? Are there ways for the public to engage in consultations with policy makers, government officials and one another (e-consultation)? Can citizens directly influence decisions, for example, by voting online or using a mobile telephone (e-decision making)? See United Nations' Department of Economic and Social Affairs (2010, pp. 83, 113).

All other countries, except Zimbabwe, have gone some way along the path of organizational specialization, reflected in the creation of centralized units for social media, corporate relations, opinion research, thus showing some development of strategic capacity.

The stability and location of communication roles and functions in the organizational chart can provide evidence for their strategic institutional weight. Looking at element A-2, the definition and fixity of the chief executive or government spokesperson position, in Sweden and Australia, for example, it is a position held by ministers who act as ministerial spokespeople by virtue of their office with no specific chief executive or government spokesperson position fixed in the organizational chart. In other Group 1 countries – Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom and Poland – together with South Africa and India from Group 2 and China and Zimbabwe from Group 3, on the other hand, there is a fixed and defined position. France and Spain from Group 1 and Chile (Group 2), Mexico and Singapore (Group 3) have a government or chief executive spokesperson position but, in the periods charted by chapter authors, the position has moved around the organizational chart. In France, for example, the government spokesperson has shifted from being a presidential to a prime ministerial appointee, representing power battles within government. The same lack of definition and fixity of position is also found in Mexico. In Spain, on the other hand, there is a tendency for the position to be held by one of the deputy prime ministers.

Recruitment and training of communicators

We wished to examine the background and training of government communicators (see Table 16.3, elements A-3 and A-4). We found that some Group 1 countries (the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia) recruit government communicators from a broad mix of communication backgrounds including journalism, marketing and public relations. Sweden, Germany and Spain however, have tended to recruit government communicators from a journalism background, although public relations and advertising are also increasingly considered acceptable fields for government communicators. The journalism background of many government communicators appears to reflect a long-held presumption that government communication is equivalent to media relations and, as argued earlier, more linked to a tactical communication approach. Chile employs communication staff from a broader range of communication and social science backgrounds as do France, Poland, Chile, South Africa, India, Mexico and Singapore, reflecting a growing tendency to recruit from a wider pool of communication specializations. At the left end of the continuum, Zimbabwe's chief criterion for recruitment is loyalty

to the Mugabe regime so that its communication staff is composed chiefly of war veterans and personnel with a military or intelligence background.

In most countries, systematic training is not provided for communication staff. The exceptions are the United States and Britain from Group 1 countries. South Africa's communication body has a section in charge of training and development that runs short skills' courses and plans to develop a more comprehensive programme for the future. Spain began short communication training courses for generalist staff in 2008 but provides no systematic and comprehensive programme. China also introduced training courses for its communication staff, run under the supervision of the Communist Party, in mid-2000. These results suggest there is much still to be done by governments in developing the communication skillsets of their staff and in recognizing, as the corporate world has done, the increasingly specialized nature of communication knowledge and expertise.

Rules regarding government communication functions

We asked researchers to identify specific legislation, policy or conventions regarding the functions of government communication (Table 16.3, element A-5). The lack of clear, publicly known rules about what communication is for, the situation in all Group 3 countries except Mexico could result in a discontinuity in purpose suggesting a deficient understanding of the strategic significance of communication. In all Group 1 countries, extensive rules have been developed, expressed either in legislation (Spain and Poland, for example) or policy and guidance documents (the United Kingdom). To take Poland, for instance, a number of government communication functions are legislatively mandated and include the obligation to provide the media with information. In Germany, government communication functions include informing the public and the media about the political activities and objectives of the government, providing information about Germany to other countries and monitoring public opinion as a basis for government decisions. In Group 2 countries, Chile, South Africa and India as well as the Group 3 country, Mexico, there has been more limited development of rules regarding government communication functions.

Technological infrastructure: E-government resources

Developing e-government resources requires considerable investment in technology and human resources to develop services for the public. In order to chart progress in implementing e-government, the United Nations carries out a periodic survey rating all governments in relation to the scope and quality

of online services, telecommunications infrastructure and human capacity. They use this to establish an E-Government Development Index (EDGI) which is a weighted average of three normalized scores of these three dimensions, each of which is a composite measure (see United Nations, 2010, p. 123). Online services are rated according to a four-stage model where services are considered emerging, enhanced, transactional and connected where, in the last case, there is a 'web of integrated functions, widespread data sharing, and routine consultation with citizens using social networking and related tools' (United Nations, 2010, p. 95). Telecommunications connectivity is ranked according to five indicators: the number of personal computers per 100 persons, number of internet users per 100 persons, number of telephone lines per 100 persons, number of mobile subscriptions per 100 persons and number of fixed broadband subscribers per 100 persons (United Nations, 2010, p. 113). Human capital is a composite of adult literacy rates and educational enrolment.

