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Media framing of democratisation conflicts in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa: a content analysis

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Table of contents

Executive Summary

This MeCoDEM working paper presents an overview of the main findings from a quantitative content analysis covering different types of democratisation conflicts (i.e., conflicts over citizenship, elections, transitional justice and distribution of power) in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. The sample involves 5162 newspaper articles and news stories in the four countries selected on the basis of two main criteria: the degree of independence of media outlets from government and political parties, and their relevance. The key findings from the content analysis are organised around several themes: causes of democratisation conflicts, portrayal of conflict parties, preferred solutions to conflicts, perceptions of democracy, role of the media, authoritarian past, and tone of reporting and polarisation.

Although this paper focuses principally on description, we also speculate about the main factors that shape similarities and differences in media coverage of democratisation conflicts. The main finding from the content analysis is that cross-national variations that we found in media reporting of democratisation conflicts appear to depend on several factors:

- Our data strongly reflect specific country contexts (and contexts of broader regions from which they come from, including the Arab Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and post-communist Europe) to be a consistent factor that shapes the pattern of media coverage, reflecting the close interdependence between media and politics. Historical and geographical influences crystallise over time into specific political, institutional and cultural legacies and thus shape media framing in different ways. For example, the army is perceived as a relevant political institution in Egypt (and much of the Middle East) – due to its dominant role in politics since independence from colonial rule – but not in other countries. However, the relationship between country context and media coverage is not a simple 1:1 reflection and multiple transformations of meaning in public discourses can tilt interpretations of political events toward unexpected directions.

- Regime type and the stage of democratisation matter when it comes to media framing of political conflicts because press freedom is an important aspect of democracy. As a result, countries that feature similar levels of democracy, or find themselves at similar points in democratisation, cluster together on several (but not all) relevant variables. Across all four countries, media's portrayals of the achievements of democracy differ considerably with the most negative reporting recorded in South Africa and the most positive in Serbia. This finding is puzzling because these two countries can be seen as the two most advanced democracies in our sample. Factors that contribute to a positive evaluation of democracy are peaceful elections, the rule of law and economic growth,

whereas institutional deficiencies, social inequalities and limited citizenship undermine beliefs in democratic governance.

- In addition, media reporting also varied depending on types of democratisation conflict – which reflect the main arenas of political contestation – though less so than on country contexts. Our data show that elections, as a highly institutionalised type of conflict (though it also probably depends on regime type/situation), were covered somewhat differently than other conflict types. Across all countries, the quality of media coverage is limited by bias, emotionalisation and – most importantly – polarisation.

In particular, conflicts over the control of power trigger sharp polarisation, whereas elections – contrary to existing literature – seem to force media towards a more restrained style of reporting. Further research, which draws on other sources, including the qualitative analysis of media content, interviews with journalists, civil society and political actors, as well as document analysis, is required to explain how exactly and why all these factors shape media coverage of democratisation conflicts.

Introduction

Democratisation involves far-reaching re-configurations of power structures, value systems and resources and thus triggers conflicts between reformers and those who benefited from the old regime and are attached to its values. In these periods of political and social transformation the media are playing a crucial role as a space where democratisation conflicts are played out. But the media are also active participants with their own interests, preferences and world views.

Communication scholars have pointed out that the media's role is not confined to just mirroring what is going on. Instead, they provide a particular interpretation of reality (Bennett 2005). They do so by selecting events and topics while neglecting others, by providing or denying access to actors and by taking sides in ongoing conflicts and debates. In particular, the media's capacity to frame political issues and events has been shown to have the potential to direct people's perceptions of reality and by consequence, their actions (see for an overview Vladisavljevic 2015).

The project *Media, Conflict and Democratisation* (MeCoDEM) sets out to systematically investigate the media's role in democratisation conflicts. This paper presents an overview of the main findings from a quantitative content analysis covering democratisation conflicts in four countries: Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. The aim of this paper is to identify similarities and differences in the way in which the media in these four countries reported on and framed these events. Within the limitations of this paper, we can only offer initial explanations of the factors that have shaped such media coverage and briefly reflect on the consequences this might have on the dynamics and outcomes of democratisation conflicts. More comprehensive analyses that incorporate a broader range of data from interviews with journalists, civil society and political elites will follow as the project progresses.

The paper consists of the following sections: the first provides an introduction to the four country contexts, different types of democratisation conflicts, and the conflict cases that were selected for the MeCoDEM research programme. It also outlines hypotheses about factors that are most likely to shape media coverage of conflicts in transitions from authoritarian rule and in new democracies. The second section discusses methodological issues, including principles of quantitative media content analysis, research instrument, sampling and coding procedures. The main part of the paper then presents and discusses the key findings from the content analysis. These are organised around several themes: causes of democratisation conflicts, portrayal of conflict parties, preferred solutions to conflicts, perceptions of democracy, role of the media, authoritarian past, and tone of reporting and polarisation. Finally, the conclusion brings all these threads together.

Democratisation conflicts in four countries

The MeCoDEM project explores the contentious dimensions of democratisation by focusing on selected democratisation conflicts in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. The four countries are selected because they provide a diverse set of political contexts with regard to democratic development. Egypt is an example of a (so far) failed attempt at democratisation that involved a broad popular uprising against a personalist rule, sharp polarisation between secular elites and the military on the one hand, and popularly-based Islamist parties on the other hand, culminating in a violent military crackdown. Kenya

represents a post-colonial emerging democracy that carries with it various deep social cleavages, such as ethnic divisions, which often translate into political conflict and, occasionally, violence. The legacy of Yugoslavia's breakdown and subsequent violent conflicts, as well as that of personalist authoritarian rule, has strongly shaped Serbia's democracy, which remains marred with clientelism, corruption and unresolved issues of national identity. South Africa has more experience with democracy than other selected countries, but is suffering from the legacy of social inequality, corruption and restricted citizenship rights, resulting in growing popular discontent and protests (for a detailed discussion of the research design of MeCoDEM see Voltmer and Kraetzschmar 2015: 12-13).

We opted for an issue-based (as opposed to actor-based) approach in the study of democratisation conflicts since it facilitates a close, thematic exploration of the links between conflict and democratisation in very different contexts. Several types of conflict are relevant in this respect. Democratisation involves conflicts over the distribution and control of power, which include old and new elites and broader groups in the shaping of a new political order. Likewise, conflicts over different conceptions of citizenship emerge after authoritarianism since previously marginalised groups demand citizenship rights. Election campaigns in democratising regimes often revive and reshape existing social divisions and conflicts, not least in the zero-sum fashion, which boosts polarisation, and may sometimes facilitate violence. Another form of democratisation conflict relates to the legacy of repression and violence produced by prior regimes and involves struggles over the accountability of old elites and broader issues of how to deal with the authoritarian past, that is, over transitional justice (see Voltmer and Kraetzschmar 2015: 17-24). *Table 1* lists the democratisation conflicts that we explored in the content analysis.

