

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:
HOW MEDIA PLURALISM PROTECTS
DEMOCRACY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

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Accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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ABSTRACT

Ownership of mass media companies in recent years has grown increasingly concentrated in many areas of the world. Consolidation of ownership has raised fears among some industry observers that declining media pluralism could affect the political functions performed by the mass media for democratic societies. This study uses longitudinal analysis to assess claims that declining media pluralism impairs democratic institutions, the observance of human rights, and the control of corruption.

I first explain the economic logic behind steady consolidation of media ownership, and the rationale for concerns about declining media pluralism. I then examine the European media market, which confronts both issues of media ownership consolidation and commercialization of former state broadcasting systems. In Chapter Five, I use a dataset with information from former communist countries to analyze the effects of media pluralism on observance of human rights and corruption. Using logistic and ordinary least square regression, I find mixed results. Lower levels of media pluralism are associated with poorer records with some human rights, but not with all of the human rights surveyed. Also, lower levels of media pluralism do not show statistically significant effects on levels of corruption.

I follow this quantitative analysis with a case study that examines one of the countries included in the dataset. I draw upon my first hand experience in Azerbaijan as a journalism instructor to examine how the media and the political environment in that country have changed since its independence 20 years ago. Media pluralism has become increasingly constricted in Azerbaijan, as levels of corruption and human rights abuses have increased.

Finally, I revisit the media environment within the United States, presenting data on the current state of media ownership. I discuss technological trends in media

leading to growing partisanship of both the news media and the media audience. I conclude overall that effects of lower levels of media pluralism are deleterious and conditional on the existing institutions of a country. Where democratic institutions are stronger, the effects of lower media pluralism can be mitigated, but when democratic institutions are weak, the effects of lower media pluralism can be severe.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I remember very well the afternoon nearly 25 years ago when I was summoned to the office of my editor. My employer, an established Boston newsweekly, had just published a long article of mine in which I explored how a local bank was financing a rash of condominium conversions. These conversions displaced hundreds of people and were frequently illegal. In the overheated Boston real estate market, they were also highly profitable.

I was proud of my work, but I soon learned that my publisher had a real problem with the article. The problem was not because of any argument with the facts. The problem was that the publisher had a special relationship with the bank named in my article. I kept my job, but for the remaining months I worked at that newspaper I was prohibited from even mentioning Capitol Bank and Trust Co. of Boston.

With his overt censorship, my publisher made me more keenly aware of the conflict between the theory and practice of journalism. In theory, the aim is to provide interesting, unbiased, and accurate information to readers. In practice, owners of media outlets have distinct preferences, and these preferences often influence the news coverage provided to the public. So, in some sense, this dissertation is a fruit of the seed that was planted on that rather ignominious afternoon in Boston.

Of course, I must acknowledge more proximate and conventional assistance I have received during the course of my doctoral studies and dissertation research. For example, most proximate has been the help of my friend Ryan Ziegler, who provided much appreciated last minute proofreading assistance. Also, Dr. Gayane Torosyan has read much of this work and has offered her advice and encouragement along the way.

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I also would like to thank the International Center For Journalists, which awarded me a Knight International Journalism Fellowship in 2007. This fellowship allowed me to return to Russia, where I had worked some years earlier, and to live and work in Azerbaijan for the first time. The fellowship was invaluable helping me develop relationships with a wide range of journalists in the two countries. I worked with very young and wildly idealistic journalists and I worked with cynical journalists who were highly skilled at practicing Soviet-style journalism. I learned from them all.

Finally, I would like to thank my family for their support over the years. And I would like to thank my dear wife, Dianne Hodack, for her essential advice, patience, and love.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Media Pluralism and its Role in Democracy

When the Beacon Press published the first edition of *The Media Monopoly* by Ben H. Bagdikian in 1983, the largest merger to date had been the \$340-million purchase of Combined Communications by the Gannett Company in 1979. In the ensuing years, the dimensions of the deals and the conglomerates formed by them continued to grow. Scarcely 13 years after the publication of that first edition of Bagdikian's book, Disney combined with ABC/Cap Cities in a \$19-billion merger, a more than a 24-fold increase over the Gannett deal, accounting for inflation over the period. The merger activity accelerated over the next 10 years and the global media environment that the public now faces would have been unrecognizable to the journalism professionals of 1983.

The situation has become particularly grim for sectors of the media in the United States, where a combination of poor strategic decisions, technological advancements, and a severe financial crisis left newspapers in particular in an extremely tenuous position. As the first quarter of 2009 concluded in the United States, the *Chicago Tribune*, the *Chicago Sun Times*, the *Minneapolis Star-Tribune* and the owners of the *Philadelphia Daily News* and the *Philadelphia Inquirer* were in bankruptcy court. *The New York Times* was threatening to close the *Boston Globe*, which it had purchased in 1993. *The Rocky Mountain News* in Denver closed in February. On March 29, the *Detroit Free Press* and *Detroit News* had reduced home delivery to three days a week. Earlier in the month, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, the oldest newspaper in Washington State, completely eliminated its printed edition,

leaving Seattle, a city of more than 560,000 people, with only one daily newspaper, the Seattle Times.

Problems in the media are not confined to United States newspapers, of course. After years of statements of concern about the declining levels of media pluralism, the European Parliament has eyed developments in the United States with alarm. In the spring of 2009, the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education called for urgent measures to be taken to safeguard the diversity that remained on the media landscape. While the European Union enshrines media pluralism within its Charter of Fundamental Rights, actually safeguarding pluralism is considerably more complicated because of disagreements over philosophical as well as methodological approaches. As a recent report from the Commission of the European Communities states: "The failed attempt to launch a harmonization directive on pluralism and media ownership in the mid-1990s demonstrated the political sensitivities surrounding the subject and the need for a balanced and realistic approach which would take into account the specificities of media markets in the various Member States. The successive enlargements of the European Union, in which Central and Eastern European countries, characterized by relatively young media markets and intense media reforms, have joined, has further diminished the feasibility and appropriateness of a uniform approach to media pluralism" (Leuven 2007, 1-2).

Likewise, regulatory and elected officials in the United States have seemed flummoxed by the speed at which the media environment changed in the course of a couple decades, aware that the changes could affect democratic politics but uncertain of how these changes might be felt and quite unsure of what remedies might be needed. Indeed, although there is consensus among many observers that the media

system is in crisis, far less agreement exists on the most fundamental tenet of Bagdikian's work - that the consolidation of the news media diminishes the pluralism of the media system and so presents a threat to democratic government.

In this study, I attempt to assess the impact of media ownership changes on democratic processes, the respect for human rights, and the incidence of corruption. All three of these dependent variables are important, but the bulk of analysis here focuses on democracy because of the assumption that democratic principles can provide effective solutions to problems concerning human rights and corruption. If concentration of media ownership and increasing commercialization of media threaten democratic processes, then the effects of the changes occurring in media systems should be apparent in the political processes of these countries. If the media influence those who consume their content, then this influence should be detectable. This study includes a range of media systems, examining the media of the United States and Europe, as well as the media of the former Soviet Union. Using both quantitative and qualitative analysis, I show the civic, political, and social consequences that follow changes in nations' media ownership patterns. Among the changes in the media described here are overall ownership concentration, decreasing media pluralism, and increasing levels of commercialization within the media system.

At first glance, a study such as this might appear redundant. After all, considerable work has been done to establish the effect of the media on political behavior. Norris (2000), for one, examines the so-called "media malaise" effect of media. Snyder and Strömberg (2004) describe the result of media changes on voters in a natural experiment involving newspaper coverage. Many texts detail the numerous dangers of increasing media ownership consolidation and increasing dominance of the media by commercial interests. Indeed, American critiques of the

corrupting influence of corporate media date back at least to Upton Sinclair's *The Brass Check* (1919). Aside from Bagdikian's groundbreaking work, the canon includes important works such as *Manufacturing Consent* by Herman and Chomsky (1988), all of Robert W. McChesney's numerous incisive books, C. Edwin Baker's tightly argued *Media, Markets, and Democracy* (2002) and *Media Concentration and Democracy* (2007), *Censorship Inc.* (2002) by Lawrence Soley, and *All the News That's Fit to Sell* (2004) by James T. Hamilton, to mention just a few of the numerous books on the subject.

But in contrast to critiques about the current trends in the media, quantitative analysis of the impact of these trends is comparatively rare. Most of the works on the subject offer anecdotal evidence and logical assertions, but do not present their arguments in terms of dependent and independent variables measured quantitatively. A few exceptions exist, but these works too leave room for further research. For example, recently Leeson (2008) considered the effect of media ownership on political opinions, but his work compares a set of media systems at one time. Leeson builds upon the work of Djankov et al. (2003), who also compare private versus public ownership of media systems in a "snapshot" approach. Both these works fall short of a complete analysis of the effects of media changes, however. To determine what is the impact of media ownership changes requires that the process be examined over time. Such an examination is the aim of this study.

Adding the time element to the analysis adds complexity and the task in general is fraught with difficulty. Media ownership details are often opaque, even in economically developed countries, and they change constantly. Sorting out the endogenous and exogenous factors and attributing changes in public knowledge or behavior to these shifts in ownership presents considerable challenges. Furthermore,

there are conceptual arguments about what changes in media ownership is important. Some countries are more concerned about the growth of foreign ownership of their media, and hence track that phenomenon more closely. Others pay more attention to the overall concentration of ownership within the country. There are few yardsticks that measure many countries with a methodologically unified approach.

While up to this point, I have referred generally to terms such as “media pluralism” and “media concentration,” before I proceed further in describing the problem or my approach to it, let me briefly describe some of the key concepts that I intend to discuss. More precisely defining the terms will allow me to better formulate the research questions and the results of this research. Later, I will explore each of these terms and subjects more thoroughly, but a preliminary review of the terminology is needed here.

Even pinning down the primary term here has become increasingly difficult in recent years. The “mass media” encompass films, radio broadcasts, Internet content, newspapers, and books. If we are talking about means of transmitting the information, then we must include even mobile phones, which now are the means by which news is transmitted in regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. For the purpose of this study, I concern myself primarily with the production of news media content. Often the production of the news media content will be linked to the transmission of the information, as when the newspaper company publishes information gathered and prepared by its reporters, but this is not always the case.

One huge factor in any discussion of the media nowadays is the advent of the Internet as a means of communication. The Internet, however, most fundamentally is a “distribution device,” as is sometimes noted (Baker 2007, 117). My focus in general will be on the production of mass media content. The content distributed on Internet

websites can be useful, subversive, innocuous, or pernicious, but the fact is that the audience for most websites is infinitesimally small compared to the total audience. Because the use of links between sites can form an information cascade, theoretically the attention garnered by websites may be even more concentrated than in the world of print. Hamilton confirms this general phenomenon in a study comparing the websites of U.S. newspapers (2004, 197). After all, a million bloggers may indeed be penning wildly subversive material and unloading it across the Internet but the audience for any one blogger is miniscule compared to even a medium-sized daily newspaper.

Concentration of media markets, the primary independent variable in this study, is generally defined as the percentage of a market controlled by the top companies in the field. Measuring concentration can be controversial, and a variety of methods are generally used to assess this variable. The three principal methods for determining levels of concentration are concentration ratios, the Lorenz Curve, and the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index. I will return to these measurement methods in Chapter Seven when I present data on the concentrations in U.S. media markets.

The markets in which media operate become concentrated because the larger firms in these markets have expanded, usually absorbing or eliminating rivals. “Expansion” itself can have multiple definitions. The generally recognized methods of ownership expansion are through horizontal, vertical, and product diversification. Horizontal expansion refers to the phenomenon of one or a few media owners establishing control of a market. In the case of the media, this could be a case where a company or a few companies establish oligopolistic control over a media market. Vertical expansion refers to increasing control at different levels of the supply chain. In the media, this could refer to cases where media companies control production of

content all the way through distribution or retail of media products. Product diversification or ‘lateral expansion’ occurs when a company enters new business areas. A newspaper company may expand into radio broadcasting, or a television company may merge with an Internet company.

Media ownership consolidation is frequently perceived to threaten “diversity,” a term that also has multiple definitions. Some media analysts refer to the difference between “internal diversity” and “external diversity.” The diversity of a media source is internal if a wide range of views or opinions is expressed within the source. A newspaper, for example, that prints a broad selection of viewpoints on its pages could be judged to manifest internal diversity. This is also sometimes referred to as “content diversity.” External diversity refers most often to the actual ownership of the media. If the media are owned by a diverse group of owners, then it may be judged to show external diversity. I am concerned here principally with the issue of external or ownership diversity. In addition, diversity is sometimes characterized as being “reflexive” or “open” (de Bens 2007, 20). Briefly put, reflexive diversity refers to the approach that the media choices offered to an audience will reflect the preferences of that audience. Open diversity refers to the normative intent that a nation’s media ought to represent the range of opinions and viewpoints in a society, giving them roughly equal weight.

“Commercialization” is a term also related to the dynamics of media ownership. When a media outlet becomes privately owned, it is generally perceived to become commercialized, as the outlet begins to carry advertising content to fund media operations. A publicly funded media outlet, however, is sometimes perceived to become commercialized, even when it is still primarily publicly funded because its

content is influenced by the outlet's competition in the media market (Williams 2005, 18).

With those terms roughly defined, let me state roughly the argument behind this study.

- Consolidation of media ownership and increasing concentration of ownership within media markets presents at least three important threats to the functioning of the media in the public interest.
- A decrease in the number of independent media outlets diminishes the number of viewpoints to which the public is exposed in the media. Some observers argue that this is not necessarily the case. After all, most respected newspapers such as the Washington Post and the New York Times make a point of including conservative and liberal commentators. Furthermore, a fundamental tenet of American journalism is its supposed "objectivity." The reality is quite different, as most journalists will testify and as has been documented by dozens of researchers. Among those who have recently published on this subject are Akre (2004), Blatmann (2003), Farsetta and Price (2006), Gilens and Hertzman (2000), Kahn and Kenney (2002), Soley (2002), and Starkman (2002). The FCC itself has recognized that diversity of ownership is essential to safeguard real diversity of viewpoints (FCC 2003).
- As diversity and media pluralism decreases, the conflicts of interest inherent in privately-owned become more serious. If a broadcaster biases news coverage for financial gain, the media audience is deprived of the balanced coverage it expects. The number of media outlets it owns compounds the seriousness of this problem. If the media environment is composed of a diverse group of private owners, there exists the possibility of a media competitor exposing another's conflict of interest. If an oligopolistic media environment is maintained, however, little chance may exist that

an independent assessment of the dominant media outlet's conflict of interest will be made. In extreme cases, the media oligopolists operate in collusion with the government, freeing the central authority from examination or critique by any independent media.

- As real competition between media owners diminishes, the economics of the media market increasingly is marked by oligopolistic or monopolistic characteristics. A fundamental economic truth is that market constraints only bind the monopolist at the extremes. In a monopolistic environment, the law of supply and demand does not function to supply the optimal amount of goods at the price that the market will bear. Instead, the monopolist will provide the quality and quantity of goods that maximizes his profit. This is no less true in the market for media than it is for the market on other commodities. Freed from competitive or government-imposed restraints, providers of media content will maximize their profit, often at the expense of the quality of information or programming provided to the public.

Each of these problems is equally serious, but some present special challenges for a researcher attempting to measure their impact. For example, in media theory, the free press is supposed to serve as a watchdog, a function, hindered by conflicts of interest, among other factors. But can a researcher determine the effect of the watchdog that does not bark? Clearly, one demonstrable effect of an ineffective watchdog is the presence of effective burglars. The recent examples of the U.S. media's failings in this regard are legion, but surely some of the most glaring were the failure of the U.S. media to aggressively question the Bush Administration's assertions about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq and the media's failure to probe Wall Street's increasing reliance on the complex financial instruments that led to global financial crisis in 2008. These failings have had dramatic impacts

for society as a whole, as well as the democratic functioning of that society.

Systematic measurement of these failures, however, presents a problem because we must confront the counterfactual situation. What would the world have looked like if the Bush Administration had been thwarted in its efforts to sell the argument for war to the American public? How would the political environment be changed if voters were not consumed by economic worries in the fall of 2008? Some political scientists purport to measure the counterfactual universe, but I will not attempt that here.

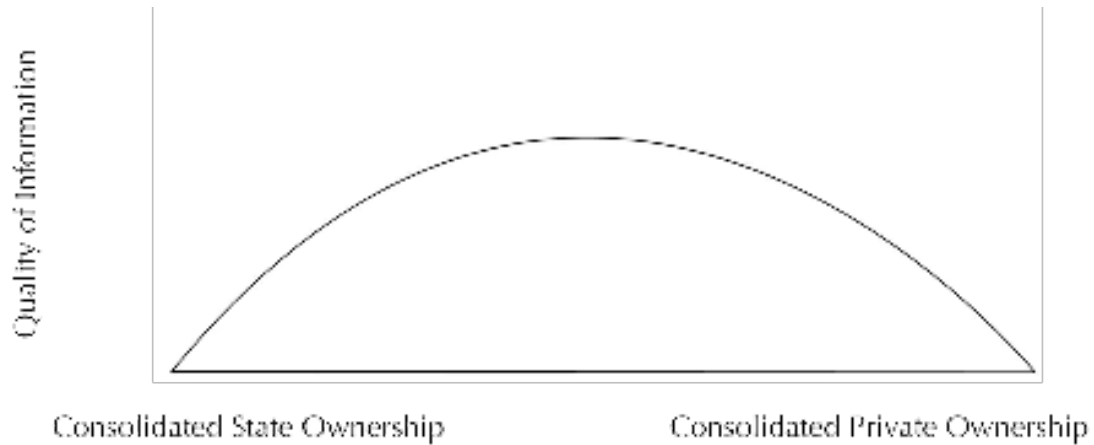
The constriction of public debate caused by the diminished number of media outlet owners also presents significant measurement challenges for quantitative analysis. If we are comparing political debates across polities, how can we differentiate between the effects of a shrinking pool of media owners and the effects of different political systems? In a proportional representation system, for example, the range of parties represented in government is likely to be much wider than in a majoritarian system, in which two parties tend to dominate. Because the politicians seeking power in a proportional representation system will use the media to publicize their agenda, the range of debate is likely to be broader than in a system dominated by two parties. Comparing the levels of media pluralism over time, of course, may provide some clues to the impact of this phenomenon. Of course, a system of proportional representation does not mean that a country is more immune to the phenomenon of media ownership concentration, as the example of right-wing media owner and Italian President Silvio Berlusconi proves (Doyle 2003; Mazzoleni 2004).