This ranking is used to assess element A-6 (see Table 16.3). Apart from Poland, all Group 1 countries are ranked in the top 30 for e-government development together with Singapore and are thus found at the right end of the continuum. The remaining countries have some e-government development with India and Zimbabwe having the most limited development. E-government development is obviously contingent on broader macrolevel factors such as the prevailing economic conditions. However, it also provides an indication of the strategic capacity of governments in being able effectively to inform, deliver services and communicate with citizens.

Communication processes: Communication practices and coordination

Assessing processes – understood as structured activities designed to produce a specific goal – in relation to communication practices can provide a picture of the extent to which government communication is carried out with a strategic perspective. If practices are geared more to short-term media relations, for example, we would consider government communication to be more tactical. Where evidence can be found for longer-term coordination and planning based on research and assessment, we would consider government communication practice to be more strategic in character.

We found that most countries have developed some degree of strategic planning of communication as evidenced by the development of systematically managed communication planning, research and assessment. This is most developed in some Group 1 countries, the United States, Britain and Australia, and least in Zimbabwe (see Table 16.3, element A-7).

The way in which coordination processes are structured (or not) also indicates whether communication is considered to be a strategic function of government. The United States, Britain, Australia, South Africa and China have developed formal coordination structures for communication (see Table 16.3, element A-8). All the remaining countries contemplate coordination as a function, role or task without giving it structural expression and chapters show that this is one of the most difficult challenges for developing strategic communication.

Communication purposes

Assessing the presence or not of specific communication values permits us to evaluate government communication in relation to the question of what purposes it seeks to achieve.

Identifying the extent to which governments have developed processes and rules that safeguard the communication values of impartiality, transparency and participation is not straightforward. There are no commonly agreed standards in these areas even though initiatives such as the Open Government Partnership established in 2011 and the United Nations E-government survey are working to establish internationally shared indicators. The 'insider' case studies in this book provide useful complements to the information available in global ratings.

Non-partisanship

Having rules regarding non-partisanship suggests a public service orientation of government communication where communication is understood as being directed to serve the public rather than the political party in power. We asked researchers to identify specific legislation, policy or conventions regarding the impartiality of government communication (see Table 16.3, element B-1). The non-partisanship of government communication receives the most comprehensive underpinning in Sweden, Germany and the United Kingdom. These Group 1 countries have developed extensive policy and/ or guidance regarding the requirement for non-partisanship in government communication. Together with the United States, France, Australia, Spain and Poland from Group 1, Chile and South Africa from Group 2 and Mexico from Group 3 countries, they also have legislation or policy but limited to specific issues such as the use of public resources for electoral campaign activities. Countries which appear to have no legislation or policy regarding impartiality in government communication include India and Group 3 countries, Singapore, China and Zimbabwe.

Regarding the rules for government spokespeople (see Table 16.3, element B-2), spokespeople are assigned their tasks on the basis of two and sometimes overlapping criteria: first, they are public servants employed to work on government business and second, they are political appointments, designated to fulfil communication tasks because of their political affinity or position with the governing party. The role of government spokesperson is one in which the political criterion comes powerfully into play in countries from each group. In Sweden, Germany, France, Australia and Spain from Group 1, Chile from Group 2 and Mexico, Singapore, China and Zimbabwe from Group 3, political appointees are designated as government spokespeople so they are at the left of the continuum. In the United States, Poland, South Africa and India, a mixture of political appointees and public officials serve as government spokespeople. The United Kingdom is unique in that official government spokespeople are civil servants, although an informal system of political government spokespeople functions through the network of special advisers.

Transparency. Reporting practices and effective legislation

To examine transparency, we examine three lines of evidence: reporting practices regarding (1) the financial and (2) the human resources dedicated to government communication and (3) evidence of effective transparency legislation.