Table 1: Selected conflict cases

Country	Citizenship (rights, minorities, identity)	Distribution of power	Elections	Transitional justice
Egypt	Christian-Muslim violence (2013)	Maspero incident (2011)	Presidential election (2012)	
Kenya	Somali community/ Kenya's 'war on terror' (2013-2014)		Presidential election (2007)	
			Presidential election (2013)	(also includes ICC prosecution of Kenyatta)
Serbia*	Pride Parade (2010)	Ombudsman (2015)	Parliamentary election (2008) (EU integration/Kosovo's secession)	Transitional justice/Arrest and extradition of Milošević to the ICTY (2001)
South Africa	Xenophobic attacks (2008, 2015)	Service delivery protests (2009, 2010, 2013, 2014)		
		State of the Nation Address (2015)		

* We selected three conflicts per country, except for Serbia which includes four. The case of a government-initiated smear media campaign against the ombudsman, which occurred after empirical research had already started, was added later as highly relevant to understanding the role of media in democratisation in Serbia.

Although this paper focuses principally on description, we also speculate about the main factors that shape similarities and differences in media coverage of democratisation conflicts. Several hypotheses are built into the very foundations of the MeCoDEM research project, especially its selection of cases. In fact, the selected countries and conflicts serve as proxies for diverse political contexts along the criteria of history, institutions and culture, type of democratisation conflict, regime type and stage of democratisation, which thus reflect the main hypotheses.

Firstly, historical and geographical influences crystallise over time into specific political, institutional and cultural legacies that tend to differ across countries and across world regions. We expect that media reporting will differ in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa; reflecting their specific historical experiences and/or legacies of such a diverse set of regions they come from, including the Arab Middle East, sub-Saharan Africa and post-communist Europe, especially with respect to perceptions of conflicts' causes, proposed remedies, perceptions of democracy and instrumentalisation of the past. Secondly, we anticipate that the types of democratisation conflict, which reflect the main arenas of political contestation, will shape media reporting in different ways, not only with regard to causes of democratisation conflicts, but also preferred solutions, the role of the media and tone of reporting. For example, media coverage tends to be more biased, emotional and polarised during election campaigns than in the reporting of other issues.

Thirdly, regime type is significant because press freedom is an important aspect of democracy. As a result, media reporting should differ in more and less democratic states. We expect that media will cover democratisation conflicts differently in South Africa and Serbia – as more advanced in democratic development – than in Egypt and Kenya (Vladisavljević 2015). Fourthly, media tend to report on conflicts differently depending on the stage of democratisation. One possibility is that media coverage of politics is more confrontational in early stages of democratisation, as media try to compensate for decades of political control and subdued reporting, and gets more restrained over time as new democratic institutions consolidate. Alternatively, media remain dependent on key power centres in the wake of regime change, or take pains not to undermine a new democratic government at a time of uncertainty, and start demanding accountability from the main political actors only in the subsequent years (see Vladisavljević 2015). One has to bear in mind, however, that influences that originate from long-standing political, institutional and cultural legacies and those emerging from more immediate political factors, such as those related to regime type and stage of democratisation, overlap to some extent and/or may work in opposite directions.

Method: content analysis

How news media frame key issues and actors during and after transitions from authoritarian rule has a major impact on the emergence, dynamics and outcomes of political conflicts. To learn more about media coverage of these conflicts, we employ a method that produces a detailed description of media reporting. Content analysis is the systematic and quantitative analysis of message characteristics. When related to media coverage, content analysis aims to describe its main patterns accurately by examining the manifest content of reporting. The focus on manifest elements of the text requires detachment from any interpretations, or 'reading between the lines', during the process of data collection. Quantitative content analysis typically singles out those characteristics of reporting that are important for a specific research project, while largely disregarding other features of the

reporting. In other words, the resulting data set reflects selected features of the textual material, but does not represent the text in its entirety. It is widely regarded as problematic to draw inferences from the content to social processes outside the text, in particular to any effects on audiences or the wider society (see Neuendorf 2002; Krippendorff 2004). Other research methods employed in the course of the MeCoDEM project are designed to probe questions about causes and consequences of media reporting, including those that shed light on factors that shape journalistic practice and the media strategies of various political actors, and on various contextual factors (see Lohner et al. 2016; Pointer et al. 2016).

Therefore, the quantitative content analysis in the MeCoDEM project identifies and describes the main features of media representations of conflicts during and after transitions from authoritarian rule in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa. As a result, we can compare and contrast data about conflict communication from the four countries and from different types of democratisation conflicts (i.e., conflicts over citizenship, elections, transitional justice and distribution of power).

The **codebook** or the content analysis protocol lies at the centre of quantitative content analysis. It specifies how selected variables should be measured and recorded. It builds upon key concepts that are the foundations of the research project, in our case drawn from democratisation studies, communication research, various strands of conflict studies and from general political and social science research. Entman's definition of the key aspects of framing (1993) provides a useful organising device for the investigation of media reporting on conflicts in transitions from authoritarian rule and in new democracies. From this perspective, key puzzles explored are (1) how the media define problems at the centre of democratisation conflicts, (2) what are the causes and instigators of the conflicts they identify in the process, (3) how the media coverage evaluates the problems, and (4) what solutions the media prescribe for the conflicts.

The **unit of analysis** is the newspaper article or the news story within a television programme. We defined a newspaper article by layout (i.e., headline, confined story of various length) and a news story by topic introduced by a newsreader or presenter (e.g., includes read-out text, live report, various quotes from interviews). Another news story begins when the coverage returns to the newsreader or presenter, or if a different journalist presents a report. As a result, sometimes there are several news stories on the same topic within one news programme, which are coded separately (for a more detailed description of the research instrument, including the codebook, see Vladisavljević 2014).

Coder training and inter-coder reliability

The codebook was piloted on a sample of newspaper articles and news stories across all conflicts in the four countries. Coder teams – employed and trained by country team leaders – consisted principally of post-graduate students from local institutions. Coding was conducted in English in South Africa and Kenya but in Arabic in Egypt and in Serbian in Serbia. The content analysis protocol was prepared in English, so we used bilingual coders, who were fluent in English (the project language) and in Arabic and Serbian respectively.

None of the local teams had prior training in quantitative content analysis. Therefore, coders were trained over several months to guarantee a high quality of data. The training involved regular meetings to discuss the main concepts, how they are operationalised and applied to the coding of specific news material. These discussions took place both among

country team members and between country teams to ensure consistency across the whole project.

To monitor the quality of coding, inter-coder reliability tests were conducted in all four country teams, each comprising at least 40 randomly selected news stories per country team. *Table 2* gives an overview of the level of reliability, broken down for individual country teams.

