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## Employing new communication methods during the political crises in the 1980s

Nowadays crisis communication is on the verge of assuming a new nature as we witness significant technology shifts. New media are gaining a dominant position in communicating crises. However, in order to grasp the way in which these changes develop, it is crucial to analyze the issue of previous shifts and the employment of new approaches to crises. This article focuses not only on the crisis itself but on political crisis communication. The role of political crisis is of primary importance as much of social life derives itself from the flow of political life. Thus it is obligatory to first examine the definitions of the subject and then to take a close look at the different approaches to crisis communication. The cycle of developing and employing new approaches cannot be understood without prior research on the subject of communication methods, crises, nature of political crises, and the responses to the crises undertaken by political decision-making bodies. Therefore we can distinguish new communication approaches and try to find out how political crises help and stimulate the process of establishing these new approaches.

However, much in the field of crisis communication and political communication is unclear concerning the process of shaping and establishing new crisis approaches. Schonfeld, Lichtenstein, Pruett, and Speese-Linehan in their article assert that “crises are inevitable”<sup>1</sup> and the two most common theories that simultaneously are embedded in literature concern Timothy Coombs SCCT theory and William Benoit’s theory, called IRT. The first one is focused on one person’s reac-

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<sup>1</sup> D. Schonfeld et al., *How to Prepare for and Respond to Crisis*, Los Angeles 2002, p. 6.

tions and the second one is rather situational theory. Its goal is to prepare effective response strategies. The main assumption is that managers and decision makers should match their responses to the depth of crisis responsibility and threat of reputation that is posed by a crisis. The theories give many thoroughly thought-out response strategies, inasmuch they do not compose the process of creating new response approaches to crises.

Kenneth Hacker and Jay Blumler say that civic participation is the major part of making political communication itself, and consists of adequate information, an accurate picture of public life, and a sense of connectedness to governmental institutions.<sup>2</sup> They go on to say that without civic participation, political crisis does not exist. Moreover, it is worthy of attention to look at crisis and risk communication from Barbara Reynolds and Matthew Seeger's paper on crisis and risk communication.<sup>3</sup> This paper tried to find the basic conditions and circumstances within which the new ways of establishing approaches to risk communication are made.

The problem this article takes concerns two political crises and a description of their genesis. It was made via the example of the president of the United States and the Iran-Contra affair, and the Iranian embassy siege in London, during Margaret Thatcher's tenure. The two events were very similar in their political nature and they happened in similar time frames. Then the whole characteristic of Ronald Reagan's and Margaret Thatcher's responses to crises gives opportunity to create new ways and methods of responding to political crisis. The present paper proposed a few conditions that are necessary to establish new methods of responding to political crisis communication. Then it touches the field of social, political, and individual communication during crises and lays down new components that propels the undertaking of innovative methods of communication. The paper presents data of political backing of the politicians before and after the respective crises. Besides, it researched the channels of communication and number of crisis communication recipients.

The present paper consists of a theoretical analysis of political and crisis communication, immersing, or delving into the rich literature in the field. Among the notable professors there are such theoretic researchers as Timothy Coombs on crisis response strategies, Robert Goodin on political sciences, Robert Heath on risk and crisis communication, Lucian Pye on political communication, and Barbara Reynolds, editor of a book on risk and emergency communication. However, the literature overview gives only the background for analyzing the phenomenon and nature of politicians' approach to quick employment of new communication methods for the purpose of repairing the image of certain political parties. It presents the example of two right-

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<sup>2</sup> J. Blumler, "Communication and democracy: The crisis beyond and the ferment within", *Journal of Communication* 33, 1983, no. 3, pp. 166–173; K. Hacker, "Missing links in the evolution of electronic democratization", *Media, Culture & Society* 18, 1996, pp. 213–232.

<sup>3</sup> B. Reynolds, M. Seeger, "Crisis and emergency risk communication as an integrative model", *Journal and Health Communication* 2005, no. 10, pp. 43–55.

wing politicians who assumed office in the 1980s: president of the United States Ronald Reagan in 1981 and prime minister of Great Britain Margaret Thatcher in 1979.

## Political crisis communication overview

The different schools of thought basically give us three models of political communications. Firstly we can take theories that were made before World War II on mass propaganda. For example we refer to Harold Lasswell's theory. Its main statement was "Who says what to whom in what channel with what effect."<sup>4</sup> Secondly there are various theories on *partisan reinforcement*. Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet were the first to write on this subject. Although there are many different assumptions and statements of the theory, the most important of these is simple. It states that people do not feel very well when they are wrong. They want to be right, thus they follow only the information that can prove their attitudes are correct. Thirdly, there are many modern theories on political communication, like agenda-setting theory or inoculation theory.

