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The Mass Media and Modern Government

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Abstract

This paper discusses a set of propositions about the impact of the mass media on modern government and politics in the west. Because the literature, though voluminous, is inconclusive and controversial, the propositions are presented as a series of contradictory pairs. The intention is not necessarily to resolve the contradictions, though this is possible in some cases, but to review the literature in a systematic way. The propositions are grouped under seven headings - the nature of politics; citizens and political life; elections; political elites; political parties; governments; contemporary democracy; globalization of information. When the argument and evidence is organised this way the general conclusion seems to be that media impacts are strongest when they are closest to the news media output themselves (the editorial room and news room) and weakest at the more general levels of institutions, the democratic system, and the global system.

Zusammenfassung

In dem Papier werden Überlegungen zum Einfluß der Massenmedien auf Politik und modernes Regieren in den westlichen Demokratien erörtert. Die vorliegende Literatur zum Thema ist zwar äußerst umfangreich, in ihren Schlußfolgerungen jedoch widersprüchlich, ja sogar gegensätzlich. Aus diesem Grund werden die Forschungsbefunde und Schlußfolgerungen als eine Serie von gegensätzlichen Aussagenpaaren vorgestellt. Dabei besteht die Absicht nicht in erster Linie darin, diese Gegensätzlichkeiten aufzulösen, obgleich dies in einigen Fällen möglich wäre. Vielmehr wird der Literaturstand einer systematischen Überprüfung unterzogen.

Unter dem Gesichtspunkt der politischen Kommunikation behandelt der Autor acht thematische Schwerpunkte: Die Essenz der Politik; Bürger und Politik; Wahlen; politische Eliten; politische Parteien; Regierungen; zeitgenössische Demokratie; Globalisierung der Information. Hauptergebnis der Analyse ist, daß der Einfluß der Medien dort am stärksten ist, wo es um die Produktionsstrukturen politischer Botschaften geht, und am geringsten dort, wo politische Institutionen allgemein, das demokratische System und die Weltgesellschaft angesprochen sind.

INTRODUCTION

This report discusses the impact of the modern mass media on western political systems and institutions. Its main concern is with the macro and meso levels of the political system and its institutions, and less with the individual or micro level. Most research on media effects, perhaps the overwhelming majority of it, focuses at the micro level (Nimmo and Swanson 1990: 23-4; Becker and Kosicki 1995: 44, 53) because it either has the great advantage of using experimental or quasi-experimental methods or can call upon survey research. As a result, most recent textbooks have a chapter or two on the effects of the mass media on individual attitudes and behaviour, but even when writers argue for new and fresh approaches to media-impact research they tend to assume that individuals should be the unit of analysis (see, for example, Blumler, Dayan, and Wolton 1990).

To focus on systems and institutions is to move away from the 'safe' ground of experimental and survey research, and into more speculative, uncertain, and interpretative realms of social science. There are two arguments for doing this. First, one should not exaggerate the advantages of the micro approach: some of its data is soft; less is of a long-term time-series nature which enables the analysis of slow processes of change; little is of a cross-national comparative nature; and there are endless arguments and theoretical controversies about its interpretation. In short, although there is much to be said for micro research, we should not fall into the trap of believing that it can answer all the important questions.

Second, macro and meso levels of analysis are important in their own right (McLeod and Blumler 1987; Pan and McLeod 1991). Organisational and system level effects may be more powerful and far reaching than individual ones, and they can create frameworks of behaviour which are built into our everyday assumptions about the world and the 'natural' order of things. Having said this, it is also true that the distinction between individual and system effects is an artificial, theoretical device which helps social science analysis, but in the real world the two merge into a single whole.

THE MASS MEDIA AND THEIR IMPACT

The concern here is with the news media which broadcast to mass audiences. In practical terms this means newspapers, radio and TV the numbers, penetration, and importance of which have increased substantially in the last twenty or so years, as Table 1 suggests. Setting aside future possibilities for the 'wired nation' (Negrine 1995: 180-5) and electronic democracy (Arterton 1987), it is clear that the media are now capable of an enormous impact. In fact, ever since Noelle-Neumann (1973) announced a "return to the notion of powerful mass media", a consensus has emerged among scholars that they are a powerful force in modern government and politics (see, for example, Blumler et al. 1990: 263; Entman 1989: 75-88; McQuail 1994). The question now is not whether the media are powerful, but what their effects are. There are two problems with the current discussion.

First, it is easy to exaggerate the impact and effects of new technologies, and to assume that something will happen simply because it is technically possible. The field of media research seems especially prone to this the temptation of ignoring the power of culture, history, institutions, economics, and national differences to modify, deflect, or obstruct the course of technological change (see Parker 1995). Setting technology aside, it is also often necessary to pick a way through enthusiastic exaggeration, over-theorising, and premature trend-spotting in the writing on media impact. The "wild speculation" noted by Robinson (1976: 409) in the mid-1970s has even more to be wild about now.

Second, most media research is American, and there is a tendency to assume that American trends are repeated (or will soon be) in other parts of the western world. The extent to which this is true is an empirical question. The mass media now have a global quality, but it does not follow that their impact is universal or uniform over the globe. The benefit of macro cross-national comparative research is precisely to pick out the institutional and governmental factors which vary media impacts in different ways and in different countries.

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Table 1

The Mass Media: Outline Statistics

Newspapers. Worldwide there are about 8,500 newspapers which publish more than 575 million copies each day. In west Europe alone there are an estimated 1,777 daily newspapers, and 5,154 non-daily papers. The former have a daily circulation of almost ninety six million, or 285 per thousand inhabitants. Germany has over 300 daily papers, with a circulation of about twenty one million, compared with the UK total of about 100 with a circulation of some twenty two million. Finland has sixty six daily papers, a total circulation of 2.78 million, and the highest circulation per thousand inhabitants (559) in west Europe. The OECD nations have over 3,700 daily and more than 14,000 non-daily papers. The total circulation of the dailies is estimated at 240 million, or about one paper for every three inhabitants.

Radios. There are thirty seven radios per hundred people in the world. In west Europe there are about 310 million radio receivers in use, which amounts to almost 750 per thousand inhabitants. In Britain most households have at least two radios and a majority of cars have one. The USA has over 10,000 radio stations, France approximately 2,700, and Italy over a thousand.

TV. There are about 1.2 billion TV sets in the world, three times the number in 1984. About 125 public communication satellites now circle the globe, and outside the USA, CNN International is received in more than 209 countries by up to 65 million people. In west Europe, there are over 175 million TV receivers in use, which amounts to one for every two inhabitants. In the OECD nations there are now 370 million TV receivers in use.

Sources: Frederick 1993; Lane et al. 1996: 170-5; Parker 1995: 14-15; Europa 1995.

PLAN OF THE PAPER

This paper is not a detailed account of a particular research project, but a survey of the literature which compares and contrasts general theories, empirical findings and conclusions. It is divided into seven main sections, each dealing with media effects on different aspects of politics and government, as follows:

1. The nature of politics;
2. Citizen political life;
3. Elections;
4. Political elites;
5. Political parties;
6. Governments;
7. Contemporary democracy;
7. Globalization of information.

Because the literature on media effects is controversial, and because much of the argument and evidence seem to be inconsistent or contradictory, each section of the paper will be presented in terms of contrasting propositions about media effects. Newton's second law of the social sciences states that to each and every hypothesis there is an opposite and equally plausible hypothesis, a law which applies with uncanny precision to almost all media research. Indeed, to present only two alternatives in each case is often to over-simplify.

THE NATURE OF POLITICS

According to the economist Amartya Sen (1994: 34) no substantial famine has ever occurred in a democratic country with a free press. The observation raises questions about cause and effect: does a free press alert societies to the danger of famine, thereby making it possible to avoid them, or are societies which are wealthy enough to avoid famine generally democracies with a free press? Nevertheless, this statement highlights dramatically the possibility that the mass media can effect the scope and content of politics itself.

- 1a. The media report the news.
- 1b. The media concentrate on negative news and conflict.

Even in theory the media could not report all the news. They have to be selective and in practice, tend to pick a relatively small and special part of the news, and to give that part a particular twist. They tend to concentrate on the negative side of world events - war, death, famine, destruction, disaster, conflict, incompetence and corruption. Bad news is good news because it attracts audiences and sells media products. There is also a tendency for the news to emphasise conflict and disagreement, even when it is not particularly significant, because it is more interesting and dramatic (Schudson 1995: 9). To add to this negative aspect of the daily news bulletins, politicians seem to have increased their attacks on opponents rather than stating their own case (see, for example, Franklin 1994: 10). In addition, coverage of election campaigns, at least in the United States, seem to be more and more negative and critical of the candidates (Robinson and Sheehan 1983; Patterson 1993). All this is said to leave a bad taste in the mouth and to contribute to what Robinson (1976) terms 'videomalaise', and to decreased voter engagement and motivation (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon 1995: 24)

There may be a tendency to over-emphasise the negative and critical qualities of the media. At any rate, one of the few comparative studies of TV political advertising (Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995: 211-13) found it to be more positive than negative in the US, UK, France, Germany, Italy, and Israel. Negative advertising can be powerful, but

only up to a point and within limits (Devlin 1995: 198-200). There is, of course, a big difference between political advertising and the news. News programmes should, by some democratic standards, be critical and negative when necessary (see Proposition 4a and 4b), but the purpose of television political advertising is completely different, and in order to be effective it may have to limit its negative aspects and mix them with the positive (Devlin 1995: 203). Besides, styles of news reporting may go through cycles. For example, the American news media were fairly positive about American politics and politicians in the 1950s and 1960s, but became more negative as a result of Vietnam and Watergate. Similarly the British news media seem to have become more negative in the 1980s and 1990s as a reaction to the political circumstances of the time. The main point, however, is that the news does tend to be a catalogue of gloom and despair, and the main question is whether this effects mass attitudes and behaviour, a theme to which we will return shortly.

