
Political journalism from a comparative perspective

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PMCb1006 Political and media systems

week 7

Outline

- media systems
 - media + politics
 - political journalism
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Think of different factors that influence journalism.

- form pairs and come up with different factors (aim for specific examples)
 - write them on the whiteboard

 - 5 minutes
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Media system

= all media in a particular country, interrelated organizations, and actors, subject to a set of laws and regulations, shared journalistic culture

→ but different media sectors: different business models, ownership, media type, audience served

Media system

- journalism rooted in the society → shape and form of the media system
 - with variations according to cultures and subcultures, individual choices, technological and political changes...
 - national media systems are always, in some respect, unique
 - to compare, it is essential to focus on key systemic factors
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Media system

- **socio-structural factors** – historical differences (quality × popular press), distribution of the news audience across social classes (print, TV, online), demographics (population size, age, gender, ethnicity...), geographical differences, geo-political influence on international distribution
 - **political factors** – legal and regulatory arrangements, relations between political actors and journalists (see Hallin & Mancini, 2004 – three models)
 - **economic factors** – ownership (diversity, owner influence, market vulnerability), source of finance (advertising, audience income, public funding), competition (quality, diversity)
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Media + politics

Pluralism + independence = media freedom

- media independence and plurality as frequent indicators to measure the quality of democracy (Landman, 2012; Jakubowicz, 2017)
 - **media independence** = no political, corporate, or ownership influence or pressures
 - **media plurality**
 - internal: the plurality of voices, opinions, and sources (content)
 - external: various types of media and their owners (media)
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Media + politics

Examples of independence and plurality of media worldwide:

- [Media Pluralism Monitor reports](#)
- [World Press Freedom index](#)
- [Fairness in news coverage analysis,](#)
Digital News Report 2021

Media + politics

Some of the current challenges

- *weakened influence of citizens* in the society: society permeated by media and economic forces that are trying to make the most of the opportunity to put pressure on the political system (Blühdorn, 2007; Jakubowicz, 2017)
 - *increasing media coverage of politics*: politicians trying to adapt to the media logic → actions shrunk to media-interesting topics that lose their ideological essence (Jakubowicz, 2017)
 - *commodification, digitalization, changing audience routines* (Macek, 2015)
 - prevalence of *false information* (Egelhofer & Lecheler, 2019)
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Media + politics

Some of the current challenges

- *political polarization*: according to Inglehart & Norris (2019) caused by the division of society into socially liberal and socially conservative groups
 - *technological, economic, and political changes*: fragmentation of media, allowing audiences to consume only the content that matches their beliefs and thematic interests, which may increase political and media polarization (Tewksbury & Rittenberg, 2012)
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Media + politics

Some of the current challenges

- *decline in trust in traditional political elites:* especially in politically polarized countries → often accompanied by decreasing trust in the professional media (Hanitzsch et al., 2017; Van Dalen, 2019)
 - *emergence of a large number of media outlets that hold specific positions of opinion and tend, along with far-right populist politicians, to undermine trust in professional media:* professional media portrayed as “heralds of biased elites” (Rauch, 2015)
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Media + politics

Independent and professional journalists

- professional autonomy of journalists = an important part of how journalism fulfills its democratic function and how journalistic independence and professionalism are manifested (Deuze, 2005)

Journalistic autonomy: “the degree of self-governance within the profession, and the extent to which the profession is independent of other societal institutions” (Örnebring, 2013, p. 39)

Media + politics

The level of journalistic autonomy can be determined by a **range of factors**, for example:

- the state of democracy
 - presence of interest groups
 - nature of the media system
 - the inner workings of the media itself (including owner interference in content)
 - concentration of media ownership
 - characteristics of individual journalists
-

Media + politics

failing to maintain independence from those covered in journalism, inability to serve as independent monitors of power → **less professional journalism**

“If the journalists don't do their best, the trust of the people or the respect is going down, which is actually happening here. People are rejecting the media and I think that this is a real problem for democracy.”

Ioana Avădani, Director, Centre for Independent Journalism, Romania

Political journalism

- new media, social networking sites → **different relationship between politicians and journalists** → journalists needed to communicate the politicians' messages × direct communication
 - journalists **more dependent on the politicians' online messages**, willing to take anything as a quotation
- = **different power relations between politicians and journalists**

“It is a distribution problem and obviously we can't get back to the old times, when journalists were the gatekeepers. And I don't think that it was good, it was not very democratic, but what we have now is bad for journalists but also for democracy.”

András Pethö, Editor, Direkt36, Hungary

Political journalism

Roles of journalists in political systems

- journalists' identity and place in society (journalists' professional roles) seen as important for democracy (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2018; 2017).

Hanitzsch and Vos (2017), two analytically distinct levels of roles:

Role orientations: normative (what journalists ought to do); cognitive (what they want to do)

Role performance: practiced (what they really do in practice); narrated (what they think they do)

Political journalism

Normative roles

“encompass generalized and aggregate *expectations that journalists believe are deemed desirable in society*. Most normative roles of journalists are derived from a view that emphasizes journalism’s *potential contribution to the proper workings of democracy*”

Cognitive roles

“comprise the *institutional values, attitudes and beliefs individual journalists embrace as a result of their occupational socialization*. These roles tend to appear as evident, natural, and self-explaining to the journalists”

Political journalism

Practiced roles

“practiced role performance captures the roles of journalists *as they are executed in practice*”

Narrated roles

“*subjective perceptions of and reflections* on the roles that journalists carry out in practice”

Political journalism

- various roles = good and bad political journalism (De Vreese et al., 2016)
 - **quality × news performance** (different functions of media)
 - news performance – strategy and game framing, interpretative journalism, negativity, political balance (?), personalization, ...
 - in practice: usually different levels of quality and news performance
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Political journalism

Journalists + politicians

“democracy dependent on a well-informed citizenship, and it is up to journalism to provide the people with accurate and reliable information based on which to make informed political decisions” (McNair, 2008, p. 238)

→ professional relationship between political journalists and politicians = **integral part of the democratic societies**

Political journalism

politicians trying to attract journalists to cover them, journalists need politicians as one of the most important sources of information

×

journalists' and politicians' close relationships, let alone emotional → considered unprofessional (Hájek et al., 2015).

→ constantly negotiated and renegotiated boundaries

→ **the role of emotions and individual values**

Political journalism

Context

- journalists under increasing pressure to maintain good relations with politicians due to increasing online presence of politicians (Van Dalen, 2019)
 - journalists perceived as being increasingly dependent on politicians' statements online (Broersma and Graham, 2016).
 - journalist–politician relationship: verbal attacks on journalists, political hostility towards media (Krämer, 2018; Figenschou and Ihlebæk, 2019), accusations of fake news spreading across the political spectrum (Aalberg et al., 2017)
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Group activity

- form groups of up to 3 people
 - choose one country
 - briefly characterize its media system with a specific focus on the relationships between media and politicians
 - find its position in one of the independence and/or pluralism rankings
 - shortly present to the class (one of you, two, all three – up to your choice)

 - 15 minutes to prepare + up to 3 minutes speech after
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Some sources from the many:))

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Thank you & see you next week!

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