However, in this paper we cannot consider every political actor trying to research individuals as parts of the whole political process. It is obvious that political communication seems to touch almost everyone who speaks, draws, paints, and even thinks about politics. Nevertheless it is improbable to research them. Thus the paper concerns the political process changes as a whole, meaning the public.

The diagram above presents a triangle interaction system. It runs vertically, from media and politics to the public, horizontally through connections between political actors in the media field, and from the bottom to the upper side from public opinion to a variety of governmental organisations.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines public relations as "the business of inducing the public to have an understanding for and goodwill towards a person, firm, or institution; *also*: the degree of understanding and goodwill achieved."<sup>5</sup> Connecting the above-mentioned concept of political communication and public relations, there can be seen the lack of organisational or social structure that is influenced by the political communication process. The answer is found in the concept of two American professors, Jesper Stromback and Spiro Kioussis. They minted the new term of *political public relations* stating that political public relations is the management process by which an organisation or individual actor through a variety of different tools seeks to influence beneficial relationships with key publics to help support its mission and

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<sup>4</sup> P. Wenxiu, „Analysis of new media communication based on Lasswell's 5W model", *Journal of Education and Social Research* 5, 2015, no. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Merriam Webster Dictionary online, 11th ed. (accessed: 27.12.2017).

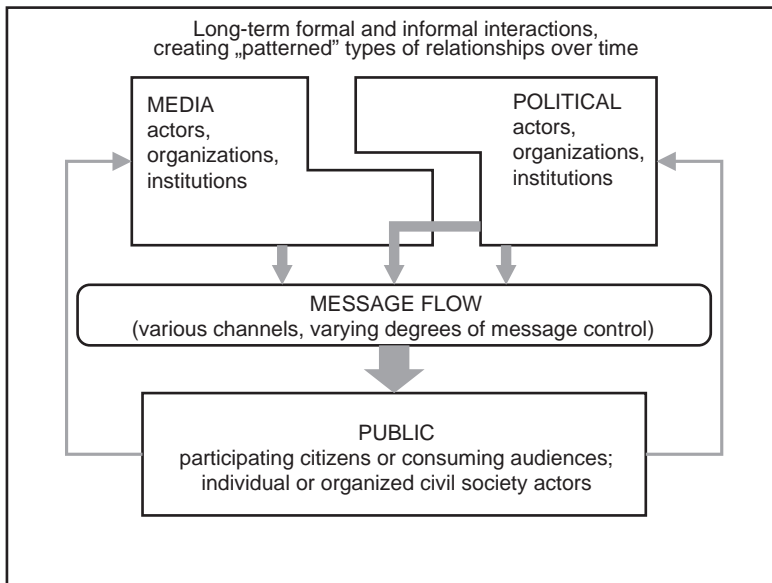


Diagram 1: Dimensions of a political communication system<sup>6</sup>

achieve goals.<sup>7</sup> The main concept in the above-mentioned definition that may be unclear is *key publics*. It would be a lot easier to state that it concerns the *electorate*. Thereupon a simplified definition may be given: “political public relations is the process by which organisations or individual actors seek to influence the communication process, and thus the electorate itself is the essence of the political public relations processes”.

Trying to research any political communication campaigns, it is difficult to omit the purpose of changing the electorate’s attitudes, opinions, and reactions. In fact the electorate is the essence of any political communication process, and thus it is also the essence of the political public relations processes.

## Crisis communication theories: IRT and SCCT

There are many definitions and a multitude of scientific books and handbooks concerning the above subject. It seems impossible to clarify the field and give one, universal definition of crisis communication. There are also many fields in which crises arise. However, it is not so clear what is political crisis communication, and in this paper it is obligatory to focus on the field of communication crises. Nonetheless it is crucial to firstly examine a few basic definitions in communication theory.

<sup>6</sup> F. Esser, B. Pfetsch, „Comparing political communication”, [in:] *Comparative Politics*, ed. D. Caramani, Oxford 2016.

<sup>7</sup> J. Stromback, S. Kioussis, “Political public relations”, *Political Communication* 2015, pp. 249–266.