- 2a. The mass media provide a window on the real world.
- 2b. The mass media provide us with a public relations picture of the world.

Rather than relying on second-hand reports, as we used to, we can now see events and politicians first hand when they appear daily in our living rooms on the TV screen. We can see and judge for ourselves. Television offers us a window on the real world like no news media before it. But this, of course, is not quite what happens. Politicians take enormous care to stage-manage the news: photos are retouched, camera angles and lighting adjusted, voices trained, body language schooled, clothes carefully chosen, studio audiences handpicked, answers to questions rehearsed, events planned and staged (Denton and Holloway 1995: 91-115). Surely, politicians have always tried to say the right things in the right words at the right time to the right audience. What makes things different now is the extent to which politicians try to create and shape events, especially for TV, so that they have all the appearance of naturalism and reality. Are audiences deceived into believing that they are seeing the real world rather than a public relations picture of it? Probably not. According to some writers, the more exposure politicians get, the more they demystify themselves, and the more suspicious or cynical voters become of their performances. Thus, TV is said to undermine its own image of realism (Meyrowitz 1995: 117-38; Entman 1995: 154). In this respect the news media have an effect in a curious round-about way, of presenting a real window on the world of politics.

- 3a. The media present an objective account of politics.
 3b. The media present a balanced account of the news.

There is a difference between objective and balanced news. Balance involves taking no political position in a debate, but reporting it faithfully in its own terms. Objectivity involves not just summarising events accurately, but stepping outside them and treating them critically. Balance means reporting the words and opinions of the leading participants in a political controversy (usually only two of them - Proposition 11b), no matter how implausible, desperate, untrue, or partial they may be. Objectivity entails calling attention to grounds for believing that the statements may be one or more of these things.

To use a courtroom analogy, we expect judges to be objective, not balanced: they should try to discover the truth of the case, not by positioning their final judgement half way between prosecution and defence, one of whom may be plainly lying, but by using judgement to arrive at an objective conclusion about the two sides. According to Entman, "strict balance violates its own purpose: to ensure that the news offers a neutral, factual mirror of reality." (Entman 1989: 34). Modern rules of balanced reporting require that spokespeople for major interests must be heard, no matter how weak, groundless, or deceitful their views (Entman 1989: 38). Baker (1994: 69-70) argues that this is the result of commercial competition and increasing dependence upon advertising revenues, whereas Patterson (1993: 6) sees it as the result of reporters taking up a detached, professional, outsider stance (see also Gurevitch and Blumler 1990b: 280-1). Both Entman and Baker agree that there is increasing pressure on the mass media to *appear* both objective and balanced, and increasing pressure to *behave* in a partial manner.

An example is provided by Hertsgaard (1989) who points out that the American media faithfully reported the words of Ronald Reagan, because he was the president, although they knew some of them to be implausible, silly, or untrue. As Gurevitch and Blumler (1993: 282) state: "Instead of promoting a 'marketplace of ideas', in which all viewpoints are given adequate play, media neutrality can tend to privilege dominant, mainstream positions." In this way spokesmen for mainstream political interests will most generally make their voice heard, no matter how poor or groundless their case.

The difference between objectivity and balance helps to explain why there is so little agreement about 'bias' in the news media. Those who concentrate on the rules of balance, claim that the quality media are usually impartial reporters of the news. Those who focus on objectivity claim that the news media are biased. Possibly both positions are right, but the objective ('watchdog of the constitution') role is the more crucial and the

more exacting one in modern democracy, and the mass media may increasingly fail by this standard.

- 4a. The media present an objective and disinterested account of the news.
- 4b. The media present an engaged and critical account of the news.

The issue of objectivity versus balance is closely bound to another problem. We expect incompatible things of the news media: on the one hand, they should be objective and disinterested; on the other, they should be critical and engaged. The reporting of news calls for objectivity and detachment, commentary requires critical engagement. In theory it is possible to separate news and opinion, but in practice it is difficult, especially if politicians claim foul play (by the standards of objective reporting) when the media are critical of them.

A second set of pressures seem to contribute to the difficulties. Reporters are caught up in a close relationship with politicians. Politicians need the press and try to make its life easy by providing press releases which can be used with minimum effort, and reporters need politicians to supply them with material, if possible pre-digested and ready for immediate use. The Hall-Jamieson study, Dirty Politics, (1992) shows how many 'ad bites', 'ad stories', and 'news ads' were simply edited versions of party press releases, and many other studies find the news media heavily over-represent the views of public officials, especially government officials (Schudson 1995: 214). This may help to explain why so much of the TV news in the USA is the same on different channels (Paletz and Entman 1981). As the more powerful and better organised interests in politics become better at 'managing the news', so the problem will become more acute.

The more politicians try to manipulate the news media by criticising them for being biased, the more the news media will try to be balanced, and the more balanced (i.e. favourable) they are likely to treat those who accuse them of being unbalanced. Jesse Helms, Spiro T. Agnew, Margaret Thatcher and Norman Tebbit well understood the political advantage they could gain by attacking objective media on the grounds that they lacked balance.

- 5a. Reporters form an occupational group which is open, variegated, and outward looking.
- 5b. Reporters form an occupation group which is closed, homogeneous, and inward looking.

Journalism is not a classic profession, like medicine or law, with a long, specialised training capable of socialising its members into a world view which sees the same things in the same way. Nor does it recruit from narrow sections or strata of society. Reporters come from diverse backgrounds, and they learn their trade on the job in many different ways, places, and branches of the media. As a result of this diverse background and training, one might expect journalists to present many different kinds of news in many different ways with many different interpretations.

In fact the reverse seems to be the case. According to Theodore White (1961:335), journalists form a 'brotherhood' which is created by constant and intense interaction. They spend most of their working time talking to each other, or reading or watching each others work (Rodriguez 1995: 131), and they tend to focus on the same events and interpret them in the same way with the same concern for the same news angle (Norris 1995: 3). As an occupational group they seem to be as closed, homogeneous in outlook, and inward looking as any other occupational group. Or perhaps it is better to say they are shaped by the same intense occupational pressures. Being a reporter is like living in an echo chamber with other reporters (Hess 1981: 118). The result is less a diverse occupational group presenting a variegated product, than a homogeneous group with standard product.

To try to summarise this section it can be said that the media do shape the content of the news at least so far as there is evidence that they concentrate on bad news and (sometimes) on the negative. Moreover, the impression the news media leave on citizens may be strengthened by their tendency to demystify politics and political leaders as a result of prolonged exposure. While this may be of importance in its own right, its significance would be magnified if it contributed to the 'videomalaise' hypothesis which is considered later in the paper. Meanwhile, it may be that the modern media bias their account of the news in three ways. First, some of the news comes close to partisan propaganda, because the demands of speed and convenience push journalists to rely heavily on official press releases. Second, the news is biased in favour of taking the statements of leading contenders in the debate at their face value - of presenting a balanced, not an objective account of the debate. Third, organisations or interests without much standing or many resources tend to be excluded from the news, which often focuses on only the two leading sides of the discussion. These tendencies seem to be reinforced, if anything, by the 'echo-chamber' characteristics which journalists create as an occupational group.

CITIZENS AND POLITICAL LIFE

- 6a. The media help create a politically informed public.
- 6b. The media provide many distractions from politics, and cause political overload, 'memory loss', and information fatigue.

Never before have so many citizens been provided with so much news, so easily, so quickly, and so cheaply. And yet in spite of this, and in spite of rising educational levels, there is little hard evidence of an improved level of political information among western citizens. Evidence of any kind on the matter is hard to come by because most political scientists are not interested in the general population's changing levels of factual information, so much as in whether these levels are high or low, satisfactory or unsatisfactory. However, one of the few studies of change, Delli Carpini and Keeter (1991) found little difference in political information levels in the USA between 1940 and 1989 (see also Dimock and Popkin 1995: 3).

There are four main reasons why the mass media may not produce a better informed general public. First, they present an ever widening and more attractive array of distractions, and with such demands on their time it is surprising that citizens attend much to politics at all. Second, in some circumstances people feel increasingly overburdened by political news and comment. The huge media coverage of the 1992 British election caused TV news audiences and newspaper readers to fall sharply (Franklin 1994: 131, 151; Wober 1992: 2; MacArthur and Worcester 1992: 5). Third, it is in the nature of news reporters to make every story important, but if everything is important, nothing is important, and it is difficult to know what to attend to. Fourth, the prominence given to bad news (Proposition 1b) may cause some people to avoid politics and the news.