Table 2: Inter-coder reliability

	Nominal variables[a]	Ordinal variables[b]
Egypt	0.88	0.73
Kenya	0.79	0.52
Serbia	0.94	0.84
South Africa	0.85	0.65
All	*0.86*	*0.69*

a) Percentage agreement
b) Spearman's rho

Overall, the level of reliability across coders is acceptable to excellent. Apparently, coders had more problems with ordinal variables (we used 5-point scales for measuring degrees of various qualities), than with nominal variables that identify categories of objects. Variations in the level of reliability achieved across countries also reflect the different levels of research capacity provided in the academic institutions of the four countries.

We used SPSS – a statistics software package that is widely used by social science scholars – to analyse data collected for the content analysis. The detailed categories of the codebook were for the most part summarised into broader categories in order to identify general trends and patterns, for the purposes of presentation of data in this report

Sampling

We opted for two main sampling criteria: independence and relevance of media outlets. Firstly, we selected both those newspapers and television channels/programmes that are under the control of government or parties and others that are largely independent. Normally, media outlets from these broad groups tend to differ in their daily coverage of conflicts in periods of democratisation. There are those government- or party-controlled media that serve as little more than a mouthpiece: governments or parties own the media and/or appoint editorial personnel and therefore control editorial policies. Other media outlets are close to governments or parties, in terms of generally following political directives, but without any formal links to them. On the other hand, media that are largely free from government or party control may also differ between themselves: some may follow a general ideological or other line, without being loyal to governments or parties, while editorial policies of other media may be exclusively guided by market interests and news values, without any political alignment. While the degree of government control or independence from it varies across our very different political contexts (i.e., Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa), this division still captures the main ways in which media outlets cover politically controversial issues, especially those related to democratisation (see *Table 3*).

Secondly, we chose those media outlets that were highly relevant in the coverage of selected democratisation conflicts, drawing on expertise of country specialists involved in the MeCoDEM project. Some media outlets were relevant because of their circulation/reach and others due to their agenda-setting capacity, or both. Initially, we aimed to include both print and broadcast media in our sample since such inclusion would largely represent traditional media coverage of the conflicts. Still, difficulties in obtaining access to broadcast media content in several countries directed us principally towards the quantitative analysis of newspapers. These difficulties involved the lack of archives of broadcast media material or, alternatively, high costs of access to such archives where they existed. The exception is Serbia where our researchers managed to get access to digitised archives of print and broadcast material for three out of four conflicts and to traditional archives of media content for the remaining conflict.

Table 3: Selected media outlets

Country	Title	Media outlet	Independence [a)]	N
Egypt	Al-Ahram	Newspaper	Low to medium	261
	El-Masri Al-Yaum	Newspaper	Medium to high	341
	Shuruq	Newspaper	Medium to high	345
Kenya	The Nation	Newspaper	Medium	719
	The Standard	Newspaper	Low to medium	477
	The Star	Newspaper	Medium to high	353
Serbia	Politika	Newspaper	Medium to high	377
	Večernje novosti	Newspaper	Medium	487
	RTS	Public broadcaster [b]	Medium to high[c]	288
	B92	Private broadcaster[b]	Medium to high	366
	Blic (2010 and 2015)	Newspaper	Medium	96
	Danas (2010 and 2015)	Newspaper	Medium to high	105
	Pravda (2010)	Newspaper	Medium to high	39
	Press (2010)	Newspaper	Low to medium	55
	Pink (2010 and 2015)	Private broadcaster[b]	Low to medium	34
	Prva (2010 and 2015)	Private broadcaster[b]	Medium	22
	Informer (2015)	Newspaper	Low	39
	Naše novine (2015)	Newspaper	Low to medium	13
South Africa	Business Day	Newspaper	High	192
	Daily Sun	Newspaper	High	233
	Mail and Guardian	Newspaper	High	142
	New Age (except for 2008)	Newspaper	Low to medium	178
Total				**5162**

[a] Note that the level of independence relates to the period of the coded conflict.
[b] We coded news stories in central TV news programmes.
[c] Except in 2001 when the score was Low to medium.

Table 4 breaks the sample down into individual conflict cases. The uneven number of coded items across the four countries reflects the particular difficulties faced by research teams in some countries. For example, country teams in South Africa and Egypt experienced considerable obstacles in trying to acquire access to print and broadcast media archives, which reduced the time left for the coding process itself. Moreover, a high volume of relevant newspaper articles published on some of the selected democratisation conflicts, especially in Egypt and Kenya, made it necessary to select a random sample, which required the listing of all relevant articles as a first step of the sampling process. The South African team focused primarily on service delivery conflicts, which are by their very nature protracted and without easily identifiable peaks in media coverage, which meant that they had to experiment with various sampling methods. The listing of all relevant items would have produced a very high volume of items, while 'constructed week' sampling initially failed to provide a sufficient number of items. These various problems together with the availability of staff are also reflected in the sample size achieved by each of the country teams.

Nevertheless, the four country teams overcame these challenges and the integrated dataset created through the quantitative content analysis provides ample high-quality empirical material to describe and analyse media representations of democratisation conflicts in Egypt, Kenya, Serbia and South Africa.

Table 4: Number of coded items by conflict case

Country	Conflict Case	N	Percent (country)
Egypt	Maspero incident (2011)	300	31.7
	Christian-Muslim violence (2013)	175	18.5
	Presidential Election (2012)	472	49.8
	Total (Egypt)	*947*	*100.0*
Kenya	Presidential election (2007)	337	21.8
	Presidential election (2013)	786	50.7
	Somali community (2013-2014)	426	27.5
	Total (Kenya)	*1549*	*100.0*
Serbia	Transitional justice (2001)	661	34.4
	Parliamentary election (2008)	561	29.2
	Pride parade (2010)	420	21.9
	Ombudsman (2015)	279	14.5
	Total (Serbia)	*1921*	*100.0*
South Africa	Service delivery protests (2009-10, 2013-14)	278	37.3
	Xenophobic attacks (2008, 2015)	386	51.8
	State of the Nation Address (2015)	81	10.9
	Total (South Africa)	*745*	*100.0*
Total (All)		***5162***	***100.0***

Causes of democratisation conflicts

This and the following sections are organised thematically and present and discuss data about the main conflict causes, conflict parties, preferred strategies to deal with conflicts, perception of democracy in its institutional, individual and societal aspects, role of the media, authoritarian past, bias, emotions and polarisation in media reporting.

One of the key aspects of media reporting on conflicts in transitions from authoritarian rule and in new democracies is which causes of conflicts they identify as prominent. Journalists are expected not only to describe events, but also to provide contextual information and analysis, which is difficult to achieve under the time constraints that they normally face in their work. This section of the report assesses how journalists provide context in their reporting of democratisation conflicts by examining a range of relevant themes. Guided by a theoretical understanding of democratisation conflicts, we developed a list of potential causes of conflict, relevant to different conflict types and country contexts. *Table 5* summarises the media's interpretation of the causes of conflicts, as rooted in political institutions, political culture, the judicial system, economic conditions, collective identities and international influences. Note that coded items could have more than one cause.