Of all the pernicious effects of media ownership consolidation, I believe the one that may be most easily measured in terms of the political behavior of an electorate is the degradation of coverage of public affairs. First, the link between diminished media pluralism and diminished coverage of public affairs can be

established both logically and empirically. Second, the connections between the lower quality coverage of public affairs, public opinion, and government policies can also be established logically and empirically. Lower levels of pluralism in the media also can affect how the well government authorities respect the human rights of the citizenry. If less competition exists within the media, theoretically abuses of human rights are less likely to be publicized and governments can follow repressive policies with impunity. In the study that follows, I will present results of tests showing the relationships between media pluralism, corruption, and human rights abuses.

It is important to note that the provision of information plays an important role in government policies and public opinion whether we are discussing democracies or authoritarian governments. The media are important tools, after all, for autocrats or plutocrats. The focus of this work will be primarily on democracies because it is in these cases that the change in media ownership presents the most current danger, but I will also include a chapter that details the media history of an authoritarian country that briefly appeared to move in a democratic direction, only to reverse course firmly in recent years.

I should also note at this point that the relationship between competition and the quality of information is not strictly linear. Rather, the relationship can be better described as curvilinear. At one extreme, total state control of the media means that only information favorable to the government will be allowed. At the other extreme, complete commercialization of the media means that content will be provided only the basis of its profitability. In such a market, media content will provide little if any of the information needed for democratic governance. If we use the Y-axis to measure the overall quality of information and the X-axis to measure types of ownership, we might sketch the relationship with the following diagram:



At one extreme, concentrated state ownership of the media will exclude all information that can be used by opponents of the regime. The quality of the information will be extremely biased because no countervailing views will be expressed. The content of the media will be completely propagandistic. Because the control of the media will be complete, the public's ability to independently assess the degree of bias will be severely impaired.

At the other end of the spectrum, concentrated commercial control of the media will mean that media companies will only provide the most profitable information and monopolists will be reap maximum profits while providing minimal quality. Some competition between media owners may occur, but absent any government intrusion, this competition will not necessarily generate accurate information on public affairs. Rather, the competition may be between outlets offering low-cost content.

In this study, I discuss environments that range across the spectrum described above. At one end of the spectrum, the government of Azerbaijan tightly limits the level of media pluralism within the country through a variety of methods. It subsidizes media outlets that are friendly to the government and represses media outlets that are deemed hostile. At the other end, the profit motive dominates in the United States, where a growing portion of the media market is dominated by a

shrinking number of owners. In between, a mix of media systems function in Europe. In general, Europe provides examples of cases where government plays a role somewhere between the two extremes, offering some subsidies to news media while allowing market forces to operate.

As discussed later in this study, production of news is comparatively costly, and absent any government action, the most rational approach for media owners will be to provide the most profitable content. Education of the public by the news media can be considered a positive externality, as discussed later in this study. Externalities by definition not priced into the market transaction and absent any subsidization, the market will provide an insufficient level of an externality. In an environment of complete commercial ownership, the quantity and quality of information on public affairs will fall far short of the optimum for a democratic society. As real competition between the media diminishes, this problem will become exacerbated.

The optimum point of government involvement in the news media is a matter of judgment, but historically many governments have played an important role in the operations of the mass media. In the United States, for example, the government played a vital role in the development of the telegraph system, used to transmit information across the young republic. From its inception, the U.S. postal system provided subsidies to magazines, which provided news and comment for readers. The FCC used to seriously assess the content of broadcasters. These broadcast companies originally were granted licenses with understanding that they served the public interest while profits for themselves.

When the government does provide a well-funded and reputable news source itself, the market as a whole is affected by the competition. Consider, for example, the situation in the United Kingdom, where news organizations for generations have

competed against the BBC, the largest broadcast news gathering operation in the world. This well-funded news organization provides a standard against which other news organizations must compete. A certain floor is set in the news coverage that is provided to the public. Compare that competitive environment to the United States, where the National Public Radio and the Public Broadcasting System claim a small fraction of the audience claimed by their commercial media outlets.

These issues are complex, so I will begin this study with a review of media ownership consolidation, explaining the driving forces behind this phenomenon. The media business is not like most other businesses because of the nature of its product. For economic reasons alone, the very nature of the media business encourages increasing consolidation within the industry. I will discuss the logic of this phenomenon and the consequences it has for democratic societies.

From there, I will discuss the connection between media content and political behavior. At one time, political scientists in the United States were dismissive of claims that the media play a political role or even had political effects. In recent decades, however, this position has been reassessed, and now there is increasing recognition that the media have an impact on politicians, political processes, and the electorate. I will review some of the relevant recent literature in this field, highlighting some of the effects that are most serious for democratic politics.

One focus in this study will be on the media systems of Europe, which presents an interesting puzzle for a researcher. The continent presents a diverse set of media systems, a recent history that is marked by dramatic political changes, and a general commitment to democratic processes. In the third chapter I will describe the recent media history of Europe, the current forces that are affecting the landscape of media ownership, and the consequences of these changes in the media system on the

politics of Europe. The continent in the future could lend itself to fruitful comparative analysis, but the very diversity of the subject matter presents a challenge for the scholar who would subject media of Europe to quantitative analysis. At this point, the rubric for a quantitative comparison of the ownership concentration in the media systems is incomplete, but progress is being made in this regard. I review some of the current trends in research in this area and the issues confronting researchers.

In the fifth chapter, I present the results of a quantitative analysis of the effect of media pluralism on government respect for human rights and on corruption levels. The data on media pluralism is gathered from an international organization dedicated to research and education. The dataset describes the levels of pluralism in a set of former communist countries in Europe and Asia. Despite the fact that the countries surveyed in the set experienced authoritarian governance in the comparatively recent past, the countries show significant variation in their current governance. Examining their levels of pluralism, the human rights situations in the countries, and their levels of corruption, I find support for the hypothesis that diminished media pluralism reduces respect for human rights. The connection between diminished pluralism and higher levels of corruption is much more problematic.

Chapter Six is devoted to a case study of Azerbaijan, a former Soviet Republic and a country that at one point appeared to be moving toward democracy. Since Azerbaijan achieved independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, the political pendulum has swung from authoritarianism to slight democratization to increasing authoritarianism. A war preceding its independence remains unsettled, further complicating efforts to democratize the country. War in nearby Afghanistan has increased the strategic importance of the country, dampening any pressure from the United States to improve human rights within the country. The country's rich

endowment with petroleum and gas reserves also tends to make the current ruling regime more impervious to outside pressures. The political shift to authoritarianism have been reflected in the ever decreasing pluralism of the news media, as some level of independent journalism was permitted during the slight liberalization that followed independence, only to be effectively quashed in recent years. I spent a year within the country, working with a wide variety of journalists and political activists. This chapter distills some of my observations about the media situation within Azerbaijan and how the diminished pluralism in the country affects the prospect of democratization.

In the seventh chapter, I assess the recent history and current status of media ownership in the United States. The U.S. media market, of course, must be acknowledged as a primary player in the global market, despite the increasing power of other international media companies such as Vivendi (France) and Bertelsmann (Germany.) Furthermore, the progress or decay of democracy in the United States has grave implications for other democracies around the globe. In some sense, the task of determining levels of media ownership concentration in the United States is simpler than it is in other parts of the world. While webs linking corporate ownership together are still incredibly complex, the ownership itself is more transparent than in some other parts of the world. Also, as opposed to Europe, where a number of national and international governmental bodies are charged with monitoring media issues, the Federal Communications Commission is the primary body that oversees issues of media ownership and content in the United States. This centralization of authority means that the data on the issue is at least marginally easier to assemble.

The United States also is a good example of how the effects of media system changes are themselves contingent on the political structures within a polity. In the United States, which is often classified as a majoritarian democracy (e.g. Lijphart

1999, Powell 2000), the political system amplifies the political impact of the trend toward partisanship in the media system. As the media audience becomes increasingly fragmented, political polarization in the United States has grown steadily. Seeking to serve audiences that have become increasingly delineated politically, networks such as FOX and MSNBC exemplify the openly partisan slant that increasingly influences media audiences and in turn affects US politics.

Finally, I review my findings and assess them in light of the global media environment. How are various measures of quality of life associated with the functioning of a nation's press? How do a nation's political institutions interact with its media systems? Does freedom of the press have the same effects everywhere, or are its effects mitigated by cultural or political norms? In the conclusion, I will examine these questions, offer some suggestions about further avenues of research, and make some general policy recommendations.

Chapter Two

The Causes and Effects of Media Concentration

Few terms are used as loosely as “the media,” a fact that makes precision in discussing the subject all the more important. Viewed as a business, the media represent a complex network of relationships between producers, aggregators, and distributors of content - some of it informational, some of it pure entertainment. The business of the media is more intertwined today than ever. One company can sell video games, produce a movie based on those video games, and also own news outlets that provide publicity for the movie and the video games. In order to better analyze the effects of the expansion of media companies and the overall consolidation of ownership within media markets, its necessary to review the different forms this expansion may take.

Despite the innumerable individual variations within the media business, the expansion of media companies takes three main forms: horizontal, vertical, and diagonal. These forms of expansions are not necessarily unique to media firms, but can be found in the business strategies of firms in other industries as well.

Vertical expansion occurs when a media company acquires properties in one or more stages of the media production process. This occurs, for example, when a broadcaster purchases a television production company or when a publisher acquires a distribution company. Such expansion not only reduces the transaction costs for the expanding firm, it can also grant it greater control over unexpected expenses. In the United States, prohibitions against vertical integration in the media have been strict, but in the 1990s these restrictions began to be lifted by regulators. Time Warner, Disney, General Electric, and News Corporation are just some of the media

companies that have acquired major holdings in all stages of the media production process (Bowman 2006, 8).

One example of this type of expansion in the United States is the 2003 merger of General Electric and Vivendi, which put control of Hollywood film production studios, cable TV channels and TV production studios under one \$43 billion corporate owner (Chipman 2003). Sometimes this type of expansion is lauded by corporate executives for the “synergies” it provides. One example of this is when properties owned by one corporate entity can be used for cross promotion. For example, when Disney released “The Lion King,” the movie was heavily promoted on the ABC television network, which Disney owns (Alger 1998).

A company engages in horizontal expansion when it gains control of other companies engaged in providing the same sorts services. Such expansion benefits the companies by using corporate resources more efficiently and allowing them to gain economies of scale. By gaining market share, the expanded company can also obtain additional power in setting prices. Some regulating bodies and courts have looked critically at such expansions because of their impacts on the market. In 2006, the Court of First Instance in Luxembourg ruled against the merger of Sony and Bertelsmann that had occurred three years earlier, a merger that had been already approved by the European Union. The court ruled that merger would grant too much market power to the new corporate entity.

But this rejection of a merger by a court judgment is comparatively rare. Recent years have seen an acceleration of horizontal expansion. In the United States, this trend grew especially following the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which to a large extent removed ownership restrictions on media companies. The concern of consumer advocates about horizontal expansion is that when oligopolists

dominate a market, real competition is impossible and consumers suffer from poor quality and higher prices. In fact, in the six years following the 1996 deregulation, cable television rates increased at a rate three times the inflation rate. (Dreazen 2002)

Diagonal expansion involves efforts of a company to operate in several different, albeit often related, fields. This type of expansion is sometimes called “lateral.” An example of this might be the decision of a newspaper company to enter the magazine business or the plans for a telecommunications company and a television company to merge.

This corporate strategy can insulate a company against the risks of a shifting marketplace. If a company owns both a publishing operation and a music business, it will not be hurt so much by a downturn in either of these businesses. While not all large media companies have expanded diagonally, most of the largest companies are involved in several different areas of media. Time Warner, for example, publishes books, runs Multiplex cinemas, and owns theme parks and the Internet service provider AOL. Bertelsmann is the world’s largest book publisher, but it also owns Channel 5 in the United Kingdom, and one of the world’s largest music companies, BMG (Williams 2001).

This last type of expansion is related to the general trend of all media companies to become increasingly transnational. Just as a diagonal expansion plan may protect a company from shifts in the market for one of its products, a transnational strategy can protect a company from political or regulatory shifts in countries where its businesses operate. A transnational strategy is also natural for companies seeking to grow beyond the often-limited markets of their home base. Metro Newspapers, for example, started out in Stockholm, but rapidly expanded across the globe, and now publishes in more than 100 cities in Europe, Asia, and

North and South America (Metro Newspapers 2010). The media empire of Rupert Murdoch, News Corp., got its start as a newspaper company in Australia before expanding, first into the United Kingdom and later across the globe. Now the News Corp. is one of the top media companies in the world with cable television, publishing, and Internet-service divisions (News Corp. 2010).

The expansion of media companies in these directions is not the result of a particular personality type of the people who work in this field. Rather, media companies are uniquely positioned to benefit from expansion because of the nature of the good that they produce. Their unique nature also confers on them a special importance to society that far exceeds that of most consumer products. Media products are sold in the marketplace, but they differ in several important ways from other products that we buy and sell.

Perhaps the main aspect of the media products that makes media companies prone to increasing consolidation is that the media industry has what economists term “positive returns to scale” or sometimes “increasing returns to scale.” This means that costs increase by a smaller amount when some level increases production. This occurs because the companies that produce media goods and services face very high initial production costs but very low or no marginal costs for additional production. For example, producing the first print of a movie, for example, is extremely expensive. Screening that movie, however, will involve very low marginal costs, especially compared to the additional revenue that will be generated. Or take the radio business, for example. Producing a radio broadcast is very expensive, but the additional cost incurred by increasing the audience from 1,000 to 100,000 is minimal if not non-existent.

The increasing returns to scale for media firms goes a long way to explain their tendency to expand, but examining some other economic characteristics of media products also helps explain the marketing of media products, the importance of media products to society, and the implications of media expansion and media market consolidation.

In economic terms, the products sold by media companies are a “public good.” Public goods are judged by economists to be “non-rivalrous” and “non-excludable.” “Non-rivalrous” means that one person’s “consumption” of a public good does not interfere with another’s enjoyment of the good. “Non-excludable” means that it is impractical to exclude another person from enjoying the benefit of the good. Two classic examples of public goods are national defense and a fireworks display. One person’s “consumption” of national defense or a fireworks show does not affect another citizen’s consumption of this good. Because it is impractical to exclude non-paying consumers from enjoying public goods, they are usually under-provided by the market. Usually, such public goods are provided collectively and are funded through some sort of taxation. Municipal taxes may pay for fireworks displays, while national taxes pay for national defense.

While not every media product is a perfect example of public good, many of them do have the characteristics of public goods. A radio broadcast, for example, cannot be effectively withheld from a member of the public that does not wish to pay for it. Conversely, one person’s consumption of a radio broadcast in no way diminishes someone else’s enjoyment of the same broadcast. Of course, the public good nature of other media products is not always so clear. An individual newspaper is sold, of course. That newspaper, however, will not be used up if one, two, or a dozen people read it.

Also, in each of these cases, the public good is judged to have a significant impact beyond the individual who consumed the media good. In economic terms, this is called an “externality.” An externality can be positive or negative. The pollution released by a factory, for example, is a negative externality. Unless the remediation of that pollution is somehow incorporated into the price of that product, the community at large, not the person buying products from that factory, is bearing the cost for the price of that pollution. But an externality can be positive too. Public education, for example, has a large positive externality. The fact that basic education is provided to the general population is thought to benefit the entire society, not just those people who receive the education. The society judges this positive externality important enough to ensure that a certain amount of publicly funded education is guaranteed. Government plays an important role with both negative and positive externalities. By imposing fines and sanctions, governments force polluting firms to pay for the negative externalities they create. Governments may also offer subsidies to encourage the creation of positive externalities such as educational or cultural benefits.

Media products, particularly products of what may be called the news media, have externalities that resemble those of public education. Externalities are costs or benefits that are not reflected in the cost of producing or consuming a product. Because they are not reflected in the cost, externalities lead to inefficiencies and market distortions. These market distortions can be caused by either positive or negative externalities. For example, if the cost of pollution is not accounted for in the pricing of a product, excessive pollution will be produced. Similarly, if the benefits of a good like education are not accounted for, then a less than optimal level will be produced. Likewise, the media can be thought of as providing externalities both positive and negative.

On the positive side, even if an individual does not ever watch a news broadcast or read a newspaper, that individual benefits if other members of that society have the ability to be informed about their government and the world around them. The assumption is that a society composed of individuals educated about pertinent issues will make on the whole better decisions about policies and be better able to govern itself. The news media is used to share economic, political, and social information, and without an effective system to share information within a society, even the most basic sort of projects would be impossible. Efficient markets require information to function and democratic government certainly would be impossible if citizens are not informed about the functioning of their government or candidates for public office.

On the other hand, it could be argued that the media can also have negative externalities. For example, if one argued that purveyors of pornography degraded the general moral fabric of society, this could be regarded as a negative externality to the extent that the producers of the pornography profit from its sale, but its societal costs are not reflected in the pricing of the product.