It seems likely that much will depend upon the nature of the media, the nature of audiences, and their interaction. A combination of quality media used by educated and politically involved citizens is likely to have one set of effects, a poor quality media with an uneducated and an a-political audience another.

- 7a. The media illuminate, dramatise, and simplify politics for popular consumption.
 7b. The media over-simplify and trivialise politics.

The modern media make the news interesting by dramatising and simplifying it, and hanging it on human interest stories. As Schulz says: "In order to make politics comprehensible to the citizen, it must first be reduced by journalists to a few simple structural patterns." (Schulz, quoted in Gurevitch and Blumler 1993: 273). This often means that there can be only two sides to a story, more making it too complicated (Epstein 1973: 227), and it helps if the two sides can be attached to two well-known public figures. Simplifying, dramatising, and personalising politics may be particularly important for those with low levels of education, political interest and knowledge.

If the advantages of the modern media are that they dramatise, simplify and personalise the news, the disadvantages are said to be that they dramatise, simplify and personalise the news: the same thing is good or bad, depending on one's point of view. Research on the knowledge gap in The Netherlands (Kleinnijenhuis 1991) suggests that people with lower education learn more efficiently from TV news and easily readable newspapers and learn, assimilate, and understand less from complex (serious) newspapers. Better educated people with stronger political interest claim to learn more from the papers than from TV (Pfetsch and Voltmer 1995; Dimock and Popkin 1995; Negrine 1994: 2-3). Perhaps, therefore, we should be less concerned about the rise of the tabloid press and more aware of the beneficial effects it can have for its poorly educated readers who would gain little from serious newspapers, TV news and current affairs programmes.

According to Entman (1989: 10) the modern mass media are caught in a vicious circle: "To become sophisticated citizens, Americans would need high-quality independent journalism; but news organizations, to stay in business while producing such journalism, would need an audience of sophisticated citizens." This is true, but the countervailing realist argument is that the tabloid press can have the beneficial function of simplifying, personalising, and sensationalising the news for mass consumption. Forcing people to read Shakespeare or Goethe is not the best way of getting the less well educated to read for pleasure. The question, perhaps, is whether trivialising and personalising the news in order to capture their audiences, the mass media then can and will help to improve the general level of political understanding. It seems unlikely that they will, even if they are able to do so.

- 8a. The modern media deepen our understanding of government.
- 8b. The modern media present us with a superficial and fast moving stream of political events, and with little understanding of them.

Knowledge and understanding are different things, and perhaps one of the great merits of the modern media is that they can help us understand as well as inform. Not only do we have TV news which makes world events come alive, ("seeing is believing", "a picture tells a thousand words"), but we can watch politicians on the screen and judge them for ourselves, and we can see, hear, and read endless commentary and in-depth analysis by experts.

At the same time, there is a built-in tendency for the modern media to speed up the development of events and thereby to blur an understanding of them. Because news is a highly perishable commodity, the media have an insatiable appetite for new news, and what matters is not so much the quality of the news, or its analysis, but simply the speed of its delivery. There is evidence that the pace of American TV news increased between 1968 and 1988, and that news items are shorter but have more packed into them (Hallin 1990: 27-8). The result is the 'fast forward' syndrome (Ranney 1983: 73-4; Entman 1989: 19) in which readers and audiences are washed with an endless, fast-moving stream of news. We forget yesterday's events as today's rush past, and we understand less of either (Robinson 1976; Ranney 1983: 65, 69-72; Shawcross 1984; Robinson and Levy 1986. But see also Robinson 1977). Our information may be broad but not deep; our knowledge extensive but not cumulative. The danger, according to Manheim (1991), is that elite manipulation will provide the understanding of politics for the masses who cannot provide it for themselves. Another possibility is that confusion and lack of understanding will lead mass audiences to withdraw from politics.

Propositions 8a and 8b may be reconciled. Educated audiences who read good newspapers and watch serious TV may acquire a broader and deeper understanding of politics from the mass media, and, at the same time, their broader and deeper understanding may help to increase their interest and information levels. Less well educated people who read tabloids and watch mainly soaps and game shows may find the fast moving world of political news bewildering and incomprehensible.

- 9a. The modern mass media broaden political horizons and time perspectives.
- 9b. The modern mass media emphasise the immediate.

In theory, the mass media are eminently capable of placing political events in a broad historical perspective. In practice, the specialist media do this, but the mass media

seem to do the opposite. The effect of the fast-forward syndrome is to focus attention on today's news, and forget about yesterday's. Long-term economic policy is submerged by news of this month's inflation or unemployment figures. Policies which run into early opposition have to be dropped before they have had time to be properly considered, and the inordinate attention paid to the immediate feeds a tendency for politicians to think in the short term and seek immediate public opinion gains.

It is tempting to blame the fast-forward syndrome on the media's appetite for news, but it should not be forgotten that the pace of the modern world is faster, that change is quickening, inter-dependencies are growing, and therefore the sheer volume of world news is increasing. No doubt the media have magnified the problem, but they did not create it all in the first place.

10a. The mass media expand policy options.

10b. The mass media narrow policy options.

The mass media can broaden political horizons by drawing examples of political debates, policies, practices and outcomes from all over the world. The mass media could turn us all into amateur comparativists, constantly drawing on the experience and knowledge of other countries and other circumstances in order to make sense of our own situation. In fact, the mass media are more usually parochial, concentrating on personalities, trivialities and local events. In election news there is a strong tendency to concentrate on the horse-race theme (Hallin 1990: 23), or on news about the campaign news - image-making techniques, campaign strategy, events contrived for the media - rather than policy issues.

Policies which might attract widespread but diffuse support may be rejected if small and intense minorities can gain publicity. Similarly, media attention may make certain sorts of policies more difficult to contemplate at the outset. Rather than giving time for discussion and debate to circle around a new option, discussion may be foreclosed by a vociferous opposition - both tax increases and war may be in this category. Equally, media coverage of elections can often deflect attention from issues to personalities and scandals (Patterson 1980).

11a. The media expand the political arena - political inclusiveness.

11b. The media contract the political arena - political exclusiveness.

If everyone can be famous for five minutes, everyone, every group, or every interest should be able to make their voice heard in the modern media. Once controlled

and dominated by elites, the mass media are now accessible to all. Besides, the media are so eager for new faces, themes, ideas, and news, that they hunt out anything that can satisfy their appetite. In response to this, in the 1992 election in the USA, politicians began to make increasing use of popular TV talk-shows, radio phone-ins, talk radio, and even MTV. The new media, it has been said, have democratized access to the political system and given all a voice in it - *vox pop*.

Some evidence suggests otherwise. In America the percentage of news soundbites given to ordinary people (as against politicians and experts) fell from 20% in 1972 and 1976 to 4% in 1988, and the length of the average soundbite also fell to four seconds. In 1988, 85% of citizen soundbites were taken from whites, and two thirds from males (Hallin 1991: 33). It is possible that the *vox pop* function of the mass media has been taken over by phone-in radio and TV, but the evidence shows that such things remain marginal compared with network TV news and the newspaper (Kohut 1996: 98-104). Besides, in a study of *The New York Times* and *Time* magazine coverage of the nuclear freeze, Entman and Rojecki (1993) found little mention of the popular movement favouring a freeze even though the polls showed mass support of between 71% and 78%. Both the *Times* and *Time* tended to 'delegitimize public participation in organised political movements'. In another American study of TV news coverage of poverty, Entman (1995) found that the issue was often presented as threatening, or in a way which made it easier for audiences to blame the victims. As a consequence, even when the poor and poverty got media attention, it was in a way which tended to lower the policy priority of poverty, depressed sympathy for the poor, and equated 'poverty' with 'black'. (Entman 1995: 148-50). In a recent Canadian study, Knight and O'Connor (1995) found that business interests were presented as speaking for the economy as a whole, whereas trade unions were presented as a special interest group.

In the United Kingdom, a great amount of evidence shows that the popular press often excludes or ignores some voices, or systematically undermines and devalues them (see, for example, Hollingsworth 1986; Snoddy 1992; Curran 1986). The British tabloid press is probably extreme in this respect, but even the TV news, required to be fair and balanced, has not escaped criticism. The first studies by the Glasgow Media Group have documented how almost every section of Glasgow society affected by a strike was interviewed, except the strikers themselves (Glasgow University Media Group 1976; see also Harrison 1985).

We are therefore faced with (at least) two contradictory hypotheses, part of the explanation for which may lie in the increasingly polarised media market. The mass media, precisely because it is dependent upon a mass market (or in the case of public

service TV, strongly influenced by its commercial rivals), may present a view of the world which tends to exclude or devalue minorities or the unconventional, or both. In contrast, the increasingly specialised small market media, may become ever more inclusive and pluralistic, taken as a whole, but each part of it may be confined to a small part of society.

- 12a. The media are important instruments of cognitive mobilisation.
 12b. TV is an instrument of passive cognitive mobilisation, and the media are a cause of 'videomalaise' and political demobilisation.