Table 5: Causes of conflict by country (%))*

Causes	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
Political institutions	66.8	76.6	42.8	44.4	57.6
Judicial/legal	34.5	47.2	53.7	39.6	46.2
Political culture	65.4	35.2	17.3	68.9	39.0
International	8.6	9.1	34.0	2.8	17.4
Identities	31.0	10.1	10.5	17.9	15.2
Economic	12.7	10.3	4.9	47.1	14.0

*) Multiple causes per unit possible.

Overall, our data show that political institutions are perceived in media reporting as the most significant cause of selected democratisation conflicts, followed by judicial issues and political culture. Thus, 'reality' created by the media portrays democratisation conflicts primarily as conflicts that unfold within, or spill over from, political institutions rather than, for example, economic conditions. As a key institution of democratic politics, elections as an institutional cause of conflict become particularly salient during election campaigns. Since four of our selected conflict cases (Egypt 2012, Kenya 2007 and 2013, Serbia 2008) are elections, the significance of political institutions as perceived causes of conflicts can therefore be assumed to be somewhat exaggerated in the data (see *Table 6*).

Closely related to political institutions is political culture, which emerged as a very important cause of conflict in media coverage, in particular in South Africa and Egypt. Conflict cases that stand out as being caused by a lack of democratic political culture are the Kenyan 2007 election and South Africa's service delivery conflicts. Further qualitative analyses will have to explore why political culture is a more dominant aspect of public discourse in South Africa and Egypt than in Serbia and Kenya.

In line with the institutional focus of media coverage, judicial or legal causes come just after political institutions in terms of significance. It turns out that democratisation conflicts are not only about politics broadly conceived, but also have an important legal angle. Much of the media coverage on judicial problems originates from debates triggered by political violence and law enforcement, regardless of whether or not it relates to terrorism and elections with ethnic backgrounds in Kenya, xenophobic attacks in South Africa, Muslim-Christian violence in Egypt or right-wing violence at Serbia's Pride parade. In Serbia, there was also a transitional justice perspective related to the arrest and extradition of Milošević to the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia in The Hague (ICTY). Interestingly, this legal angle was missing from media reporting on Kenya's 2013 election that took place against the backdrop of Kenyatta's indictment by the International Criminal Court (ICC).

The other causes are seen as much less relevant. International causes are perceived as very significant in Serbia only, reflecting an international dimension of the 2001 conflict over the arrest and extradition of Milošević and the 2008 elections conflict that focused principally on the issues of Serbia's potential integration into the European Union and on Kosovo's secession. Collective identities as causes are more relevant in Egypt and South Africa than in Serbia and Kenya – despite our focus on identity-charged conflicts in the latter two countries. A similar pattern can be found with regard to political culture as perceived cause of conflict. Finally, economic causes are significant only in conflicts in South Africa, which are fuelled by poverty and chronic inequality.

Looking at the media's causal interpretations of conflicts across different types of conflict (see *Table 6*), we find a wide variation of perceived causes of conflict. For example, citizenship conflicts are primarily put down to judicial factors, followed by political culture and collective identities in equal measures, implying that the media approach conflicts over citizenship from the perspective of both rights and cultural factors. Likewise, perceived causes of the arrest and extradition of Milošević to the ICTY come from judicial and international angles, as well as that of political institutions, which reveals competing views in media framing of this conflict.

Table 6: Causes of conflict by conflict type (%)*

Causes	Citizenship	Power	Elections	Transitional justice	Total
Political institutions	28.9	55.3	84.7	33.4	57.6
Judicial/legal	67.1	36.6	25.8	82.0	46.2
Political culture	41.7	36.8	48.7	4.2	39.0
International	13.1	4.6	18.0	42.5	17.4
Identities	36.7	7.6	8.5	2.1	15.2
Economic	16.1	24.8	11.3	3.2	14.0

*) Multiple causes per unit possible.

Unsurprisingly, political causes featured most prominently in conflicts that focused on election campaigns and power distribution, while judicial causes were highly significant for transitional justice and citizenship conflicts (most of the latter involved violence). Meanwhile,

international causes are perceived as important for transitional justice conflicts (i.e., indictments by international courts) and identity causes for citizenship conflicts. Finally, economic factors are largely absent as explanatory factors for democratisation conflicts with the exception of power-related conflicts, which involve accusations of corruption and political inefficiency.

Conflict parties

To identify who the media portray as the key opponents in the selected conflicts, we coded the two main conflict parties per story that can be combined to interacting pairs. Political authorities – including government, parliament, executive forces on national and sub-national levels – featured by far the most frequently in the media coverage of democratisation conflicts in the four countries, followed by political parties and citizens (as individual or collective actors without a clear group affiliation, for example, demonstrators). Identity groups, related to ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation, appeared in the media coverage as a distant fourth conflict party. *Table 7* shows for each of these conflict parties their specific constellation of opponents as represented in media coverage.

Table 7: Conflict parties and their opponents

Conflict party	Opponent	Total % (N)	Partial % (N)
Political authorities		**58.1 (2511)**	
	Political authorities		21.6 (542)
	Political parties		16.2 (406)
	Citizens		23.2 (583)
	Identity groups		6.1 (153)
	Militant groups		11.9 (299)
	International actors		15.2 (381)
	Others		5.6 (147)
	Total		*100 (2511)*
Political parties		**35.9 (1551)**	
	Political authorities		26.2 (406)
	Political parties		48.4 (750)
	Citizens		11.5 (179)
	Identity groups		6.4 (100)
	Militant groups		0.3 (4)
	International actors		3.7 (58)
	Others		3.5 (54)
	Total		*100 (1551)*
Citizens		**27.9 (1207)**	
	Political authorities		48.3 (583)
	Political parties		14.8 (179)
	Citizens		23.8 (287)
	Identity groups		3.3 (40)
	Militant groups		4.6 (55)
	International actors		2.2 (26)

	Others	3.1 (37)
	Total	*100 (1207)*
Identity groups	**10.6 (458)**	
	Political authorities	33.4 (153)
	Political parties	21.8 (100)
	Citizens	8.7 (40)
	Identity groups	22.5 (103)
	Militant groups	6.3 (29)
	International actors	1.7 (8)
	Others	5.5 (25)
	Total	*100 (458)*

Starting with the conflict constellations in which political authorities are involved, it appears that their main opponents are citizens and their public expressions of discontent and even hostility. This constellation makes up for nearly a quarter of all conflicts in which political authorities are represented on the media agenda as one of the conflict parties. Otherwise, political authorities are mainly engaged in conflicts with other elites, ranging from other branches of government and political parties to international actors.

For political parties, by far the most prominent opponents are other political parties. About half of all conflicts in which political parties are involved are directed at other political parties. This pattern reflects the competitive nature of democratic elections, which – as outlined before – form a central part of the MeCoDEM research programme. The other major opponent of political parties are political authorities and, to a lesser degree, citizens.

