

POLITICAL PROPAGANDA IN SOCIALIST REGIMES: THE CASES OF GERMANY AND VENEZUELA

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Summary

This study compares political propaganda in the German Democratic Republic and 21st Century Socialism in Venezuela (2014-2017), using Domenach's principles. Common strategies such as simplification, exaggeration, repetition, and media control are identified as tools to shape public perception. Despite historical and cultural differences, both regimes used propaganda to consolidate power and manipulate social consciousness.

Keywords: political propaganda, socialism, media control, ideology, manipulation, Venezuela, Germany.

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Introduction

Every political system uses propaganda as a communicational strategy to transmit the message it wants to be accepted by civil society, the masses or the collective. Currently, political systems function correctly thanks to the competition between parties that seek to achieve power, being of greater importance the role of propaganda since this competition exists, because it favors one's own proposal over that of its opponent, with the objective of achieving greater popular support and reaching political power.

The problem lies when propaganda is used for the wrong reasons, either for personal interests of certain leaders to achieve power, or to have an overwhelming support of the masses regardless of the consequences of the actions, losing its original value, which is to achieve the affection of the collective for the common good.

Entering into the analysis of the political propaganda used by authoritarian and totalitarian regimes, which gained power as parties that were able to persuade individuals through a series of principles that at the time seemed more appropriate for the majority, but in the end turned out to be more convenient for those who sold the political proposal.

The influential power of propaganda is evident, because if it is used strategically it favors authoritarian movements to acquire sufficient followers to achieve power and take control of all the essential elements of the functioning of the State. Regardless of the passage of time, technological evolution or cultural differences, political propaganda can benefit regimes seeking power for power's sake, if the features that reveal their true intentions are not given prominence.

Therefore, the research aims to compare the points of coincidence and divergence of the use of political propaganda by the German Democratic Republic¹ with that carried out by the XXI Century Socialism in Venezuela during the period 2014- 2017; analyzed as a communicational strategy of authoritarian regimes to influence the thinking of the masses.

This research objective was achieved through definitions of essential concepts such as propaganda, the media, among others. Likewise, the corresponding historical environment of each of the regimes to be compared was developed; as well as their communicational strategies, to finally relate the management of political propaganda strategies based on Domenach's work.

The scheme elaborated by Domenach has been chosen because he was one of the first who was concerned with giving order and structure to the most important aspects found in political propaganda; dedicated to the study of propaganda cases of both authoritarian and democratic regimes and serving as a basis for many subsequent investigations.

The relevance of this documentary research is its ability to respond to uncertainties about the validity of the basic rules of political propaganda in authoritarian regimes; demonstrating that although there are greater tools that contribute to freedom of expression, thanks to technology, if the government's objective is to remain in power it will seek support from citizens, having greater advantages if the only truth that the population has is the one that the State transmits in order to avoid instability, diversity of opinions and the construction of critical thinking, which are great enemies of a regime that yearns for collective unanimity and favors State control.

The rules usually found in political propaganda, according to Domenach (1968), are the following:

1. Rule of simplification and single enemy: The voice of command and the slogan stand out. In extreme cases it can be summarized in a symbol (graphic, image, music). On the other hand, good propaganda has a main objective on each occasion, concentrating all forces on a single target, and this goes hand in hand with the consolidation of hatred towards a person or group, unifying in turn one's own side under the hopes of a single leader. (p.53)
2. Rule of exaggeration and distortion: This rule is used in partisan news to highlight information that favors it. It also requires that the message be understood by the majority, seeking to present the idea in general terms, in a forceful manner and in as little detail as possible. (p.57)
3. Rule of orchestration: Incessant repetition of the main themes is fundamental. The central message is insisted on, presenting it in different aspects. The essential part of the orchestration of a theme consists in its repetition by all propaganda organs in forms adapted to different audiences.(p.59-60).

¹ Hereinafter RDA will be used

4. Transfusion rule: Propaganda generally works under a pre-existing element, which could be a national mythology. The aim is not to contradict the public, but to be in agreement with it and to place itself in the same current in order to bend it. It is important to emphasize that the language must seek to attract and convince the masses. (p.66-69).
5. Rule of unanimity and contagion: Different sociological studies have shown the importance of belonging to a group and the influence that group pressure generates on individual opinion. Taking advantage of this, propaganda seeks to reinforce this unanimity of thought or to conceive a new one. It tries to create a feeling of exaltation and fear, which leads the person to have the same political conceptions that seem to have the majority of the individuals who surround him in his daily life. Here enters the "law of psychic contagion" which is an immediate sympathy, the letting oneself be carried away through ideas of friendship, health and joy. (p.69-70)

The aforementioned rules can be perceived both in the propaganda of the GDR and in that of 21st Century Socialism, since both regimes were concerned with conceiving the value it deserves to achieve collective unanimity; in fact, if one studies in detail each of their particular campaigns, slogans, chants, uniforms, political meetings and activities, it becomes evident that these rules were used hand in hand with the slogan, in order to make it a truth.