Another characteristic of media products that has implications for their importance and their marketing is that they are what economists call “experience goods.” They are not tangible objects that can be taken for a test drive or tried on in a dressing room. To judge a news story, you have to read it. You may read movie reviews in order to make an intelligent choice about purchasing movie tickets, but when you buy a movie ticket, you are buying the experience of watching that movie, an intangible product.

Brand identification for experience goods is generally very important because of the need of the consumer to know what is being purchased before it is consumed. If

you are going to a Bruce Willis movie, you have certain clear expectations about what sort of movie you will see, just as you will have expectations about the news you will read in particular newspapers or watch on certain broadcasts. This branding aspect of the news has acquired increasing importance in recent years, and helps explain otherwise puzzling aspects of the media business. The extremely high salaries offered to television anchors, for example, can be justified financially because of their importance in establishing the brand of the news they convey.

While media products can be funded through a variety of mechanisms, when they are privately funded the media can be understood to be delivering two products or services. The media are sometimes described as functioning in a “dual product market” (Picard 1989). A news outlet delivers and sells the content of the consumer but it also delivers an audience to advertisers. A media outlet that does not deliver the audience clearly will not sell advertising, and commercial media depend on advertising revenue to maintain their business. This operation of the media in two markets is especially important to consider in regard to the news media, which is my primary focus. If a news outlet delivers news content that is judged inferior by consumers, a competitor can achieve an advantage in delivering an audience to advertisers. In a genuinely competitive media environment, news outlets delivering inferior quality news could face a disadvantage in their efforts to obtain advertising to fund their operations. In an uncompetitive media market, however, the consumers have less ability to judge whether the product they consume is inferior or not. They have a diminished ability to judge the quality of the information they receive because the pluralism of the media system is itself diminished.

I will return to these concepts and examine their implications in more detail throughout this study, but some initial discussion of these economic characteristics of

media products and media firms is essential to explain the trends in the media business and their implications.

Because a fundamental characteristic of media companies is that their business involves increasing returns to scale, media companies achieve greater profits with greater production of media products. With increased levels of profit, the tendency for media companies, especially in an environment when regulatory and technological barriers are falling, is to expand in every manner possible. I will not catalog here all the expansions of media companies in recent years. The details I present today may well be eclipsed by the mergers of tomorrow. In any case, a rough outline of the situation should suffice to demonstrate the general state of media ownership consolidation around the world.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, Bagdikian raised the alarm about consolidation in the media business when *The Media Monopoly* was published in 1983. At that point, Bagdikian identified 50 media companies that controlled the bulk of radio and television stations newspapers, magazines, book publishers, and movie companies in the United States. Since then the number of companies controlling the market has diminished ten-fold. In the most recent edition of his book, *The New Media Monopoly*, Bagdikian puts the number of firms controlling the bulk of the nation's media at about a dozen, while roughly a dozen other media companies control the rest of the media business in the United States. The exact ranking of companies in the market depends on the criteria used in making the list.

For example, according to *Advertising Age*, the top five United States media companies in terms of net U.S. revenue in 2008 were Comcast Corp. (\$29.03 billion), Time Warner (\$20.53 billion), Walt Disney Co. (\$18.6 billion), Direct TV Group (\$17.31 billion), and Time Warner Cable (\$15.58 billion). The companies on this list

are both producers and distributors of media that carries advertising. According to the publication, “Media is defined as information and entertainment content distribution systems in which advertising (including branded entertainment) is a key element” (Johnson 2009, 1). This definition excludes large business activities, such as book publishing, that other observers might include in their understanding of the media. Also, this listing only includes U.S. revenues, leaving out global leviathans operating in the United States that earn most of their money elsewhere.

The Media Information Center of Northwestern University uses different criteria, including total media revenue for media companies. For its ranking, the center also defines “media” as “media content and distribution businesses supported by advertising. Its 2003 list ranks Time Warner (\$29.2 billion), ComCast Corp. (\$17.4 billion), Viacom (\$17.25 billion), Walt Disney (\$11.23 billion), and NBC/General Electric (\$8.17 billion) as the top five media companies (Media Information Center 2003).

A couple of points are evident in examining these lists, imperfect as they are. First, a close examination of the companies represented makes it clear how quickly such detailed rankings become inaccurate. In the 2003 Media Information Center list, Yahoo is listed as 26th in size, and Microsoft is 39th. Since the list was compiled, of course, Microsoft has attempted once to acquire Yahoo, and currently has a signed operating agreement with the company. Google, listed 33rd on the 2003 list with revenues of 962 million, posted net revenues of \$21,795 million in 2008.

Second, a sense of the technological convergence and blurring boundaries becomes clear. Both lists include ComCast, for example, as one of the largest media companies, although it is not generally thought of as a content producer. Likewise, Google does not report news or produce media content per se, but its media

properties, which include YouTube, definitely provide news and entertainment. Generally, however, when judging the largest media entities, the emphasis is on content creation, not just transmission or aggregation of information. One 2005 listing names Time Warner, News Corporation, Viacom, Disney, Vivendi, and Bertelsmann as the main media giants in the United States (Skinner, Compton, and Gasher 2005, p. 45-50). In his account of media ownership, Bagdikian names Time Warner, Disney, News Corp., Viacom, and Bertelsmann as “The Big Five” (Bagdikian 2005, 30-50).

As noted above, one of the main ways for media firms to grow is to expand internationally. Each of these firms has business activities and properties that extend far beyond any one national border. The United States, as the world’s richest economy, has boosted the fortunes of these media giants, but not all of them got their start in that market. Bertelsmann, for example, traces its origins back to 1835, when Carl Bertelsmann founded a small publishing house in Gutersloh, Germany to print Lutheran hymnals (Bagdikian 2004, 48). Now its holdings stretch around the globe. Bertelsmann, for example, is one of the main media companies taking advantage of newly opened markets in Eastern and Central Europe (Karacs 1999, 3). Rupert Murdoch’s News Corp. traces its origins to an Australian newspaper company and now is one of the main media companies positioning itself in the Chinese market (Kahn 2007, 1).

Given that ownership consolidation in the media business is in large part driven by the economic fundamentals of the business itself, it is reasonable to ask why anyone would object to the market taking its natural course. Countries such as the United States, after all, place a high theoretical value on the functioning free market to provide optimal economic and social solutions to most problems. Greater consolidation of ownership of media properties can lead to greater operating

efficiencies within the media companies and greater profits for shareholders. In the Darwinian universe of the free market, the survival of the fittest is supposed to ensure that the “winners” in economic struggles are also the most innovative and economically efficient.

The problem here is that there is a fundamental conflict between the economic characteristics of the media run as business and the social and political roles that the media play. To explain why this is the case, let me first explain some of my assumptions.

The first assumption is that individuals primarily act in their own self-interest. For the purposes of this analysis, I am adopting the rational choice paradigm, with the assumptions that an individual’s preferences can be ranked in order of preference and that those preferences exhibit transitivity. This is relevant to the media when we examine the motivations of the people and organizations that are responsible for the generation and transmission of content. While not denying the existence of altruistic bloggers or ham radio operators, the vast majority of media content stems from individuals pursuing their own self-interest. This self-interest primarily takes the form of either political or economic motivation.

While the financial motives may dominate in the media business nowadays, it was certainly not always so. The first newsletters in Great Britain did begin with the intent of boosting business. These newsletters circulated among merchants, beginning about 1620, and advertised shipping news. The political aspect of the news media, however, quickly developed as the nation descended into the English Civil War; pamphlets and newsletters on both sides of the issue proliferated (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 206). The government subsequently attempted to control the growth of

newspapers first through the Licensing Act of 1695 and later with the Stamp Act of 1712, but newspapers continued to proliferate.

The model of journalism developed in Great Britain was exported to the American colonies, which supported a lively partisan press even before the Revolutionary War. For example, John Peter Zenger, a New York publisher, became a legendary figure in the pantheon of free press heroes when he was arrested on charges of seditious libel in 1734. It should not be forgotten, however, that the “free speech” for which he was imprisoned for eight months had little to do with the “fair and balanced” reporting that modern U.S. journalists purportedly adopt as their goal. Whatever the merits of his case, Zenger was, in fact, part of a factional political dispute that used Zenger’s newspaper, the *New York Weekly Journal*, to argue its case before the court of public opinion (Chiasson 1997, 5).

The political motivations behind the media were dominant in the first half-century of the media in both the United States and Great Britain. At this time, newspapers were the principal type of news media, but the newspaper often resembled what we would call pamphlets or newsletters. The partisan slant of these newspapers was bald; the prose was often crude and raucous. Readers had no doubt about the policies or candidates favored by the owners of these newspapers.

The shift in the United States and Great Britain in the latter part of the 19th century toward at least the appearance of greater balance in news coverage in newspapers was not motivated by the editors’ evolution toward equanimity. Rather, it was the advent of a new business strategy that changed the editorial content of the newspaper. The so-called “penny press” in the United States started with the *Boston Transcript*. Published by Lynde M. Walter, the financial model of the *Transcript* was later transplanted to New York when the *Morning Post* was founded (Schudson 1978,

52). The “penny press” marked a change in approach from the newspapers, which were funded by subscriptions and generally cost at least six cents. The penny-press newspapers relied more on advertising, and so were able to cut the price of their newspapers for consumers. Because they were competing on price rather than political content, however, the penny presses adopted a non-partisan approach to the news, eschewing the divisive approach that characterized other newspapers of the day. Previous to this commercial approach, newspapers had been usually small businesses that were frequently subsidized by political parties or patrons. With commercialization, newspaper publishing became a large and profitable industry. Indeed, by the 1870s, newspaper publishers were among the largest manufacturing enterprises in the United States.

This business model did not develop evenly across all societies. The type of media business that developed in the United States and Great Britain responded to both the effects of the industrial revolution and high literacy rates, creating a media system dependent on advertising. The industrial revolution created an abundant supply of comparatively cheap consumer products that would later be advertised in newspapers. The high literacy rate was essential to sustain the market for mass readership publications. Most other societies lagged behind the United States and Great Britain in both the progress of industrialization and in the literacy rate of the populations. In other societies, the media developed quite differently, with greater roles played by governments and political parties (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

Whether the owners of the media are political parties or private businesses, it is the motives of the media owners that are the primary factor in determining the content of the media. When the motives are political, as with party newspapers, the media will reflect that motivation, supporting the relevant political agenda. When the

motivation is financial, the primary goal will be to gain money. The main way that most privately owned media obtain revenue nowadays is through the sale of advertising. This dependence on advertisers can be reflected in different ways. The influence may be more subtle or obvious. The influence may be reflected, for example, by either the inclusion or exclusion of certain information. The examples of this are legion, but I will cite just a few.

- *The New York World*, one of the most prominent newspapers in the 1930s, nonetheless bowed to the concerns of its department store advertisers when it refused to run a story by O. Henry about a lowly paid department store employee (Seldes 1935, 202).
- The advertising manager of Procter & Gamble, the largest advertiser in the United States for decades, testified in 1965 that the company had a policy that prohibited its ads from appearing during programs that were unflattering toward soldiers or businessmen or that did not “minimize the horrors of war” (Bagdikian 1997, 237).
- *Ms.*, the pioneering feminist magazine stopped carrying advertising in 1990, but before this policy decision was made, editors frequently felt financial pressure from the business community. When the magazine published a front-page cover of Soviet-era women dissidents not wearing make-up, Revlon stopped advertising with the publication. The hand of Procter & Gamble was especially heavy at *Ms.*, which depended heavily on consumer product advertising. In its contracts with the magazine, Procter & Gamble forbade editorial content about gun control, abortion, or cults in any issue carrying the company’s advertising (Soley 2002, 198).
- Advertisers can even have an impact on what other advertising is sold by a media outlet. For example, when Neighbor-to-Neighbor, a group promoting the peace process in Central America, tried to publicize the role of large coffee companies in

prolonging the civil war in El Salvador, two Boston television stations refused to sell the airtime to the group. The stations' public relations manager explained that the advertising would cause damage to "a particular product" (Farhi 1990).

The fundamental point is that the funding behind the media will always influence the content of that media, whether the media is an overtly partisan newspaper or supposedly independent publication. This fact, however, by no means dooms the public to an impoverished information environment. If vibrant competition between news outlets exists, whether that is competition between party news outlets or competition between privately funded news outlets, then the public at large may have the opportunity to partake of the public good provided by the media. But if a competitive marketplace of ideas and information does not exist, the public will be deprived of important information for self-governance. The news reported to the public will reflect the biases of the media owners, whether those owners are government or corporate.

The biases of the media can be either expressed as concrete omissions of fact, such as the failure of newspapers to print articles critical of their advertisers. More subtly, the media are unlikely to challenge the economic fundamentals that are perceived to be essential for their functioning. The corporate-owned media will tend not to publish or broadcast information or opinions that are critical of the economic system on which they depend. This is not surprising; it is rational. The Soviet Union's newspapers did not publish articles about the vibrancy of the capitalist economic system. *Time* magazine will not publish editorials that are critical of the fundamentals underlying the U.S. economic system.

The media in an authoritarian country and in a country where the media are privately owned differ profoundly. To the extent that competition exists among

privately owned media, criticism of government and society is possible. For example, information about the infamous Watergate case that brought down the Nixon administration was first leaked to the *New York Times*. For unclear reasons, the journalists at that paper who had preliminary information about that scandal did not pursue the lead, so it was left to the *Washington Post* to first publicize the facts about Watergate. In 2009, the *Washington Post* itself found itself the subject of news coverage, after it attempted to sell access to reporters and government officials. Not surprisingly, the news of this ethically questionable policy was publicized not by the *Washington Post* but by a comparative newcomer in the political media, the website *Politico* (Vogel 2009). The “scoop” provides driving energy to a newsroom that is competing with another media organization. Without real competition, the idea of a “scoop” is nearly meaningless. After all, the media deliver information for consumers and they deliver consumers to advertisers. If no alternatives exist for consumers, then the media outlet will not be as driven to provide the best quality information for consumers. The monitoring of government and of society in general will be less effective.

But when competition between media organizations diminishes, the impact is greater than just the dulling of journalistic energies. Think of journalism as one type of media product that is sold to consumers. This product can be made more cheaply or more expensively, depending on the owner of the media organization. News reporters, editors and editorial resources all cost money. If a media organization is in a competitive environment, the decision to decrease money invested in journalistic enterprise must be weighed accordingly. How much will the decrease in investment affect the quality of the journalistic product? How much will any deleterious affects on the quality of the journalism affect the ability of the news organization to deliver

an audience to its advertisers? The optimal spending level will be to reduce costs to the point where no marginal loss of audience occurs because of these spending reductions.

Remember also that journalism is just one of many types of content that may be produced and transmitted by a media organization. Whatever its civic virtues, good journalism is more expensive than many other types of content. One journalist estimated that a recent 14-part newspaper series about the plight of the elderly cost roughly \$42,000 to produce (Filloux 2009, 3). The financial benefit of spending this money must be balanced against the benefit that the newspaper management expects that it will receive in boosting readership. An expanded readership in turn will enhance the value of the newspaper in the eyes of advertisers.

Conversely, reductions in expenditures for editorial functions must be made with an eye on what effect they will have on the readership. For example, the management at the *Pasadena Now* website, a news portal that provides local news to the California city, in 2007 decided to hire two reporters living in India to write articles for the website. One reporter was paid \$12,000 a year and the other was paid \$7,200. The reporters covered the government news by watching webcasts of the city's government meetings. The owner of the website, who used to run a clothing manufacturing business that used labor in India and Vietnam, judged the savings on his payroll worth whatever loss in readership might occur because of outsourcing the journalist positions (Pham 2007, 2).

But at least the Pasadena website was paying reporters. Many media outlets simply use press releases to supply content for their broadcasts or publications, and if the primary goal is to maximize profits, this can be entirely reasonable. Objectivity, obviously, is completely lacking in such content, and often little or no effort is made

to verify the information in the press releases. The practice of using such releases has even spread to television broadcasting. In one recent study, 77 stations were identified using so-called “video news releases” in broadcasts, without identifying the producers of the material. Among the corporate entities that supplied these VNRs to the television broadcasters were General Motors, Intel, Capital One, and Pfizer. In more than one third of the cases, according to researchers, the stations airing the material aired the VNRs in their entirety and made the corporate-generated material look like their own material. According to the study, the increase in usage of VNRs is due at least in part to a decrease in the number of local reporters and hence an increase in the workload in the number of reporters who remain on staff (Farsetta and Price 2006). The Project for Excellence in Journalism described the situation in its 2006 State of the News Media assessment, reporting that news organizations in general are relying less on original reporting and more on the use of second hand material (Project For Excellence in Journalism 2006).

Does any of this really matter, though? How does the quality of information available to a population affect how that population lives and governs itself? In the following chapter, I will attempt to address these questions.

Chapter Three

How Media Content Affects Political Behavior

The question of how information affects a population is complex. After all, the consequences of any historical development or a public policy cannot be foreseen exactly. Nonetheless, an examination of history can provide some guidance in examining the subject. Answering questions about what effects the media have is important in the context of this research. If media have little effect on opinions or political behavior, then changes in format or ownership are not important. Research shows, however, that not only do the media affect political opinions, but also the content of the media is itself affected by changes in ownership.

There is no need to go back to the invention of written communication, but if we are looking for evidence that the mass media play an important social and political role, we might as well start with the invention of the printing press. It was the invention of Johannes Gutenberg around 1440, after all, that allowed books to become a medium with a mass market. The social, political, and economic effects of the new invention were nothing less than revolutionary in Western Europe. The availability of printed material affected scholarship, for example, allowing better communication in the scientific community. Even the nature of the reading experience changed, as books became something to be enjoyed in private rather than read aloud communally. As book production became a business, the first laws protecting copyright were formulated, in turn aiding the development of literature and writing as a profession. As printing became cheaper, the literacy of the population broadened, the importance of Latin declined, and the grammar and spelling of local languages became standardized. Some historians believe this development may have led to heightened feelings of nationalism in the ensuing centuries (Eisentein 1969, 363).

