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Introduction

1

Overview

1.1 As individuals, we tend to remember important events in modern history through their media coverage. Every generation in contemporary society has a set of images and words associated with defining political moments, from the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, to the images of the planes hitting the World Trade Center on 9/11, to the sight of Western soldiers on the streets of Baghdad. As societies, we communicate, share, and attempt to come to terms with political events through the mass media. At the same time, most people are aware that there is a range of filters in place that shape this relationship between politics and the mass media. In some countries, the mass media focus more on light news and entertainment at the expense of serious political analysis. In other places, state-run or public media dictate a greater emphasis on the needs of society rather than the demands of commercialism. Much of the time, viewers, listeners, and readers are fairly complacent about what they learn from the mass media. Yet, at times of

change and crisis – ranging from elections, acts of terrorism, war, to the collapse of a regime – citizens find themselves in great need of comfort, information, and even direction from their mass media.

How can we understand the dynamics between modern mass media and the political sphere? It is a complicated yet fascinating relationship that has engaged scholars and analysts for decades. This scholarship, which has provided a range of useful insights into the relationship among politics, media, and citizens, spans different disciplines and subject areas. Most studies tend to focus on a single country, which can make it difficult to see cross-national or international patterns. As a result, it is often challenging for students who are intrigued by the power of the mass media in politics to know where to start a serious study in this area.

This book is designed to bring together a broad range of theories and analysis in order to synthesize an introduction to the field of media and politics. In particular, this text is designed to strengthen the field of comparative media studies, which looks at the relationship between the mass media and politics in ways that offer more than a description of one country's media and political system. Rather, the idea is to allow us to see how this relationship can work in a broader, more generalizable manner. Throughout this book, there is an emphasis on applying research design and method to the study of media and politics. There are two central challenges to comparative media and politics. The first is moving from being descriptive to becoming analytical. In other words, it is not enough to know that most television outlets in the US are run as commercial organizations and that the main television outlet in Britain is a public body. What difference does that make? Does it mean that the journalists who produce the news at these stations work differently? How does the broadcast content differ? What do the audiences in the US and the UK think of their own television channels? Would Americans prefer to have an influential public television station – or do British viewers really hanker for television that is more commercial? How does a system dominated by either commercial television or public television react when faced with crises such as terrorism, war, vitriolic election campaigns, or the major changes wrought by developing technology? Which system fosters more responsible citizens?

Clearly, these questions cannot be answered without relevant research. Not only are these intriguing enquiries for the citizens (and media organizations) in these countries, but they are part of larger puzzles as well. What are the strengths and weaknesses of various media systems? Are there particular media systems that better support democracy? By the same token, are there types of media systems that tend to subvert or undermine democracy? This text will give students the information to analyze these questions. The book focuses on broadcast, print, and internet media in comparative perspective, basing much of the analysis on the two influential media systems of the US and the UK. The text has a particular focus on news outlets. In addition, this book uses a range of case studies and information from other countries, particularly from

the intriguing media sphere in the Russian Federation and other non-free states, to show how media operate in non-democratic systems. The text strives to give enough factual information on the workings and significant stories in these systems in order for students to assess the situation analytically. It is particularly important to realize that what is accepted as the status quo in one country might be considered a violation of norms of good journalism in another country. Media systems, media content, and audiences differ a great deal from country to country. This book looks for both similarities and differences in the interaction between media and politics to reach general conclusions. For example, it is difficult to assess whether paid political advertising has a negative impact on democracy without looking at one country that allows it and another that does not.

This chapter will begin the discussion of comparative media and politics with an introduction to various models of how the media relate to the political world. Further chapters of the book will present key points about the relationship between media and politics, including the production of news, the journalistic profession, the nature of the audience, elections, war coverage, terrorism, and the internet. The text will introduce each of the main concepts and then present important examples from the US, the UK, Russia, and other countries. Readers will then be encouraged to develop their understanding of how and why there are differences – and similarities – among the media systems in these countries. Each chapter will provide a summary of central points, study questions, references, as well as websites with material suitable for further research. The goal of each chapter is to 'jump-start' analytical thinking, giving students and researchers the ability to assess ideas and carry out their own research in the field.

Studying media and politics: what do we look at first?

1.2 One of the most important aspects of studying media and politics is to be very clear about which element of the relationship is under analysis. In particular, are you examining the effect that the media have on politics or the impact that the political system has on the mass media? In the first case, for example, one might be interested in the effect of television coverage of the election results in the 2004 US presidential contest. In other words, how much difference did television – whether it was news coverage, paid political advertising, or the debates – make in terms of how people chose to vote? Clearly, there will be a range of other variables affecting voter choice, such as people's political party affiliations, how they are doing economically, where they live, and other factors. The media coverage would be just one of these elements in influencing choice at the polls. On the other hand, you could turn the question around to ask how television itself is influenced by a range of political factors. In that case, you might choose to undertake a study of the changes in election news coverage over the course of the 2004 campaign

between George Bush and John Kerry. Once you had measured how the campaign coverage had changed, you could then consider which factors – events such as the televized debates, reports from the war in Iraq, possible new security threats, hints of scandal – might have changed the direction of this coverage. Thus, you can study the interaction between the media and politics from different perspectives.