Almost half of the conflicts in which citizens are one of the conflict parties, involve political authorities as the main opponent, which is not surprising given that most public protests are directed at the government and frequently are accompanied by clashes with security forces. What is perhaps more surprising is the fact that nearly one quarter of citizens' conflicts involve conflicts with other citizens, indicating the divisions within society during transitional conflicts. This horizontal pattern of conflict constellation is also apparent with regard to identity groups. Here conflicts with other identity groups and citizens comprise a similar proportion as conflicts with political authorities.

In the next step we investigate how the media evaluate the conflict parties, either by adopting the evaluations expressed by the conflict parties themselves or by expressing their own evaluations. Evaluation is measured on a 5-point scale, where 1 indicates a strongly positive evaluation and 5 a strongly negative, while the midpoint 3 indicates an even mixture between positive and negative attributes. Overall, 76.2 % of units (newspaper articles, broadcast news items) included evaluations of at least one of the conflict parties, reflecting the high degree of contestation during democratisation conflicts. Correlating the evaluative scores of the two conflict parties gives an indication of the degree to which media portrayals create divisive images of 'us' and 'them'; a negative correlation denotes to a positive evaluation of one conflict party while the other one is evaluated negatively. Positive correlations indicate either positive or negative evaluations of both conflict parties. In *Table 8* the first column shows the correlation between the two evaluation scales based on evaluative units only. The second column comprises all units, including those evaluation, which were treated as 'balanced', i.e. put on the middle point of the scale.

13

Table 8: Evaluation of conflict parties (Pearson's r)

	Evaluative units only	All units
All	-.21**	-.16**
Country		
Egypt	-.50**	-.41**
Kenya	-.19**	-.14**
Serbia	-.20**	-.18**
South Africa	.11[ns]	.07[ns]
Conflict type		
Citizenship	-.53**	-.43**
Power	-.12*	-.11**
Elections	-.02[ns]	.03[ns]
Transitional justice	-.41**	-.22**

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Looking at the pattern of evaluation, media coverage in Egypt stands out as the one with the sharpest division between 'us' and 'them', implying the juxtaposition of unanimous support of one of the conflict parties and demonization of the opponent. Media coverage in Kenya and Serbia takes a middle position, while there seems to be no such divisive representations of conflict parties in South Africa. With regard to conflict types, citizen conflicts over inclusion and exclusion generate the sharpest 'us-them' divisions in media coverage, closely followed by conflicts over transitional justice. In contrast, election coverage features as a rather balanced arena of contestation, indicated by weak and insignificant correlation scores.

Preferred solutions to conflicts

An important aspect in the study of media reporting on democratisation conflicts relates to suggested or promoted solutions to conflicts at stake. Overall, almost three quarters (72,6%) of coded media items engage in a discussion of possible solutions to the conflict at hand, reflecting the urgent need for solutions in conflictual, often dangerous situations. *Table 9* presents different modes of conflict solutions, measured on a 5-point scale, with low scores indicating a preference for approach [a] and high scores indicating preference for approach [b]. These variables are about general approaches for dealing with conflict and not about specific policies.

Our data suggest that discourses about conflict treatment are dominated by the option of institutional versus cultural approaches, with a clear endorsement of institutional, as opposed to cultural, bottom-up solutions for democratisation conflicts. With regard to different modes of conflict solutions, there was no clear preference for either gradual, peaceful change, based on compromise and toleration, or radical, violent change, based on the lack of compromise and intolerance.

Table 9: Preference for specific strategies to deal with conflict by country* [Means (N)]

Preferred strategy	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
Evolution/gradual change [a] vs. revolution/radical change [b]	2.10 (21)	3.38 (85)	3.70 (20)	2.14 (35)	2.98 (161)
Compromise/cooperation [a] vs. no compromise/no cooperation [b]	2.45 (51)	2.83 (459)	3.26 (501)	2.16 (82)	2.96 (1093)
Peaceful [a] vs. violent action [b]	2.57 (37)	2.36 (146)	2.50 (14)	1.89 (44)	2.32 (241)
Toleration [a] vs. intolerance/ repression [b]	2.43 (14)	2.56 (48)	2.62 (13)	2.26 (31)	2.46 (106)
Institutional [a] vs. cultural approach [b]	2.17 (293)	2.18 (586)	1.88 (963)	2.23 (305)	2.05 (2147)
Other	2.00 (2)	/ (0)	2.00 (1)	1.90 (10)	1.92 (13)
Total	2.24 (418)	2.52 (1324)	2.37 (1512)	2.18 (507)	2.38 (3761)

* Scale: 1 Strong preference for [a]. 2 preference for [a]. 3 combination of both [a+b]. 4 preference for [b]. 5 strong preference for [b]

There was an interesting cross-national variation in the data. For example. we found a contrast between a preference for revolutionary change with little compromise and co-operation in Serbia and that for evolutionary change based on compromise and co-operation in South Africa. There was also a considerably greater focus on peaceful solutions and toleration in South Africa than in Serbia. while the opposite was the case with regard to institutional solutions. It could be that the data reflect different historical experiences with democratisation in the two countries – pacted and gradual transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa and fast. revolutionary regime change in Serbia – which over time shaped their political cultures in contrasting ways.

Table 10 utilises the same set of variables. broken down for different conflict types:

Table 10: Preference for specific strategies to deal with conflict by conflict type* [Means (N)]

Preferred strategy	Citizenship	Power	Elections	Transition-al justice	Total
Evolution/gradual change [a] vs. revolution/radical change [b]	3.32 (77)	1.94 (34)	3.11 (47)	4.00 (3)	2.98 (161)
Compromise/cooperation [a] vs. no compromise/no cooperation [b]	3.01 (133)	2.71 (152)	2.93 (610)	3.21 (198)	2.96 (1093)
Peaceful [a] vs. violent action [b]	1.83 (42)	2.06 (32)	2.50 (162)	2.00 (5)	2.32 (241)
Toleration [a] vs. intolerance. repression [b]	2.53	1.76	2.76	/	2.46

	(47)	(21)	(38)	(0)	(106)
Institutional [a] vs. cultural approach [b]	2.13	1.96	2.10	1.84	2.05
	(672)	(395)	(771)	(309)	(2147)
Other	2.50	1.78	2.00	2.00	1.92
	(2)	(9)	(1)	(1)	(13)
Total	2.35	2.13	2.50	2.38	2.38
	(973)	(643)	(1629)	(516)	(3761)

* Scale: 1 Strong preference for [a]. 2 preference for [a]. 3 combination of both [a+b]. 4 preference for [b]. 5 strong preference for [b]

Regarding conflict types. media coverage of conflicts about the distribution and control of power suggests preference for more gradual and institutional solutions. based on compromise and toleration. In contrast. the representation of electoral and citizenship conflicts is characterised by more uncompromising approaches to conflict solution (note that cases for transitional justice conflicts are too low to allow for interpretation). In spite of rather hardened positions in conflicts surrounding citizenship and elections. calls for violence or repression are outnumbered by statements that promote some form of peaceful solution and toleration.