Later, technological advancements in the printing process had an impact on the fledgling democracies in the United States and Great Britain. The invention in 1811 by Frederich Koenig of a steam-driven press allowed printers to produce 1,000 copies an hour. Other inventors further improved the equipment and process, and by 1827 publishers were printing as many as 6,000 copies an hour. With the invention of the rotary press, printing newspapers became dramatically cheaper and faster. By mid century, it was possible to print 12,000 sheets an hour (Musson 1958, 422).

It was not until the British Parliament lifted the Stamp Act in Great Britain in 1855, however, that publishers there could make full use of these technological advantages to make newspapers affordable to the masses. The so-called “penny press” that developed has been judged to be a critical factor in the “the formation of national parties as communities of sentiment” (Vincent 1966, xx) Publishers of these newspapers depended less on political patronage and were less likely to hone to a partisan line, using coverage of politics as a means to boost circulation. Cox suggests that voters in the 1860s may have exhibited a less partisan behavior because they had been exposed regularly to an affordable mass circulation press (Cox 1987, 121).

The development of the mass circulation press in the United States actually proceeded earlier than in Great Britain, because newspapers were not burdened by the Stamp Act. As late as the 1870s, the majority of these newspapers were still partisan in nature; Republican newspapers accounted for 43 percent of the circulation in metropolitan areas, while Democratic newspapers sold 33 percent. As the growth of the advertising industry began to steadily expand, however, the ratios changed. By 1880, independent newspapers claimed 55 percent of the circulation and by the turn of the century they represented 47 percent of the total number of newspapers published in the metropolitan areas (Hamilton 2004, 48). The growth of the

advertising coincided with the industrialization of the United States and the development of a consumer economy. Newspaper publishers themselves became wealthy and powerful individuals, often using their publications to further personal crusades. William Randolph Hearst's used his *New York Journal* and other publications to advocate for war against Spain in 1898, for example.

Despite such historical evidence about the political impact of mass media, the assessment by political scientists and communications scholars of the media's role in politics has varied widely in the last century. World War I saw the first systematic modern use and study of propaganda, and the consensus was that the media possessed an almost sinister power of influence over the public. This attitude toward the impact of the media changed, however, in ensuing decades, replaced by the conclusion that the media exerted so-called "minimal effects."

This model (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Klapper 1960) dominated communications theory; scant attention was given to how the mass media was distorting democratic discourse. According to the "minimal effects" model, the ability of media to influence public opinion is weak, if it exists at all. The understanding of "minimal effects," which developed from research that was conducted when television was in its infancy, now is largely seen to be fundamentally flawed. Beginning the 1970s, media scholars began to see evidence of new strong media effects (Noelle-Neumann 1973). The focus of research shifted to more cognitive effects of mass media, as opposed to the search for attitude change, as was examined in the studies at Columbia University (Beniger and Gusek 1995). More recently, "social constructivism" has become the dominant approach used by scholars. The perspective most generally shared is that the mass media do have a significant impact by presenting images of reality in a systematic way (McQuail 1994, 331). The effects

of the media, however, are constrained by the process in which the public consumes the mass media. Discussions in the media are part of a general process used by individuals to construct meaning of the world around them (Gamson and Modigliani 1989). Media researchers as a rule now understand that the media exert influence on their audiences through setting the agenda, priming the audience, and framing issues. The media consistently fulfill each of these functions in all countries to one extent or another.

Agenda setting refers to the function that the media perform when they allocate different levels of attention to issues in the news. When the media ignore certain issues, those issues are less likely to be deemed important by the general public. When the media devote considerable attention to other issues, those subjects are more likely to be evaluated as more important by media consumers. Obviously, people obtain first hand information about many issues and can use that information in forming opinions about the relative importance of these issues. On many issues, however, the public depends on the news media to obtain, aggregate, select, and present information. Most members of the general public, for example, do not have the scientific background to evaluate issues such as global warming or the expertise to evaluate subjects like nuclear disarmament. The public will use information conveyed by the news media to judge the importance of these issues.

One of the first researchers identifying the agenda-setting effect was Bernard C. Cohen, who famously stated that the media “may not be successful most of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (1963, 13) Subsequent studies confirmed the importance of the media’s role in establishing priorities both for the general public and for the elite.

McCombs and Shaw (1973) conducted groundbreaking research in this field, attempting to match what a group of voters said were key issues in a campaign with the actual content of the mass media use by them during the campaign. The researchers did not claim that their study “proved” the existence of the agenda setting function, but they pointed out that the evidence was consistent with the necessary conditions for the existence of agenda setting.

Most researchers have used cross-sectional or panel studies in examining the effects of agenda setting. Cross-sectional studies sometimes focused on election campaigns in a single community, such as the 1972 study of McCombs and Shaw. McLeod et al. (1974) and Benton and Frazier (1976) also followed this approach. Erbring et al. (1980) used a study that examined national cross- media variation to more closely specify the functioning of agenda setting in the media. Subsequent studies gathered more evidence for the agenda setting function of the media and provided more details about how it was manifested. For example, Hill (1985) interviewed 1,204 television news viewers, and found that certain factors could strengthen or weaken the agenda-setting effects of that medium. When viewers were already aware of news issues by reading about them in newspapers, the agenda setting effect of television broadcasts was heightened.

The agenda setting function was revealed to have impacts beyond the general public. The media can affect policy makers directly by the action of covering particular news. In a creatively structured experiment, Cook et al. (1983) probe the opinions both of the general public and policy makers before and after the broadcast of an investigative series of reports on home health care agencies. The study finds that broadcast of the reports did affect the public’s estimation of the problem, figuratively placing it on the agenda. Interestingly, the news series also affected policy makers,

but the most powerful factor in shifting their opinions appeared to be the close relationship between the investigative journalists and officials of the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. The authors posit that the collaboration of journalists and public officials as “presenters of reality” runs counter to normative ideals of democracy.

Priming, sometimes regarded as an extension of agenda setting, refers to how the media affect the way the public evaluates political actors. The media are said to “prime” their audience, elevating specific issues, themes or events for use as criteria to judge politicians or policies (Ansolabehere et al. 1993). Priming refers to the way news coverage influences individuals’ evaluations of particular issues and criteria. As individuals form their political opinions, they obtain clues from the media about the relative importance of various issues. If an issue is deemed more important, positions on that issue will attain greater relative importance (Miller and Krosnick 2000). Priming is found to be particularly effective when media directly attach credit or blame for a national issue to a particular politician (Iyengar and Kinder 1987).

Framing refers to the way in which media allocate responsibility for issues to certain societal or political actors. Framing effects are generated by contextual clues within a news article or broadcast that influence the reader when making decisions or forming judgments about the subject of the article or broadcast. Developed by psychologists Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman, framing theory stems from the results of their research into how people make choices. They showed that the choices that individuals make can be effectively reversed by changing the definition of the consequences, defining outcomes as potential gains or losses. The experiments conducted by Tversky and Kahneman (1984) demonstrate how framing manifests itself in people’s evaluation of situations. In the hypothetical questions posed to their

subjects, the language was functionally identical, but subjects preferred a solution that emphasized the number of people who could be saved by a hypothetical response, rather than the choice that stressed the risk of mortality.

The phenomenon has been further dissected by media researchers, who have identified two types of framing: emphasis framing effects and equivalency framing. Equivalency framing is when the contrasting terms are functionally equivalent. Emphasis framing stresses contrasting aspects of a particular issue (Druckman 2001, 228) For example, the issue of gun control could be framed or presented as a matter of public safety or as a question of personal rights. Even the terms used by the political organizers on issues reflect the acknowledged power of framing, as abortion rights advocates term themselves “pro-choice,” while anti-abortion activists call themselves “pro-life.”

Framing in the news media can be further divided into episodic framing and thematic framing. Thematic framing is exemplified by reporting on an issue that attempts to give it historical or broader context, such as an analysis presenting the factors leading to a public health crisis or international conflict. Episodic framing, on the other hand, is concerned more with the specific impact of individual events, presenting visual context for news such as bombings or civil strife. The dominant news paradigm in the United States incorporates episodic framing, mainly because of the marketplace in which the news media compete. The emphasis is on short news segments that have high impact, rather than a more deliberative approach that stresses societal or historical context to problems.

The way that information is framed affects how news consumers comprehend the chain of events depicted in news coverage. Researchers have assembled evidence to show that if news coverage is broadcast on television using an analytic approach,

viewers are more likely to understand events in a societal context. On the other hand, if the news is presented with an episodic framing, consumers of the news are more likely to understand that individuals, rather than social or political causes, are primarily responsible for the events. This characteristic means that television news, which is more likely to use an episodic frame of reference, will be in general favorable to incumbent government officials because individuals, rather than current office-holders, are more likely to be blamed for social and economic problems. On the other hand, if news is presented with a thematic frame of reference, the broadcasts can hurt incumbents (Iyengar 1991).

Framing, priming, and agenda setting all play important roles as the mass media establish the boundaries for what degree of dissent is conceivable within society. The transmission of symbols selected and transmitted by the media is far from neutral, and the media frequently display selection bias as well as description bias in their coverage of social movements (Smith et al. 2001). The overall effect is compounded.

“On the one hand, a growing ‘frame’ of the media is that public life is corrupt, a point of view that is comfortable for readers and viewers because it justifies inaction or demobilization. On the other hand, the interest of movement-mounted dramatic activities quickly fades for the media unless they change or escalate their routines. When protests escalate, the media will continue to offer coverage but are quick to give priority to their violent or bizarre aspects” (Tarrow 1998,116).

In fact, recent research has revealed great complexity in the dynamic between message generation and its reception. One study of the U.S. news media audience, for example, indicates that Americans as a whole are neither so ideologically consistent nor so politically sophisticated that they will selectively absorb information that only supports pre-existing political beliefs (Entman 1989). Presenting what he calls an “interdependence model,” Entman posits that public opinion originates from the

interaction between media messages and the interpretation of those messages by audiences. In this model, influence is exerted through the selection of information, but conclusions are not dictated to the audience. If the media affect what an audience thinks about, the actual information that is considered, then media also affect the attitude of the audience.

Building upon the research of Kahn and Kenney (2002), which shows how editorial positions affect news coverage, Druckman and Parkin (2005) examine how the relative slant in newspaper editorial coverage affects voters. The researchers focus on the 2000 Minnesota Senate race, probing the reactions of voters to coverage by two competing newspapers. The study finds that the tone of news coverage is significantly correlated with the position taken by the newspaper in its editorial page. Furthermore, in subsequent post-election interviews, researchers found that the newspaper coverage influences perceptions of politicians, which in turn affects evaluations of those politicians.

Researchers in the United States and other advanced democracies have assembled impressive evidence about the role that media play in determining people's political views and their levels of civic and political activism. For example, as Norris (2003) documents extensively in her study of the media and politics in the United States and Europe, exposure to the news media and to political party campaigns leads to higher levels of participation and greater levels of trust in democratic government. Conversely, we might expect that a public that is exposed to less public affairs information is less likely to participate in democratic processes.

Some research on this particular question has been done in both the United States and in other Western-style democracies. For example, Livingston and Markham (2008) surveyed voters in the United Kingdom, exploring the connection

between media consumption and the likelihood of voting, interest in politics and civic activism. Higher interest in the news was associated with higher levels of voting, but higher levels of television watching was associated with lower levels of civic activism. The authors interpret their findings as supporting the cognitive/motivational theory of news as a factor that engages the public.

In the Netherlands, Semetko and Aarts (2003) conducted a study of 1,053 media consumers and found support for a hypothesis that watching public service channels has positive effects voter turnout, the public's ability to acquire knowledge, and the political effectiveness of individuals. On the other hand, people watching commercial television are less likely to be politically involved or knowledgeable. Rather than using a standard set of civics questions, the researchers' measures of political knowledge were designed to test knowledge of current political affairs in the country during an election campaign. Based on the data, the researchers conclude that the type of television watched is a critical variable in reducing citizen ignorance. Use of press or radio had little or no influence on the measure of political knowledge.

“Our findings suggest that in this established European democracy, political awareness – Zaller's (1992) term for political knowledge – is consistently but differently influenced by the types of television news programs to which one is exposed regularly and the direction of this influence is positive for public and negative for commercial channels' news and current affairs programs” (Semetko and Aarts 2003, 775).

Another approach to testing the effect of civic affairs information on the public is taken by Curran, Iyengar, Lund, and Salovaara-Moring (2009) in their study of four nations with different media systems. Examining the level of civic knowledge in two public service media systems (Denmark and Finland), a mixed media system (United Kingdom), and a market media system (United States), the researchers find that public service television devotes more time to public affairs and international news, leading the media consumers to possess greater knowledge in these areas than

the media consumers in the market model. Public service television also devotes more attention to the news, encouraging higher levels of news consumption and contributing to higher levels overall of civic knowledge.

Given the evidence that media do, in fact, affect the beliefs and behavior of media consumers, a number of concerns have been raised about the consequences of increasing consolidation of news media companies. While the pace of media consolidation accelerated following the passage of the 1996 Telecommunications Act, the concerns of scholars and policy analysts predate this legislation. One concern examined was that group ownership of media outlets could lower local autonomy to investigate news, with the central office making cost-cutting a priority (Compaine 1975; Roach 1979; Benham, Hannegen and Parsons 1982). Roach (1979) also was concerned that ownership consolidation was likely to reduce diversity of opinion in the general environment of the media marketplace.

Changes in ownership structure can affect the framing, priming and agenda setting roles of the media in many different ways. The ownership of a media company most directly influences the content presented through the allocation of resources (Bogart 1974). The allocation, however, is not a strict question of resources available; the resources are allocated according to the goals of the news organization (Soloski 1979). If the media are being run as a business, then the prime consideration in their operation has to be at the very least securing profitability. Changes in ownership structure can mean that greater profits are sought from media companies. This affects everything from the mix of broadcast material presented to the staffing of news operations.

Alternative understandings, however, also exist about media firms' other goals. For example, Cyert and March (1963) suggested that a coalition theory of

behavior based on goals and choices of people within the firm. Williamson (1964) argued that because management is separated from ownership of the firm, managers may work to maximize their own utility, rather than obtaining the highest level of profit for the company. When media companies combine, frequently new opportunities arise to use the resources of the companies in new ways. For example, leveraging resources in the marketplace makes financial sense when large media companies merge. Entirely new opportunities for cross-promotion are born in these new operating arrangements. Time-Warner, for example, can promote the films produced in its movie studios via *Entertainment Weekly*, one of its many publications. Disney has based entire movies on rides at its amusement parks (Verrier 2002, 1). Disney also used its ESPN cable channel to launch ESPN Magazine and an ESPN radio network (Schwartz 1998, 8). CNN, owned by Time-Warner, regularly promotes material contained in Time Magazine (Picard 1998, 59). From a management viewpoint, cross-promotions are an essential part of a profit maximization strategy.

Mark Crispin Miller, one of the leading U.S. media critics, says that such cross promotions have real cultural and political impacts as the popular culture is homogenized and commercialized, and entertainment news takes precedence over new content essential for democratic governance.

“In the shadow of the culture cartel, all media have converged, so the news is completely continuous with entertainment. There’s a smaller audience for real news, but real news is crucial to democracy. One problem is that media managers envision the audience as a huge mass, but we’re not. There are many audiences out there, and many segments are deprived of what they’d enjoy. People who say, ‘We’re giving the public what it wants,’ forget that people change frequently. Australian movies like *Shine* and *Babe* wouldn’t be made in Hollywood” (Galician 2004).

The effects of conglomerate ownership, however, can be even more pernicious when news coverage is involved, affecting what material is broadcast or printed by

outlets owned by large media companies. This, in turn, affects the information that an electorate uses when contemplating issues of public consequence. For example, General Electric, one of the world's leading builders of nuclear power plants, acquired NBC in 1986. One search of programming archives from 1987-1992 determined that NBC ran fewer stories about the issue of nuclear power than did ABC or CBS. When a damning internal GE report showing inadequate testing of GE plants was leaked, NBC did not report this news until August 7, 1987, two months after other news outlets publicized the issue. (Soley, 2002, 230)

In fact, GE's ownership of NBC created numerous cases where journalists or even entertainment figures found that certain material was completely off-limits. Cartoonist Harvey Pekar was upbraided after mentioning GE's ownership of NBC when he was a guest on the David Letterman Show, carried at that time by NBC (Pekar 1994, 12). In an investigative piece about defective bolts in nuclear power plants and planes, all mention of GE by the reporter was deleted (Shales 1989, 5). Similarly, a planned appearance on the Today Show of Helen Caldicott, an anti-nuclear activist, was abruptly cancelled after producers learned that Caldicott criticized GE in the book she was promoting (Bernstein 1992, 2).

Because of the dozens of joint ventures between the media giants, these companies are essentially business partners in many areas (Bagdikian 2004, 36). Disney, for example, maintains joint ventures with General Electric, owner of NBC and nominally a competitor. Providing critical coverage of a corporate entity is logically less likely if that corporation is a business partner. These corporate connections create censorship as well as opportunities for self-promotion. For example, in the early 1990s, Disney persuaded Bantam, a book publisher owned by media giant Bertelsmann, not to publish a book that was critical of company founder

Walt Disney. A much smaller company published the book in 1993 (Weiner 1995, 76-77).