Once you are clear about whether you are studying the impact of the media on an element in politics or the effect of politics on the media, you need to think about what part of the media sphere itself is under examination. This book generally divides the media sphere into three main categories. The first category is *news production*, which relates to all the factors that are involved in the creation of media output in the form of broadcasts, newspapers, internet content, etc., within a particular country. This includes a country's political environment, the media norms, media regulation, ownership of media outlets, as well as how the journalistic and public relations professions carry out their jobs. The second broad category to scrutinize in the study of media and politics is that of *content*. This includes studies of what is actually transmitted or printed in outlets such as the broadcast news, newspaper stories, radio broadcasts, and websites. The third category is that of the *audience*, analyzing how people react to what they see, hear, and read in the mass media. If you divide the study of the media and politics into these categories, it becomes much easier to examine the relationship between media and politics in a comparative perspective.

To return to the example above of election coverage, the first research category of news production would be concerned with all the elements that affect how news is produced. For example, you could look at whether owners of media organizations had any influence on the daily editorial meeting at newspapers. Additionally, you could study how journalists picked which events to cover and which sources they used most often. You could compare the difference in how American and British journalists followed candidates on the campaign trail. Content studies are relatively straightforward, if somewhat time-consuming. They typically involve the measurement of coverage devoted to particular issues, people, or themes. Content analysis of television, however, can be quite difficult because of the range of images and nuance in the broadcasts (not to mention the time and trouble of recording or retrieving the content). Finally, how does the audience react to news content? Do people accept it unthinkingly? What parts do they absorb and what parts do they ignore? Do they feel that they are impervious to slant or bias in the news? What media sources do they trust? Where do they turn in a national crisis, such as after an act of terrorism or during a war? Do Americans and Russians, for example, expect the same sort of coverage of terrorist acts? Does that coverage leave them feeling more secure or more vulnerable to a security threat? Finally, how does the audience reaction dictate how the news producers plan their coverage?

This three-step model of media production/environment, content, and audience is not static. The constraints of the media environment and its production

will dictate, to a large degree, the type of content that is produced by a media outlet. Even when two media outlets in the same country are presented with the same event, they will cover it at least slightly differently. When various media in different systems – whether in the US, the UK, or Russia – are presented with terrorism, war, elections, or other major events, they often will cover them very differently indeed. Which way is the most democratic? What effect does this approach to coverage have on content? For example, election coverage in the UK is far more focused on issues than in the US, while election coverage in Russia has become increasingly biased and propagandistic. The content, in turn, dictates the range of responses from the audience. While US audiences would probably find the BBC news staid, British audiences would certainly find US local television news trivial and excessively chatty. One audience might expect and welcome a level of censorship in war coverage while another audience would feel that a certain level of dissemblance on the part of war correspondents was a violation of their civil rights. Looking at media audiences in a comparative perspective will quickly reveal that norms and expectations about media content differ markedly among people in different nations. This, in turn, influences the first element in this three-step model of analysis, namely the production of news. Those who produce the news are aware of the expectations of the audience and should seek to meet the needs of that audience as consumers or as citizens – or as some combination of both.

Classic models of media and politics

1.3 It is useful to look at how people have conceptualized the relationship between media and politics, although it is also important to remain flexible to account for different types of media environments, content, and audience. One of the classic ways to attempt to model the mass media comes from work by Siebert, et al. (1963). They divided the world's media into four models: libertarian, socially responsible, authoritarian, and Soviet. Siebert and his colleagues argued that the Soviet press model required that the press support the Marxist-Leninist view of reality; the authoritarian model called for a press completely subservient to the state; the libertarian model supported the notion that opinions should be aired freely; and the social responsibility model held that media should work proactively to include all segments of society in its coverage (see Table 1.1).

Although these models have been criticized as being simplistic and an artefact of the Cold War, they provide a useful starting point for a discussion of the media and the public in a generalized way. All of these models represent 'ideal' situations, as opposed to actual media systems. However, the authors of *Four Theories of the Press* certainly had particular countries in mind in developing each model – and the models are useful for understanding the broad parameters of media systems. The libertarian model parallels the US media

Table 1.1 Classic models of media systems

Model	Definition
Libertarian (Commercial)	The media are free to publish what they like. Attacks on the government are allowed and even encouraged in the interest of bettering society. Journalists and media organizations are given full autonomy.
Social responsibility	The media are not completely free to publish what they like as they have certain obligations to society to provide information and balance. The media should provide access to all groups. The media and the government are partners in constructing civil society.
Authoritarian	The media serve the needs of the state through direct governmental control. The media are not allowed to print or broadcast anything that could undermine the established authority or give offence to the existing political values. Control is by censorship and punishment of those caught breaking the rules.
Soviet	In theory, media serve the interests of the working class and the sense of limit/censorship is imposed by the consciousness of the journalists in solidarity with the workers. In practice, the Soviet media were controlled by the state as in the authoritarian model.