The point that the modern mass media are important instruments of mass cognitive mobilisation is widely argued and sustained by a large amount of empirical data drawn from many western nations (see Dalton 1988: 18-24; Inglehart 1990: 336-42; Kaase 1993: 29-30). Cognitive mobilisation may, however, take an active or a passive form. The passively mobilised understand but do not act - the Riesman type of 'inside-dopester' - while those who are cognitively mobilised in an active way both understand and act. The literature stresses the dual role of both the mass media and education in fostering cognitive mobilisation, and it may be that while education creates the active form, TV tends to create the passive form (Postman 1985) which turns people into spectators. Hence the systematic difference between the educated who read quality newspapers and watch TV news and current affairs programmes, and the uneducated who either read no paper or a poor quality one, and mostly watch TV entertainment programmes.

Nonetheless, there is a great deal of cross-national survey data suggesting rising levels of cognitive mobilisation among western populations. It shows stable or rising levels of political interest and discussion (Topf 1995: 61-66; Dalton 1988: 23), increasing levels of political activity (Topf 1995: 68-9), more citizen effort to contact representatives (Verba 1993: 679), high levels of belief in democracy as a principle of government (Newton 1995: 134), persistent levels of belief in democracy in particular countries (Kaase and Newton 1995: 61), rising levels of cognitive mobilisation (Inglehart 1990: 335-70), and greater degrees of ideological sophistication (Dalton 1988: 23; Neuman 1986: 40). The evidence does suggest that disillusionment with modern politics and government is to be found in certain places and at certain times in the western world, but it does not suggest that is either widespread or generally increasing (see the essays in Klingemann and Fuchs 1995).

The videomalaise hypothesis claims the exact opposite. Although it recognises that it is extremely difficult to establish causal relations, it claims that the news media

concentrate on conflict and exaggerate it where little exists (see, for example, Lang and Lang 1968: 307), that the news is an endless procession of depressing events (Proposition 1b), that it tends to create political distrust, disenchantment, and suspicion (see Ranney 1983: 74-79; Putnam 1995b: 679), that watching TV privatises people, makes some of them scared and alienated (Gerbner et. al. 1986), tends to disorient them socially (Mander 1978), leads to a withdrawal from social engagement and activity, is associated with misanthropy, pessimism, passivity, and with aggression and psychosocial malfunctioning among children (Putnam 1995b: 678-9), that TV tends to de-motivate people politically, and to immobilise them as citizens (Ansolabehere, Iyengar, and Simon 1995: 24). In a word it generates videomalaise (Robinson 1975: 106; 1976; see also Schudson 1995).

How can we possibly reconcile these two very large bodies of literature, each with its own substantial amount of supporting empirical evidence? There are different possibilities. First, it seems that some of the media impact literature contains more speculation than the data-driven literature on cognitive mobilisation. Second, some of the media impact literature is based upon experimental research which may only demonstrate a short term effect (Schudson 1995: 21). Third, it could be that the videomalaise hypothesis is right but does not get fully translated into mass political behaviour. There is a long causal chain between the immediate output of the mass media and their final effect on the political system. Many factors may intervene at different points in the causal chain which dilute or modify or even wash out altogether the immediate impact of the media. In particular, individual level effects may not be expressed in aggregate behaviour or at the system level because of intervening or contextual countervailing variables. Fourth, it may be that TV has a different impact from radio and newspapers. Fifth, much of the videomalaise literature is American, and it could be that American and west European TV tend to differ in their effects. Sixth, it may be that some of the work confuses cause and effect - rather than TV causing fear, it may be that fearful individuals or a threatening society cause people to retreat to the safety of their home where they watch TV, which then confirms their fears. Whatever the explanation, however, the vast quantities of cross-national, time-series survey data on political attitudes and behaviour generally seem to support the mobilisation hypothesis rather than the videomalaise hypothesis.

ELECTIONS

- 13a. The modern media create opportunities for campaign discussion and debate.
- 13b. The modern media undermine democratic debate by relying on soundbites and photo opportunities.

As the means of mass communication multiply and as access to many of them becomes easier and cheaper, so in-depth consideration of a widening variety of public issues becomes possible. In contradiction to this, modern media politics are increasingly soundbite or photo-opportunity politics which eliminate the possibility of considered discussion or in-depth debate. This is not a recent development. It first became visible in the USA presidential campaign of 1956 when both main parties abandoned thirty minute television programmes for shorter advertising spots. Since then the length of the average political advertisement, like the length of the news soundbite in the USA, has decreased - the latter has shortened from 42 seconds in 1968 to 7.3 seconds in 1992 (Hallin 1991; Adatto 1990). Ten minute party election broadcasts have recently been criticised in Britain by advertising agencies claiming they are too long and boring.

It is increasingly difficult to develop political ideas, to explain party programmes, sustain debate about complex and intricate matters, and say anything that takes longer than 10 seconds, or is more demanding than the tabloid article. Political debate is thereby diluted and debased, and mass communication becomes shallow. Political leaders are increasingly required to be telegenic, and according to Maarek (1995: 114), the effectiveness of a politician's television appearance probably depends as much on his 'non-verbal' communication as on his actual words.

- 14a. The mass media contribute to falling election turnout.
- 14b. The mass media have little effect on turnout.

According to Ranney (1983: 80-86) and Maarek (1995: 225-6), the media contribute to falling election turnout because they bore electors with too much election information (Proposition 6b) and by predicting results make the actual outcome a foregone

conclusion. Others (Ansolabehere et al. 1993; Ansolabehere et al. 1995: 24-26; Entman 1995: 153) suggest that the negative nature of much political campaigning increases disenchantment with politics and decreases voter engagement. And yet this does not seem to be the case in west Europe where election turnout has not generally fallen over the last decades when the mass media, especially TV, have come into their own (Topf 1995: 27-51). It may be that part of the explanation lies in the different nature of the media systems on either sides of the Atlantic (public service compared with commercial), or perhaps the sort of negative campaigning which depressed voting turnout has given way to more positive strategies in recent years. In any case, some research suggests that the intention to vote is unaffected by exposure to poll results (Ansolabehere and Iyengar 1994). In addition, as this paper has already argued (Proposition 1b), it seems that the negative nature of political campaigns may have been exaggerated by some. Or perhaps there is rather little general connection between the modern media and voting turnout.

- 15a. The mass media personalise politics and hence personalise (presidentialise) elections
- 15b. The mass media personalise politics, but this appears to have little effect on electoral behaviour.

It is often argued that the news media tend to concentrate on a few leading politicians and to personalise political discussion and conflict. Issues are pushed to the background, and attention focuses on appearance and style. Elections are not battles between ideologies, visions, and programmes, but horse races between two candidates. In the 1992 British election, for example, the news concentrated on a handful of leading figures, and the rest, even major office holders, got rather little attention (Newton 1992: 246). In Germany a few politicians are invariably in the news, the rest consigned largely to a supporting role (Schatz 1992: 246). As a result, it is sometimes said, western elections, even in parliamentary systems, are becoming increasingly personalised and presidentialised.

There is little evidence to support the suggestion. Kaase (1994: 211-30) finds no clear signs in Germany, Crewe and King (1994: 181-206) uncover little support for the theory in Britain, and Mughan's (1995: 327-42) analysis indicates that presidential-style TV campaigns in Australia and the United States have not been able to break down voting patterns based upon long-standing party loyalties.

There are two likely reasons for this conflict of presidential theory and evidence. First, is it possible that TV in particular and the mass media in general are not as presi-

dential as some claim? Crewe and King (1994: 189-90) conclude that TV campaign coverage of general elections was not significantly more leader-centred in the 1980s than the 1960s, and in their comparative study of political advertising in six western nations, Kaid and Holtz-Bacha (1995: 211-12) find a concentration on issues rather than images of either leaders or parties. Second, it is also possible that the presidential leanings of TV news, and of the news media generally, has little impact on voters, either because the media do not have this sort of impact or all, or because voters are shielded from it by their party loyalties (see Mughan 1995: 334-7). Whatever the reason, it appears that for all the speculation about the media, and especially TV, producing presidential elections, there is little evidence to support the claim. As in the case of election turnout the media impact, if any, is slight.

In conclusion, we can summarise the results of this section on media effects on elections rather briefly and simply: the literature suggests that the modern media have the effect of reducing election turnout and of personalising or presidentialising elections. Neither suggestions are supported by the empirical data. It is, however, likely that serious and in-depth discussion of election issues tends to be undermined by the sound-bite, photo-opportunity nature of the modern news which tends to emphasise appearance and packaging at the expense of content.

POLITICAL ELITES

- 16a. The media shorten political lives.
 16b. The media have little or no effect on the length of political lives.

Not only do the media turn the full glare of critical publicity on political leaders but they also expose their human frailty to the world at large - we see Nixon sweat in the debates with Kennedy, Ford stumble leaving his plane, Bush faint at a banquet in Japan, Thatcher lose her temper in a studio debate, and Carter collapse in a fun run (see Meyrowitz 1995: 133). The mass media demystify not only by presenting Shelley plain, but by over-exposing him as well. In this way, they may also cut political lives short. According to Ranney (1983: 147-150) the glare of publicity shortens the tenure of American politicians.