Perception of democracy

The next part of our analysis is concerned with media discourses on democracy and related norms in the context of selected democratisation conflicts. We designed a set of variables that identify specific dimensions of democracy and their evaluation. Specifically. we distinguish between aspects of democracy that are related to the institutional order. individual rights and opportunities and societal correlates of democracy. such as pluralism. welfare and others. Each of these general dimensions is further distinguished into specific issues. which are then measured on a 5-point scale of positive versus negative evaluation. For the sake of simplicity. *Tables 11* and *12* only show the general dimensions of democracy and their evaluation. but the interpretation of the findings will also take the specific aspects into account.

Table 11: Evaluation of democracy by country [Means (N)]*

Aspects of democracy	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
Institutional[a]	2.69	2.13	2.04	3.62	2.44
	(335)	(1126)	(758)	(473)	(2692)
Individual[b]	2.37	2.79	1.96	3.47	2.69
	(268)	(340)	(406)	(448)	(1462)
Society[c]	2.18	2.10	1.95	3.75	2.45
	(218)	(952)	(502)	(494)	(2166)

* Scale: 1 strongly positive. 2 positive. 3 mixed. ambiguous. 4 negative. 5 strongly negative
a) Includes: the general principal of democracy. elections. governance. rule of law. media and press freedom;
b) Includes: general principals of dignity and self-determination. citizenship. human rights. freedom of expression. economic freedom;

c) Includes: general principles such as pluralism and secularism. group rights. social cohesion. market and welfare.

Our data show that for the most part the media portray democracy in a positive light. more so with respect to its institutional and societal dimensions than individual rights and liberties. Across all four countries. the perception of democratic institutions in general is more positive (mean: 2.10) than aspects of actual governance (mean: 2.70). This is hardly surprising since high expectations of democracy are rarely met in real life. especially in adverse political and economic conditions that usually accompany democratisation. This gap is widest in Egypt (mean evaluation of democratic principles: 1.72; of actual governance: 3.04). which reflects high levels of instability and conflict in transition from Mubarak's authoritarianism during the time that is covered by our media sample.

There is a wide cross-national variation in the evaluations of democracy. with Serbia being an outlier on the positive side of the spectrum and South Africa on the negative one. This finding is puzzling since the two countries appear to be more advanced in terms of democratisation than Kenya and Egypt. which suggests that their evaluations of democracy in media coverage should rise and fall together. in comparison with the other two countries. In Serbia. especially positive evaluations are those related to elections. the rule of law. human rights. social cohesion and economic issues. Such assessments suggest a broad satisfaction with the state of democracy in the first decade after the fall of Milošević. despite a low quality of democracy estimated by both professional and casual observers.

Kenya comes close in terms of positive evaluations. with regard to the institutional and societal aspects of democracy. largely thanks to positive assessment of elections. governance. social cohesion and economic issues. This is not the case in the evaluations of democracy's individual aspects. mainly due to the mixed assessment of Kenya's record on human rights.

At this point it is important to remind ourselves that these data do not reflect the state of democracy in the four countries under study or popular perceptions of democracy. but the media's 'construction' of democracy which might or might not correspond with the circumstances on the ground. The positive evaluations of governance in Kenya and the rule of law in Serbia underline this point. as these countries are struggling with widespread corruption and a weak judicial system. One conclusion from this apparent discrepancy between 'media reality' and 'political reality' would be that the media do not sufficiently fulfil their role of watchdogs of political power. as models of professional journalism would imply. But the discrepancy between media coverage and real events might also hint at a positive role of the media.

For example. the evaluation of elections in Kenya might come as a surprise given the large-scale violence that accompanied the 2007 election and still cast its shadow over the 2013 election. Our data suggest that the mainstream media of our sample tried to project a positive image of elections. while intolerance and hate speech seem to have occupied other media spaces. both online and offline. Further in-depth analysis is necessary to shed more light on the role and interconnectedness of different media spaces in the development of intergroup violence during and after elections.

A similar evaluative pattern can be observed with regard to the evaluation of individual and societal aspects of democracy. Again. South African media stand out in their negative view. especially on citizenship and economic opportunities for the disadvantaged

(means: 3.35 and 3.87 respectively). There is also great concern about social cohesion in the country (mean: 3.73). which twenty years after its celebrated transition is at risk of disintegrating. In contrast. Serbian media see democracy as a means of individual empowerment (mean: 1.97). protection of human rights (mean: 1.94) and social cohesion (mean: 1.79). On most accounts. media representations of democracy in Egypt and Kenya sit somewhere between these extremes.

Table 12 shows media evaluations of democracy by conflict type. We find surprisingly positive evaluations of democracy in the context of elections conflicts. despite the tensions and violence in connection with Egypt's 2012 presidential election and Kenya's elections in 2007. Here the media's positive portrayal can be understood primarily as an appeal to what role elections should play in a democracy. rather than a reflection of the events themselves. The positive assessment of transitional justice conflict mainly reflects the reporting of Serbia's 2001 conflict. Within the context of citizenship conflicts the evaluation of democracy moves towards more mixed. ambiguous evaluations. whereas conflicts over the control of power shed a primarily negative light on democratic politics.

Table 12: Evaluation of democracy by conflict type* [Means (N)]

Aspects of democracy	Citizenship	Power	Elections	Transitional justice	Total
Institutional[a]	2.69	3.27	2.19	1.94	2.44
	(570)	(411)	(1464)	(247)	(2692)
Individual[b]	2.91	3.04	2.34	1.89	2.69
	(627)	(284)	(458)	(93)	(1462)
Society[c]	2.57	3.66	2.08	1.93	2.45
	(911)	(226)	(971)	(58)	(2166)

* Scale: 1 Strongly positive. 2 positive. 3 mixed. ambiguous. 4 negative. 5 strongly negative
a) Includes: the general principal of democracy. elections. governance. rule of law. media and press freedom;
b) Includes: general principals of dignity and self-determination. citizenship. human rights. freedom of expression. economic freedom;
c) Includes: general principles such as pluralism and secularism. group rights. social cohesion. market and welfare.

Role of the media

Our codebook also includes a set of variables to measure the role of the media in democratic transitions and how this role is evaluated. Following the conceptualisation of journalistic roles suggested by Christians et al. (2009). we distinguish between the following categories: the monitorial role focuses on providing information that enables citizens to fulfil their rule; the facilitator role views the media as an enabling force in the development of civil society. social cohesion. tolerance and democratisation; the collaborative role focuses on working together with the government in order to advance goals such as economic development and institution building; the radical role corresponds with the watchdog role that challenges political authority and holds power to account. Evaluative variables then establish whether these norms are regarded as desirable and how well actual media coverage fulfils these roles.