Source: Derived from Siebert, Peterson and Schramm (1963)

market, while the social responsibility model comes closer to that of the UK broadcasting sector. However, even with those matches, there are interesting exceptions within each country, notably the British tabloid newspapers that exploit scandal and even scaremonger in the quest for more sales. This would place the British tabloids closer to the libertarian model than the social responsibility model. The Soviet system has collapsed, but the Soviet model is still useful in understanding the poor performance of the media as a pillar of civil society in many post-Soviet states (not to mention present-day China). Finally, the authoritarian model is still recognizable in countries around the world, including Iran and Burma.[1]

Much of the discussion among people who analyze media systems focuses on either the libertarian model or the social responsibility model. Is one system better than the other? Unsurprisingly, countries tend to approve of their own system, but it is clear there are advantages and disadvantages to both systems in terms of the role the media play in democracy (see Table 1.2). For example, the libertarian system is considered to be driven by the needs of consumers, hence the chief obligation of the news media in free societies is to provide the general public with information about significant current events – as well as with entertainment. The libertarian model is also often referred to as the 'commercial' model of the news. Anything that happens that seems interesting or important for media audiences may become news. It should be reported quickly, accurately, and without any attempt to convey a particular

Table 1.2   Comparing the libertarian and social responsibility models

	Libertarian model	*Social responsibility model*
Definition	Driven by the needs of the consumer and often called the 'commercial' model. Chief obligation of the news media in free societies is to provide the general public with information about significant current events and entertainment.Anything interesting or important for media audiences may become news. Reported quickly, accurately, and free from opinion. Left to the audience to decide what to believe and what to question.	News producers design news output to support a civil society and discourage anti-social behaviour. Media output should reflect social concerns. Media should foster political action and publicize social evils. Media should not broadcast undesirable viewpoints and questionable accusations, even if sensational. Media should hold government accountable when necessary.
Role of audience	Can absorb all messages and decide what is important	Given information to promote acting is responsibly.
Role of media	Provide all information deemed of interest.	Provide information in a responsible manner.
Primary perception of audience as …	Consumers	Citizens
Primary perception of journalists as …	Information providers	Gatekeepers
Mostly adhere to this model	US – although tends more towards social responsibility model in times of war or terrorist acts on US targets.	UK – although its tabloid newspaper adhere to the libertarian model as do some commercial television broadcasts.

point of view. It is left to the audience to decide what to believe and what to question. The libertarian media system reduces the the power of the media to serve as political 'gatekeepers', making issues of media ownership and journalistic bias less important.

If the system is consumer-driven, then it is much less vulnerable to manipulation, either by a powerful group of elites or by inchoate masses. It places a high level of trust in the audience to decide what is important and to synthesize the critical messages about society. Yet, this high level of trust in the audience can be problematic, as studies suggest that people often pick entertainment over serious issues. In addition, unfiltered news can lead to panic, insecurity, or even danger such as in the deadly 1992 Los Angeles riots that were sparked by broadcasts that white policemen had been acquitted of a crime in savagely beating black motorist Rodney King. There are legitimate

concerns that unfiltered information, released without regard for its societal impact, can lead to serious problems. In the short term, this can mean violence. In the long term, it can mean the erosion of the rational fabric of society.

The social responsibility model of the media should address some of these problems by having a more considered policy about the use of information in society. The social responsibility model of the news suggests that producers design their news output to support a civil society and discourage anti-social behaviour (Negrine, 1994). Or, as Graber (2005: 22) phrases it, 'adherents to the tenets of social responsibility believe that news and entertainment presented by the mass media should reflect social concerns'. This turns the mass media into the guardians of public welfare, who 'should foster political action when necessary by publicizing social evils' (such as preventing nuclear contamination or stopping child abuse). The media should not broadcast undesirable viewpoints and questionable accusations, even if they are sensational. However, if the media believe that the government is hiding information vital to the public interest, journalists should seek that information out and make it public.

The benefits of the social responsibility model of the media, when compared with the more free-wheeling libertarian model, are clear. The social responsibility model provides a level of protection to society, from everything ranging from bad taste to information that could lead to panic or violence. It protects the public from damaging, distorted, or dangerous information. Overall, it works towards building a societal consensus while the libertarian coverage of the same news might destroy that harmony. The social responsibility model of the media helps to maintain a sense of common good and, most probably, build a sense of nationhood. On the other hand, it deprives citizens of the right to act on full information – even if that could lead to injustice or violence – and gives media organizations much more power over the distribution of information in society. If the media take on a greater 'gatekeeping' role, then they are more at risk of either information manipulation or control by forces such as the government.