Heath and Millar give about twenty definitions of crisis communication. Most of them are focused on the problems, consequences, and after-crisis changes of organisation. Robert Heath asserts that in order to make a situation of communication crisis, firstly a crisis itself is needed, and thus it is essential to give the definition of crisis first. Heath creates a very short but meaningful definition of crisis: “it is risk manifested”. Therefore any case that risk is manifested can be called a crisis. In that sense crisis communication is seen as something very common and the kind of problem organisations often have to deal with.

Many other definitions concerning crisis communication also undertake the issue of visible consequences of the crisis. Thus, what is obvious, crisis starts when problem becomes visible.

What is more important, the way in which crisis is defined shapes the prospective view on the subject and all of its derivatives.<sup>8</sup>

The issue of organisational crisis is also significant. For example Higgins and Snyder say that “organisations are vitally concerned with nurturing positive images.”<sup>9</sup> Thus, although it seems very clear, it is impossible to look at crisis communication without taking into consideration the organisations involved. Another factor in organisational crisis is the role of media. Timothy Coombs asserts that: “media report about a crisis very quickly” and “that they shape the way the crisis is presented to the public”. Media, as we can see, has not even a crucial, but inherent role in informing about, developing, and ending the crisis situations. In this case the technology is very important, since the impact and quickness of response is completely different when newspapers and the social network Twitter are concerned.

Researchers who examine educational crises say that “crisis situations are inevitable.”<sup>10</sup> It is very important to recall the classics of sociological literature, that conflicts and crises are always constructive, and their aim is never to destroy but rather to build and develop a better future.

However, the following two crisis communication theories are the most legitimate for the purposes of studies on Ronald Reagan’s and Margaret Thatcher’s response to crises. The first is IRT,<sup>11</sup> which stands for image restoration theory, and the second is SCCT,<sup>12</sup> which is situational crisis communication theory.

Image restoration theory is based, as its name suggests, with the aim of restoring the pre-crisis image to that suffered through crisis. There have to occur two components in the damaging of the image:

<sup>8</sup> R. Heath, *Handbook of Risk and Crisis Communication*, Routledge 2010.

<sup>9</sup> R. Higgins, C. Snyder, “Business excuses: Their effective role in the negotiation of reality”, *Psychological Bulletin* 1988, no. 12, p. 79.

<sup>10</sup> D. Schonfeld et al., op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> T. Coombs, “Choosing the right words: the development of guidelines for the selection of the crisis-response strategies”, *Management Communication Quarterly* 1996, no. 10.

<sup>12</sup> W. Benoit, *Accounts, Excuses, and Apologies*, New York 2014.

1. The one who is accused is really responsible for the conducted action,
2. The activity that has been done is held up as being offensive.

Besides, there are two assumptions that IRT theory is based on:

1. Communicating during a crisis has the very clear goal of restoring the image at reasonable cost.
  2. The most important goal is to maintain a favourable image.
  3. According to Waldemar Rydzak it is also an opportunity to conduct changes.<sup>13</sup>
- There are also defensive and offensive strategies, and many other approaches one may adopt in the process of implementing IRT theory.

Whereas IRT is usually focused on one person, SCCT is situation theory, and its goal is to prepare effective response strategies. The main assumption is that managers and decision makers should match their responses to the depth of crisis responsibility and threat of reputation posed by a crisis. Within the theory, its author, Timothy Coombs, gave three main clusters of crisis:

1. Victim cluster, where the organisation is a real victim,
2. Accidental cluster, where actions leading to this crisis were not intentional,
3. Intentional cluster, where actions leading to this crisis were intentional.

Then, the theory offers a few basic response strategies: denying the crisis, diminishing the crisis, rebuilding the crisis.<sup>14</sup>

## Background of the political crises

In 1982, one of the biggest social scares occurred after seven people died within the space of several hours on September 29th after taking Tylenol pills. The case became very famous and profound in its numerous case studies that have been conducted since then. Many scientific conclusions have been drawn. That is why it is very important to take a short look at aftermath of the events.

The example of Tylenol gives us many valuable lessons. Firstly, it has to be admitted that the company was innocent, because it was proven that the painkillers had been contaminated with cyanide.

Secondly, the economic factor is of importance. Johnson & Johnson commanded almost 35 per cent of the analgesic market. At that time it consisted of 15 per cent of the company's net profit. As a effect of the events it lost 1 billion dollars.

The above aspects of the case give us a few very important insights. It can be surely said that:

- it was not the company's fault,
- it lost much of its income,

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<sup>13</sup> W. Rydzak, *Reputacja a działania informacyjne organizacji w sytuacjach kryzysowych i determinanty ich wyboru*, Poznań 2011, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> T. Coombs, "Protecting organisation reputations during crisis", *Corporate Reputation Review* 10, 2007, no. 3, pp. 163–176.