This does not seem to be a general tendency, or at least, it seems not to apply to some leading European figures such as Thatcher, Kohl, and the late Mitterand. In the United Kingdom, Major has survived a long time by post-war standards, much of it in the face of strong newspaper criticism. In Spain the Socialist party of Gonzales lasted from 1982 to 1996, and in Australia Fraser, Hawke and Keating dominated the office of Prime Minister from 1975-96. In case this is thought to be anecdotal evidence, Budge and Ke-man (1990: 162) find little variation in government duration in twenty western states between 1950 and 1983. Perhaps American, but not other countries' media have the effect of shortening political lives, or perhaps there is no media effect at all.

The contradiction between Proposition 2b and 16b may be more apparent than real because while public relations experts and spin doctors try to control the news, they can only succeed up to a point. This is partly because public relations campaigns are still uncertain and unpredictable in their effects, and partly because some events take over from the spin-doctors who cannot control or direct them.

17a. Reducing leadership dependence.

17b. Increasing leadership dependence.

Low ranking politicians who were once dependent upon party leaders to advance their careers can now use the mass media to appeal over the heads of leaders to the general public. They may even be able to make their way up the greasy pole by their own media efforts rather than working through a party political apprenticeship. If so, elected representatives may be less controllable and manipulable by party leaders than before.

However, it is difficult to believe that this has had much effect on either policy or political careers. In the first place, the personalisation of politics and media concentration on a few leading political personalities means that party leaders are in a much better position to exploit media attention than other politicians. In the second place, there are many sanctions which leaders can use to push people into line. It is significant that a British source (Franklin 1994: 16-17) which argues that backbenchers can exploit their media connections in order to maintain their political base, names six politicians with high media exposure - Ken Livingstone, Tony Banks, Austin Mitchell, Charles Kennedy, Jerry Hayes, and Peter Bottomly. None are major-league players in British politics, and it is a reasonable bet that most would trade their high media visibility for a more powerful party position.

- 18a. Keeping politicians (and journalists) honest.
18b. Encouraging blandness and dishonesty.

The glare of media publicity may help to keep politicians and public figures more accountable in the sense that they can no longer say different things to different audiences, or deny their own words which have been recorded for posterity - Bush's famous "Read my lips..." statement about taxes came back to haunt him. Equally, politicians who are wary of being misquoted by journalists have started to record interviews to keep journalists honest.

The politicians response to this may well be to opt, wherever possible, for bland statements, or for statements which leave much unspoken but plenty of room for inference - warm words and weasel words. The same effect can be achieved by advertising campaigns which leave much to inference and implication - the Willie Horton advert of Bush/Quayle is often cited as an example. As a result of this sort of development, writes Entman (1995: 155): "The effect of the televisual may be to diminish the accountability of politicians for their campaigns and issue stands." Indeed Propositions 18a and 18b both seem to hold: it is more difficult to get away with fork-tongued or two-faced statements; but, at the same time, politicians are more likely to be cautious and non-committal. In this case perhaps the correct conclusion is that the modern media have their impact, but that the outcome makes very little difference to modern government - the modern media help to make politicians accountable for their words, but this merely makes them disinclined to say anything which commits them to anything in the first place.

In conclusion, while some argue that the modern media have the effect of shortening the lives of politicians and governments, of reducing leadership dependence, and of keeping politicians (and journalists) honest, there is little evidence to support any of these claims. Politicians and governments do not seem to fall more readily or rapidly than they did, and indeed, the media spotlight may help to make a few national political leaders even more powerful than before. Rather than making politicians more honest, the modern media may encourage them to be more bland, non-committal, or actually more dishonest.

POLITICAL PARTIES

As the political environment of parties and other intermediary organisations has become more media-centric, so their organisation and modes of operation have changed. There are five notable features of this change:

1. The changing structure of political organisations.
2. A shift from the politics of policy to the politics of packaging and presentation.
3. Non-ideological politics with greater policy instability.
4. Centralisation of power in some respects, deconcentration in others.
5. The decline of political parties, and the rise of personality politics.

There seems to be rather more agreement or certainty about media effects on party organisation, and for this reason some of the propositions will not be accompanied by a contradictory statement.

- 19a. The modern mass media make it easier for political parties to develop their grass roots organisation.
- 19b. The modern mass media make it easier for political parties to pull up their grass roots.

The mass media make it easier for political parties to communicate with their grass roots. Party leaders can speak to their supporters on radio or TV, it is now cheaper and easier to print intra-party newsletters, and the cost of direct mail-shots has been decimated by desk-top computers and printers. At the same time, modern communication has reduced the importance of many traditional means by which political parties inform, organise, and mobilise voters and grass-roots members. There are now fewer public and party meetings, less need for local activists to organise events, put up posters, and round up audiences. It is still necessary to mobilise voters on election day, but other functions have been bypassed by studio interviews, photo opportunities, and direct mail shots. The London journalist Hugo Young (1992) refers to this as 'politics without people'. As a result, there has been a fall in the number of local party organisers and agents at the grass roots level (Ware 1995: 73). The British Labour Party had 296 qualified and

full-time agents in 1951, only 68 in 1987 (Kavanagh 1990: 126). Lack of money has been used to explain the decline in the Labour party and other parties, but since parties now spend more on media election campaigns, the argument is not convincing.

Changing party organisation is evident in two ways. First, the reduced role for local spear-carriers and campaign troops has eroded the bonds of local activism, which may help to explain the decline in party identification, membership, and organisation experienced in many western countries (Katz et al. 1992). However, the modern media have not rendered party activists and volunteers obsolete. Rather, they have undermined their *raison d'être* between elections while leaving untouched their vital role of mobilising party supporters during elections (Maarek 1995: 204).

Second, the consequence of the slow erosion of local party activists and organisers may have implications for the classic interest aggregating functions of political parties. People who were once firmly rooted in local public opinion, and who conveyed it up the organisation to leaders, are now thinner on the ground. Without these grass roots connections, party leaders have become more isolated from everyday life and local opinion.

20a. Modern communications encourage intra-party policy discussion.

20b. Modern communications encourage the politics of packaging and presentation.

Maarek (1995: 226) suggests that there is a natural short term pragmatism inherent within political marketing which entails adaption to public opinion rather than ideological consistency. There is a constant search for the median voter, an avoidance not just of clear political positions, but of any position that might alienate minorities. In politics, it is often easier to make enemies of small groups with strong opinions than to win friends among large, moderate groups. Thus marketing pushes politics towards the bland, centre ground. If there is a loss of ideology in western democracies and a tendency to drift towards low-temperature, pragmatic, and vague policies, then the emergence of media parties may have a lot to do with it.

Attention also focuses less on the content of political messages and more on packaging and presentation (Davis 1995: 330). The more is known about public opinion and the greater the competition for media attention, the greater is the emphasis placed upon presentation and packaging. Whereas policy used to be made first and then ways worked out of selling it, now the selling of policy enters earlier into the policy process, perhaps to the point where it is the first consideration.

Sometimes political marketing has become so important in the minds of politicians that they get things badly wrong. Thatcher's poll tax met with serious and sustained public opposition, but the government decided that there was nothing wrong with the policy, only with the way it had been presented to the public. The mistake was a prime factor in Mrs. Thatcher's downfall.

- 21a. Party policies can be stabilised by opinion polling.
 21b. Public opinion-guided policy is volatile and unstable.

One problem with public opinion-guided policy is that public opinion is superficially changeable and volatile, and that parties responding to these short-term changes will tend to follow short-term public moods. At the same time, there is a tendency for strategic decisions and policy making to become progressively centralised in a rarefied circle of media-managers. This group, like most specialists and professionals, have a powerful tendency to talk mainly to each other, to develop common assumptions and concerns, and to react to the same things in the same way. They form a small hot-house or echo-chamber of media experts who are removed somewhat from direct contact with everyday life, but interact intensively with politicians and a small circle of journalists. They pay close attention to the hourly developments of mass media stories with their feeding frenzies, rapid change of moods and concern, short-term fashions, and talking-up of issues and dangers. Consequently, policy making and decision making may become increasingly like stock markets - prone to influence by short term events, speculation, rumour, hear-say, and even panic.

In sum, with weaker and shallower grass roots, with fewer local agents and organisers, and with policy increasingly under the influence of closed circles of media managers and manipulators, dependent upon changeable and interpretable opinion polls, policy making may lose its traditional and ideological foundations and become more changeable and volatile. Politicians grappling with this problem may be encouraged to make policy statements even blander and more non-committal than before, thereby aggravating the problem.

- 22a. The modern media encourage inner-party communication and democracy.
 22b. The modern media encourage party centralisation and technocracy.

The media party is a centralised party. On the one hand it starves its own grass roots, and on the other, it formulates careful and expensive election strategies which are devised by a small and centralised team of experts. Since the unexpected often happens

in politics, the team must be given power to respond quickly to circumstances in order to limit damage or grasp opportunities. The national campaign organised at the centre assumes greater importance, the local campaign fits in.

An example is the 'New Labour' of Tony Blair which seems to be emerging as a prime example of a media party - that is a political party which is organised around and well adapted to the political requirements of the modern mass media. The power of the trade unions, once crucial to fund-raising and mobilising, has been redistributed to ordinary party members, but especially to a rather small number of people who manage the mass media image of the party and its policies. Policies are safer, blander, vaguer, and there seems to be less discussion of contentious policy for fear of these being presented as party splits, and control of the rapid-deployment media-machine is increasingly centralised.