Changes in ownership not only can eliminate the negative coverage of other properties owned by the parent; a merger can also accentuate the positive coverage of such corporate assets. This has the effect of boosting the public's assessment of the properties. In a study of coverage in Time, Lee and Hwang (2004) found that the magazine provided coverage that was markedly more favorable to entertainment products produced by the parent corporation after Time merged with Warner Corp. to form Time Warner in 1989. Compared to Newsweek during the same period, Time carried more articles about Time Warner products and devoted more column inches to such products. If the media have the effect of setting the agenda, then clearly such cases are examples of decisions to take certain information out of the public realm and take certain issues off the public agenda. The critique of Miller and others is that the corporate mergers have the tendency to replace news with what is essentially advertising for products produced by other divisions of the company.

Another effect of corporate mergers may be the reallocation of resources from news divisions to other corporate areas that are perceived to be more profitable. This can, in turn, affect the quality of the news coverage that is provided to a community. Media companies point to the increased resources made available after a company is acquired by a larger company, but there are countering disadvantages. First, the opportunity for new managers and fresh ideas is offset by the lack of editors and managers who know the community as well as an owner who has lived and known the community for decades (Beam 2002). Risser (1998) felt that individually owned newspapers have the advantage of knowing the problems the community faces through direct, longstanding contact with residents, rather than relying on editors who

are in constant pursuit of promotions and may quickly leave for another newspaper within the chain's circuit. In addition, when a larger corporation owns a newspaper, there is more money to invest in the news operation (Beam 2002); however, there is still pressure from investors to cut costs.

The net effect of such consolidation of news companies is to reduce the autonomy and resources available for news coverage at the local level. Studies have shown these effects in the television, print, and radio media. (e.g. Dunaway 2008; Patterson 2002; Hertsgaard 1988.)

One FCC study became notorious not only for its damning findings, but also for the fact that the FCC attempted to suppress its release. The 2004 working paper carefully analyzed the amount of time allocated to the broadcast of local news. An ordinary least squares regression of the data suggests that local ownership of a radio news station on average added almost five and a half minutes of local news and three and a half minutes of local on-location news to a station's half-hour news broadcast. The authors hypothesize that economies of scale favor the use of non-local material for the stations owned by a media group. Beyond that, local owners are more likely to have close ties to local advertisers. Local owners may be able to more easily monitor local news. Finally, a local owner is more likely to have local interests. This last factor can be problematic because it may introduce bias into the station's news coverage, the authors note (FCC 2004).

One aspect of the consolidation trend within the media is the shift from privately controlled companies to publicly owned corporations. The form of ownership is important because of the structure of incentives changes with ownership (Moe 1988; Miller 1992; Agrawal and Knoeber 1996; Himmelberg, Hubbard, and Palia 1999). Monitoring the managers of privately owned organizations can be

performed more effectively and more easily than monitoring of publicly owned organizations. The principal in a privately owned corporation is an individual or tight group of individuals, whereas in a publicly owned corporation the principal is a large and diverse group of shareholders who are less inclined or able to monitor daily operations of a firm (Agrawal and Knoeber 1996; Demsetz and Lehn 1985; Hansmann 1988).

Media ownership by an individual or a family has its own drawbacks, of course. Bovitz et al. (2002) showed how such a media owner can control the ideological bias of news coverage. Such ownership also has its benefits, however. Schaffner and Sellers (2003), for example, found that independently owned newspapers are more likely to cover activities of local Congressional representatives. Without the direct influence of and monitoring by the personal owners of a media firm, the driving motivation is more likely to become the quest for higher profits. The connection between the goal of maximizing profits and poor quality journalism has been made in several studies (e.g. Arnold 2004; Hamilton 2004; McManus 1994), so it is predictable that publicly-owned corporate media companies will produce poorer quality journalism than privately-held media firms. In general, the publicly-held firms will be less likely to pay attention to substantive issues, and more likely to frame issues like a “horse race,” seeking the broadest audience appeal possible.

Building on this theoretical base, Dunaway (2008) finds that public corporate ownership of media firms was negatively related to substantive political election coverage. The probability that a newspaper produces substantive coverage decreases by 16 percent when it is corporately owned. In general, large privately owned newspapers were found to be the most likely to cover issues substantively, while small corporate media companies were the least likely to produce such coverage.

Similar effects were discovered in field of television news. Duneway's study finds that when a station is corporately owned, the probability that it will provide substantive issue coverage declines by 23 percent.

Another recent study examined the coverage of local issues provided to Minneapolis-area residents. The research involved mainly gathering news from the evening newscasts of the four television stations serving the metropolitan area of St. Paul-Minneapolis: CBS-owned WCCO, Gannett-owned and NBC-affiliated KARE, Hubbard-owned and ABC-affiliated KSTP, and News Corp.-owned KMSP. The study determined that the local news aired on these stations was not, in fact, local. Broadcasts touched on the U.S. Senate race, but very little or no coverage was provided of the other political campaigns current in the area. As the presidential contest that year became more contested, the coverage of local and state elections declined even further. The researchers found heavy use of centrally provided footage of the national elections, and little attempt to augment this information with locally generated reporting (Stevens et al. 2006).

The use of centrally produced editorial material has also been documented in newspapers. The motive behind this practice is not necessarily nefarious. The central office of the news organization may be seeking to use all its resources most effectively. Legitimate and valuable journalistic enterprise may produce articles that are valuable to democratic discourse. For example, researchers examined the coverage of what may be called the "Gary Hart story," provided by newspapers owned by the Knight-Ridder Co. One of the Knight-Ridder newspapers, the Miami Herald, effectively "broke" the story about how presidential candidate Gary Hart was romantically involved with a woman named Donna Rice, marketing representative for a pharmaceutical company. While the researchers did not allege that the Knight-

Ridder management exerted direct control of all editorial content in the chain, they did find that newspapers owned by Knight-Ridder gave more extensive and more prominent coverage to the Gary Hart story than did newspapers with no affiliation with the Knight-Ridder company (Glasser, Allen, and Banks 1989). The authors of the study pointed out that the homogenizing effect occurs even without an established policy to diminish localism.

“While the evidence we present here cannot speak to a chain’s commitment to local autonomy and press diversity, it does call into question a chain’s ability to meet that commitment. All editors engage in what Gallagher appropriately calls the ‘politics of accommodation’ - the constant negotiation with all the various interests that can and often do impinge on editorial judgment and newsroom discretion. But chain editors must contend with the additional burden of accommodating - though not necessarily acceding to - the allocative interests of the chain itself” (Glasser, Allen, and Banks 1989, 614).

The primary effect, of course, of consolidating media ownership is a net reduction in the number of media owners represented in any particular market. This is problematic in several ways. Courts have held that democratic norms justify the objective of creating a maximum level of diversity for the benefit of civic discourse. As one well-known court decision states, “diversification of mass media ownership serves the public interest by promoting diversity of program and service viewpoints as well as by preventing undue concentration of economic power” (Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC, 2004). Another states that “the greater the diversity of ownership in a particular area, the less chance there is that a single person or group can have an inordinate effect, in a political, editorial, or similar programming sense, on public opinion at the regional level” (Sinclair Broadcast Group v. FCC, 2002).

The effects of the ownership consolidation on breadth of debate can be subtler than the more quantifiable reductions in resources expended at local media outlets, but they are nonetheless profound. The consequences of reduced diversity of

ownership may manifest themselves in the content of news coverage and the framing of the news that is presented.

Stempel (1973), for example, studied the effects of media monopoly in the city of Zanesville, Ohio. The same company owned the city's newspaper, radio station, and television station at the time of the study. Stempel compared Zanesville residents with inhabitants of comparable cities and discovered that in general the people of Zanesville were more poorly informed and received less news than the residents of the two comparison cities, yet were less likely to use non-local media and had a favorable assessment of their local media.

The voting habits were not the subject of Stempel's study, but other researchers have examined how the media can have an impact on the electorate. One recent study, for example, examined how the entry of Fox News affected the share of the vote claimed by the Republican Party in the 1996 and 2000 elections. The study found that the introduction of Fox News had a significant effect on the vote share in the presidential elections in those years, and also affected the Republican voter turnout and the Republican vote in the Senate races. The overall impact of Fox News on these elections ranged between three and eight percent, enough certainly to make the difference even in elections that were not particularly close. Interestingly, the effect was "smaller in towns with more cable channels, which is consistent with the moderating effect of competition" (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2006, 2)

A number of studies have found that competition improves the general level of information provided by media outlets. Dyck and Zingales (2003) maintain that presentation of firm profitability becomes less biased as the number of alternative sources of information is increased. Lim (2001) also looks at economic information, finding that when more analysts present data on a company, the overall bias of the

reports is reduced. Gentzkow, Glaeser, and Goldin (2006) show how the development of non-partisan newspapers in the United States was more rapid in greater metropolitan areas, suggesting the role played by competition in the increase in more reliable news organizations.

Competition, in fact, has been found to be a critical factor in mitigating the effect of media bias and diminishing political polarization. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) use a Bayesian game-theoretic approach to show how consumers positively assess the quality of news sources that agree with prior expectations. This fact provides incentives for media firms to slant news reporting to accord with the prior beliefs of their audiences. Bias, therefore, in news reporting is the natural result of media firms seeking to establish a reputation, paradoxically, for accuracy. In the model described by the researchers, bias arises in news coverage, even though it has the potential to produce negative consequences for all the participants in the market. The game-theoretic conclusions are tested with data from the 200 Local News Archive (Kaplan and Hale 2001). In an analysis of local election evening news coverage in the 30 days prior to the 2000 presidential election, Gentzkow and Shapiro found that the degree of bias was lower in markets when more local news broadcasts were available, as predicted by the model.

(Kaplan and Hale had pursued their original research without a game theoretic model in mind. Rather, they had been interested in determining to what extent did local news broadcasters voluntarily comply with a White House request to air five minutes a night of “candidate centered discourse” in last month of the 2000 election campaign. Contrary to the non-binding request and to the promises of some of the stations, the researchers found that the 74 stations surveyed ran a mere minute and 14 seconds of such news in the final month of the campaign.)

Given the above body of research findings showing that the media have real effects both on individuals and on group political behavior, and given the evidence about how consolidation of ownership adversely diminishes media pluralism and the general quality of information provided by the news media, we can expect, *ceteris paribus*, that a reduction in competition and a consolidation of news ownership by publicly owned corporations will be associated with lower levels of political knowledge. The lower levels of media pluralism also can adversely affect how governments observe human rights, including basic democratic freedoms such as the right of free speech, the right of free association and electoral rights. I will present evidence supporting these conclusions in the following chapters, but first I want to describe the fluid and diverse media world of Europe, which is experiencing changes in media ownership structure across several dimensions.

Chapter Four

The Media in Europe: Converging on Commercialism

Analyzing the media landscape of Europe presents a formidable challenge. An extremely wide range of cultures and political systems exists within what is classified geographically as Europe. After all, what unites Russia, Montenegro, Sweden, and Spain, aside from their position on what is defined as the European continent? What cultural traits do Ireland, Serbia, Italy, and Estonia have in common? How can we compare the media systems that originate from such diverse histories and which serve such a variety of audiences? How do the changes in ownership of the European media affect the political behavior and opinions of the public? Despite the challenges of examining a set of countries and media systems that exhibit such diversity, the task is worthwhile for at least two important reasons.

First, Europe has become the largest media market in the world (Williams 2005, 15). With the population of Russia, Norway and Switzerland, the former communist countries of Eastern and Central Europe, and the member states of the enlarged European Union, the European media market consists of almost 700 million people, almost three times as large as the domestic media market in the United States. The high level of media consumption predates the era of broadcasting, as newspapers have long been an important part of European life. European newspaper readership is still the highest in the world (Eurobarometer 2002). For every 1,000 residents, 261 Europeans purchase a newspaper every day, compared to 141 Americans and the world average of 96 (UNESCO 2003). The broadcasting and cable television market in Europe is even more dynamic, generating total revenues of \$79.8 billion in 2007, which represents a compound annual growth rate of 3 percent for the period from

2003 through 2007. European television has expanded from 47 channels to more than 1,678 in less than 20 years (Steemers 2007, 57-78).

As these figures imply, this market is changing rapidly. It has grown dramatically in the last decade, as new media and broadcasting developments have boosted the media audience. In no other region do so many media compete in such a modern and varied environment.

This fact underlies a second reason to include Europe in a study of the political impact of media changes. Social scientists recommend selecting observations to make sure that adequate variation in the explanatory variable exists, whatever the values of the dependent variables are (e.g. King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). In the case of European media systems, diversity can be an asset for the purposes of examining how changes in media systems affect political behavior.

Across Europe, two broad trends are profoundly altering the media landscape. First, the same tendency toward media ownership consolidation that has been so powerful in the United States also has affected Europe. Second, the national governments of Europe in the last two decades have made policy decisions that shift power and resources away from publicly owned broadcasting systems. These two trends are separate, yet they also are related, because as national media systems have become deregulated and open to competition, large media companies are playing an increasingly dominant role.

The trend toward ownership consolidation is striking in Europe, but unlike the United States, where federal regulators for the last two decades have paid little heed to concerns about pluralism within the media, European Union officials have publicly raised concerns about how diversity can be preserved within the media, while at the same time allowing maximum scope for competition. In 2007, for example, the

Commission of the European Communities began a three-phase process to examine the issue of pluralism within the media. The commission first produced a working paper on media pluralism, outlining attempts to promote pluralism by third parties and organizations. The paper included baseline information about the regulations and regulatory models within the European Union. The commission then completed an independent study of media within the European Union, seeking objective indicators of media pluralism. The last step will be opening the process up for public participation with the release of findings. A second study may be commissioned to measure the sustainability of media pluralism within Europe. The position of the commission is clearly stated on the first page of its working document:

“The European Union is committed to protecting media pluralism as an essential pillar of the right to information and freedom of expression enshrined in Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Since the early nineties the discussion on media pluralism has played an important role within the European Union” (Commission of the European Communities 2007).

But while the European Union response has been arguably more sensitive to the importance of media diversity in democracies, Europe also was affected by a wave of deregulation and loosening of ownership restrictions, allowing the European media to be controlled by a shrinking number of media conglomerates. European regulators have attempted to strike a balance between the need to preserve diversity within the media while allowing European firms the regulatory freedom to contest the dominance of U.S. firms in the media market.

For example, the Bangemann Report (1994) states the urgent need for regulatory changes to allow European firms to compete better. The report shows how the regulators attempt to balance the need for pluralism with the objective of creating favorable conditions for European media companies.

“Why the urgency? Because competitive suppliers of networks and services from outside Europe are increasingly active in our markets. They are convinced, as we must be, that if Europe arrives late our suppliers of technologies and services will lack the commercial muscle to win a share of the enormous global opportunities which lie ahead. Our companies will migrate to more attractive locations to do business. Our export markets will evaporate. We have to prove them wrong” (Bangemann 1994, 7)

One element of the policy recommendations made by the Bangemann Report was that regulation was needed at the supranational level to make sure that regulations were consistent across all member states (Wheeler 2004). In addition to the economic motivations behind this policy, regulators also recognized the cultural and political impact of the media sector. A united Europe was perceived as a critical element to avoid future conflicts among the European states. In this sense, pan-European television was a factor that could “improve mutual knowledge amongst the people’s of Europe” and “increase their consciousness of the values and the destiny they have in common” (Robins 1993, 81).

A unified approach toward media regulation may be the goal, but realization of that objective is far from complete. In reality, the approach taken by national governments toward the issue of media ownership concentration varies widely. Countries such as Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden have few or no restrictions on horizontal concentration in the television sector. In the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal, and Spain, there are no restrictions at all on cross-media ownership. Some of these countries – such as Denmark, Finland, and Sweden – have broad legal prohibitions of media monopolies, yet they have no specific terms to limit ownership (Kevin et al. 2004).

Across this diversity of approaches, some broad patterns are visible. In the Nordic countries, the emphasis is on the use of government subsidies to maintain

pluralism within the media. The media sectors tend to be highly concentrated in these countries. The Nordic countries also are home to some of the largest European companies such as Schibsted, Orkla Media, and Bonnier. The Baltic States have an approach similar to the Nordic countries, with which they share some cultural heritage and historic links. In contrast to the Nordic countries, however, the Baltic states tend to have weak public broadcasting systems, and foreign media companies control much of the countries' private broadcasting (Kevin 2008, 89-90).

In the Central and East European states, the media regulation system was guided by Western governments, international organizations, and Western companies. An uneasy balance often has been struck as regulators attempted to preserve independence while preparing the media markets for EU membership. The process in general has been controversial and contentious (Harcourt 2003, 120-136).

The only European Union countries that have developed a competition policy that treats the media as a sector of special significance for society are Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Austria, and Ireland. These countries in general also have strong public broadcasting systems. Aside from these similarities, however, the countries also exhibit considerable differences. In the Netherlands, for example, the print media is especially concentrated and some political pressure for regulating the sphere is increasing (Kevin 2008, 92).

The Mediterranean countries have a number of similarities in their media regulation regime. Spain, Greece, and Portugal share some characteristics of the Central and Eastern European states, having emerged from dictatorships relatively recently. In these countries too, large foreign companies have moved into the markets. In some countries, like Italy, home-based media empires have developed.

Some regulatory changes made in Europe may have slowed the inroads made by U.S.-based media, but a side effect was an increase in the consolidation of the European media market. The many new television and radio channels that were created by the deregulation and liberalization initiatives in Europe have been controlled by a shrinking number of media conglomerates. While the media giants such as Disney and News Corporation dominate the United States market, at this point many of the world's largest media companies are European in origin and possess enormous economic and political clout. Of the world's 50 top media companies at the end of the last century, half were European; eight were based in Germany, seven in the United Kingdom, four in France, three in Italy, two in the Netherlands, and one in Luxembourg (Meier and Trappel 1998, 48). Berlusconi, Murdoch, Hersant, Springer, Messier, Bertelsmann, Havas, and Hachette now possess the majority of media holdings in the continent, while their media businesses in general are international. The growth of these corporations has been caused essentially by "an unprecedented wave of mergers, acquisitions and partnership agreements" (Mazzoleni and Palmer 1992, 34).