— it should rather adopt a defensive strategy and declare that it is innocent and take no responsibility for the crisis.

However, as we learn from the case it did the opposite. Johnson & Johnson took a quick and firm response, saying that it would do anything possible to protect anyone who would want to take their pills in the future. Thus it created a new idea of making tamperproof packaging, ensuring every customer of its health and security.

The response, firstly criticized and taken as too strong, in the future resulted in the complete rebuilding of consumer trust. It even turned out to be the most popular pain-killer in the United States. The reaction is worthy of note due to many factors. Firstly, it is based on not waiting until anything is explained. The company decided not to wait for any explanations, but simply acted. The second is the reaction against the logical rule of being innocent, thus demanding remedy rather than paying economic losses for something that has not been done. Therefore it can be described as a “not claiming, not pretension making” attitude, but the attitude of taking the loss into advancement strategy. The third aspect is being ready for the long term rebuilding process.

The massive reaction of American society is worthy of consideration since it happened in the same decade as Ronald Reagan served in the office of president of the United States, and Margaret Thatcher was in office as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Therefore it can be of great value to look at the case when considering Ronald Reagan’s and Margaret Thatcher’s crises.

## The Cases of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher

In order to choose properly the subject of crisis in Ronald Reagan’s case, a few aspects of such a crisis have to be taken into consideration. Firstly, it must concern the nationwide communication process, including all sources of contemporary media channels. Secondly, it must take part during the election process so it could be possible to measure its effects or/and its consequences via polls. Thirdly, the reaction to the process must be proved and registered in a scientific way with very solid and reliable sources.

The crisis that has been chosen is the Iran-Contra affair. It is a very complicated, multi-dimensional, nation-wide, and even global issue that began from the moment when a US cargo plane was shot down in Nicaragua in 1986. The Nicaraguans captured the American citizen,<sup>15</sup> and he confessed that he had been hired by the CIA to manage the provision of military cargos to the Contras. It turned out that it was an anticommunist organisation fighting against the Marxist government in Nicaragua.<sup>16</sup> Then it was quickly leaked to the US press. Yet the first stage of the scandal concerned selling arms to the Iranian army in order to release and return American hostages. Thereby Congress had to pass the Boland Amendment, allowing the exception of

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<sup>15</sup> *Times*, 12th October 1986 (accessed: 2.02.2018).

<sup>16</sup> J. Diggins, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History*, New York 2007, p. 295.

selling arms to the Contras. Thus both the practice of selling arms and also using the money taken from these arms sales was an illegal process.<sup>17</sup>

### Variety of means and channels of communicating the crisis

The office of the United States of America is highly circled with a variety of means of communication possibilities. There are plenty of channels that can be utilised in the process of the reaction to any events that take place in the public political process. As it is not possible to use every one of them, it is considered to name at least the most crucial.

However, in order to choose the valid means of communications it is obligatory to enumerate the conditions concurrent with the theory presented in the first chapter. Therefore the means of communication have to be political tools of influencing the public. They can neither be undisclosed nor private. They have to be available to the public, universal in their message.

In order to start any research on communication crisis during Ronald Reagan’s presidency, it is of high value to enumerate the first days / weeks of job approval ratings for the Ronald Reagan’s office. It is also crucial to quote the very same question that was asked to the interviewees. It was literally: “Do you approve or disapprove of the way Mr Ronald Reagan is handling his job as President?” The question is very straightforward in its nature. It is a direct question of a very clear two-way choice. One can approve or disapprove of the presidency of Mr Ronald Reagan.

Here are the first weeks of the polls and the final approval ratings from the public:

Table 1: Ronald Reagan initial and final approval and disapproval polls<sup>18</sup>



President	Start Date	End Date		Approving	Disap- proving	Unsure/ No Data
Ronald Reagan	12/27/1988	12/29/1988		63	29	8
	05/08/1981	05/11/1981		68	21	11
	04/10/1981	04/13/1981		66	19	13
	03/31/1981	03/31/1981		66	18	15
	02/13/1981	02/16/1981		55	17	26
	01/30/1981	02/02/1981		51	13	36

<sup>17</sup> H. Brands, *American Dreams: The United States Since 1945*, New York 2011, pp. 246–251.