At the same time, it is easy to exaggerate the centralisation of power in media parties. In the old days a few 'men in suits', a handful of political barons, bosses, king-makers and oligarchs, wielded power of leadership and policy selection. If the new media managers exercise this kind of selective power now, they do so with one eye on TV performance and the other on the opinion polls.

23a. The decline of political parties and the rise of personality politics.

In earlier times, aspiring young politicians worked their way up through their party organisation. Now there is less need for a long party apprenticeship: the young telegenic man or woman in a hurry can make their name without party backing. Perot in the USA, Fujimori in Peru, Joerg Haider in Austria, and Berlusconi in Italy are recent examples. There are likely to be more in the future.

Within the established parties a new type of leader is also emerging - the media candidate:

"Guys with blow-dry hair who read the script well...the kind of guy ... who is not concerned with issues: who isn't concerned about the mechanics of government; who doesn't attend committee meetings; who avoids taking positions at any opportunity and who yet is a master at getting his face in the newspapers and on the television..." (Davis 1995: 187).

In conclusion, there does seem to have been a shift from mass parties to media parties. Media parties are marked by: a tendency to have weaker grass roots organisations; less discussion of policy issues and greater concern with packaging and presentation; policy that is driven by opinion polling and focus group techniques (which may cause policy volatility); greater party centralisation organised around media technocrats ;

and greater concentration on telegenic party leaders rather than policy, or around political figures with money to support their political campaigns.

GOVERNMENTS

- 24a. The modern media open up government to public scrutiny.
24b. The modern media make government more closed, manipulative, and secretive.

One of the effects of televising national debating chambers and assemblies of representatives is to open up their deliberations and practices to the public eye, which may force them to change their rules of debate and behaviour. According to Ornstein (1983), television has helped change Congress from a closed, rather private institution to a more open and public one. The old politics in smoke-filled rooms behind closed doors is no longer acceptable. Modern leaders must follow public rules of conduct.

The modern mass media also help to open up the wider political world. The ability of journalists to broadcast from almost any point on the globe, the proliferation of news sources, and the availability of desk-top publishing equipment, faxes, and computer connections, means that governments find it more and more difficult to control communication. The samizdat publications of the Soviet Union and the role of the fax in Tianemen Square are two examples.

Indeed totalitarianism may now be a thing of the past, limited by the circumstances of the early twentieth century which made it possible for governments to exercise tight control over the news. Modern communications make this difficult. But we should not push the implications too far - although western TV was widely available in east Berlin before the wall came down, east Berliners were not in the vanguard of the velvet revolutionary. And Saddam Hussein recently got 99% of the votes at an "election" in Irak.

Nor is it clear whether partial control of information makes modern governments more or less powerful than they were. This is a highly controversial area of debate. Some, like the Frankfurt school of social philosophy, argue that the manipulation of the modern media is a powerful tool in the hands of government, others that pluralist demo-

cratic government is not capable of hegemonic domination of the means of political communication.

There are two aspects to the question. On the negative side, governments can try to suppress information, by means of censorship, and on the other, they can try to promote favourable information (advertising). Both approaches are as old as politics itself, and neither is easy to apply or certain in its effects. What is true is that the stakes of modern government are now so substantial, and the costs of making serious errors so high, that few governments lack the motive to manipulate the news, while some also have the opportunity do so (Newton 1994: 297-321).

Much seems to depend upon national circumstances, and generalisations about the drift towards repressive tolerance, or the inevitability of pluralist democracy both seem to fail the empirical test. There are occasions when governments seem to have kept tight control of information, and times when their expensive and strenuous efforts have failed. Examples of the first include the Falklands and Gulf Wars. Having learned lessons from the Vietnam War, the British government kept tight control over information coming out of the Falklands, and the Allies did the same during the Gulf War. In the events leading up to that war, the American government seems to have managed the news successfully (Bennett and Manheim 1993)

Other evidence suggests that it is easy to exaggerate government power to manipulate the news, at least in peace-time domestic politics. The British government of the 1980s spent large sums of money in its efforts to sell the poll tax, but while it was able to define the poll tax issue in its own narrow terms, it was not able to win the battle for public opinion (see Deacon and Golding 1991. For an American example suggesting the same general conclusion see Brown and Vincent 1995).

25a. Television legitimises parliament.

25b. Television de-legitimises parliament.

The decision to televise the German parliament was made partly on the grounds that it would help to legitimise it (Schatz 1992: 234). Euro-MPs made the same decision about their parliament (O'Donnell 1992: 254). Presumably the point is that being able to watch representatives at work, hearing the arguments, and 'participating' in the process no matter how indirectly, gives citizens the feeling that they share in the system. Televising parliament may also oblige representatives to behave more reasonably and according to public rules of conduct. The contrary argument is that citizens might be so unimpressed by the behaviour and debating standards of their representatives that televising parliament would de-legitimise it. It seems more likely, however, parliament accounting

for such a small proportion of television politics, that broadcasting live makes little difference.

- 26a. The modern media are a cause of ungovernability.
26b. The modern media contribute little to ungovernability.

According to Ranney (1983: 154), "...the glare of television's attention has helped significantly to weaken the ability of presidents and congressmen to govern". This is because vested and special interests in society can use the media to gain publicity for their own demands, thereby escalating pressures from all sides on government. It is difficult to know how to evaluate or test this claim. On the one hand, the crisis of ungovernability and overload, though predicted twenty years ago, has not yet overwhelmed any western democracy to the point where its system of government has collapsed (Kaase and Newton 1995). Most have problems, some have many problems, a few have severe problems, but none, with the possible exception of Italy, has run into a system-threatening crisis. On the other hand, it may be true that governing western democracies is made more difficult because the pressure of special demands is heightened by media attention, although it is difficult to know how one should establish this empirically. It may be that the modern media have helped to make government more difficult, but they have not yet made western states ungovernable. Part of the explanation is likely to be that the modern mass media have not opened up the political system as widely as some predicted, nor have they expanded the scope of issues, nor the breadth or depth of debate (Propositions, 7b, 10b, and 11b).

In conclusion, it seems unlikely that televising parliaments has done much to legitimise or delegitimise parliaments, or to add to the problems of overload and ungovernability. The latter idea is based upon the assumption that the media open up the political arena for new groups and new issues, an assumption not borne out by media research. At the same time, the ability of the media to subject governments to more intense public scrutiny may have changed the nature of the political game, in that governments now make more elaborate and strenuous, though not always successful efforts to conceal or manipulate political information.

CONTEMPORARY DEMOCRACY

- 27a. The media sustain and legitimise the democratic ethos.
 27b. The media create disillusionment with democracy.

The argument that the media either sustain or undermine parliaments can be extended to democracy in general. For example, there is a circumstantial evidence that the mass media helped the democratization of the political culture in West Germany after the war (Kaase 1993: 26-7; Humphreys 1994: 328). If democracy is essentially about discussion, debate, and the peaceful reconciliation of disagreement, then watching news and the cut-and-thrust of current affairs and discussion programmes may help to socialise people into democratic norms.

It might also be claimed, no less plausibly, that the media generate disillusionment with democracy - the videomalaise hypothesis which will not be opened again. It is enough to point out that the vast majority of west European citizens express strong support for the idea of democracy as a principle of government (Newton 1995: 134), and that there is no evidence of decline in this figure. Perhaps the more interesting statistics concern support for democracy as it operates in particular countries, but once again the west European figures fluctuate and vary in ways which suggest either that the media have little or no effect, or a variable effect in different countries at different times (see Klingemann and Fuch 1995). The American case may well be different (Putnam 1995a).

- 28a. The modern mass media strengthen pluralist democracy.
 28b. The modern mass media help to create hyper-democracy.

These are variations of earlier propositions which deal with ungovernability (Propositions 26a and 26b) and do not require further elaboration here. Perhaps one current argument is enough to make a more general point. In the United States there is now concern about the hyper-democracy inducing effects of lobbying by e-mail. But is this a new development which threatens to bury elected representatives below another layer of public demand, or is it just politics as usual, but by a novel means? (Verba 1993). There is probably not that much difference in principle between receiving an e-

mail message and receiving a letter or a pamphlet - except, perhaps, that e-mail messages are easier to reply to or to delete. Possibly the problems of media-induced hyper-democracy will present themselves in an acute form when and if inter-active electronic democracy is introduced. For the time being, however, respondents in the USA say that they learn more from mainstream media sources (network news and newspapers) than from their new 'infotainment' rivals such as talk radio, TV chat shows, call-in opinion-polls, and the like (Kohut 1996: 99). This suggests that claims about media-created hyper-democracy seem somewhat exaggerated. Nor, on the other hand, is there much evidence that the media sustain or reinforce pluralist democracy.

- 29a. The media are important instruments of democratic accountability.
 29b. The media encourage both bland and extreme populism.

Media politics are populist politics (Franklin 1994: 5). The media encourage lowest common denominator politics full of manipulation, over-simplification, and short-term mass marketing. They discourage politicians from speaking painful or complex truths (Entman 1989: 126). The logic of this situation forces what Entman calls demagoguery, but what might more accurately be called modern populism. This media-induced populism has two forms - the mainstream or bland and the unconventional or extreme.