The main finding in this part of the content analysis is that there was very little discussion in media coverage of the role media should and did play in democratisation conflicts (only 2.54% of all coded items include a normative evaluation of media roles and 7.54% evaluate actual performance). Obviously. the media act as a very effective gatekeeper when it comes to reflecting on. and criticising their own activities. As a consequence. media tend to underreport those views that challenge normative assumptions of their own role in democracy or aim to hold the media to account as a powerful force in political life. *Table 13* presents normative and performance evaluations of the four media roles mentioned above.

Table 13: Evaluation of media* [Means (N)]

Role of the media	Normative evaluation	Performance evaluation	Difference between normative and performance
Monitorial	2.69	3.40	0.71
	(45)	(156)	
Facilitator	2.25	2.76	0.51
	(44)	(51)	
Collaborative	3.11	3.98	0.87
	(18)	(52)	
Radical	2.39	2.80	0.41
	(18)	(25)	
Other	3.75	4.44	0.69
	(4)	(98)	
Total	2.59	3.62	1.03
	(129)	(382)	

* 1 Strongly positive. 2 positive. 3 mixed. conditional. 4 negative. 5 strongly negative

When it comes to normative preferences expressed by the media in our sample. the facilitator role appears as the most desirable one. whereas the collaborative role is seen as most negative. The monitorial and the radical role. which dominate western journalism. fall in between. The opposing evaluation of the facilitator and the collaborative role is interesting because in practice they often overlap. Both are aimed at working for achieving wider societal goals in situations of political and social change. However. while the facilitator role expects the media to collaborate with civil society. the collaborator role places the media in close interaction with the government. thus posing a potential threat to the media's independence and critical abilities. For both roles. our data reveal a large gap between normative expectations and actual journalistic practice. possibly indicating 'too little' and 'too much' with regard to the media's ability to respond to external needs and demands (for further insights into these normative dilemmas based on results from interviews with journalists see Lohner. Banjac and Neverla 2016). There is also a considerable gap in expectations and performance of the media with regard to how they provide citizens with information essential for their political participation.

Table 14 explores differences and similarities of media evaluations across countries and conflict types.

Table 14: Evaluation of media by country and conflict type* [Means (N)]

	Normative evaluation	Performance evaluation	Difference between normative and performance
Country			
Egypt	2.40	4.04	1.64
	(40)	(164)	
Kenya	2.98	3.09	0.11
	(47)	(47)	
Serbia	2.58	3.54	0.96
	(24)	(158)	
South Africa	2.25	2.25	0.00
	(20)	(20)	
Total	2.62	3.63	1.01
	(131)	(389)	
Conflict type			
Citizenship	2.85	3.39	0.54
	(46)	(72)	
Power	1.94	4.05	2.11
	(18)	(155)	
Elections	2.62	3.44	0.82
	(64)	(108)	
Transitional justice	3.00	3.17	0.17
	(3)	(54)	
Total	2.62	3.63	1.01
	(131)	(389)	

* 1 Strongly positive. 2 positive. 3 mixed. conditional. 4 negative. 5 strongly negative

The media's evaluation of their own role in public life differs widely across the four countries of our sample. A gap between expectations and reality is most pronounced in Egypt. where in the tumultuous period during the power struggles that followed Mubarak's fall. the media were torn between high-flying hopes and persisting constraints. In contrast. actual media performance in South Africa fully matches normative expectations. which rather than pointing at a well-functioning journalism in the country. might raise concerns about the media's ability and willingness to engage in critical reflection about their own role in South Africa's troubled transition.

Turning to media evaluations in the context of different types of conflict. the gap between what is desirable and what is possible is even wider. This applies in particular to the media's performance in conflicts over the distribution and control of power. A mean of 4.05

on a 5-point scale shows that nearly all evaluative statements about the media's role in power conflicts are negative. This verdict might reflect the problematic close relationship with political power holders that come with the collaborative role discussed in the previous table.

Authoritarian past

Democratic transitions might be driven by hopes for a better future. but they also have to cope with the traumas of the past. Emerging democracies are therefore faced with the decision whether or not to cope with experiences of a past that might involve large-scale atrocities. issues of guilt and revenge and feelings of humiliation. In some cases. a society might opt to move on; others decide to engage in a national debate about the past. Our data show that there was a significant space for references to the past in media coverage of democratisation conflicts in the four countries (18.2% of all coded items). despite the fact that only two out of eleven conflicts – Serbia's 2001 conflict about Milošević's arrest and Kenya's 2013 election – explicitly dealt with the past and that many of our conflicts unfolded several years after the breakdown of the old regime. There was also a significant cross-national variation with regard to the space allocated to the past. Egypt is an outlier on the higher end (31.8% of the coded items addressed issues of the past) and South Africa on the lower end (10.2%); probably reflecting the passage of time since the established authoritarian regime ended.

Most of the media coverage that addresses the past focuses on established authoritarian regimes and less so on governments after their breakdown. There is little room for nostalgia in the media of our sample: the evaluations of the old regimes in media discourse are negative throughout (means for evaluation of the Mubarak regime: 4.36. of Milošević's regime: 4.10. of Apartheid in South Africa: 4.10). while post-transition governments receive less harsh. but still largely negative evaluations (post-2000 governments in Serbia: 3.77. Morsi government in Egypt: 3.89). It appears that new post-authoritarian governments are not given much space and time to get their act together and deal with adverse legacies of the old regime in political. economic and social life. but are assessed critically in media reporting soon after they take control of the main levers of power.

Further research is therefore required to explore a hypothesis from the literature that says that media coverage tends to be somewhat subdued in early stages of democratisation in order not to obstruct political and economic reforms necessary to deal with old regime legacies. It could be that the hypothesis applies in a somewhat modified form only to revolutionary transitions from authoritarian rule – those in which the old regimes collapse principally through massive popular mobilization – such as those in Egypt and Serbia. but not in pacted transitions. in which old regime soft-liners work together with opposition moderates to gradually build democratic institutions.

References to the past can serve many different purposes. *Table 15* explores the degree to which historical discourses are instrumentalised for political aims.

Table 15: Instrumentalisation of the past [% (N)]

Reference to the past	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
To call for reconciliation. unity	7.8	5.4	0.3	29.2	6.3
	(22)	(14)	(1)	(21)	(58)
To emphasise/mobilise internal divisions	6.8	1.9	4.9	40.3	7.4
	(19)	(5)	(15)	(29)	(68)
To emphasise/mobilise external divisions	0.4	0.8	3.6	-	1.5
	(1)	(2)	(11)		(14)
To (re)interpret the past	13.9	15.8	23.8	13.9	17.7
	(39)	(41)	(73)	(10)	(163)
To (re)interpret present regime	71.2	76.1	67.4	16.7	67.0
	(200)	(197)	(207)	(12)	(616)
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
	(281)	(259)	(307)	(72)	(919)

References to the past in media coverage were employed for various reasons. but the most significant was to interpret current regimes/governments with interpretations of the past being a distant second. Only in South Africa did media reporting use references to the past to mobilise internal divisions or alternatively to highlight the need for reconciliation. This finding confirms the view according to which conflicts after authoritarian breakdown tend to focus on current issues as opposed to those of the past. even in the case of conflicts that are explicitly about the past – such as those related to transitional justice in Serbia and Kenya.