<sup>18</sup> <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iEl565M1mICTubTtoxXMdxzaHzAcPTnb3kpRnds-rfyY/edit?ts=5bd7f609&usp=gmail#gid=1957483948> (accessed: February 2020).



Thus in the first days of the presidency, Ronald Reagan has 51 percent approval rates, 13 percent disapproving votes and there were 36 percent of voters who are unsure whether to approve or not of his presidency. In the next part of this paper it will serve as a benchmark in drawing any conclusions.

## Margaret Thatcher's crisis communication

In choosing the most exemplary crisis, in which Margaret Thatcher addressed on many occasions, it is very crucial to compare the situation of Ronald Reagan. There are a few differences of both high and scientific significance. Margaret Thatcher was not a president of the United Kingdom, as there is another system of government. The United Kingdom is by definition a Kingdom with a Queen, and, Queen Elizabeth II as the head of a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy,<sup>19</sup> while the United States of America is a federal constitutional republic with a full presidential system.<sup>20</sup> Therefore the prerogatives of the above-mentioned politics were different. Although it is not easy to assess which position is more decisive and powerful, the very fact remains that there is no other person than President who exercises executive power, and is recognized as the "National leader". However, in the case of the United Kingdom, there are two leaders: one as reigning monarch, and the other of the democratic parliament. Thus the reinforcement of only the fact that there is an absence a monarch in the United States elevates the President to a higher political position.

Therefore in studying and researching the subject of crisis communication it is very significant to remember that the clear analysis and comparison of the two systems and politicians is very difficult to conduct. Hence, the only reasonable comparison is to compare the President of the United States in the 1980s to the President of the United States nowadays, and the same with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom to their counterpart nowadays.

Besides the difference in prerogatives, there are also other dimensions which differ. It may be a background of the previous crisis. How long had it lasted before it was made public?

The intensity of the crisis. How long was the crisis since the first day of its origination? The next variable is the scope of its impact in the international perspective. How many people did it involve? Was the crisis plotted and developed by an inside party or outside party? Was it unexpected or expected? There are plenty of other questions that can be asked and the answer to those is crucial in adopting the proper approach to the final conclusions.

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<sup>19</sup> B. Hilaire, R. Jago, *Constitutional & Administrative Law*, Abingdon 2011, p. 165.

<sup>20</sup> *Oxford Handbook of Political Science*, ed. R. Goodin, Oxford 2011.

## Visual communication response to crisis

There are plenty of theories of communication that recognize the variety of non-verbal languages that allow communication between different parties. Among them there is prof. Leeman who states: “Visual Inter Language allows people to still communicate with each other despite not sharing a common language.”<sup>21</sup> It obviously concerns the simple skill of communicating with anyone without using even a word. There is a largely popular booklet, called: “The Wordless Travel Book” that allows to understand each other through pointing to the proper photo.<sup>22</sup> It is very popular in tourism, however, as it shows the simple and atavistic human skills to understand the natural world through a sense of sight.

In every kind of communication there are many factors that constitute the whole process. Sometimes they are mainly spoken words, as in the case of President Reagan, who addressed the American nation twice concerning the Iran-Contra affair, doing anything to restrict his body language to a minimum. His purpose was to inform the public about his attitude towards the aforementioned events. The audience was concerned mainly with the words and not on the visual side of the address, as it was strictly official, hence the usual setting of the White House and sat at the desk in the Oval Office and background.

In the case of Margaret Thatcher the situation was wholly different, as she took an intensive part in the process of conducting counter-terrorist operations.

Margaret Thatcher wanted to show to the world Great Britain’s response to terrorist activity in her country. Thus, she made the decision to show the spectacle of releasing hostages from the Iranian embassy, broadcast on television, ordering “not to use smoke”. Then Thatcher explained that she wanted everyone to see how the British government treated any act of violence and terrorism towards her country.

One of the most important results of the SAS “Operation Nimrod” were numbers. Robin Horsfall, from the SAS Counter-Terrorism Team said: “The message had to be clear: if any terrorist wants to come to our country, he must see what is going to happen to him.”<sup>23</sup> Another member of the SAS team, Tom (not disclosing his surname), above many other instances said:

The message was that we had to resolve the situation and there was to be no chance of failure, and that the hostages absolutely had to be protected. The prime minister did not want an ongoing problem beyond the embassy — which we took to mean that they didn’t want anybody coming out alive. No surviving terrorists.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>21</sup> N. Leemans, *Visual inter Lingua, doctoral dissertation*, Worcester 2001.