Reliable statistics about the costs of government communication are key in order to monitor and assess performance, review the appropriateness of goals and means and hold governments to account and are an indicator of its degree of transparency. We asked whether data about government communication costs were available and, if they were, how much money governments spend on communication see (Table 16.3, element B-3). This is the area in which researchers had most difficulty in obtaining data. In the United States and Group 3 countries, Zimbabwe, China and Singapore, no figures were available. Partial figures, mainly regarding the costs of government advertising campaigns, were available in Sweden, Germany, France, Spain, Poland, Chile, India and Mexico. The most complete and systematic statistics, covering advertising and staff costs, were those found for Germany, Britain, Australia, Group 1 countries, and South Africa, a Group 2 country. Group 1 countries produced the most complete financial data while Group 3 countries, apart from Mexico, provided no publicly available figures at all.

We also asked about the reporting of the number of those employed in central executive government communication work (see Table 16.3, element

B-4). We were able to obtain some data from all countries except China. Group 1 countries were most likely to provide data for clearly defined categories. The most systematic data was available in the United Kingdom and Australia. No other country had complete data about all those working on communication tasks. The United States could not provide data for federal communicators but only for those working in local government. In the case of Germany, for example, 470 employees work in media relations but no information was available about the numbers of those working in other communication tasks. One common theme was the rising number of those employed in communication tasks by governments across the world. However, this trend was reversed in Germany where numbers employed in the Federal Press and Information Office fell by around 30 per cent between 2010 and 2012 and in the United Kingdom where in the same period the government reduced communication staff by nearly 40 per cent. In sum, data regarding numbers of government communicators is more accessible in Group 1 countries and least available in Group 3 countries, although in nearly every case information is incomplete.

Finally, all countries except Singapore and Spain (although in the latter case legislation was proposed in 2012) have an access to information or transparency law (see Table 16.3, element B-5). However, having legislation does not guarantee delivery as the example of Zimbabwe shows where the law is used to clamp down on media freedom. Thus, we assess governments' degree of communicational transparency using documentary sources such as the Freedom of Information (FOI) Survey published by the non-profit organization, Privacy International and the US government's country reports on human rights which qualitatively examine government transparency. Using these additional sources together with chapter data, Singapore and Zimbabwe are found to be least transparent while Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom rank most highly in attempting to ensure transparent government.

E-participation

To examine an aspect of citizen participation (see Table 16.3, element B-6), we used the UN's e-government survey's (2010) e-participation index which posits 'the relevance of three factors in citizen engagement: electronic information dissemination, electronic consultation and electronic participation in decision-making' (United Nations, 2010, p. 110). Governments are assessed, for instance, on whether they allow the public to engage in consultations with policy makers, government officials and one another. According to the United Nations, Sweden, Germany, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Australia, Spain and Singapore are in the top 30 countries in terms of their

development of e-participation; Poland, Chile, South Africa, India, Mexico and China appear in the rankings between 30 and 100 while Zimbabwe is in position 144 out of 157 countries. Chapter data, however, suggests that in the case of Singapore the appearance of participation and reciprocity should be treated with caution since the reality is rather more controlled.

Categorizing government communication

The overall assessment of countries is shown in Figure 16.1.

The results suggest a number of interesting relationships between macrosystemic elements and mesolevel ones. Taking first those countries situated highest in the top right-hand quadrant and therefore considered most strategic and citizen oriented. In descending order, the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States are all Group 1 countries with high levels of media and political freedom. Communication is generally organized and planned at a senior level and accorded an autonomous organizational status that positions it as a strategic function of government not exclusively bound by party political considerations. As Sanders, Young and Liu and Levenshus make clear in their chapters, these are countries where some of the most vigorous debates have taken place about the alleged politicization of government communication or the legitimacy of political public relations per se. The strategic development of communication in these countries has been accompanied, according to our analysis, by the high development of citizen-centred communication in the United Kingdom and Australia and quite high
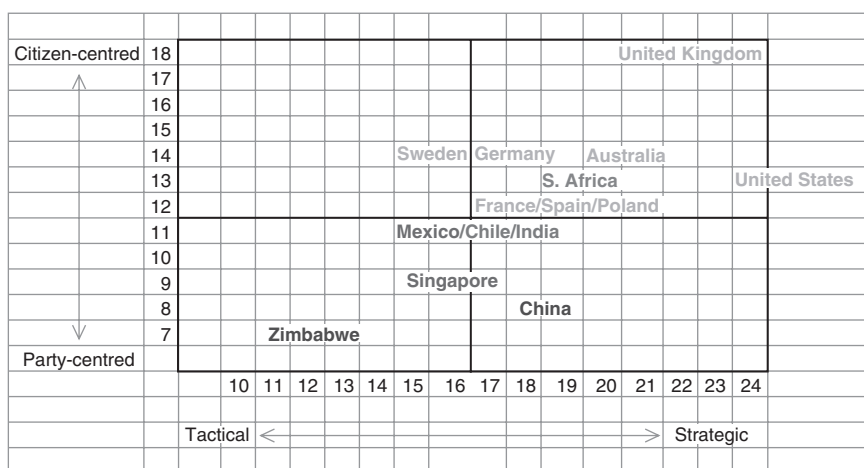