In addition to the consolidation of media ownership, a global phenomenon at this point, Europe has been affected especially by a movement to dismantle publicly funded television and radio stations, a movement fueled as much by ideological politics as economics. This movement coincides with the consolidation of ownership that is occurring globally and may potentiate the political and social effects caused by this trend. The deregulation and privatization of public broadcasting systems has meant effectively that even publicly owned systems find themselves competing in the media market. As they compete against private broadcasting companies, the

programming offered by the public broadcasting systems has often become nearly indistinguishable from its privately-owned competitors, losing the public service function that provided the original rationale for public broadcasting systems (Brants and Siune 1998, 137-9).

This rationale was quite explicit as post-war national public broadcasting systems developed in Europe over the last 50 years. While broadcasting in the United States grew along a free market model, in Europe governments took a more interventionist approach to the new media of radio and television. Within the Soviet Union and the European countries dominated by the Soviet Union, the media was completely state controlled, but even in Western Europe national governments played an important role in developing and maintaining national broadcast systems (Williams 2005). Following World War II, a consensus developed among Western European nations in their approach to broadcast systems. The policies adopted aimed for eclectic programming, public accountability, government monopoly, national scope, political independence, and non-commercialism (McQuail 1995).

The most common way of funding the public broadcasting systems in Western Europe was through a license fee on television sets, levied and collected by the national governments. In general, only one broadcaster was licensed; the monopoly was justified because the broadcast spectrum was limited, and only a few channels could be used. National governments also recognized the potential power of broadcast media, and were reluctant to allow it to operate free from government oversight.

The funding and oversight provided by national governments meant that the broadcast systems could be “highly politicized” (Blumler and Hoffman-Reim 1992, 12). The actual degree of political interference, however, varied widely, dependent in part on the institutional structure of the broadcasting system. The United Kingdom,

Ireland, and Sweden, for example, incorporated arrangements in their broadcasting systems which separated decision making in the broadcasting system from the major political parties. Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, and Belgium developed broadcasting systems that ensured that all major political parties and social movements had representation in the governing bodies of the broadcasting systems. Greece, Italy, and France, however, are served by public broadcast systems that historically have been vulnerable to direct interference by government bodies (Kelly 1983).

The overall rationale for these arrangements was that the service provided by the broadcasting system was too important to be left to the market. Both the public and politicians viewed the broadcast of information as a public good, to be provided for all and collectively organized. Public broadcasting enabled political elites to maintain some control over potentially divisive social forces. The public broadcasting system also served cultural elites, serving to educate the public about the arts and sciences. In general, the public broadcasting system was perceived as a tool to foster social harmony (Williams 2002, 46).

Beginning in the 1970s, however, the public broadcasting system in Europe began to be shaken by a combination of technological and political factors. The original rationale for the public broadcasting system was, after all, the limited nature of the broadcast spectrum. As new technologies developed, incorporating the use of cable and satellite transmission, this rationale seemed less justifiable (Negrine 1998, 228)

The epicenter of change was in Italy, where the defeat of the Christian Democrats in 1974 provoked calls for changes in the nation's broadcasting system. The first phase of the changes was deregulation, a process that eventually led to the

establishment of about 600 local television stations and 2,500 radio stations (Mazzoleni 1997, 129). The audience share of these stations grew from four percent in 1977 to about 24 percent in 1979 (Sartori 1996). The motivations of the station owners at first ranged from idealism to profit seeking, but by the end of the decade, large businessmen had taken control of the majority of the new stations. Silvio Berlusconi, who eventually became the dominant force in Italian media and president of the country, got his initial start in the business during this period.

The case of Berlusconi is extreme in the clarity with which it demonstrates how media power is political power. With 82 percent of Italians depending on television for their political news (Norris 2000, 85), Berlusconi was well positioned to take advantage of a fluid political situation in 1994, when a series of scandals battered the five leading political parties in Italy. Using heavy advertising on the three television networks he owned, Berlusconi's Forza Italia received 21 percent of the vote, becoming prime minister. While he and his party lost power in 1996, voters returned Berlusconi to power in 2001. His political power has ebbed little in the years since then.

“Berlusconi's media muscle was a major factor in his success, but not in the way that many might imagine. There is little evidence that Berlusconi used his three television networks to broadcast overt propaganda, still less that the Italian electorate are so unsophisticated as to be bludgeoned into supporting him through saturation of their TV screens. In fact, the impact of Berlusconi's media empire was both less obvious and far more significant than that. Berlusconi has transformed and reshaped the political landscape in Italy, creating a new form of political institution – rooted in his media empire – to replace the old parties of the right. Ironically, in trying to make Berlusconi's media power the central issue of the campaign, the left fell straight into his trap. In what happened in Italy in 2001, there is a major lesson to be learnt about the real power – behind the scenes and TV screens – that comes with concentrated media ownership” (Hallin and Mancini 2001, 1).

Political changes initiated the shift in broadcasting policy in Italy; politics also played a role in other Western European broadcasting systems. Margaret Thatcher, for example, took power as Prime Minister in the United Kingdom in 1979, and brought to the British broadcasting system the same advocacy for privatization that she did to the nation's transportation system, energy industry and utilities. Thatcher's government commissioned the Peacock Committee in 1986 to investigate alternative funding for the BBC, but the commission in the end decided against privatization, a policy that lacked broad public support (Weymouth 1996, 63). In France, television broadcasting had been more closely identified with the state, and it was not until 1982 that the Haut Autorité was established in 1982, formalizing the separation between the broadcasting system and the national government (Lamizet 1996, 89). Legislation in 1986 completely freed the bulk of television programming from government interference. Regulation of television was ceded to the Council for Audiovisual Media (CSA). Jacques Chirac in particular brought a decidedly adversarial approach to the public broadcasting system when he took power in 1995 (Pfanner 2004). In recent years, the French television broadcasting has been marked by verbal commitments about the importance of public interest broadcasting, coincident with a reticence to appropriate necessary funding for this function (Charon 2004).

Finally, the lobbying by business interests was also an important factor in the decision to deregulate the broadcasting systems across Europe. A variety of private interests stood to profit by dismantling state ownership of the broadcasting system or loosening strictures on competition. Cable and satellite operators saw new broadcasters as potential clients. Independent television producers perceived that opening up the market could increase their business. The advertising interests

understood that with greater competition in the broadcasting sector, the rates for advertising would fall (Mattelart and Palmer 1991).

While the trends discussed above have manifested themselves across Europe, their effect differs because of cultural differences across Europe. In general, Europe can be divided in at least two ways. One analysis categorizes Europe into post-communist and “Western. Another approach focuses on those “Western” countries, dividing them into the Polarized Pluralist Model, the Democratic Corporatist Model, and the Liberal Model (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The most obvious division in Europe is between “Western” countries and those states in which the national governments implemented broad socialist policies modeled at least in part on the Soviet Union. The countries of the former Yugoslavia, for example, were not allied with the Soviet Union, yet the government was authoritarian socialist and the media there were more similar to those in Soviet Bloc countries than they were to so-called “Western” countries. These socialist governments had a dramatic effect on the development of media in these countries in at least two ways.

First, because of the many years of government-directed economy, the per capita income level in the former communist countries is still much lower than their Western cousins. According to data from the World Bank, the 2008 average per capita income of the former communist countries of the Europe was nearly \$12,000, compared to \$32,600 per capita income in 2009 for the countries of the European Union (CIA Factbook 2009). Consideration of the media in a society cannot be separated from the economic infrastructure that supports it. The economic condition of the former socialist countries of Europe affects the development of new media within these countries because it limits the potential revenue that can be reaped from

media ventures. Material investment in a market is proportional to the amount of revenue that can reasonably be expected from a market.

Second, the media in the communist countries made no pretense of independence during the communist governments and the communist government policies in these countries have left a legacy of cynicism and underdeveloped objectivity within the media. The economic consequences of the post-war rule by communist governments are large, of course, but the political consequences of these governments in the sphere of the media is especially pertinent here.

The media in Soviet-style socialist countries play a vital role, bolstering the power of the ruling elite and indoctrinating the population with party dogma. As O'Neil (quoting both Stalin and Khrushchev) describes it, the media serve as a "transmission belt" in such countries, carrying knowledge and information from the party to the people (1997, 1). Milton describes the press in Eastern Europe as "an organ of the state, completely reliant on and subservient to the communist party." He argues that a radical transformation of the media was unlikely because the political organizations and structures had not been changed sufficiently (1997, 15). In fact, since the seminal events of 1989, the course of the media development in former socialist countries has to a large extent paralleled the democratization process of other institutions within these countries. In contrast to the high hopes that arose following the collapse of the Berlin Wall, progress has been anything but uniform.

According to the 2009 Freedom House report on the combined CEE/FSU area, eight countries (28 percent) were classified as Free, 10 (36 percent) were Partly Free, and 10 (36 percent) were Not Free. The majority of the people in this region (56 percent) reside in media environments classified as Not Free, while only 18 percent of the populations in these states have access to Free Media. The average score across

the region in 2007 showed the largest drop of any region, declines particularly noticeable in the legal and political categories (Freedom House 2010).

Even countries that appeared to be making progress toward a free media are showing disturbing signs of repression. For example, Croatia, which had been one of the Balkan states making clear progress in establishing a sustainable free press, regressed dramatically in 2008. One newspaper publisher was murdered. Another journalist was beaten. The International Research and Exchange Board (IREX), which scores countries in the region on the quality of their media, rated Croatia for that year at 2.46, down from 3.04 that it had scored in 2005 (IREX 2008).

The violent repression is just one way in which freedom of the press is threatened in these countries. In the privately owned media, publications and broadcast stations are often used for the naked self-interest of the owners. Political power is sought for economic purposes, and owning a media outlet can enhance the political power of entrenched political elites. For example, Adina Baya cites concerns such as lack of transparency in ownership and funding, poor implementation of the legislative framework and the unclear division in her study of Romanian media. By itself, the generally high level of concentration of ownership within that market might not be problematic, but because of the historical lack of editorial independence and these other concerns, ownership concentration can result in disproportional power for media owners (Baya 2008).

In the sphere of public broadcasting in the formerly communist countries, media resources nominally owned by the public possess a high value and are vulnerable to manipulation or even de facto expropriation by political elites.

“Although legally and in theory they are public organizations independent from the State, PSB (public service broadcasting) operators in Central and Eastern Europe have always experienced harsh politicization. They have shown acute deficiencies in their governance structures, easy manipulability of the sources of funding and slow reform of their programming to be distinguished from commercial broadcasters. It is common for the governing bodies of the public service broadcasters to be filled with people close to the local political elite. It has become a norm that each change in administration triggers immediate changes in the boards and management of the public service broadcasters, which has shown that these stations continue to be treated as the fiefdom of the politicians in power” (Dragomir 2010, 251).

As in most contests over power, the question of funding is especially crucial in Eastern and Central Europe, where editorial independence of public service broadcasters is more fragile than in Western Europe. Financing for public service broadcasting through the state budget is considered by many observers to create an immediate dependence of the broadcast system on the state, leaving it especially vulnerable to direct and indirect pressure. Financing from license fees, paid by owners of television sets, is judged more appropriate, because the money does not come directly from the state budget, allowing greater independence for public service broadcasters. The range of independence demonstrated by these broadcasters ranges widely. At one end of the spectrum, the Estonian public broadcasting system gets high marks in general for its public service-oriented approach, despite questions about its financing and regulatory ambiguities. The public broadcasting system is composed of Eesti Raadio (Estonian Radio) and Eesti Televisioon (Estonian TV), both public legal entities that are independent but supervised by a broadcasting council, appointed by the Riigikogu (Parliament) (Loit 2005). At the other end of the spectrum is the situation in Moldova. Moldova1, the public broadcasting station in Moldova, is notorious for interviewing only government officials actively avoiding any topic that could cast a negative light on the government. (Civil Rights Defenders 2009). The

public broadcasting system in Moldova has been the focus of sharp debates as journalists have taken the lead in organizing efforts to safeguard its editorial independence. In the summer of 2004, security forces attacked journalists who were striking to protest government attempts at censorship. (IJF 2004).

The public broadcasting systems in the majority of the formerly communist countries lie in between these extremes, struggling against government efforts to abridge their independence while simultaneously scraping for funding and fighting for audience share against aggressive privately-owned competitors. In Hungary, for example, the government has been accused of interference in public broadcasting that amounts to "a circle of improper political influence, which threatens freedom of expression in Hungary" (IFJ 2001). In Slovakia, politically connected directors who are almost entirely lacking in professional qualifications supervise the public broadcasting system. The media as a whole in that country were termed "political opposition" by the Prime Minister, who initiated an explicitly adversarial policy vis-à-vis the media (Kerlik 2007). The assessment by Krzysztof Bobinski of the Polish public broadcasting system is more or less typical of the obstacles faced by government-owned media in the region:

"As the state owned media also carries advertising and is seeing license fee payments constantly declining, the fight for audience share means that it is increasingly difficult to touch subjects which may be important but are seen as dull. As a result, television current events are becoming "tabloidised" and coverage of foreign events suffers" (Bobinski 2008).

Aside from the stark post-communist/Western division of European countries, a more subtle set of distinctions can be drawn, dividing Europe into three "models." These broad classifications - the polarized pluralist model, the democratic corporatist model, and the liberal model - have been developed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) in their book *Comparing Media Systems*, a substantial revision of the concepts described

in *Four Theories of the Press* (Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956), an ambitious Cold-War-Era attempt to explain the current shape of press systems around the world.

Four Theories of the Press displays what has been termed a “normative, functionalist focus,” providing “scant empirical comparative analysis” (Hardy 2008, 13). In contrast, *Comparing Media Systems* adopts a “most similar systems” design of comparison, recommended by Lijphart (1971) as a way to restrict the number of relevant variables by focusing on relatively comparable cases. Hallin and Mancini identify five political system variables, using them to explore the relationships between media structures and political system characteristics. Hallin and Mancini argue that these variables interact with other factors such as technology, economic system, and socio-political movements to shape the structure of a nation’s media system. The variables are:

- Moderate versus polarized pluralism.
- Clientalism versus rational-legal authority.
- The role of interest groups and the extent to which they are incorporated into political structures.
- The formal political systems and democratic rule.
- The role of the state in formulating media policy and regulation.

The grouping of media systems into the three categories is an exercise in social science, and so by definition it is not exact. In general, Hallin and Mancini make the argument that the countries of Europe can be categorized as following one of these three models of development in its media system. The media system of Norway, for example, is a good example of the democratic

corporatist model, possessing a strong welfare state, organized pluralism, and a consensus-style of government. Greece typifies the polarized pluralist model, with the state exercising a strong role in the economy, and the nation as a whole possessing a weaker development of rational legal authority. The United States is a good example of the liberal model, with a strong development of rational-legal authority, predominantly majoritarian governance and individualized representation, rather than organized pluralism. (Hallin and Mancini 2004, 68).

Each of these variables described by Hallin and Mancini has contributed to the establishment of the current media systems in these countries; each also plays a role in determining how the media system will adapt to the various market, technological, and political factors that contribute to the evolution of the current media system. What is the regulatory system for the countries in question? How responsive is the political system to popular pressure? How vulnerable is the national government to lobbying by political or economic elites? In considering the effect of broader trends such as ownership consolidation or commercialization, it is essential that we consider these questions as we evaluate the response of individual media systems.

While *Comparing Media Systems* has been termed a “major achievement and advance,” (Hardy 2008, 19) it has also been criticized for omitting consideration of factors such as country size and regionalism (McQuail 2005; Remington 2006). Furthermore, *Comparing Media Systems* makes no attempt to include the former communist states of Europe in its system, limiting its study to Western Europe and North America. Despite these limitations, broad agreement exists on its central contention that European media systems - both Western and former communist - are

in general adopting the characteristics of the “North Atlantic” or liberal model (e.g. Kelly, Mazzoleni, and McQuail 2004; Hardy 2008; Williams 2005.)

Low political parallelism, high levels of commercialization, and a limited role for the state characterize the liberal model. In the European publishing world, the party newspapers that characterize the democratic corporatist model are becoming rare. In broadcasting, public service systems now compete with commercial media, and in many countries the new commercial media have become dominant. The sources of information are changing, and the content of the media itself is also being altered because of changes in ownership and format. In earlier chapters, I described the ways in which media content affects both individuals and society as a whole. For example, reductions in the quantity of political information disseminated to the public have been associated with lower levels of interest in politics (Dunaway 2008) and lower levels of knowledge about public affairs (Stempel 1973). In individual cases, political issues have either been given precedence or been neglected, depending on the preferences of media owners. As the debate over pluralism within Europe makes abundantly clear, both the content and the ownership of the media have a grave impact on society and politics. The effect of these changes is itself mitigated by the existing institutions within a society, however, so that diminished pluralism will exhibit its most pernicious effects when the countervailing democratic institutions within a society are weakest. In the following chapter, I analyze the data from a subset of European countries, many of them with comparatively weak democratic institutions, to explore the effect of media pluralism on a nation’s respect for human rights and for the prevalence of corruption.

Chapter Five

Media Pluralism and Observance of Human Rights in Former Communist States: A Quantitative Analysis

Up to this point I have for the most part described changes in the media and their consequences in countries that have established democratic governance.

Pluralism within a media system, however, also has an effect in regimes that do not consistently exhibit democratic norms. Gradations in social and political freedoms exist, both within and without democracies.