Overall tone and polarisation

In this final section. we return to issues of journalistic quality in the coverage of democratisation conflicts. Here. we do not rely on the media's own evaluation of their performance (see *Tables 13* and *14*). but apply indicators that measure three key dimensions of quality in manifest media content: bias in our data refers to any favouritism towards one of the sides in a conflict. including supportive statements for one side and/or dismissive statements for the other(s). and selective representation of voices and opinions. Emotionality refers to the use of language in media coverage that emphasises feelings and emotional responses to events. Finally. polarisation is about speech acts and can be expressed by blaming (the other) conflict parties. using negative language to describe them or by appeals to hostile action.

Table 16: Tone of reporting by country [Means (N)]

Dimensions of tone	Egypt	Kenya	Serbia	South Africa	Total
Bias (scale: 0-3)*	1.09	1.32	1.68	1.43	1.43
	(944)	(1545)	(1917)	(745)	(5151)
Emotionality (scale: 1-3)**	1.50	1.63	1.56	1.73	1.59
	(943)	(1537)	(1914)	(725)	(5119)
Polarisation (scale: 1-3)***	1.78	1.69	2.15	1.97	1.96
	(414)	(1029)	(1720)	(535)	(3698)

* Scale: 0 Neutral. 1 balanced. 2 somewhat biased. 3 very biased
** Scale: 1 Detached/neutral language. 2 some emotional language. 3 very emotional. inflammatory language
*** Scale: 1 Moderate speech. 2 somewhat polarising speech. 3 strongly polarising speech

The data in *Table 16* reveal similar trends across the four countries with regard to these three variables. Overall. media reporting of democratisation conflicts in the four countries featured balanced to somewhat biased language. neutral to somewhat emotional language and somewhat polarising speech. There was some cross-national variation in the reporting from these angles. revealing similar clustering of countries. Interestingly. media coverage of conflicts was more biased in Serbia and South Africa than in Kenya and Egypt. even though the former countries were more advanced with regard to democratisation than the latter during selected conflicts. Likewise. there was more polarisation in media coverage in Serbia and South Africa than in Kenya and Egypt. Finally. more emotional language was dominant in South Africa. while more detached/neutral language prevailed in Egypt.

It could be that these trends reflect cautious media role in initial stages of transitions from authoritarian rule. when old dependencies on political power still persist and/or media take pains not to undermine new democratic governments after regime change. but become more actively involved in later stages of democratisation by switching to watchdog and activist roles. with the rise of polarisation in general (i.e.. the more advanced a democracy. the more space for competing media coverage of conflicts. including also biased and emotional reporting. even polarisation). There is some support for this conclusion from Serbia's conflicts: we identified a steadily growing share of biased and polarising speech. and of emotional language. over time – from 2001 to 2008 to 2010 – and then a slight shift back in 2015. with figures still higher than those for 2008.

Table 17: Tone of reporting by conflict type [Means (N)]

Dimension of tone	Citizenship	Power	Elections	Transitional justice	Total
Bias (0-3)*	1.53	1.29	1.41	1.47	1.43
	(1406)	(932)	(2153)	(660)	(5151)
Emotionality (1-3)**	1.60	1.58	1.65	1.39	1.59
	(1380)	(927)	(2152)	(660)	(5119)
Polarisation (1-3)***	1.99	2.08	1.84	2.07	1.96
	(1053)	(581)	(1503)	(561)	(3698)

* Scale: 0 Neutral. 1 balanced. 2 somewhat biased. 3 very biased
** Scale: 1 Detached/neutral language. 2 some emotional language. 3 very emotional. inflammatory language
*** Scale: 1 Moderate speech. 2 somewhat polarising speech. 3 strongly polarising speech

Having in mind high stakes associated with elections. an interesting finding shown in *Table 17* is that they did not produce more biased reporting and more polarisation than other conflict types. Only with regard to emotional language were election campaigns at a higher end. Election campaigns in fact featured the least polarising speech in relation to other conflict types. Further research is required to find out why this is the case. One explanation could be the degree to which elections are truly competitive. free and fair. that is. how democratic a regime is. Another reason can be a high degree of control over media coverage during election campaigns. Many established democracies impose strict regulations to ensure unbiased media coverage during election times. In emerging democracies media dependency on political actors can either lead to centralised control by the incumbent government. resulting in rather uniform pro-government reporting. or to capture of the media by competing political camps. resulting in sharp polarisation. As mentioned above. Kenya's elections in 2007 and 2013 are in particular exemplary cases for both scenarios.

Conclusion

The main finding from the content analysis is that cross-national variations that we found in media reporting of democratisation conflicts appear to depend on several factors. Our data strongly reflect specific country contexts (and contexts of broader regions from which they come from) to be a consistent factor that shapes the pattern of media coverage. reflecting the close interdependence between media and politics. For example. the army is perceived as a relevant political institution in Egypt (and much of the Middle East) – due to its dominant role in politics since independence from colonial rule – but not in other countries. except to some extent in the context of the conflict around the Somali community in Kenya. which is associated with terrorism. Likewise. the significance of international causes of conflict in Serbia (and the former Yugoslavia) reflects the importance of international factors in Serbia's political development since the late 1980s. which is hardly surprising taking into account Yugoslavia's breakup and subsequent 'wars of succession'. the NATO intervention. the ICTY trials of Serbia's former officials and army officers. and Kosovo's secession. However. the relationship between country context and media coverage is not a simple 1:1 reflection. Further investigations are needed to explore the multiple transformations of meaning in public discourses that can tilt interpretations of political events toward unexpected directions.

Regime type and the stage of democratisation matter when it comes to media framing of political conflicts since countries that feature similar levels of democracy. or find themselves at similar points in democratisation. cluster together on several (but not all) relevant variables. At this point. however. additional research that would look at other sources is necessary to establish a direction of influence with regard to media reporting on conflicts in different phases of democratisation. It may well be that media framing also depends on if the breakdown of non-democratic regimes and (at least temporary) transition to democracy unfolded through pacting or revolutionary popular mobilisation.

In addition. media reporting on democratisation conflicts also varied depending on conflict type. though less so than on country contexts. Our data show that elections. as a highly institutionalised type of conflict (though it also probably depends on regime type/situation). were covered somewhat differently than other conflict types. Further research. which draws on other sources. including the qualitative analysis of media content. interviews with journalists. civil society and political actors. as well as document analysis. is required to explain how exactly and why all these factors shape media coverage of democratisation conflicts.

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