FIGURE 16.1 *Categorization of government communication*

in the United States. Strategic communication in these countries appears not to be synonymous with an exclusive party political focus but looks towards citizens' interests. The existence of political and media freedom may be strong drivers for ensuring government communication is more citizen focused.

Looking at the other extreme of the figure, the lower left-hand quadrant, the Group 3 country, Zimbabwe, is found to be the most party politically oriented and least strategic. As Maqeda puts it in Chapter 11, 'Zimbabwe's government communication is intrinsically linked to the partisan political agenda of Zanu PF' and could be said to be considered to be a party political function serving party political goals. This is also true to some extent for Singapore, which also appears in the lower left-hand quadrant and is a Group 3 country. However, Singapore is more strategically orientated and is somewhat more citizen focused than Zimbabwe, reflecting perhaps Lee's guarded optimism that the 2011 elections marked a watershed for Singaporean politics in moving the country towards a less controlling political environment.

China, also a Group 3 country, is the only country considered more strategically than tactically oriented and more party than citizen oriented and is found in the lower right-hand quadrant. Dong, Yoon and Chia-Wen consider that technological development and external drivers such as the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2003 SARS crisis have contributed to moves towards more strategic government communication. However, China's citizen-centred focus is limited and without change in political and media freedoms, the professionalization of government communication is likely to remain stymied in the near future.

There is one country, Sweden, a Group 1 country, found in the upper left-hand quadrant. This is a case of the country with a strong citizen focus, scoring highly on the citizen-oriented axis, reflecting a distinctive political culture exemplified in its 1766 Freedom of Information Law. At the same time, it has not developed a high strategic capacity: the changes reported by Falasca and Nord have produced a government communication structure that is flat, decentralized and rather fragmented. As Falasca and Nord argue, these developments will require further research to see how government communication in Sweden could gain more strategic capacity.

A number of countries can be found towards the midpoint of the two axes. On the one hand, Germany, France, Spain and Poland, Group 1 countries, are all situated towards the lower part of the upper right-hand quadrant with middling scores for strategic and citizen-centred development (although Germany is somewhat higher). In each case, institutional designs and practices continue to reflect particular historical imprints for good or ill. Looking at Spain, for example, its corporatist history has often made state control of information a default position as evidenced by the absence of transparency legislation.

Indeed, despite its strong position in e-government development, Spain's strategic development of government communication is still hampered, according to Canel, by structures and approaches inherited from the previous regime. Political systemic features of France and Germany also leave their mark on the strategic development of government communication: in France due to the tensions of the presidential/prime ministerial relationship and in Germany due to the multilayered complexities of the federal *Länder* system.

The case of South Africa is interesting: a Group 2 country, scores high in strategic development and relatively high in citizen orientation compared to other Group 2 countries and is found in the upper, right-hand quadrant. It is clear that the country has made notable attempts to establish more participatory and strategically organized government communication. However, in Makombe's account, it is also clear that there have been some government attempts to indulge in strong-arm tactics in relation to the media, threatening, for example, to direct advertising revenue exclusively to government supporting media. If these trends were to continue, they would undoubtedly impact negatively on the development of professional government communication in South Africa.