<sup>22</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00A1O25KI/ref=rdr\\_kindle\\_ext\\_tmb](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B00A1O25KI/ref=rdr_kindle_ext_tmb) (accessed: 22.05.2018).

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qyCn365Hlq4> (accessed: 30.05.2018).

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jul/24/military.features11> (accessed: 30.05.2018).

The position of the government with Margaret Thatcher as head was clear. They preferred the terrorists to be eliminated to make the message of eliminating terrorists possible. They wanted to communicate numbers: all the terrorists were eliminated and only one hostage was killed.

There were 25 hostages. Only one was killed by the terrorists during the raid, and all but one of the terrorists were killed. He was captured and later sentenced. However, the SAS member responsible for taking him out of the building said that only when another SAS member pointed out to him that the events were being broadcast on live television, and therefore better to not do it, he intended to drag him to the back of the building and shoot him.

The numbers were: 25 hostages, one previously killed by the terrorists, one killed during the raid, and 5 terrorists killed, one captured. Since television broadcast scenes with no smoke, it gave at every instance the information about numbers: one hostage killed, 24 hostages survived, 5 terrorists killed, 1 survived but captured. It was not a total success, but the numbers communicated the effectiveness of the United Kingdom's policy towards terrorists. The one terrorist who survived was a clear example that it was an accident, and next time the goal is to eradicate all the terrorists in a very firm and complete way.

On the purpose of this thesis a new phrase shall be coined: "numery communication" in terms of informing the public about the numbers of the final result of any operational work.

Numerary communication has a variety of purposes:

- To inform about numbers, percentages,
- Showing effectiveness of the undertaken action
- Forecast future actions,
- Develop society's awareness of the institutional attitudes towards dealing with any issues,
- Present a margin of error,

In any data, the numbers are the major communication factor. In the case of terrorists, the numbers were one of the most, if not the most important data, showing people that the message Mrs Thatcher sent to the world is clear: we are not going to accept any acts of terrorism in our country.

## Gallup net approval figures and its findings

Job approval has been the most reliable tool to show the public's attitude towards any President's quality of work. It actually reflects the very trust, contentment, and evaluation of the President's administering of the American state.

Net approval is a modified version of job approval data. It means the approval figure with consideration of the disapproval rating. Thus, for example when the approval

is 71 percent, and the disapproval 13 percent, the net approval equals 58 percent. The following graph shows the net approval figures over the eight years of Ronald Reagan's presidency:

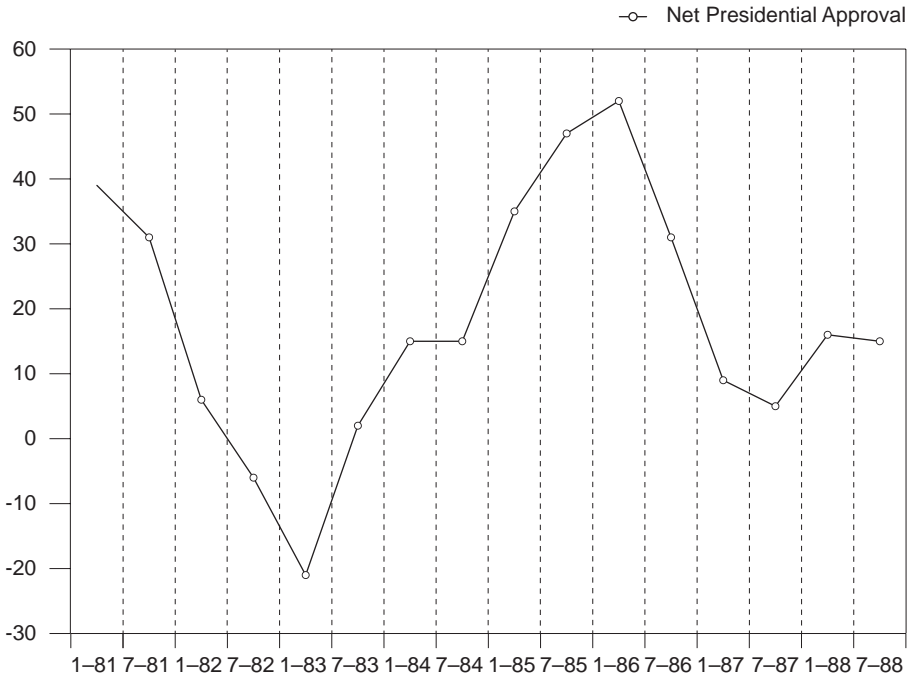


Diagram 2: President Reagan Net Approval during his presidency<sup>25</sup>

The initial net approval figure was almost 40 percent, and the final figure had almost the same value (36 percent and 34 percent, respectively). Thus it can be said that over the eight years of Ronald Reagan's Presidency the job approval had not changed significantly. However, the better conclusion is that the President was able to save his initial approval rating through effective, but at times long-lasting political communication, including crisis communication.