Many modern political communication scholars reject the models developed by Siebert et al. (1963). For example, Bennett (2000: 204) finds it more useful to think about the media's relationship to political power when assessing the impact of media on societies. Bennett derives three aspects of perceptions of political power from Luke's (1974) typology of power in society: People either accept political actions that affect them as legitimate; or they resist them; or they resign themselves to being powerless about these actions. The media can feed into these conceptions in three ways. First, media can frame coercive power within societies in ways that can 'encourage, discourage, hide, or expose it' (Bennett, 2000: 205). In addition, the media can be selective in their formal political coverage, reporting on some politicians and their activities while ignoring others. Finally, media are important for 'transmitting values, problem definitions and images of people in society that provide resources for people in thinking about their lives and their relations to government, politics

and society' (ibid. 205). This final definition is particularly important in a transitional society, a country in which there has been an authoritarian regime and where democratic institutions are still weak. Yet, it is also dangerous, in the sense that an emphasis on values that divide the population or fail to foster civil society – such as a focus on nationalism of the dominant group or strong leadership over mass preference – can have a detrimental effect on the development of civil society.

However, if the mass media choose to 'lead' their audience by attempting to challenge majority beliefs too vehemently, they run the risk of losing both the audience's attention and its trust. This is complicated by the fact that it is often hard to gauge the opinion or mood of an audience, particularly when journalists become somewhat isolated from average citizens. In addition, public and commercial media outlets cannot act in isolation from the competition. Even if their funding structure allows them to ignore short-term popular trends (as is technically true of the BBC), if they lose audience share to a point at which they fail to communicate messages to a significant number of people, then they become marginalized. There is compelling evidence that media pursue their own interests and traditions. Media in the US, in spite of growing concerns over 'infotainment', still devote a relatively large amount of coverage to elections. In turn, the BBC continues to cover ceremonial state occasions such as the opening of Parliament at Westminster and the laying of wreaths for the war dead on Remembrance Day, notwithstanding their lack of dynamic viewing value. This idea is supported by work by Schudson (1995), who makes a compelling argument that media and culture are intertwined – and it is impossible to understand a media system without understanding its historical and cultural parameters.

Concerns arise when what could be termed tradition becomes too open to control by a particular group or part of the government, such as a charismatic leader and his or her following. This issue is also linked to the larger debate about media ownership. In Europe, where the consensus is that state or public-funded television is vital to society, there are quite serious conflicts about state control over news broadcasts. In addition, there is widespread criticism of the US media in elections, with claims that the coverage has become little more than a 'horse race' with candidates gaining less and less time to speak for themselves (Patterson, 1994). Arguably, the US media are continuing the tradition of covering elections, yet offering less useful and unbiased information to the voters. If established democracies and media systems such as the UK and the US face serious issues in terms of openness and control, the problems for less democratic systems are even starker. Sparks (2000) suggests that the whole argument about public media versus commercial media misses the point. He posits that the discussion of media and society should be re-ordered from an examination of public versus commercial media to consider who controls the media under *any* type of ownership. For example, Sparks argues that two of the classic models of the media from Siebert et al. (1963)

(Soviet and libertarian) do not work because economic and political power are so intertwined in both systems. Thus, the systems can never really be contrasted since the basic component of media control is in the hands of elites, whether you are in a libertarian or authoritarian media system. For Sparks, power is more important than whether media controllers are in the state-funded sphere or the commercial sphere.

The four models listed above generally focus on how the media system relates to the ruling government and the audience. Graber (2005) finds it useful to theorize about media in a slightly different manner by categorizing them according to the manner in which they approach news coverage. This overlaps somewhat with the models from Siebert et al. (1963), yet provides an additional method of comparing media in different systems. Graber divides the news media into four models: mirror, operational, political, and professional (see Table 1.3). In the mirror model, news should simply be a reflection of reality. In the organizational model (akin to organizational theory found in management studies), news is thought to emerge from pressures inherent in the organizational processes and goals of media organizations. The political model suggests that the news reflects the ideological biases of individual journalists and their media organizations. Finally, the professional model posits that news making should be viewed as an endeavour of highly skilled professionals, seeking to create news that attracts consumers and citizens.

Graber's models are useful in terms of theorizing about how the news is made, particularly how the media environment shapes the media content (the first two steps of the three-part model outlined earlier). However, these models are slightly narrower than those suggested by Siebert et al. (1963) in that all but the political model do not really take into account the broader political context in which media must operate. This includes leaving out the third component of the model, the audience, in theorizing about the relationship between media and society. These four models delineated by Graber, however, do represent four diverse yet measurable ways in which media operate in the real world.

There are two additional media models that suggest a slightly different relationship, where the media play a less passive role in politics. A few US newspapers have experimented with the democratic-participant model of having a more equal and interactive relationship between the media and the audience. This is particularly relevant when thinking about the possible role of the internet in politics. This idea of 'civic' journalism involves initiating actions such as town meetings in order to stimulate political interest. However, studies suggest that it is relatively difficult to motivate disengaged citizens, even with the extra incentives of town meetings or website forums. On the other hand, the *developmental democracy model* is about making the relationship between the media and the audience less equal by giving media the power to withhold certain facts and distort other information in the attempt to support a young democracy. For example, this would involve journalists turning a blind eye to mild levels of corruption in an administration if they felt that the leader was genuinely trying to build democratic institutions. The main issue with the