The remaining Group 2 countries, Chile and India, are located in the top part of the lower, left-hand quadrant. In other words, they have developed a limited strategic and citizen-centred capacity. In both cases, structural and systemic constraints condition the development of effective communication, restricting the establishment of communication strategy as a management function coordinated across government. As Uribe explains in the case of Chile, communication structures are not optimally designed for achieving their purpose. Their redundancy and lack of synergy reflect the competing demands of Chile's political system and effective communication can lose out. In the case of Mexico, a Group 3 country, modifications introduced in recent years show that governments' attempts to control the media are accompanied by an inability to craft a consistent communication strategy. As Meyenberg and Aguilar argue, governments have been unable to connect well with citizens and to develop positive perceptions of the achievements of democracy.

In sum, all Group 3 countries are located in the lower and most on the left-side of the quadrant while the reverse is true for Group 1 countries. Notwithstanding all the limitations of the analysis, it does appear that media and political freedoms are associated with the development of strategic and citizen-focused government communication. However, in all cases the interplay of systems and structures points to the particular complexity of establishing government communication within professional parameters as we shall see below.

Challenges for government communication research

Across the world, governments are adopting new formulae and expending more resources on communication, implicitly recognizing the centrality of communication to their work. The internet and the myriad possibilities it offers for speedier service delivery, public interactivity and engagement, as well as for citizen surveillance and control, have changed the nature of government communication. These developments open up a range of questions for researchers that we summarize in three challenges

Nailing the data and improving practice

A major challenge for researchers, policy makers and government officials is to define and collect relevant data related to government communication. When Britain's House of Lords' Communication Committee examined the country's government communication structure, one of the main obstacles to completion of its task was the difficulty in obtaining data. In response to criticism, the United Kingdom's senior civil servant replied that the failure arose from the fact that it is 'very difficult to specify . . . what constitutes "communications" civil servants' and because 'different departments will organise their business in different ways. Not all the communications functions in a department will be part of a single communications directorate with a single budget for communications' (HOLSCC, 2009, p. 33).

This study shows that this is not only a British problem. All our researchers had difficulty in obtaining the material needed to respond to our mesolevel questions regarding government communication structures partly because of the unavailability of the data but also because of the lack of precise definition on the part of governments about what constitutes communication activity.

Defining who works in these areas and the resources dedicated to them, charting their projects and tasks would allow a more realistic assessment of future needs. Governments would be able to establish richer and more accurate measures of communication value, allowing them to benchmark practice and measure outputs (the goods and services produced for society) and outcomes (the impact on citizens), answering public and media concerns about efficient and appropriate use of limited resources. Governments would be in a position to develop appropriate and coherent guidance, monitoring and enforcement instruments to help ensure that communication is in accordance with declared values. On present evidence, few countries are able to do this in a systematic way and this is where the research community should work to provide cross-national measures that are robust for future comparative and benchmarking studies.

Defining professional government communication

In this chapter we have assessed the communication strategic capacity and citizen orientation of government communication. Drawing on public relations and corporate communication literature, we have assumed that countries need to score high in both these areas for their government communication to be considered professional. We are aware that this approach is debatable, as a number of authors in this volume have suggested, and as we discuss below.

A common trend in all countries is a move towards giving more relevance and importance to communication in terms of capacity – structures, processes and knowledge. Practically every author charts a significant shift of institutional and human resources into government communication although, in several countries, the 2008 economic crisis has prompted budget and staff cuts.

The reasons for this change vary from country to country. In Sweden and China, controversy about inadequate communication at times of crisis (the 2004 tsunami in the first case and the 2003 outbreak of SARS in the second) has been a spur to the expansion of capacity. Spain, Poland and Chile place the development of more professionalized government communication in the context of democratic emergence from authoritarian pasts. Singapore, on the other hand, appears to have considered it as a means for ensuring a compliant population although, as Lee points, there are some hopeful signs since the 2011 elections that the government realizes that 'it must evolve its communication approach and style'. With the exception of Zimbabwe, in every country studied, there are new developments in government communication giving relevance and responding to changing demands of media and/or citizens.

This shift, however, has not been assessed by authors in a similar way. In a number of countries (Germany, the United States, United Kingdom and Australia), this increase of resources and the development of strategic approaches have been associated with a debate about the 'professionalization of government communication': chapters report controversies about governments using their communication resources to pursue partisan goals and employing 'spin' to manipulate the public and media. Debates about the politicization of government communication have been particularly lively in countries with high levels of media freedom, suggesting that they are a healthy indicator of a press sector prepared to hold politicians to account. However, the understanding here of professionalization – more strategic and resourced government communication – leading to more manipulative communication suggests to us that more thought needs to be given the definition of professionalization and professionalism being used in political communication scholarship.