I examine in this chapter the political and social effects of constricting the media in polities that are sometimes termed “transitional.” In this analysis, I use data on press freedom, corruption, political freedom, and human rights. These data show how diminished media pluralism, which creates such concerns in the United States and the democracies of Europe, has analogous impacts in nations that are not considered consolidated democracies in any sense. A whole chain of consequences originates from the constriction of information sources, whether it occurs by government fiat or because of financial reasons. With fewer news sources informing the public, the possibility of the government co-opting the media increases. The co-opted media are more likely to serve as government cheerleaders than watchdogs guarding the public interest. Overall, when media pluralism is reduced, many human rights are adversely affected, both in democracies and dictatorships.

The countries examined in this chapter are a diverse set, including former republics of the USSR, former republics of Yugoslavia, and Eastern European countries that were nominally independent from the USSR. They range geographically from the Adriatic in the West to the Tian Shan Mountains in the East. Culturally, they include countries that formerly belonged to the Holy Roman

Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire. The common denominator is that communist governments in the last century have ruled all of them. Since the collapse of these governments, these countries have developed in diverse ways. Some, such as Croatia, are developing democratic institutions and are even candidates for accession to the European Union. Others, such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, have become even more dictatorial since independence. For all these countries, however, their recent history under Communist rule still shapes both the politics and media systems in these countries. All of these countries wrestle still with legacies of corruption and authoritarianism, two factors that affect the quality of the news media functioning in these societies.

While the media of the Soviet Union and the other Communist nations in this sample were not monolithic, a firm ideological hand guided them all. In general, the Soviet Union provided the model for the management of the media within its sphere of influence (Hollander 1972, 30). Control of the press by the central government was an essential element of the communist system.

“Leninist views of the press, combined with the theoretical supremacy of Marxist-Leninist Philosophy and the needs of totalitarian regimes to influence public opinion, led to censorship in various forms across communist states. Thus, the suppression of press freedom was among the first steps of communist regimes in Bolshevik Russia and Eastern Europe, although in Central and East European countries this was often an incremental process” (Škokay 1997, 62).

It is difficult to overstate the importance of the role played by mass media in the Communist countries of Europe and Eurasia. Western media theory ascribes the media roles of such as watchdog and democratic forum (Graber 1986, Habermas 2003) but in Communist societies, the media was considered quite differently. Lenin, himself the editor of the revolutionary newspaper *Iskra*, saw the media as performing multiple functions, all of which could serve to consolidate the position of the

Communist Party. Lenin's description of the media became a guiding slogan for the new Soviet media system:

“A newspaper is not only a collective propagandist and a collective agitator; it is also a collective organizer. In this last respect it may be likened to the scaffolding round a building under construction, which marks the contours of the structure and facilitates communication between the builders, enabling them to distribute the work and to view the common results achieved by their organized labor. With the aid of the newspaper, and through it, a permanent organization will naturally take shape” (Lenin 1961, 17).

Efforts to establish control of the media began early in the Soviet history. In 1922, the Soviet government formed Glavlit, the Main Administration of Literary and Publishing Affairs, which was responsible for approving all printed matter before publication and monitoring publications. In addition to overtly censoring media, the Soviet government also took proactive steps to inculcate communist values in the journalism community. Doing so required establishing norms that supported the perspective of the Communist Party. As opposed to the “who, what, why, where, how” questions that Western journalism students are instructed to answer in their articles, Soviet journalists had different priorities. A handbook for Soviet journalists listed “Basic Principles of the Soviet Press” to guide media professional.

1. Party loyalty (Partinost)
2. High ideological content (Ideinost)
3. Patriotism (Otchestvenost)
4. Adherence to Leninist theory (Pravdivost)
5. Proximity to the proletariat (Narodnost)
6. Accessibility to the masses (Massovost)
7. Criticism and self-criticism (Kritika I Samo-Kritika)

An entire chapter further described how these values were to be manifested in the work of journalists (Hollander 1972, 39).

After the media system was established, its fundamentals remained largely unaltered for more than 80 years. The media outlets themselves may have differed in form across the USSR and other Communist countries, but the Communist Party effectively controlled the media as a whole. The press was an “organ of the state, completely reliant on and subservient to the communist party” (Milton 1997, 15). As a servant of the party, the role of the media was clear, although its effectiveness in fulfilling that role might be questioned.

Lenin’s successor, Stalin, took the system established by Lenin and further institutionalized its objectives and means. Stalin referred to the media as a “vital transmission belt,” conveying ideology from the Party to the masses. The press, according to Stalin, was a “prime instrument through which the Party speaks daily, hourly, with the working class in its own indispensable language” (Markham 1967, 100). Stalin viewed the media as serving a strictly “proletarian” role, in which the Western concept of freedom of inquiry was completely irrelevant. In a 1927 interview with foreign journalists, Stalin maintained that because the entire publishing infrastructure had been nationalized, the masses now had freedom of the press. Freedom of the press was for proletarians, not for the bourgeoisie and political enemies (Hopkins 1970, 75).

The death of Stalin in 1953 prompted some additional openness in the media system, but not a significant change in orientation. The name of Glavlit changed in 1953 to the Chief Administration for the Protection of Military and State Secrets in the Press and in 1966 the word “military” was removed. Other agencies aside from Glavlit continued to monitor the press. The committee on the press disbanded in the 1930s but was brought back under Khrushchev to monitor publication of newspapers and magazines (Hopkins 1970, 80-85).

In 1945, the Communist regimes acquired another media tool for indoctrination: television. Evidence about its ideological role, however, is mixed. While Soviet television contained a substantial amount of ideological content, much of the information was not explicitly political. Radio, newspapers, and magazines were chosen to perform the majority of the indoctrination function of the media (Powell 1975). Nonetheless, in Moscow non-conformist circles, the 1,772-foot-tall Ostankino television tower, which towered over the neighborhoods in the northern section of the city, was termed “the needle,” partly because of its shape but also because of the way television injected propaganda into the Soviet population (Shane 1994, 153).

During Khrushchev’s rule, the committee on the press supervised press censorship activities, but later this activity was transferred to the Council of Ministers in 1966. The Department of Propaganda, which was supervised by a Politburo member, had ultimate authority over functioning of the mass media (Hopkins 1970). While Khrushchev famously denounced Stalin’s excesses and ushered in a period of comparative openness within the Soviet Union, he also referred to the press as a transmission belt, carrying directions from the party to the masses. For Khrushchev, the differences between the media directed by the Soviet government and the Western media, directed by the economic elite, were not so grand.

“Everyone is free to write what he wants. If a publisher finds that the writing does not help strengthen the capitalist system, he rejects it. He does not print it, and it turns out to be written not for people, but for mice” (Khrushchev, cited in Hopkins 1970, 105).

Khrushchev may have sincerely hoped that the Soviet media could give voice to the complaints of Soviet workers struggling against sluggish bureaucracy, but by that time the media itself had accommodated themselves to the role of

propagandists, and were unwilling or unable to serve as a watchdog or popular forum. For the most part, journalists remembered too well the fearful years of purges and repressions under Stalin. Journalists were reluctant to make individual judgments that might put themselves at risk (Hopkins 1970, 105).

Just in case there were such journalists, the Department of Propaganda, itself overseen by a Politburo member, appointed party members to editorial and management positions of both the official and nominally independent news organizations such as Novosti (Hopkins 1970). The media system operated with these general structures until the changes initiated by the perestroika policy of Gorbachev. When these changes came, professionals working in the media sphere were puzzled by and skeptical of the signals sent by Gorbachev early in his presidency. What, after all, could journalists accustomed to decades of censorship, make of comments such as this?

“When the subject of publicity comes up, calls are sometimes made for exercising greater caution when speaking about the shortcomings, omissions, and difficulties that are inevitable in any ongoing effort. There can only be one answer to this, a Leninist answer: Communists want the truth, always and under all circumstances” (Gorbachev 1986).

Reporting the truth was dangerous, and how could journalists know that such behavior would not be punished, especially if power or policy shifted? One observer noted that the press was “unable to stomach the highly controversial issues raised by Gorbachev” (Hazan 1987, 165). This attitude changed as the signs of the regime’s commitment to glasnost and perestroika became unmistakable. In time, the media became among Gorbachev’s greatest allies, publicizing mismanagement, corruption, and crimes that had been beyond the pale of discussion for decades. According to Zassoursky, in fact, the press was the only reliable ally Gorbachev had in his battles with the conservatives within the Communist Party (Zassoursky 2004, 4). In the first

year of his presidency, Gorbachev appointed Alexander Yakovlev, former ambassador to Canada, to the head of the Central Committee Propaganda Department. A close friend of Gorbachev, Yakovlev had been relegated to the relative obscurity of Canada because of antipathy to the Brezhnev regime. In his new position, Yakovlev proved to be a vocal and effective proponent of glasnost (Turpin 1995, 16).

One of the journalists to take advantage of the changes was Yegor Yakovlev, appointed as the new editor-in-chief at the Moscow News. A respected journalist who had been fired from several government-run organizations, Yakovlev took his new position seriously, firing or replacing 60 staffers at the publication. He aimed to make the Moscow News, which had become a party mouthpiece distributed for foreign consumption, into a Soviet newspaper, critically assessing reality rather than parroting party dogma (Turpin 1995, 30). Yakovlev clearly saw the importance of the media in realizing the political and democratic changes aimed for by Gorbachev.

“Without glasnost, there is no perestroika, no democracy, no socialism. Glasnost is the strength, courage, and the willingness to look truth in the face, at home and abroad. We have emerged from self-delusions, from a silence designed to cover up negative phenomena and abuses of power. Daringly and radically, we are changing our thinking and our practices, as you know from reading our press. And as you know, as a result of glasnost there is a tremendous demand to increase the print runs of newspapers, magazines, and journals. Everyone wants to subscribe to the best ones. But we don’t have the paper at this time, which shocks me. Here, too, is economic mismanagement”
(Cohen and vanden Heuvel 1989, 42).

Collapse of USSR and Commercialization of Mass Media

While the media environment was changing rapidly under Gorbachev’s perestroika, the development of media was altered radically and suddenly by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. In the component parts of the Soviet Union that achieved their independence, the media suddenly had new masters. Across the region,

the genie of privatization was loosed, and entrepreneurs quickly realized the political and economic gains that could be realized by owning media properties. The investors were both foreign and domestic across the region, brave or foolish entrepreneurs seeking to exploit what was perceived to be a huge latent market for journalism that was unfettered from ponderous state restrictions.

In Russia, for example, the large banks and industrial concerns, operating in a nearly anarchic political and economic system, soon saw the value of owning media properties. These media properties could be used to defame foes or provide free advertising for political or business positions. Vladimir Gusinsky, a former theater director who made his first fortune selling copper bracelets, created the Media Most media empire in 1997 (Hoffman 2003). By 1997, Gazprom, Russia's natural-gas monopoly, had acquired a 30 percent stake in the television station NTV, as well as a large interest in the newspapers Trud and Komsolmolskaya Pravda (Gordon 1997). Further to the west, established Western media companies saw opportunity in the formerly Communist countries of Eastern Europe. As early as 1994, foreigners owned roughly 50 percent of the Czech press, including at least 16 of the largest daily publications (Kettle 1997). The Central European Media Enterprises, led by Ronald Lauder (heir to the Estée Lauder fortune), in this period acquired interests in roughly 20 national commercial television stations including POP TV in Slovenia, PRO TV in Romania and TV Nova in Czech Republic (Landler 1996).

The lifting of overt state controls and the influx of money did not mean a uniform improvement of media across the region. Given how long journalists had labored under tight state restrictions and the shallow democratic roots in many of the formerly Communist countries, it would be unrealistic to expect that the media could quickly perform their democratic functions well. This period of

adjustment is not unique to the post-Communist world. In 1963, Herbert Passin examined the journalistic practices in the Philippines, Korea, India, and Japan and concluded the countries had “an oppositional, partisan press which finds it difficult to transform itself into the kind of responsible, non-partisan press that the new situation requires” (Passin 1963, 82).

Not surprisingly, the old Communist publications in most of these countries either came under the control of the new political parties or else remained the de facto property of the local nomenklatura that remained from the Communist era (Downing 1996). Across the region, the media were recognized immediately as a vital political tool. In general, the consensus among the post-Communist political elites in many of these countries was that the electronic media in particular should play an essential role in the interpretation of information and shaping political opinion (Škokay 2004). Perhaps the most notorious example of this willingness to dispense with journalistic objectivity in favor of supporting political goals came during the reelection campaign of President Boris Yeltsin, when media magnates effectively collaborated with the Yeltsin campaign, ignoring or downplaying serious doubts about his health (Hoffman 2003, 348-350).

Even in countries generally seen as following democratic norms, politicians often categorize media as “friendly” or “hostile,” and communicate with them according to these classifications (Prevratil 1995). Across this region, political elites have maintained strong ties to the media, even when those media do not apparently reflect the ideology of particular political parties. In Poland, for example, Jerzy Urban, the former spokesman for the Communist government during the period of martial law, was appointed editor of a pro-Communist, populist newspaper that specialized in coverage of scandal (Goban-Klas 1994). Despite these connections to the former

elites, the media in a number of former Communist countries reflected the tumult of the period, with new reformist parties contending with parties led by the former Communist elites. The old elites may have been discredited by their association with the Communist system, but in some ways they had an advantage by being better organized and with a clearer view of their objectives. The new democratic forces, on the other hand, have been described as inchoate and directionless, lacking a sociopolitical objective (Hankiss 1990).

By the end of the first decade following the collapse of Communist rule, however, in a number of the former Communist countries political power was becoming consolidated, with political parties finding their niches and becoming comfortable with their identities (Argh 1998). Simultaneously, new media companies were becoming established. In many cases, this meant that media outlets were separating themselves from the political patronage that had sustained them in the years following the collapse of the old regimes. This development was not an unmitigated benefit to democratic institutions (Gross 2003).

“While the media’s dependence on political parties and politicians for financial support has lessened, their dependency on the market for such support has increased. Furthermore, the profit-making incentive of some of the owners was simply married to the political use of them, which is to say, some media owners are also politicians, members of a political party, politically engaged out of personal convictions, or all three. When it comes to public service media, they are still dependent on the state or, more correctly, on the political party or parties in power and the their largesse with taxpayers’ money” (Gross 2003, 82).

Clearly, the lifting of overt state controls and the influx of money did not mean a uniform improvement of media or increased consciousness of democratic values in these countries. The uneven development of the media freedom and different levels of media pluralism is reflected in the assessments made in the region. The 2001 report on global press freedom published by Freedom House,

for example, noted positive developments in the Eastern and Central European former Communist countries.

In that year, Croatia's parliament expanded the independence of public and private news media. The parliament in Romania passed a law that theoretically provided greater public access to information. Serbia, meanwhile, opened state-owned media to NGOs and representatives of the political opposition.

During the same year, however, Russia and Ukraine were judged "Not Free," according to the report. Gazprom, the giant state-owned gas company, had taken control of the Media-Most, the media company started by Gusinsky with such optimism several years earlier. This change in ownership had immediate consequences, as the company closed the newspaper *Sevodya*, dismissed the staff of the weekly publication *Itogi*, and assumed control of the radio station *Ekho Moskvy*, one of the highest profile radio stations independent of government control (Karlekar 2002).

Measuring the Media

The journalism advocacy group Reporters Without Borders began compiling its reports on press freedom in 2002, focusing especially how press restrictions affect working journalists. In its 2003 report, the organization found that the republics constituting the former USSR in general received poor marks for press freedom. For example, Russia was rated 148th, Ukraine 132nd, and Belarus 151st out of the 166 countries surveyed. In 2008, Russia's ranking had improved slightly to a ranking of 141st, but the researchers noted that the government there showed its ability and intent to intimidate the media. The high profile murder of reporter Anna Politkovskaya on Oct. 6, 2006 was emblematic of the problems faced by journalists working in that country.

The International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) conducted a separate assessment of the region in 2001, focusing on the question of sustainability of media enterprises. At that point, the most progress among the countries surveyed was being made in three countries of Southeastern Europe – Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania. The media in these countries were judged then to be approaching sustainability, but the authors of the annual study were cautious about the future. The comments made by the authors echo other observations made about the media in the area.

“These states operate in an environment in which everything becomes political and society often becomes polarized. This not only provides the state with arguments to curb the right to free speech in the name of stability but can also impede the further development of professional journalism when media mirrors the political and societal polarization” (IREX 2001, 5).

The report compiled by IREX, termed the Media Sustainability Index (MSI), examines countries in which IREX operated media education and development projects. Since the initial Eurasian MSI was begun in 2000, the study has grown to encompass other regions. Now IREX compiles the index in 76 countries in Africa, Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. From its inception, the MSI has assessed the sustainability of the media in each country in terms of five “objectives.”

1. Do the legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information?
2. Does the journalism in that country meet professional standards of quality?
3. Do multiple news sources provide citizens with reliable, objective news?
4. Are the independent media well-managed businesses, allowing editorial independence?

5. Do supporting institutions function in the professional interests of independent media?

A score is given for each objective, using between seven and nine indicators that show how well each country meets the objectives. A two-staged process is used to score the countries. First, IREX gathers a panel of local media experts from each country. The people assessing the indicators may be media professionals, representatives of nongovernmental organizations, professional associations, and academic institutions. The panels are constituted with the goal of representing the capital city and other geographic regions of the country, and reflecting the ethnic, gender, and religious diversity. In order to establish some longitudinal consistency, at least half of the previous year's participants are included on the panel the following year.