Table 1.3   Models of news production

Model	Definition	Benefits to model	Flaws in model
Mirror	News should be reflection of reality.	News is not distorted or biased by production.	Unrealistic, impossible to cover all events. News producers must make choices about focus, highlighting, filtering the news, or there will be information overload. Discounts political bias and pressures.
Organizational	News emerges from pressures inherent in the organizational processes and goals of a news organization.	Differing outputs from various media organizations provide evidence for this (particularly as compared cross-nationally). Observations of journalists suggest that they are constrained by organizational factors.	Does not consider the fact that actual events also will affect the news. Discounts political bias and pressures. Ignores the notion that journalists may have professional norms that can counter organizational behaviour.
Political	News reflects the ideological biases of individual journalists, as well as that of media outlet. Only high-status, approved people covered by news; those who do not support the system are ignored or vilified.	Provides strong support for a regime. Fits evidence from some media systems particularly well.	News becomes a powerful tool for oppression. Does not consider the fact that actual events will also affect the news (except in authoritarian regimes in which there is such widespread control that events can go uncovered).
Professional	News making viewed as an endeavour of highly skilled professionals. Events selected for importance, attractiveness to media audiences, and balance.	Consumer-driven and apolitical.	Skilled professionals may act as filter of unpleasant or unpopular, albeit important news. Leaves out element of civic responsibility, such as hearing about dull, yet critical economic policy or election campaigns. Could lead to dumbing-down and pandering to the audience.

Source: Derived from Graber (2005)

developmental democracy model is that it could be easily subverted to justify the undemocratic consolidation of power by elites, rather than be used as the eventual conduit for expression by the masses. While at times mass opinion can be destabilizing, a deliberate decision to distort the issues is always worrisome. This speaks to the vital question of whether the means can justify the ends – and whether democracy can be created without freedom of speech.

   All of this begs the question of the role that the mass media should play in civil society. Unsurprisingly, this is a question that has intrigued philosophers

for centuries and is the subject of a wide range of books (some of the classics in the twentieth century are Dahl, 1989, Habermas, 1989, and Huntington, 1991). While it is clear that the view on what constitutes democracy is culturally specific, most critics agree that the media play a crucial role in fostering civil society. Commentators vary somewhat on the exact nature of this role. While Dahl perceives democracy as an ideal rather than an actual type of governance, he sees freedom of expression, media freedom, and the right to expression as key components of civil society. Habermas argues that the media provide a critical 'sphere' in which the public can debate and discuss policy as they continually forge a better society. Huntington perceives the media as important in an educative role – and the more educated the citizens, the better chance there is for democracy. There are different definitions, however, in terms of what constitutes 'education' and what is really just 'propaganda', definitions that vary not only from regime type to regime type, but even among countries with relatively similar political ideologies.

It is this idea that Hallin and Mancini (2003) explored by comparing media systems and trying to model the role of the media in the political sphere in ways that are more subtle and perhaps more useful than those suggested more than 40 years ago by Siebert et al. According to Hallin and Mancini, one of the central problems with Siebert's *Four Theories of the Press* is that the elements of all of the models except the Soviet model are evident in many democracies. In fact, Hallin and Mancini claim that these four theories, which had little link to actual comparative research, have 'stalked the landscape of media studies like a horror-movie zombie for decades beyond its natural lifetime' and there is need for 'the development of more sophisticated models based on real comparative analysis' (2003: 10). By using the study of political systems in North America and Europe, Hallin and Mancini devised the liberal model, the democratic corporatist model, and the polarized pluralist model (see Table 1.4).

As Hallin and Mancini defined and tested their models, it became clear that it is very difficult to usefully compare entire media systems. In addition, they found that the forces of commercialization and globalization were leading to 'considerable convergence' among media systems in different countries, making it that much more difficult to construct models that analyzed the media and political sphere within a single country (ibid.: 12). While their three models offer a more nuanced understanding of how media systems operate today and are based on modern-day research, they also show the limitations in trying to define 'models' that usefully explain the relationship between media and politics in a comparative context. This book will refer to models and use them as ways of informing broad ideas about this relationship. However, it is often more relevant to look at particular components at each of three basic levels of the media and politics relationship – the media environment, content, and audience – in a comparative context. For example, it can be more illuminating (at times) to compare war coverage on the BBC and CBS than to talk about the overall role of the media in war coverage in general.

Table 1.4   Hallin and Mancini's media models

Model name	Definition	Countries on which it is based
Liberal	Relative dominance of market mechanisms and commercial media. Relatively small role of state.	Great Britain, Ireland,US
Democratic corporatist	Historical co-existence of commercial media and media tied to organized social and political groups. Relatively active, but legally limited role of the state.	Northern continental Europe
Polarized pluralist	Integration of media into party politics, weaker historical development of commercial media. Strong role of the state.	Mediterranean countries of southern Europe

Source: Hallin and Mancini (2003)

Audience studies

1.4 How does the audience react to the various ways in which political news is presented to them? Various studies, including Berelson et al. (1954), have dismissed the notion that media consumers are easily swayed by propaganda. Rather, the relationship between the audience and media messages is perceived as a complex, interactive association. In particular, it is difficult to isolate the effect of media messages, because they are only one factor in a range of political influences. This is made even more complex by the fact that people tend to select media that support their pre-existing political viewpoints. Most people seek confirmation, rather than challenge, from their media outlets. That being said, there is a range of ways (which will be discussed in more detail in later chapters) in which audience effects can be measured. Focus groups encourage people to speak more descriptively and in depth about how they are affected politically by the mass media. In addition, there exists a range of mass public opinion surveys that ask people to report their media use and reactions. These are particularly useful in looking at variations in audience factors – such as usage, trust, interest, preferences, likes, or dislikes – that relate to political news. It is clear that understanding the audience means considering not only short-term reactions, such as being repelled by a candidate who uses negative advertising, but also conceptualizing the long-term socializing effects of how the media report on politics in general.

