The Media in Transitional Democracies

Katrin Voltmer
The Media in Transitional Democracies
Contemporary Political Communication

Robert M. Entman, *Scandal and Silence*

Max McCombs, R. Lance Holbert, Spiro Kiousis and Wayne Wanta, *The News and Public Opinion*

Craig Allen Smith, *Presidential Campaign Communication*

James Stanyer, *Intimate Politics*

Katrin Voltmer, *The Media in Transitional Democracies*
The Media in Transitional Democracies

Katrin Voltmer
Copyright © Katrin Voltmer 2013

The right of Katrin Voltmer to be identified as Author of this Work has been asserted in accordance with the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

First published in 2013 by Polity Press

Polity Press
65 Bridge Street
Cambridge CB2 1UR, UK

Polity Press
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148, USA

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.


A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Typeset in 10.5 on 12 pt Times Ten
by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited
Printed and bound in Great Britain by MPG Books Group Limited, Bodmin, Cornwall

The publisher has used its best endeavours to ensure that the URLs for external websites referred to in this book are correct and active at the time of going to press. However, the publisher has no responsibility for the websites and can make no guarantee that a site will remain live or that the content is or will remain appropriate.

Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders, but if any have been inadvertently overlooked the publisher will be pleased to include any necessary credits in any subsequent reprint or edition.

For further information on Polity, visit our website: www.politybooks.com
Contents

Detailed Contents vii

Introduction 1

1 Democracy and Democratization: One Idea, Many Roads 13
2 Democratic Media: A Question of Means and Ends 23

Part II The Media and Political Change Across Time and Space 51
3 Communication Technologies and Journalistic Agency: Mass Media and Political Change 55
4 Complex Transitions and Uncertain Outcomes: The Media and Democratization Over Time 72
5 Emerging Media Systems and the Legacies of the Past 115

Part III Transforming the Media 129
6 Media and the State 133
7 Media Markets 161
8 Political Parallelism 179
9 Journalistic Professionalism 197

Conclusion 217

Notes 228
References 233
Index 258
## Detailed Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>About the book</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part I  What Democracy? What Media?  11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Democracy and Democratization: One Idea, Many Roads</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost in definitions: democracy and democratization</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Democratic paradoxes</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Pluralism versus unity</em></td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Conflict versus consensus</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Individualism versus collectivism</em></td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exporting democracy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Democratic Media: A Question of Means and Ends</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Means and ends</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Press freedom and power</em></td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*How free is free?</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Diversity, the truth and the market</em></td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The virtues and perils of internal and external diversity</em></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part II  The Media and Political Change Across Time and Space  51

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Communication Technologies and Journalistic Agency:</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mass Media and Political Change</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure and agency</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Detailed Contents**

The contingent power of the media 59  
*Media technologies* 60  
*Media content* 65  
*Conditions of media impact* 68

4 **Complex Transitions and Uncertain Outcomes:**  
The Media and Democratization Over Time 72  
Stages of democratization: always moving forward? 73  
Before regime change: pushing the boundaries of control 78  
*Bottom-up liberalization* 79  
*Top-down liberalization* 85  
*External influences* 89  
Collapse and new beginning: the drama of regime change 92  
Consolidation after regime change: a rocky journey with uncertain outcomes 95  
*Institutional consolidation* 97  
*Political culture* 108

5 **Emerging Media Systems and the Legacies of the Past** 115  
Pathways of democratization 116  
Authoritarian regime types and media transformation 121  
*Military dictatorship* 121  
*Communist one-party rule* 123  
*One-party rule in contexts of statism* 125  
*One-party rule in the contexts of weak state institutions* 126

**PART III Transforming the Media** 129

6 **Media and the State** 133  
Between two evils: dominant state and weak state 134  
Cornerstones of an ‘enabling environment’ for media independence 139  
*Freedom of information laws* 140  
*Libel laws* 143  
*Regulating media structures* 147  
Focus: Transformation of state broadcasting to public service broadcasting in Eastern Europe 153

7 **Media Markets** 161  
The political economy of the media 164  
Democratization and media markets 169  
Focus: Media, money and power 173
Detailed Contents  ix

8 Political Parallelism  179
   Parallelism, partisanship and political engagement  180
   Parallelism and the dark side of partisanship  184
   Focus: Rebuilding public communication in post-conflict societies  188

9 Journalistic Professionalism  197
   Journalism as a profession  198
   The global divergence of journalism  200
   Democratizing journalism in a time of crisis  203
   Focus: Brown, red and other envelopes: the hidden story of paid journalism  207

Conclusion  217

Notes  228
References  233
Index  258
Introduction

There you have it – reforms on unprepared ground, and copied from foreign institutions as well – nothing but harm!

Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

The collapse of authoritarian regimes and the rise of democracy around the world over the past decades add up to one of the most significant developments in global politics which has changed the lives of millions of people. In all these transitions the media have played a pivotal role, not only by disseminating the images of change to a global audience, but also by becoming a force of change in their own right. When in 1989 the Berlin Wall came down, I was living in Berlin (the part of the city which was then called West Berlin). For months, since the first demonstrations took place in various cities of the then GDR, everybody in the city, and indeed around the world, was glued to the television screen, following the events as they unfolded at breathtaking speed across Central and Eastern Europe. Thirty years later, the uprisings in the Middle East that became known as the ‘Arab Spring’ captured the attention and imagination of people everywhere in the world like no other of the many transitions that had taken place since 1989. While I was working on the last chapters of this book, my postgraduate students were constantly searching the web, tweeting and chatting to stay abreast of the events in Tunisia, Egypt, Syria and elsewhere in the region. Some of these students were themselves from Arab countries, and while they probably felt that they were in the wrong place at this important moment in the history of their country, they were still able to take part in the
uprisings as virtual participants thanks to the opportunities opened up by new media technologies.

People climbing over the Berlin Wall, the ‘tank man’ on Tiananmen Square, Colonel Gaddafi begging for his life: all are iconic images that will signify the joy, heroism and horrors of democratization for the years to come. Anti-regime protest and regime change have become global media events, forging a close link between democratization and modern mass communication. As a result of the crucial role that international broadcast media played during the events of 1989, the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe has been dubbed the first ‘TV revolution’ in history. And Egypt’s struggle for democracy became known as the first ‘Facebook revolution’. However, the assertion that the media have played a central role in the democratic transitions of the past couple of decades does not imply that they determined the success or failure of the many struggles for democracy, or even that they were responsible for their occurrence in the first place. But it is safe to say that in a media environment that offers fewer opportunities for mass mobilization and global information flows, all these events would have taken place in a different way and would probably have yielded different outcomes. It is this difference which this book sets out to explore.

The active involvement of the media and their strategic use by those fighting for (or against) democratic transition distinguish the transitions that have taken place since the late 1980s from earlier regime changes of the so-called ‘third wave’ of democratization (Huntington 1991) – for example, those in Southern Europe and Latin America in the mid-1970s. Since then, economic and technological advances of the media industry have fundamentally changed the dynamics of democratic transitions. News has become a global, highly competitive business driven by a constant hunger for breaking headlines and dramatic images. Satellite transmission and 24-hour news channels have accelerated the global flow of news. With regime change high on the agenda of Western foreign politics, political protests and upheavals have gained a high level of news value, which immediately catapults the events to the top of the international news agenda, thus expanding the scope of the event to global significance.

Yet the role of the media in transition processes is not confined to providing iconic images for the consumption of global audience spectators. They also affect the course of the events in various ways. The fact that the whole world is watching shapes the behaviour of the actors involved in the process and thus the dynamics and the eventual outcome of uprisings against authoritarian regimes. The availability
of ever more sophisticated communication technologies has expanded
the repertoire of strategic choices for both democracy activists and
the ruling elites, who are trying to preserve their grip on power. Activ-
ists have quickly learned how to utilize, sometimes even manipulate,
the media for their own purposes. And political leaders and govern-
ments have followed suit. At the beginning of the twenty-first century,
the internet and mobile communication technologies have comple-
mented traditional channels of mass communication and are about
to reconfigure the strategic arena of political change yet again. In
particular, the new ways of interaction, networking and information-
sharing opened up by Web 2.0 have added a fresh dynamic to the
interplay between democratic change and the media.

Furthermore, the importance of the media in transitions to democ-
racy does not stop with the overthrow of the old regime. Even more
important are the years that follow. Are the media able to take on a
role that supports a viable democratic political process? or do they
impede the consolidation of the emerging democracy? The fact that
the media often play the role of midwife during regime change does
not necessarily mean that they automatically slip into a democratic
role once the old regime has ceased to exist. In fact, the recent wave
of democratization not only witnessed the first TV and Facebook
revolutions, but also the first attempts in history to build and consoli-
date democratic institutions in a media-saturated environment. In the
established democracies of the West, the structures and methods of
operation of key institutions, such as parliaments, elections and politi-
cal parties, were developed before the media became a pervasive
force in everyday and political life. In contrast, the new democracies
of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century immediately leap-
frog into what has been labelled ‘media democracy’ (Meyer 2002) – a
notion that denotes a state of affairs where the media’s rules of the
game shape, to some extent even determine, the functioning (and
dysfunctioning) of political institutions. Nowadays, professional
media management and public relations have become an integral
part of the political process and a precondition for political success,
be it in elections, in intra-elite power struggles or in implementing
policies and regulations. In the established democracies of the West,
the increasing adaptation to the imperatives of the media has raised
widespread concerns about the possible impact of media-centred
politics on the quality and viability of democracy (for a political
science perspective, see Patterson 1993; for a journalistic view, see
Lloyd 2004). These concerns apply even more to young democracies.
The complexities of modern ‘media democracy’ have caught most of
the newly elected political leaders in transitional democracies largely