Maarek, for example, suggests that politicization is the natural condition of government communication and that the notion of impartial 'communicatión publique' is an impractical one. It is certainly true that the communication advantages and imperatives of incumbency are considerable: governments command huge resources and the governing party wants to maintain public approval and has political communication objectives. However, it is also clear that the controversies and growing distrust of politicians in Western democracies have prompted moves to put in place measures to ensure citizen-oriented communication. Germany and the United States, for example, have introduced legislation and Britain developed policy to safeguard the non-partisanship or impartiality of government communication.

The challenge is, then, to define more clearly professionalism and its component elements. There is little research, for instance, about the definition of non-partisanship for government communication and whether, in fact, it contributes to its professional practice. The same can be said with regard to transparent, accountable and participative government communication. Developing commonly shared measures, drawing on work already being done for other sectors, would provide a useful contribution to building professional government communication capacity that truly serves the citizen.

Finally, there is little microlevel research on the professional values and attitudes of government communicators. There are yawning gaps and systematic work in this area would assist in understanding the shared and divergent interpretations of professional government communication found across different cultures.

Digital technology and the empowering and/or controlling of citizens

One of the key developments in government communication, reflected in this study, is the uptake of new technology. With the exception of Zimbabwe, governments everywhere are using the internet to deliver more efficiently government services and messages. Social media are used across the world to interact with citizens and mainstream media. Digital engagement including e-information, e-consultation and e-participation, are the buzz-words of this brave, new digital world.

However, developing e-government capacity as defined by the United Nations' study (2010), is no guarantee of increased citizen empowerment. In Lee's account, Singapore is an example of the development of digital participation where citizens are regularly and frequently consulted about government policy initiatives. However, the lack of mechanisms to ensure transparent and accountable processes, key values for citizen empowerment,

has led to what Lee refers to as 'feedback fatigue'. Singaporeans no longer believe these consultations have any real impact and are instead mere window-dressing exercises to give the appearance of open government communication.

However, Lee also points out that the digital environment can provide the venue for citizens' communicational interaction in ways that can undermine governments' attempts to control, misinform or not inform at all. Semetko and Wadhwa point to a similar phenomenon in India with the rise of social networking sites and China too, albeit in a controlled environment, is experiencing the dissolving effects of internet technology on governments' attempts to control public opinion.

These are exciting developments found at different speeds and intensities across divergent media and political systems. However, they also have a flip side. The internet is also the home of special interests, rumour and disinformation. Powerful groups, and there is none more powerful than big government, can capture and manipulate its specific dynamics and it is clear that a Panglossian view of the democratizing effects of digital media is naïve (see Mozorov, 2012). But nor should we, as these chapters suggest, be hopelessly pessimistic. The internet is opening up new possibilities, in engagement, in gaining citizen insight, in transparency. The challenge, we believe, is to understand how digital media can in fact be employed in government communication in ways that can encourage grown-up conversations about policies, priorities and social goods. This will require thinking about suitable oversight structures and cultures.

Conclusions

This book brings together research on central government communication in 15 countries incorporating concepts and perspectives from public relations, corporate and strategic communication studies to the political communication tradition. It has been a challenging endeavour first because our research subject, central government communication, can be said to have inhabited for some time a kind of empirical and theoretical no-man's land in which, furthermore, the raw data is neither easily identifiable nor collectable. For this reason, we are specially grateful to our fellow authors for having brought together, against the odds, the material necessary to build a collection of case studies and data covering a wide set of parameters. We hope that the work will constitute a first step towards the systematization of dispersed and fragmented data on government communication from different countries. However, there is still much to do. The second part of the challenge is its interdisciplinary character. Interdisciplinary research requires multiple efforts

by scholars from different areas so that, as we have attempted, advances can be made in the definition, understanding and practice of government communication.

As we stated in Chapter 1, in this book we have sought to respond to both challenges. We hope that it will be taken as a modest starting point for future research that will bring together multiple theoretical perspectives and richer and commonly defined data sets. In turn, these will allow researchers to better understand the role and practice of government communication in the development of communities.

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