Assessing media freedom

1.5 One of the most compelling questions is whether the media are either contributing to democracy or helping to suppress the population's political freedoms. At times, abuses of media freedom are quite obvious,

such as in the clear censorship of the mass media in China or in the high number of murdered journalists in Russia. At other times, however, it is more difficult to compare some of the more subtle elements of media freedom. Several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) track different levels of media freedom and report regularly on how various political systems are performing. For example, Freedom House publishes an annual report on media freedom, in which various elements of media systems in countries around the globe are rated on a scale of 'completely free' to 'completely unfree' (www.freedomhouse.org). This organization based in the Washington, DC examines categories of legal, political, and economic freedoms as they relate to the media and assigns each country a score. Their findings suggest that media freedom is by no means universal. In its 2005 survey, which ranked media systems in 194 countries and territories, Freedom House judged 39 per cent as free, 26 per cent as partly free, and 35 per cent as not free. The US and the UK were both ranked as free, 29th and 34th in the world respectively. Russia was ranked at 151st and judged as not free. A trio of Nordic countries (Finland, Iceland, and Sweden) were ranked as having the freest media systems in the world, while North Korea was ranked as having the least free.

As the rankings suggest, there is a bias towards Western values in the system,which is not surprising given that Freedom House was very much a product of the Cold War. The international NGO Reporters Without Borders (www.rsf.org) also compiles an annual index, based on 52 criteria that affect journalists personally (including murders, imprisonment, physical attacks, and threats) and news media (censorship, confiscation of issues, searches, and harassment). In its investigation into such incidents from 1 September 2003 to 1 September 2004, the organization ranked the US as 23rd out of 167 countries and the UK as 29th. Once again, Nordic countries were found to have the most free media systems and North Korea the least free.

While the rankings generated by Freedom House and Reporters Without Borders allow for comparisons among countries as well as over time, it is often difficult to quantify media freedom meaningfully because of the huge variation in media norms from country to country. Other international organizations routinely report on the media situation around the world. For example, Amnesty International issues regular warnings and reports about the violation of media freedom, as does Internews. In addition, Reporters Without Borders produces a blacklist of countries in which the human rights of journalists have been grossly abused. In July 2005, this list included Argentina, Bangladesh, Columbia, Gambia, Guinea, Malawi, Mexico, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Peru. Ironically, places in which there is virtually complete control of media by the state tend to have relatively little violence against journalists (such as China or Uzbekistan), although journalists are vulnerable to arrest and imprisonment. The Committee to Protect Journalists publishes a list of the 10 worst enemies of the press (which in May 2001 included Russian President Vladimir Putin) for the first time. In May 2005, the same organization issued a list of the top five 'most murderous' countries for journalists: Bangladesh, Colombia, Iraq, the Philippines, and Russia.

Content of the book

1.6 This book will cover several important themes as an introduction to media and politics in a comparative perspective. As with any text, this book cannot reference all of the relevant work in this field, particularly as political communication is an immense area that stretches across political science, sociology, management studies, film studies, English, and beyond. As such, the chapters are designed to give students a grounding in some of the main arguments and analyses of the field. Most of the chapters are structured around an informed discussion involving the three central case studies of the US, the UK, and Russia. However, the chapters on the internet and research methods take a slightly different approach, organizing the work along more international concepts and a focus on slightly different examples. Each chapter has an introduction, subject headings with the main ideas, a synopsis of the central points in each section, a summary of the chapter, and discussion questions related to the chapter material. Each chapter also includes a section on further reading and internet resources. It should be noted that there are many excellent and exciting places on the internet to look for more information, analysis, and even raw data on comparative media and politics. The websites listed in this book were generally chosen as places that offer some valuable resources for further research and analysis. Where it is helpful, the book will include tables to summarize key concepts and information.

The central themes covered in the book are the forces that shape news production, including a separate chapter on the journalistic profession and public relations. In addition, the book covers audiences in a comparative perspective; media and elections; media and war; media and terrorism; the role of the internet in the political sphere; and an introduction to research methods in the study of media and politics. The internet, as a major communications tool, also appears in the discussions throughout the book. Much of this text is designed from experience in teaching media and politics courses to undergraduates and graduate students. In addition, the work derives from several research projects, including: a comparative study of the framing of the terrorist threat in recent election campaigns in the US, UK and Russia; a 10-year study of the demise of freedom of the media in Russia; a comparative study of media freedom across the former Soviet Union; and a project that brought together 13 scholars to look at the most recent developments of the internet in politics.