Leaders change, societies evolve, cultures are different depending on each region, their historical facts and the religion they practice; and despite having all these inequalities, political propaganda still has the same basic elements to be successful, what changes is the means by which it is transmitted, but if you know how to use it to obtain beneficial results, you can find a lot of similarities between different regimes, especially if they both support the same ideological current and their interest in maintaining power and control is so notorious that although the message is directed to different people, in the end they have the same objective, to influence the thinking of the masses that their alternative is the only correct one to have stability in the State while they have complete control of power.

Orwell (2008) states:

If everyone else accepted the lie that the Party imposed - if all the records said the same thing - then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'He who controls the past' says the Party slogan, 'controls the future: he who controls the present controls the past.' (p.37)²

2 And if all others accepted the lie which the Party imposed – if all records told the same tale – then the lie passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.' (Traducción propia)

Orwell's words summarize the capacity for action that political propaganda has if employed by an authoritarian regime; since, by using lies to seek the isolation of individuals from reality, censoring the media supported by laws and using terror to instill fear, it seeks to achieve unanimity of thought in society.

Whoever has control of the present is capable of modifying the past for his own benefit, if that is his main interest, and this in turn causes him to control the future and the coming events. Authoritarian systems of government are not afraid to modify the past; on the contrary, they invest a great deal of energy to distort the truth and make it coincide with their own, so that propaganda is no longer a mechanism of ideological unification, but part of history.

The leaders of the GDR from before its formation acted in accordance with modifying the truth to their advantage. With the support of the USSR they instilled fear by using the Red Guard force, they used lies to isolate individuals from their reality and to make them think that the construction of the Berlin Wall was a proposal of the citizens. They also controlled the media, and those from the West who were not within their reach, pointed them out as enemies and provocateurs of the instability of the State.

Socialism of the XXI Century took advantage of a moment of anti-political crisis in Venezuela to come to power through a populist leader who decided to change the entire democratic order under which the country functioned. His successor followed in his footsteps, being able to increase the level of lies to which society is subjected, selling the idea that the crisis is due to external reasons, seeking isolation with the closing and control of the traditional media, instilling terror to anyone who thinks differently through the National Guard with the support of the National Constituent Assembly. However, it has not been able to cut off the information flowing through the 2.0 media, having as its main strategy the use of pseudo news to twist the truth and modify the past, justifying its future actions lies.

Both systems of government share the same ideological current, they seek with power to alter the present, they employ propagandistic strategies such as lies, simplification, exaggeration, repetition, orchestration and transfusion to produce a new reality for the people. addition, through parades and political meetings, they create an atmosphere that gives rise to the "delirium of the crowd", infecting the people present with a feeling of unanimity that perhaps they would not otherwise feel, since emotions are exalted by inspiring a feeling of joyful complicity; this memory remains in the minds of the attendees, relating it directly to the government.

For those who are not part of these meetings, there remain the daily messages that are disseminated by all media, which may be accompanied by images, chants, slogans and phrases that are repeated to be considered true passed into history and became truth. 'Who controls the past,' ran the Party slogan, 'controls the future: who controls the present controls the past.'(Own translation)

The GDR and 21st Century Socialism have escape valves that release the pressure of those who do not accept their propaganda as truth, but without allowing them to have too great an impact against them. They have as their common enemy capitalism, represented in the figure of

the United States; pluralism, of those who want to make counter-propaganda; and education.

However, these systems also have differences. Their origins are different, because the GDR emerges from a citizenry that was already subdued, moving from one extreme to another, with distant memories of a democratic process. In contrast, Venezuelan society was an example of pluralism and democratic representation in Latin America, but constant failures in decision-making favored the emergence of an opposing model based on populism, which, although it has been a growing authoritarianism, traces of the original pluralism can be found. Likewise, the functioning of the political order of the GDR depended entirely on the SED as the major figure of power; while within the Socialism of the XXI Century, power is concentrated in one person, the figure of former President Chávez, messianic leader of the Bolivarian Revolution.

The truth is that education is the greatest enemy of authoritarian propaganda, because it is an incentive to know the truth. For this reason, these regimes seek to prevent society from being educated, from aspiring to have knowledge different from that which the State presents, and from being curious to know that there are alternatives other than those that correspond to its reality.

If people are educated and know that there are other truths, they will not accept the propaganda imposed by the government, because they will know that they can aspire and choose something better, without allowing history to be changed to control the future.

The purpose of this research is not to classify propaganda as harmful, but rather the way in which it is used for the benefit of a few. In a democracy, propaganda can be used, but without relying on lies and with freedom of press and expression so that citizens can evaluate which alternative they prefer.

For this reason, it is important to carry out this type of research, to broaden our areas of knowledge and discover that without education we are capable of making the same mistakes of the past because we are not aware of them. By forming critical thinking as a result of learning and understanding contrary realities, we will know when the propaganda seeks to deceive us and when it invites us to consider different alternatives.

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