The next table shows the exact approval and disapproval rates and very exact data on certainty and uncertainty of interviewees. The figures were almost the same: 7 percent of uncertainty in the initial days of taking office, to 8 percent of uncertainty in the last days of Reagan's presidency. Moreover, as can be seen, the approving rating was falling up to the moment when Reagan made the above-mentioned speech on 4th March 1987, one week after receiving the Tower Commission report. The spe-

<sup>25</sup> Author's project on the basis of: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iEl565M1mICTubT-toxXMdxzaHzAcPTnb3kpRndsrfyY/edit?ts=5bd7f609#gid=1957483948> (accessed: 30.05.2018).

each was soft and thorough in sound and information, giving motives to why Reagan previously lied to the public, believing that the welfare of the state and protection of the nation is of the highest priority. Then the lowest approval rating (40 percent) happened just a few days before the report and from that moment on it increased systematically from minus 12 percent of net approval figure, to plus 44 percent of net approval and 63 approval figures. It showed that the soft and thorough motive-based reaction to political crisis when connected with the fault of the President, changed the way American society perceived Reagan's honesty and trustworthiness.

Table 2: President Ronald Reagan's detailed approval data<sup>26</sup>



President	Start Date	End Date		Approv- ing	Disap- proving	Unsure/ NoData
Ronald Reagan	12/27/1988	12/29/1988		63	29	8
	11/11/1988	11/14/1988		56	35	8
	09/09/1988	09/11/1988		53	37	9
	07/01/1988	07/07/1988		50	35	14
	05/13/1988	05/15/1988		49	37	12
	03/08/1988	03/12/1988		51	36	11
	03/10/1988	03/10/1988		51	41	6
	02/04/1988	02/04/1988		52	36	10
	12/15/1987	12/15/1987		51	35	12
	12/08/1987	12/11/1987		61	32	6
	11/06/1987	11/06/1987		52	38	9
	10/23/1987	10/26/1987		50	40	8
	10/23/1987	10/26/1987		50	40	8

<sup>26</sup> <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1iEl565M1mICTubTtoxXMdxzaHzAcPTnb3kpRndsrfyY/edit?ts=5bd7f609&gid=1957483948> (accessed: 2.06.2018).

10/22/1987	10/23/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	48	38	12
10/07/1987	10/09/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	47	41	11
09/25/1987	10/04/1987	█	51	38	10
09/02/1987	09/03/1987	█	51	36	11
08/24/1987	09/02/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	48	42	8
07/10/1987	07/13/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	48	43	8
07/09/1987	07/10/1987	█	50	39	10
06/01/1987	06/01/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	45	40	14
05/17/1987	05/18/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	49	42	8
04/29/1987	04/30/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	47	44	8
04/10/1987	04/13/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	48	43	8
03/14/1987	03/18/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	46	43	9
03/05/1987	03/06/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	46	45	8
02/27/1987	02/27/1987	█	40	52	7
01/28/1987	01/29/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	49	40	9
01/16/1987	01/19/1987	+ + + + + + + + +	48	42	8
01/07/1987	01/08/1987	█	52	36	10
12/04/1986	12/05/1986	+ + + + + + + + +	47	43	8
12/04/1986	12/05/1986	+ + + + + + + + +	47	43	8
10/01/1986	10/02/1986	▨	64	28	7

Soft reaction related to showing remorse, saying sorry, and taking full responsibility for his decisions. That allowed the President to empower and strengthen his political position. The example of President Reagan proves that in cases of political crisis communication it is not recommended in American society to take a hard and shallow

response. American citizens have high democratic standards and they are in demand of honest and soft reaction. It also proves that in cases when political actors face political crises caused by them they need to confess their fault, be accountable for their actions and take steps in a new direction, showing they take seriously the electorate's opinion.

As mentioned in the previous chapters, methods used to communicate during crises in the 1980s in the United States and United Kingdom differed due to not a slight discrepancy in political systems. Also, it was said that the methods, tools, and channels that are being used differ depending on the subject, length, and sensitivity of the foregoing issue.