Book structure

1.7 After this introductory first chapter, Chapters 2 and 3 concentrate on the first element of the three-step media and politics model, namely media production and environment. In particular, the chapters discuss the elements of the News Production Model, which theorizes that news is produced by passing through a series of filters, from political environment, media norms, regulation, and ownership of media outlets. In the final step or 'filter',

news content is influenced by the nature of the journalistic profession, as well as by public relations efforts. Organizing the study of the media environment around the concept of a series of steps through which news is formed, allows students and researchers to consider each of these elements in a cross-national perspective.

Chapter 2 will discuss political and media environment, media norms, regulation, and ownership via the three central case studies of the US, the UK, and Russia. What emerges are distinct differences that are useful in comparing and contrasting the appropriate role of the forces of media production in the formulation of a civic society. The News Production Model allows us to conceptualize the relative impact of the different elements of the news-making process on what people see, read, and hear on a daily basis in the news. A model of the news production process in a comparative perspective also allows us to filter out what is mere description, and to focus on the relative importance of different elements in analyzing the political role in the production of news.

Chapter 3 turns to the intriguing subject of the people themselves who carry out the business of news reporting: journalists and, to an increasing extent, public relations professionals. Journalists have certain established professional practices within countries, but the notions of news making vary enormously among countries. In the US, the idea of 'objectivity' is held up as a standard and remains an important way of understanding the nature of the US journalist, even though it is under threat in some ways. In the UK, the standard held up is 'balance' rather than 'objectivity' in a schizophrenic system in which television is held to high standards but some segments of the print media revel in scandal and muck-raking. In Russia, journalists are perhaps best defined as political and economic pawns, although some achieve power in their own right as the voice of political forces. What are the different professional journalistic norms, particularly those of self-censorship, which have developed among journalists in different countries and media systems? What are some of the crises faced by journalists, such as at the BBC after the suicide of a key source in a story on reported flaws in the government's case to go to war in Iraq? Chapter 3 also will provide information on the craft of the journalist – such as the process of news construction and presentation – and how this varies among countries. As the relationship between public relations consultants and reporters continues to develop, does it shut out less organized (and less well-financed) voices?

Chapter 4 looks at the media audience, using studies of media consumers in the US, the UK, and Russia to explore ideas about the nature of the relationship between news consumption and politics. Interestingly, the study of the media audience is often overlooked. While differences in media environment and content tend to be rather obvious, the nature of their relationship with the audience often remains somewhat hidden. We know there is some effect of media usage, but how do we define it? What does it mean in different media

and political systems? Levels of usage and trust vary among different media outlets both between countries and within countries themselves. Does this matter? What does it mean if trust in a public television system erodes? Why do people trust the media so much more than many other political institutions? Varying segments of the audience have quite different relationships with the mass media. Some are empowered by the information, some are indifferent, while still others are alienated from the political sphere altogether by what they see, hear, or read. Understanding these nuances and comparing them across country boundaries will allow us to gain a better understanding of the relationship between media and politics in general.

Chapter 5 discusses elections and the media. The way in which candidates and parties are covered on the nightly news can have a relatively large amount of power in influencing undecided voters. In addition, countries have a range of approaches to allowing paid and unpaid appearances by political parties and candidates on television during election campaigns. This chapter compares and contrasts the libertarian US model, in which massive amounts are spent on televising political advertising, with the UK system, which bans paid political advertising. In addition, the chapter discusses how the Russian mass media retarded the development of political parties and subverted the construction of an electoral democracy. It is important to consider not only how media in elections can subvert, rather than support, democracy both in the specific case of Russia as well as in the broader comparative sense. Are citizens being empowered or merely duped by election campaigns?

Chapter 6 discusses and analyses the media coverage of war, particularly how it has become controlled in a quite distinct way in democratic systems. The coverage of war has developed from the 'Vietnam Model' of confrontational war correspondents to the 'Gulf War' model of a docile, self-censoring media in the service of the military. This chapter traces the developments that have led to a marked decrease in openness and freedom of information in the coverage of conflict. In particular, the chapter focuses on how the British pioneered principles of media control in the Falklands War in 1982, taming journalists with a pool system, self-censorship, and the appeals to nationalism that now predominate. The chapter will include a discussion of the news coverage of US and British military campaigns in Iraq. The chapter will contrast the notion of a 'controlled' free media during war with that of the complete news blackout and resulting increase in human rights violations in Chechnya.