1. Conventional populism and the mass media

Mainstream or conventional media politics drift towards safe ground - what Ranney (1983: 103) calls 'nice guys' politics. Looks, dress, manner, count heavily, and policy statements will be of the motherhood and apple pie kind. Conventional populists play 'percentage game', committing themselves to little and seizing on opposition mistakes. Policy packaging will become more important and politicians will raise the interview to the high art of evading questions, throwing them back, or answering questions which they wanted put to them. Valence politics and valence elections will become the norm. Politics will become more shallow and more superficial. Populism of a bland sort will rule the day.

2. Unconventional populism and the mass media

The modern media may push conventional politics towards the centre-ground of populism, but it also cries out for the drama, personality, and outrage which can capture attention. Therefore, the mass media help to create bland populism and then, for the sake of news drama, help to create extreme populism as well. The more the media are faced with Reagan, Major, or Clinton, the more they will also turn the spotlight on the Le

Pens, the bland populism of Berlusconi, and Perots who trade on their difference, their flamboyance, and their outspokenness. They use the media to maximise their visibility, and they exploit their unconventionality to get into the spotlight. They are the analogues of the Benetton advertising campaign which deliberately created controversy by bucking the advertising fashion for glossy niceness.

Because of their demand for political corruption, scandal, incompetence, and drama, the media will also destroy the rogues and outsiders of politics (on the rise and fall of Perot see Zaller and Hunt 1994; 1995). Because they are unconventional, the extreme populists are likely to have skeletons in their cupboards, and the media will not rest until they expose them. They will build up the extreme populists for their news value, and then help to destroy them for its news value.

In western politics conventional populism will triumph. But this does not mean that unconventional populism is ineffectual. On the contrary, unconventional populists may shift the agenda and introduce new ideas which will be taken up in a more acceptable form by conventional politicians. In politics, the moderates usually disown the extremists, but keep a close watch on them to see what they can steal.

30a. TV helps political integration and cohesion.

30b. TV isolates and erodes social capital.

In a fragmented and changing society, some argue, the mass media represent important forces of social integration, unity, and stability. There is a softer and a harder version of this argument. The softer versions claim that the modern media serve as a focus for national feelings and aspirations (see, for example, Hallin and Gitlin 1993). In Germany the term 'integrational broadcasting' has been applied (Humphreys 1994: 328), and in Britain Lord Reith consciously used the BBC as "the integrator of democracy" with the power of "making the nation one man" (Cardiff and Scannell 1987: 157-9). It could be argued that TV programmes about national events, ceremonies, and celebrations create social solidarity in the same way as ritual does in primitive societies. Had Durkheim known about TV, would he have drawn a less clear distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity?

The stronger version of the argument claims that the mass media are a crucial integrating force without which rapidly changing modern society would become even more individualistic, isolated, and anomic. (see, for example, Williams 1974: 21). Sartori (1989: 43) claims that "television homogenises" (see also Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 100). Media dependency theory (DeFleur and Rokeach 1989) argues the power of the mass media may be increased during periods of social, economic, and political

change and their capacity to integrate and unify society correspondingly increased. According to this argument, the media do not merely provide a convenient focus for integrating national rituals and ceremonies, but they are crucial socialising agents which help bind political systems together. The claim is not that the political system would disintegrate without the mass media, but that post-modern politics would be even less integrated and stable without the media.

The opposite argument claims that the modern media fragment society, isolate individuals, and represent forces for political disintegration. Once again there is a soft and a hard version. The soft case is that the modern media are no longer for the mass, but on the contrary custom-made for small groups with lifestyles of their own. There is no longer a powerful mass media which integrates and unifies society, but an expanding array of specialised media which fragment and differentiate it by providing greater variety.

The harder and more convincing version of the argument suggests that the effects of long hours of TV watching are pernicious. Heavy TV viewing is said to have done more than anything else to erode the social capital of the USA, to make it harder, not easier to govern and to organize a coherent society, and to undermine the cooperative, trustful, and democratic ethos of the nation (Putnam 1995b: 664-83). Two possibilities might help reconcile propositions 20a and 20b. First, in its earlier years TV may have helped to integrate and homogenise. There were fewer channels, and larger audiences watched the same programmes, which were softer and less violent and alienating in content. The pernicious effects of TV may have taken effect later on when there was more diversity of programming, many more hours of broadcasting, and (possibly) more sex, crime, violence, and horror. Second, public service and market-model television have rather different contents and may have rather different effects. Dimock and Popkin (1995) suggest that American TV, which is mainly commercial, is less informative than its counter-parts in some European countries, which have retained public service television - Germany in particular. Because of the poor quality of much American TV, Americans are less well informed about international politics than west Europeans. This suggests that media effects may be dependent upon the differences between public service and commercial TV news, and hence a comparison of the impact of TV on social capital in some west European countries and the USA would be interesting.

A third factor may help to modify the videomalaise hypothesis put forward by Robinson and later by Putnam in his discussion of social capital. Research in Germany conducted by Noelle-Neuman in the mid-1960s and by Holtz-Bacha (1990) twenty years later suggests an interaction effect between TV and newspapers, as follows:

'Those high on TV and newspaper information were low on alienation, while those low on TV and newspaper information were high on alienation. Conversely, those high on newspaper and TV entertainment were also high on alienation...it appears that high newspaper exposure to information diminishes alienation, whereas high TV exposure to entertainment programmes increases alienation. Once again, as in the American case, the effect is strongest for the low education groups.' (Kaase 1993: 33)

If we follow the logic of these findings, there seems to be an interaction between the combination of the media used (print or TV) and the education of the user. There may also be a difference between public service and commercial TV, and/or the countries in which one or the other dominates the TV system (Kaase 1993: 36-9; Dimock and Popkin 1995).

GLOBALIZATION OF INFORMATION

The spread of satellite and cable technology is said to have caused a redefinition of time and space (Ferguson 1990) and a global media culture, global fashions and global trends which supersede national and linguistic differences (McQuail 1992: 304; Ritzer 1995). Will it also lead to a global news system and eventually to global politics?

- 31a. Global TV news will soon replace local TV news and newspapers.
 31b. Local TV news and newspapers will remain the most important sources of news.

On the face of it pictures and newsreel footage are much more dramatic and informative than acres of print in a quality newspaper. TV news is also much more adaptable than newspapers. It can be cut, changed, and updated at short notice, and has no cumbersome print or distribution problems. No wonder TV news is the main source of information for many citizens in the modern world.

There is a lot to be said against this view. What people see is heavily influenced, in some cases, by what they are told they see, and pictures only tell a thousand words if they are explained by a few of them. With different explanations, the same picture can quite easily tell a different thousand word story (Schudson 1995: 114). As Hallin (1986;

131) puts it: "it seems a reasonable hypothesis that most of the time the audience is seeing what it is told it is seeing".

Second, politics are an enormously subtle and complex business which requires words. Pictures and images are suitable for describing things; words are better at analysing them. Pictures and images are good at telling us what happened, less good at telling us about how, why, with what motive. For answers to these questions, we have to turn to words, and to many of them, to find out how events are to be analysed and understood. Words are essential to understanding. Pictures simply will not do.

Consequently, newspapers cannot be replaced by TV news. This helps to explain why, in spite of many predictions, newspaper circulation in the west has stayed relatively high, and why newspapers, rather than TV, cling stubbornly to their position as the more important source of news and opinion among the educated and political interested (Kleinnijenhuis 1991; Pfetsch and Voltmer 1995; Dimock and Popkin 1995)

The result is that as long as newspapers continue to be an important source of news and opinion, especially for the political classes, politics will continue to be presented and interpreted along national and linguistic lines, rather than international or global ones. Each country or language group will continue to have its own particular version of global news and its own interpretation of politics, including international politics. The late twentieth century has its global car, global fashion, global sport, global food and drink, and global music, but it does not seem to be heading for a global news system.

The importance of national papers as an in-depth source of political news and comment has further ramifications. Within nations, the quality press often provides the headlines and agendas which are picked up by TV news. There is a sort of two-step flow of communication in which the press and wire services tell the news networks what is important (Ranney 1983: 22).

Paradoxically perhaps, newspapers may be more central to the construction of foreign than domestic news because reporters in one country rely heavily upon foreign papers for their news about another country. This is because of time differences, because of the need for in-depth analysis, because the papers from other parts of the globe wait conveniently and remain to be referred to again. In sum, news about foreign countries may often be strongly influenced by their own national news media and especially by national newspapers. As a result, the news in one country about another may reproduce the bias of that country's media, especially its papers. Far from a global news we may have a system which reproduces local news around the globe.

- 32a. International news sources, especially cable and satellite TV, will soon replace national and local TV news and newspapers.
- 32b. National and local news sources, including newspapers, will remain dominant for a long time.

Global or borderless TV, it is often stated, is the shape of the near future. It will be broadcast by a small number of multi-media, multi-national news sources. For example, CNN International is now available to over 65 million people in more than 200 countries. Besides CNNI there is BBC/WTV, Star-TV, MBC, and B SkyB, and all are expanding fast. According to Gurevitch and Blumler (1990b: 310, but see also p. 312), "the global diffusion of political information has rendered thoroughly porous the boundaries of national communications systems".