In case of President Reagan, the Iran-Contra problem was very long, tiring, and broadcast frequently on both TV, radio, and published in a variety of papers. Whereas the Iranian embassy siege in London had quite a different nature, as it was sudden, extremely difficult, risky, and needed an immediate response.

## Types of communication used in crises in the 2010s

Starting research in terms of communication tools and types employed by right-wing politicians in the UK and USA, it is significant to lay bases of methodology. The first factor is numbers of overall speeches and any other communication activities. The other is frequency of the above-mentioned activity. Next is the percentage share of one type of communication in overall addresses. A very crucial factor in this matter is communicating during crises: whether in this case the chosen methods and channels were based on social media or focused rather on radio and TV broadcasts.

Research of two right-wing politicians shall be undertaken: Donald Trump and Theresa May. It can be also interesting to compare the two heads of the American and British governments. The research year in question is only 2017 in order to draw clear conclusions, calculate the data, shares, and future prognoses of increasing or decreasing the numbers of any types of communication and try to assess upcoming trends. With the aim of correct data analysis it is going to take into consideration only four channels of communication: two of the previous modern era: radio and Television, and also two of the Internet era: Twitter and Facebook.

## Conclusion

New political crisis communication methods during president Ronald Reagan's term of office

President Ronald Reagan utilised mainly two methods. Public speeches, called in political language addresses to the nation, and the second method was based on using

people to testify on behalf of him, asserting his excellence and dignity. The addresses were broadcast on TV and radio stations around the state. Then, on the next day, with several hours delay, they were published in papers, often revealing things that had not been presented on the TV and radio stations. Then it turned out to be a highly effective means of communications, and the rare public remarks on controversial subjects made them of very high value, and broadly commented upon. President Reagan addressed the nation on the Iran-Contra affair only twice, and previously he had mentioned that he is intended to make an official statement, thus preparing the public to for very significant remarks: "Next week I will address the nation and give the American people my response to this report."<sup>27</sup> It sparked anticipation and showed a rather reserved style of Presidential communication at that time.

### New political crisis communication methods during Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's term in office

The situation was different in the case of Prime Minister Thatcher. It resulted from the sudden circumstances of induced conflict with international implications. The Iranian embassy siege was not an internally created conjuncture. It was an external, independent attack of outside forces in order to attain specific goals. It was significantly different from the situation of President Reagan. Here, Margaret Thatcher had to deal with public opinion towards other people — terrorists, whereas President Reagan had to deal with his own mistakes that had been revealed. The next distinction lays in the fact that Mr Reagan was the subject and not the communication crisis. That made the situation very unique. He could not often make appearances, as it gave the public unnecessary ammunition and worsened his personal and political image.

Margaret Thatcher had to meet with the most important personalities from different backgrounds and make quick decisions and create a very sensible action plan. The communication crisis reaction could not have been soft and slow. It rather needed decisiveness, panache, and creativity. Therefore Mrs Thatcher conducted an unwitting crisis communication campaign. She firmly asked the SAS to not use smoke in order to show the public how Great Britain dealt with any foreign invaders. Secondly, she planned and then executed the plan to present the numbers resulting from the SAS raid. The numbers were clear. Their aim was to communicate any future attempts to assault the territory of United Kingdom. Thus she applied the visionary (imagination- stimulating), and numerary (fact-stimulating) types of communication. Both were immensely successful and as a result for the next several years the number of terrorist attacks decreased.

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<sup>27</sup> <https://www.c-span.org/video/?171684-1/iran-contra-tower-commission-report> (accessed: 2.06.2018).



As the above cases show, the employment of new methods during political crises were successful. Establishing new methods were necessary to correctly respond to crisis and the findings prove that numerary methods and an “unsmoked” communication approach can often be very effective as a political response to crisis.

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## Employing new communication methods during the political crises in the 1980s

### Summary

The present article undertook the problem of crisis communication on the basis of the right-wing politicians who assumed office in the 1980s, president Ronald Reagan and prime minister Margaret Thatcher.

It focused on political crisis communication, and made an effort to correctly define the term. Two theories were analysed: image repair theory (IRT) created by William Benoit and situation crisis communication theory (SCCT) by Timothy Coombs. However the main purpose of this article was to analyse the phenomenon of establishing and employing new methods of communication during political crises in order to effectively respond to the crises. Thus there was an effort made to coin two new political crisis communication approaches on the basis of the aforementioned topics: “unsmoked communication” and “numerary communication”.

Keywords: crisis communication, political crisis, political communication, image repair theory (IRT), situational crisis communication theory (SCCT), communication methods