The coverage of terrorism creates some of the same issues for media involving war and state security, yet also presents particular challenges for the media. As discussed in Chapter 7, terrorism creates an enormous tension between state security and the public's right to information. The situation is gravely complicated as terrorists target the audience as well as the actual victims of the violence, thus turning the media into unwilling players in the terrorist scheme itself. While the British media have dealt with terrorism in Northern Ireland for decades, the American media have faced a different

conception of threat since the 9/11 attacks in 2001. The chapter includes material from focus groups on how the American public has reacted to ongoing coverage of terrorism since 9/11, as well as findings from British focus groups in the wake of the London bombings in July 2005. The American audience expresses frustration and patriotism in almost equal measure. On the other hand, the British audience appears more ready to discuss terrorism within a political context, long used to terrorism discussions within the political framework of Northern Ireland. Americans continue to support a balance between state security and openness that favours freedom of speech, albeit with little introspection about the causes of terrorism. Given a more socially responsible media system, British media users appear to favour more control of the media in the interest of social cohesion. Research in Russia shows that the public and the media are locked into a cycle of hatred and vilification of Chechen terrorists (and even ordinary Chechen citizens) that leaves only the most extreme political options for either the Russian military or Chechen militants.

Although the internet is discussed in specific contexts throughout the volume, Chapters 8 and 9 take an in-depth look at the internet's role in the political sphere. Chapter 8 will discuss the 'civic' side of the internet, analyzing ways in which the internet functions as part of the democratic process in the US, UK, and other countries. This will include an analysis of the central theories in internet studies in democracies, usage of the internet, and attitudes towards the internet. It includes case studies that illustrate the ways in which governments, parties, social groups, and others have attempted to use the internet to build what they perceive to be better societies and citizens. Chapter 9 considers the role of the internet in politics in a different way, by analyzing the internet 15 potential for protest and political resistance. This will include a look at the Chinese internet 'Great Firewall' as a model of multi-level internet control by the state. In addition, the chapter will examine the role of the internet in the Chiapas movement, alternative views on the Chechen war, as well as the formation of the Orange Revolution in Ukraine. The chapter will weigh the evidence about the efficacy of terrorists' use of the online world.

Chapter 10 is designed to give students and new researchers in the field a quick introduction to the central ways in which to study media and politics. This chapter first provides a quick guide to hypothesis-formation for studies of media and politics, allowing researchers to turn ideas into good research design. The chapter discusses key qualitative methods in the field, including in-depth interviewing, focus groups, as well as the analysis of broadcast, print, and internet content. In addition, the chapter provides a brief introduction to quantitative data, suggesting in particular how to use public opinion data in theorizing about the relationship of the media to the political sphere.

Finally, Chapter 11 will offer a brief synopsis and review of the main findings of each of the preceding chapters. In particular, the conclusions will underline the value of comparing media systems across national boundaries in order to understand the critical interaction between media and politics.

Study questions

- Why is it useful to study the media in different countries in order to understand the general relationship between media and politics?
- Describe and discuss the three-step model of media production, content, and the audience.
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of having a libertarian media system? What are the advantages and disadvantages of having media that operate under the social responsibility model?
- In what ways do the models of the media suggested by Graber and others help us to better understand the relationship between news and politics?
- What do studies suggest about how the audience is influenced by the mass media?
- How is media freedom worldwide tracked and analyzed by non-governmental organizations?

Reading guide

For a good overview of the US system, which includes factual information as well as theoretical ideas in a very readable format, see Graber (2005). For the British system, see McNair (2003) or Negrine (1994). For the Russian system, see Oates (2006). To further explore some of the theories about the relationship between media and politics, consult Siebert et al. (1963) as well as Graber (2005). Hallin and Mancini (2003) provide an interesting, updated discussion about media models in a comparative context. Negrine (1994) discusses media models in the British context. For more ideas about the relationship of media to society, see Sparks (2000). In the same edited volume, Bennett (2000) discusses interesting ideas about media and politics. The edited volume itself (Curran and Parks, 2000) offers a good overview of a range of media systems. Gunther and Mughan (2000) also provide a range of key insights in their edited volume on democracy and media, particularly in the first chapter (by Mughan and Gunther).

Internet resources

www.cpj.org   The Committee to Protect Journalists is an international NGO that issues an annual list of the 10 worst enemies of the press. It also publishes other reports on media abuses, including the list of the five 'most murderous' countries for journalists in 2005.

www.rsf.org   Reporters Without Borders [Reporters Sans Frontières] is an international NGO that defends journalists, other media contributors and professionals who have been imprisoned or persecuted for doing their work. It issues warnings and reports about journalists who are under threat and compiles an annual index of media freedom.

www.freedomhouse.org   Freedom House is a non-profit, non-partisan organization that promotes a 'clear voice for democracy and freedom around the world', according to its website. It issues an annual report on media freedom worldwide.

www.people-press.org   The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press is a non-profit research organization that provides a wealth of survey data and reports on the media, the public, and politics in the US. The website provides many reports and much data (free to download) that is useful for writing scholarly work.

www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org   The Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania a is policy centre with a particular emphasis on the role of media in the political sphere.

www.fair.org   FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting) reports annually on perceptions of how power shapes media content.

www.amnesty.org   Amnesty International is an international, NGO that campaigns for human rights, including compiling a list of abuses of media rights.

www.internews.org   Internews is an international, non-profit organization that works to foster independent media and promote open communications policies in the public interest.

Note

1   According to media freedom rankings by Reporters Without Borders (see www.rsf.org).

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