There is a sense in which we already have a global news system, but a probably more important sense in which we do not. We do live in a borderless world in that news about important events is distributed round the globe with increasing ease and speed. We do not yet live in a borderless world in the sense that most people still get world news through local channels presented by local sources with a local interpretation.

There are several reasons for this. First, as already noted, local or national newspapers continue to be an important source of news picked up for distribution around the globe. Second, world news is most usually received by audiences through local sources, that is, national, regional, linguistic, or culturally specific TV channels or newspapers. These tend to give their own interpretation to the world news. As Gurevitch and Blumler (1990b: 313) write, "television correspondents tend to couch the coverage of 'foreign' events in frames that will be recognizable and relevant to their home audiences but that may not be meaningful to audiences of other societies and of different cultures".

Third, and most important, the global news system is still partial and rudimentary over the world. The great majority of people tune into local or national news channels. Parker (1994; 1995) presents a great deal of evidence to this effect which cannot be summarised here. His argument is that the wealthy western nations will continue to be exposed to a modest quantity of global political media and affected by them in a modest way, but the rest of the world will be by-passed by most forms of global news media, and perhaps by many forms of electronic media altogether. The majority of the world's population does not own a phone, never mind a TV set, even less one tuned into satellite or cable.

Not only has national TV maintained its position, but the slow progress of satellite news programmes outside a very few countries (mainly the US, UK, and Germany) has prompted companies to start broadcasting multi-lingual news channels. This is a large

step back from global TV news and a major reinforcement of national - or at least linguistic - divisions. There are currently two Hindi-language satellite channels for India, and in the near future satellite broadcasting in Thai, Korean, Malaysian, and Chinese are planned. CNNI intends to broadcast in Spanish to Latin America, in Japanese to Japan, and in French to France and French West Africa. In Europe the national and terrestrial channels still dominate the TV market. Although there are over 100 satellite channels which broadcast to Europe these are received by less than 6% of total TV households. In France there is a combined cable/satellite penetration of 6% of households, in Spain 9%, Italy less than 1%, and in Japan less than 15% (Parker 1994: 17).

The major public or commercial networks across Europe have still retained a large (though smaller and still declining) share of TV audiences in the face of competition (see Humphreys 1994: 271-3; Negrine 1989; Franklin 1994). In many western countries the public sector networks retain large audiences and broadcast according to the older ethos which mixes quality entertainment, news and current affairs, and educational programmes (for Germany see Humphreys 1994: 275).

Consequently there is no clear prospect in the near or medium term of a global news media. Local, national, and linguistic media of both electronic and print types are likely to dominate the news market for some time to come. News from around the globe will continue to be dispatched and received with increased speed and facility, but this will be processed by local sources, explained according to local understandings, in local languages, for predominantly local readers, viewers, and listeners. As Parker (1995: 86-7) writes: "No doubt a hundred years from now more people will be watching more channels that include more sports, entertainment, and news than ever before - including international shows and information seldom seen before by many viewers. But just as likely those same people will still live in nations, with borders, and governments, and nationally rooted broadcast systems that provide most of what they see."

CONCLUSIONS

In media impact research it is easy to claim causal relations and notoriously difficult to establish them. However, after reviewing the evidence it seems that some of the main claims of the media impact literature seem not to be supported by solid evidence: The modern media have not caused election turnout to decline in most western countries, have not caused a general personalisation or presidentialisation of elections, have not generally shortened the lives of either leading politicians or governments, have not caused a general or widespread loss of faith in democracy as the principle of government, have not caused rates of political participation or discussion to decline, have not contributed to ungovernability, have not demobilised the population, and have not helped to create hyper-democracy. Perhaps most significantly, the widely discussed and documented videomalaise hypothesis that TV in particular, and the modern media in general, tend to create distrust, cynicism, pessimism, alienation fear, and political passivity or withdrawal does not square well with widespread findings about increased levels of cognitive mobilisation, political discussion, participation, and patterns of contacting political representatives. The videomalaise hypothesis may be supported by evidence about growing alienation, lack of trust, and political support, but the pattern seems to vary according to time and place (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995), and seems not to be due to a generalised media effect.

There is also little evidence to suggest that the media have helped to raise general levels of political knowledge, to broaden time or international perspectives on politics, to expand the political arena to include previously excluded political groups and interests, to improve the quality of political discussion, to reduce leadership dependency within parties or governments, to keep politicians honest, to hold them accountable, to open up government to public scrutiny, or to legitimise parliaments.

Indeed, there is little empirical support for many of the claims about media effects on modern politics both good and bad. Where we have a hard indicator of media impact (such as election turnout, leadership longevity, or the presidentialisation of elections), it is difficult to come up with supporting evidence. This does not mean the media have no effect. They have not caused turnout to decline, but they may create powerful but intangible feelings which are difficult to observe and hard to measure - disillusionment, cyni-

cism, world weariness, an unconscious feeling of perplexity. Perhaps the media do this, but if so the onus is on those who make these claims to come up with more than speculation. And if the media do cause these intangibles, why does it not show in figures for such things as turnout and political longevity?

We cannot draw the conclusion that the media have no impact, however. There is good evidence to support fast-forward, sound-bite, photo-opportunity claims. There is evidence to suggest that the media systematically effect the nature of the news and of politics itself - bad news, negative news, balanced but not objective news, trivialised and personalised news, and exclusive rather than inclusive news. In this sense, there is not much evidence to suggest that the media help to improve the quality or depth of public political discussion. On the contrary, they seem to reinforce the social pressures which encourage superficial and issue-less politics, concerned more with packaging and appearance than with substance or policy.

The strongest media effects on politics seem to be in the early links in the chain of causality - those consisting of the framing and the substance of news, over which news rooms and editors have immediate control - rather than the last links which immediately precede behavioural or system level consequences - voting turnout, presidential elections, hyper-pluralism, or global politics. Figure 1 lays out one possible chain of causality, going from the more specific to the more general. The review of the literature suggests that the closer research gets to the top of the figure the more likely it is to produce evidence of media effects. These are also the areas which are most amenable to experimental research, which is more likely to show media impacts than survey work which operates in complex real-world circumstances. The closer one gets to the bottom, the harder it is to find evidence of media effects, because between the top and the bottom an array of intervening and contextual variables are likely to have their effect - institutions, economics, other powerful variables like history, culture, tradition and state regulations.

Reviewing the findings leaves the impression that there may well be a difference between the United States and many parts of western Europe. Although it is only one study using one particular source of data, the Dimock and Popkin (1995) comparison of levels of political information suggests systematic variation between America and Europe. But in addition to this, there is not, so far, a great deal of data suggesting a long term decline of social capital in west Europe, although to be sure there is also rather little research of any kind on the matter. Nevertheless, Putnam (1995a; 1995b) presents a powerful argument and much evidence of this in the USA and links it to the spread of TV.

This, however, is simply to raise the question of what distinguishes the USA and Europe. Putnam identifies TV as the major cause of social capital erosion in the USA, and Dimock and Popkin also see commercial TV as a major cause of low information levels on international affairs. In this respect, west European countries with a surviving public service TV (and better newspapers - the two are likely to be linked) are better served. If commercial TV is a primary suspect for social capital erosion and low levels of political information, then one might speculate about the current state of Italian politics and the fact that it has opted, more than other west European states, for a largely commercial TV system.

One reason why it is so difficult to find clear traces of a media impact is that almost any statement about the media is likely to be wrong. There is no such thing as the media, because there are different kinds, typically used by different kinds of people, with different impacts. The well educated are more likely to use quality newspapers, and to watch public-stations TV news and current affairs. In turn the media may inform them, deepen and broaden their understanding, and mobilise them politically. The less well educated are more likely to read tabloid papers, if they read a newspaper at all, and watch entertainment, not political TV. They are likely to be poorly informed, lack understanding, feel alienated, and become passive and demobilised. If so, it is still a puzzle that Americans, the people in the west with the highest average level of formal education, are poorly informed and have such poor TV news and current affairs programmes (McNeil-Lehrer, 20/20, Sixty Minutes excepted). One is driven back to the possibility that the explanation lies not in the characteristics of its individual inhabitants, but in the media system, especially TV, which feeds them a largely junk diet.

Figure 1

MEDIA EFFECTSMediaNews Substance and Framing

Bad news. Negative news. Fast forward. Balanced news. Trivialised news. Personalised news. Exclusive news. Narrow news.

Information, Understanding, and Attitudes

Poor public information. Poor public understanding. Poor quality of political debate. Cognitive immobilisation. Videomalaise - cynicism, fear, alienation, distrust, disenchantment.

Behaviour

Political disengagement. Social withdrawal. Passivity. Aggression.

Elections

Poor campaign debate. Declining turnout. Presidential elections.

Elites

Short shelf life. Leadership dependence. Political evasion and blandness.

Governments

Public scrutiny. Legitimation of parliaments. Ungovernability.

Democracy

Democratic disillusionment. Hyper-pluralism. Lack of accountability. Erosion of social capital.

Global TV

Global news. Global politics.

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