

Media and Democracy

Lecture 2

'Fourth Estate' Media and Democracy

- Democracy and liberalism → to be political means that everything must be decided through words and persuasion, not force (**Arendt 1958**)
- A conflict still exists → elites versus plebs
- Liberal democratic state elements
 - o Collective rule and decision making (democracy)
 - o Individualism and rights (liberal principles)
 - Freedom from interference
 - o Mechanisms (formal/informal)
- The 'Four Estates'
 - o Three estates (core institutions) → church, temporal (those who work the land), commoners
 - o Principle-agent problem of democracy → distance between the people and the representatives
 - Conflict between the two, need to regulate the agent's actions
 - o Solution → media as a necessary part of the democratic system → the fourth estate
- Media functionalism
 - o Defining functionalism → an attempt to construct a way of comparing both the structure and operations of all social systems by finding necessary elements common to any stable social system. Much of its origin depends on analogies with biological systems."
 - **Robertson 2002**
 - o 'Within our large and dispersed liberal democratic society, the media is supposed to play an important communications role:
 - Facilitating public discourse
 - Informing the public
 - Representing the public
 - Acting as a watchdog of the power structures that effect public's wellbeing' (**Diceman 2000**)
 - o **Functions of the democratic media system**
 - Relationship with the public (audience)
 - Access to the decision makers (elites)
 - Autonomy from government (freedom)
 - Solution
 - Commercial media system
 - Profit → autonomous source of resources
 - Relationship with audience → political legitimacy
 - Diversity and competition → market sensing as regulation
- 'Market sensing'
 - o 'Who watches the watchers?'
 - o Commercial media provides for:
 - The financing of news production
 - The regulation of news production and innovation in news production
 - 'Telegraphing' the popular will to elites → tells about important issues to the public
 - Ratings/sales/circulation figures
- Change and media
 - o New markets, new genres
 - o Drivers

- Lowering production costs
- Changing markets → middle class, mass literacy
- Results
 - Invention of the headline
 - New types of journalists/reporting

Media as Democracy

- Political legitimacy
 - Definition → 'the situation in which the rulers as well as the ruled share the conviction that the existing division of power and, as a consequence of this, the rules and regulations issued by the government are right' (**Claessen 1988**)
 - A resource / political instrument (**Hood 1983**)
- The public sphere, **Habermas**
 - Deliberative formation of opinion and legitimacy in the political arena
 - Defining the public sphere → 'denotes a *contested* participatory site in which actors with overlapping identities as legal subjects, citizens, economic actors and family and community members, form a public body and engage in negotiations and contestations over political and social life' (**Somers 1993**)
- Powerful metaphors
 - Public sphere is democracy par excellence
 - Liberal → rights protection
 - Open → participative
 - The nation → 'public interest'
 - **Justice Holmes**: the 'marketplace of ideas'
 - That in the kind of democratic system we live in, everyone should have the right to express their opinion even if in the minority and through discursive action decisions can be made
 - 'The best test of truth is the power of the thought to get itself accepted in the competition of the market'
- Public opinion
 - Public opinion as an aggregate viewpoint → 'combined personal opinions of adults toward issues of relevance to the government' (**Erikson 1991**)
 - **Sunstein (1993)** → cannot rely on snapshots of opinion, requires discussion and debate, reasons offered for or against alternatives
 - Public opinion as a mediated process (**Hall 1978**)
 - Crystallisation of pre-existing private views of citizens and their uptake by media

A Sceptical View

- Insider dopesters → 'self-serving 'watchdog' fantasies some political journalists hold about themselves: as a fearless posse of inside dopesters, guardians of truth and justice, infallible spin-doctors and duty bound to intervene in the political process against politicians and spin doctors on behalf of an easily hoodwinked public' (**Atkinson 2005**)
- Enemies or mutual dependencies
 - Journalist-source relations → regular, close or personal
 - Both can be seen as elites
- Models of journalism
 - **Sabato (1991)**
 - Partisan journalism (UK, Italy)
 - Insider journalism (USA pre-1960s)
 - Journalists as loyal opposition/watchdogs, lapdogs (system maintainers)
 - Outsider journalism
 - Fourth estate journalism, adversarial watchdogs
- Implications
 - 'Churnalism'

- Sameness → today's media hunts in a pack (Tony Blair)
- Increased use of standardised practice
- Institutional frames → Tuchman (2002) → hard and soft news
- Van Zoonen (2005) → political narratives
 - Quest, conspiracy, bureaucracy, soap

Readings

Viewpoint: Media in Democracy – Sawant 2001

- Freedom of speech is a human right
- Media has developed into a prominent institution of society
- Decisions in democracy must be made with debate and discussion → participatory governance
 - Active participation and accountability requisites of a democratic regime
- Functions of the media
 - Inform and educate the people
 - Channel between people and authorities
 - Watchdog
 - Day to day parliament for the people
- Preconditions of a free press
 - Free press → free from overt/covert influences of the government, business, individuals, etc.
 - No monopoly → different sources of information are owned and managed by different interest groups in society
 - Respectability depends on credibility (depends on accuracy, fairness, impartiality, objectivity, range and depth of coverage, sensitivity and promptitude in reporting the matters of public interests)
- Monopoly of media sources is dangerous to democracy

The Future of Journalism – McNamara 2014

- Journalism is in the midst of an epochal transformation, as momentous probably as the invention of the telegraph or television
- Digital revolution
- Curran 2010 four discourses about journalism
 - 'Continuity'
 - 'Crisis of journalism'
 - 'A cleansing purgative'
 - 'Renaissance'
- Journalism needs to change
 - Severe and sustained loss of audiences (particularly newspapers)
 - Loss of media advertising and loss of journalists (due to decreased revenue), loss of time
 - Loss of 'gatekeepers' (disintermediation)
 - Rise of citizen journalists → inaccurate and misleading information
- Citizen journalism versus media
 - Citizen journalism → content submitted by citizens to professional media organisations
 - Citizen media → range of media directly produced and distributed by non-journalists
- Rise of public relations sourced news → though not causally linked with fewer journalists
- Loss of truth, objectivity and source credibility
 - Media early identified as the fourth estate → apart from the judiciary, parliament and church
- Postmodern views of journalism
 - For many, journalism is anchored in modernism → singular truth to be discovered
 - Out of step with current postmodernist views

- Postmodern thinkers present truth as relative, recognise the multiplicities of perspectives
- Future trajectories of journalism
 - Multimedia journalism → using technology for new ways of storytelling
 - Analysis and sense making → higher value content on specific topics
 - Digital journalism → online journalism
 - Postmodern journalism → engaging audiences and facilitating conversations, multitude of perspectives, truth as relative, foster discussion
 - Hyperlocal journalism → growing local and micro-local conversations
 - Hybrid model of emergent journalism → combination of ideas, initiatives and approaches
 - Hyper-reality back to reality