In the assessment process, participants score every indicator for each objective. For example, Objective One states: Legal and social norms protect and promote free speech and access to public information. For this objective, there are nine indicators, such as: "Market entry and tax structure for media are fair and comparable to other industries" and "Licensing of broadcast media is fair, competitive, and apolitical." In general, the survey asks panelists to consider not only the formal rights and freedoms enjoyed by media but also how those rights and freedoms are experienced on a day-to-day basis. Overall, an attempt is made in the questionnaire not to favor one type of media over another. The intent is to "capture the influence of public, private, national, local, community, and new media," according to the methodology description offered (IREX 2010, 14).

After each panelist has scored the objective indicators, they meet to discuss the project. IREX does not seek to establish consensus on scores, although

panelists may elect to change their scoring. A moderator for the panel, usually a representative of the institutional partner in the host-country or a local individual, reports on the discussion. The IREX editorial staff then edits the analysis. The staff scores each country independently of the MSI panel, with this score carrying the same weight as the scores given by individual panelists. The average of scores for individual indicators produces the objective score, with the average of the scores for the five objectives producing the overall country score.

One advantage of the dataset composed of the MSI measures is that the data represent a relatively consistent longitudinal measure of media pluralism for a set of countries. One problem in attempting to quantitatively analyze the political or social effects of changes in the level of media pluralism is that the issue of media pluralism or media concentration has not been studied consistently over a prolonged time period in most countries. In Europe, for example, there have been several attempts to survey the extent of media ownership, but these efforts do not use the same methods of analysis, making comparison of the data difficult. Ironically, the best source for data on a longitudinal study of media pluralism may be gathered from a set of countries that fall far short of the ideal standards set for media systems.

Using the MSI data as the basis for study, I then augmented this dataset with other variables measuring socio-political aspects of the respective countries. The CIRI Human Rights Data Project has gathered standards-based quantitative data on government respect for 15 internationally recognized human rights in 195 countries for the years from 1981 through 2007. The primary source for the coding of the dataset is the U.S. State Department Country Reports on Human Rights Practices. In addition, for the group of four rights designated as “Personal Integrity Rights,” that is

the rights to freedom from extrajudicial killing, disappearance, torture, and political imprisonment,” the coders use a second source, Amnesty International’s Annual Report.

In general, the CIRI coding classifies the occurrence of the human rights situation on three point scale ranging from 0-2, classifying human rights abuses as either occurring frequently, occurring occasionally, or not occurring. The lower the number, the more frequent the occurrence, so a value of “2” means that the human rights abuse does not occur. The exception to this coding scheme occurs in the area of women’s rights, where the coding occurs on a four-point scale, ranging from 0-3. These ratings, however, also continue the format of having low numbers signify a lower level of respect for these rights.

The intent of the project is to assist scholars testing theories about the causes and consequences of human rights violations, as well as determining the effects of various policies on the observance of human rights. In this context, the usage of the data is appropriate as an indication of how constriction of media pluralism affects human rights. The logic behind the assertion that media pluralism affects human rights is straightforward. If the pluralism of the news media is abridged, fewer independent sources of information are available to the public within that nation. Fewer independent sources of information means that there are fewer chances that abuses of human rights by the government or other groups will be publicized. A lower level of publicity about human rights abuses increases the likelihood that these abuses will not be remedied and will continue.

In addition to CIRI data, I have incorporated data gathered over the last 10 years in the countries of interest by Transparency International. The Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) surveys countries around the world,

ranking them to the extent that their public officials are perceived to be corrupt. The index, a composite of other polls, gathers data on corruption from experts and from business surveys around the world. The index reflects the views of foreign experts and experts living within the countries surveyed. Transparency International commissions Dr. Johann Graf Lambsdorff, an economics professor at Passau University in Germany, to compile the CPI.

For the purposes of the CPI, corruption is defined as the abuse of public office for private gain. The surveys that provide the basis for the index inquire about issues such as bribery of public officials, embezzlement of public funds, kickbacks, and the effectiveness of anti-corruption regulations. The CPI focuses on perceptions of corruption because of the difficulties in obtaining absolute data on corruption. For example, focusing on the number of successful prosecution of corruption cases could reflect the competence of law enforcement in a country, rather than the corruption level within the country. The CPI attempts to use information gathered from people who are most directly affected by the corruption problems within a country, obtaining data from business people and country analysts. Two types of samples are used in the surveys, focusing separately on non-residents and residents. The viewpoints of residents correlate well generally with those of non-resident experts. The data used in compiling the CPI deals specifically with corruption, excluding surveys that document issues such as political stability, nationalism, or decentralization. The CPI ranks countries with scores that range from 0 (highly corrupt) to 10 (non-corrupt).

The intent of including information about corruption into the dataset here is to explore another potential impact of media consolidation and diminished media plurality. I argue that fewer independent information sources means that the “watchdog” role of the independent media will be less effectively performed. Media

consolidation means fewer independent media outlets. This, in turn, means fewer independent “watchdogs,” which can lower the probability that corruption will be exposed. This, in turn, lowers the cost of engaging in corrupt behavior by elected or appointed government officials.

This hypothetical connection between media and corruption appears reasonable, supported by logic and other research. Starr (2009) presents the case for the connection between newspaper publishing and the control of corruption in the context of American politics. Ahrend (2002) takes a more econometric approach to the question, examining a range of polities and media across the globe. Using the Granger test for causality, he finds no support for the hypothesis that corruption affects press freedom, but strong empirical evidence supports the hypothesis that a lack of press freedom leads to higher levels of corruption. Grigorescu (2006) finds that the media have been particularly effective in bringing attention to the problem of corruption in Eastern and Central Europe. Lessman and Markwardt (2009) show that the presence of a free press is a crucial factor in determining whether decentralization will reduce corruption levels in a bureaucracy. Likewise, Brunetti and Weder (2003) find a close relationship between more media freedom and lower levels of corruption.

Suphachalasai (2005) finds that more media competition decreases corruption, even positing that Italy’s corruption problem could be reduced to a level similar to France’s if the Italian media were as competitive as those operating in the United Kingdom.

Despite these analyses and empirical data, there are also analyses that present different understandings of the relationship between the media and corruption.

Vaidya (2006) compares the deterrence of corruption provided by a competitive media sector with that of a media monopoly. The deterrence of corruption is not always improved by the presence of a competitive media sector, according to

Vaidya's analysis. Rather, the efficacy of the media as a tool for the control of corruption depends on the rewards reaped by the government for corruption and the benefits obtained by the media for exposing corruption.

The focus of Kolstad and Wiig (2009) is not exclusively on the media but rather on the role played by government transparency in controlling corruption in resource-rich developing countries. While transparency is sometimes viewed as an unalloyed positive, Kolstad and Wiig maintain that its benefits are confined to the ways in which transparency affects rent-seeking and patronage, affects that are not an inevitable result of media pluralism.

Linstedt and Naurin (2008) take aim at the understanding of the principal-agent relationship that underlies much of the theoretical relationship between corruption and press freedom. According to the standard understanding of the relationship, a free press will make information more available to citizens, which will consequently make it more difficult for public officials and politicians to engage in corrupt behavior. Also, a well-informed electorate will be more likely to punish corrupt politicians at the ballot box. Clearly, for this relationship to be valid, free and democratic elections are needed. Beyond that, Linstedt and Naurin argue that information regarding corruption will not necessarily reach the principal, regardless of how accessible that information is. Obtaining the information carries its own costs. Furthermore, the lack of demand and the lack of ability to process the information can hinder progress toward corruption control.

Oscarsson (2008) makes an extended review of the connection between media freedom and government corruption, and finds that the connection between the two phenomena is inadequately specified. He seeks to identify more accurately what are the components of a free media that affect the quality of governance. Oscarsson

concludes, “information in the media can be flawed, skewed, insufficient or simply irrelevant to citizens when evaluating government performance. In such cases, the information will be worthless to citizens who wish to monitor public officials or hold representatives accountable at elections” (Oscarsson 2008, 10).

Fully aware of the complexities of the relationships here explored, I posit here a positive relationship between the control of corruption and media pluralism. I also posit a positive relationship between respect for human rights and media pluralism. I use the data described previously in an attempt to support the following hypotheses:

H1: Lower levels of media pluralism are a causal factor in creating higher levels of corruption in a country.

H2: Lower levels of media pluralism also lead to lower respect for human rights as measured by the indicators in the CIRI dataset.

Methods

The primary explanatory variable that concerns me in the following analysis is the measure that indicates the media pluralism in the respective countries studied. This variable, the third one in the list of “objectives” in the reports compiled by IREX, is composed of the following elements or “indicators”:

1. A plurality of affordable public and private news sources (e.g., print, broadcast, Internet) exists.
2. Citizens’ access to domestic or international media is not restricted.
3. State or public media reflect the views of the entire political spectrum, are nonpartisan and serve the public interest.
4. Independent news agencies gather and distribute news for print and broadcast media.
5. Independent broadcast media produce their own news programs.
6. Transparency of media ownership allows consumers to judge objectivity of news; media ownership is not concentrated in a few conglomerates.

7. A broad spectrum of social interests are reflected and represented in the media, including minority-language information sources. (IREX 2009)

This indicator is continuous variable. In the dataset used here, it achieves a maximum value of 3.27 and a minimum value of .29. The mean of the variable is 1.93 and the median value is 2.06. The variance of the measure is .4554 while the standard deviation for the variable as a whole is .6748.

Table 1. List of countries included in the dataset and their most recent IREX scores for the indicator of “media pluralism” used in this study.

Country	Media Pluralism Score (2006)	Country	Media Pluralism Score (2006)
Albania	2.32	Kazakhstan	1.31
Armenia	1.81	Kyrgyzstan	2.23
Azerbaijan	1.92	Macedonia	2.66
Belarus	0.67	Moldova	1.45
Bosnia & Herzegovina	2.95	Romania	2.93
Bulgaria	3.27	Russia	1.37
Croatia	2.33	Ukraine	2.34
Georgia	2.62	Uzbekistan	0.35

Substantively, the following meanings are given to the scores.

0 = Country does not meet the indicator; government of social forces may actively oppose its implementation.

1= Country minimally meets aspects of the indicator; forces may not actively oppose its implementation, but business environment may not support it and government or profession do not fully and actively support change.

2= Country has begun to meet many aspects of the indicator, but progress may be too recent to judge or still dependent on current government or political forces.

3= Country meets most aspects of the indicator; implementation of the indicator has occurred over several years and/or through changes in government, indicating likely sustainability.

4= Country meets the aspects of the indicator; implementation has remained intact over multiple changes in government, economic fluctuations, changes in public opinion, and/or changing social conventions (IREX 2009).

Clearly, despite a shared recent history of authoritarian communist government, the countries in this dataset exhibit variation in the extent to which they have achieved progress in establishing a sustainable independent media.

Nonetheless, the overall picture for the media in this dataset is not bright. The nations represented here are still struggling with the vestiges of a political system that actively discouraged a free press. The transformation of such societies is a complex, lengthy and difficult process.

I include several control variables in the regression equations below. The gross national income (per capita) is included on the theory that a nation's wealth can affect the extent to which a government observes human rights or oppresses its population. I control for the population of the countries studied here because the size of a country's population can affect the size of the media market and by extension the potential pluralism manifested within that market. The information for both these variables comes from data collected by the World Bank.

The primary dependent variables used here are from the CIRI dataset and from Transparency International. Because of the longitudinal nature of the data, I lag the dependent variables one year on the assumption that the effect of variables such as increased pluralism within a nation's media system will not be instantaneous. The data from Transparency International is tractable with Ordinary Least Squares regression because it is a continuous variable.

While the data from the CIRI dataset is in general ordinal in nature, in the course of running logistic regressions, I encountered problems with the parallel regression assumption. In these cases, I recoded the data to transform the dependent variable into a dichotomous variable, which I then analyzed with basic logistic regression. When the nature of the data appeared to warrant it, I have made several

transformations of the variable, exploring how the independent variables affect the dependent variable at different values. I present here the tables of the pertinent regression equations with a brief description of their content. I analyze the results further in the last section of the chapter.

Analysis of Human Rights Data

The datasets I used to gather the information for these analyses were not completely chronologically congruent. For example, while the IREX data covered the years 2001-2009, the CIRI data was only available until 2007. Also, some countries included in the dataset from IREX had missing values in the CIRI dataset. The dataset used here includes 16 countries with observations on the variables for years 2001-2006. In most cases, this means that the number of observations is slightly fewer than 100, not ideal but neither in itself a fatal flaw. Furthermore, it cannot be denied that the measure for media pluralism correlates greatly with measurements for democracy. Yet, they are substantively distinct. The measurement of polity I use from the Polity IV project has a correlation of 0.64 with the measure I use for media pluralism. When the variable is transformed into a dichotomous variable, as described below, the correlation is 0.52.

Despite these caveats, I believe the regressions support my general contention that constriction of media pluralism affects how human rights are respected in a country. I will present here the strongest regression equations first, and then discuss the cases where this variable has weaker or insignificant effects.

**Table 2. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Free Speech.
N= 97. Pseudo R square: .27. Logistic Regression**

Speech	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^b	e ^b StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.37416	4.347	0.000	10.7420	4.8302	0.6633
Income	-0.00012	-1.193	0.233	0.9999	0.6746	3378.0542
Population	0.00000	0.157	0.875	1.0000	1.0431	3.4324e+07

The results above are computed by logistic regression of the lagged variable for speech on the independent variables of media pluralism, income, and population. In this case, I transformed the ordinal variable reported in the CIRI dataset into a dichotomous variable, combining the categories of “0” and “1” into one category. According to the coding manual, the rankings of “0” and “1” mean that there is “complete” or “some” government censorship or ownership of the media. A ranking of “2” means that there is no government censorship or ownership of the media (Cingranelli and Richards 2008).

As is evident from the fourth column detailing the p-value for a z-test, only the coefficient for media pluralism is significant. The fifth column shows the factor change for one unit increase in the independent variable, while the sixth column indicates the change in odds caused by a standard deviation increase in the independent variable. The last column is the standard deviation of that independent variable. The equation is based on 97 observations and has a Pseudo-R-squared value of .27. In substantive terms, the findings can be interpreted as meaning that an increase of .66, or one standard deviation in the measure of media pluralism, makes it nearly five times more likely that a country will move from having some censorship to having none, all other factors being equal. Moving up a whole unit in the ranking of media pluralism makes it more than 10 times more likely that a country will not have censorship. Neither population nor income in this equation had statistically significant effects on the dependent variable.

At first glance, the effect of media pluralism might seem to be extraordinarily large, but it is important to remember several facts to give this finding context. First of all, while the variable “Speech” in the CIRI dataset is not synonymous with the Media Pluralism variable constructed by IREX, it is correlated at a level of .5952.

Secondly, it is important to remember that the CIRI variable “Speech” is constructed on a three point, scale while the Media Pluralism variable is a continuous variable that stretches theoretically from 0 to 4.

As predicted in the hypotheses, Media Pluralism also has a large impact in other areas of human rights. The effects can be observed when lagged dependent variables for freedom of association, physical integrity, disappearance, political prisoners, freedom of movement, and worker rights are included in the regression equations. Below, for example, is a logistic regression of CIRI variable for physical integrity on the independent variables for media pluralism, per capita income, and population.

Table 3A. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Ranking for Political Prisoners. Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.29. Logistic regression.

Political Prisoners	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.30801	3.772	0.000	10.0544	4.6228	0.6633
Income	0.00015	1.547	0.122	1.0002	1.6774	3378.0542
Population	0.00000	0.688	0.491	1.0000	1.2042	3.4324e+07

Table 3B. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Ranking for Political Prisoners. Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.23. Logistic regression.

Political Prisoners	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.57610	2.978	0.003	4.8360	2.8448	0.6633
Income	0.00023	1.785	0.074	1.0002	2.1800	3378.0542
Population	0.00000	0.217	0.828	1.0000	1.1128	3.4324e+07

The first regression equation here is based on 97 observations, and yields a Pseudo R squared ratio of .29. Neither the variables for income nor population are statistically significant. The coefficient for media pluralism, however, is statistically significant and substantial.

Analysis of this category of human rights offenses demonstrates the varying effects that the independent variables have on the variable of interest, depending on its value. In this first case, Version A, I group together the two lower rankings of the CIRI variable. A coding of “0” in this variable means that more than 50 prisoners are held. A coding of “1” means that between one and 49 prisoners are held. A coding of “2” means that no political prisoners are held. The regression above shows that an increase of 0.66 in the ranking for media pluralism would more than quadruple the odds that a country would move from being ranked either a “1” or a “0” in this category to being ranked as holding no political prisoners.

I also created a variable that grouped the values of the variable differently. I show the results of the regression with this variable in Table 3B. In this second transformation of the variable, a coding of “0” means that the country is coded as a “0,” meaning that more than 50 political prisoners are held. A coding of “1” groups countries that are coded both as “1” and “2.” In the regression results posted below, the slight difference in results is evident. Media pluralism still has a result, but its effects are less dramatic. In this case, an increase of .66 in the ranking for media pluralism, a standard deviation, makes its more than two and a half times more likely that a country will be classified as either a “1” or a “2.” I include the data here mainly to show the how the parallel regression assumption is violated in some cases when attempting ordinal logistic regression.

Table 4. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Physical Integrity Rights. Observations: 91. Pseudo R-Square: 0.31. Logistic regression.

Physical Integrity	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^b	E ^b StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.29751	3.637	0.000	9.9494	4.2794	0.6328
Income	0.00001	0.111	0.912	1.0000	1.0434	3444.9048
Population	-0.00000	-1.796	0.072	1.0000	0.5515	3.5321e+07

The results above are produced by regressing the dichotomous dependent variable for physical integrity on the independent variables for media pluralism, income, and population. In this case, the equation utilizes only 91 observations, and the pseudo R-Squared statistic is .31. Only media pluralism has a substantive impact on the dependent variable in this equation. The dependent variable was constructed by grouping the rankings of “1” through “4” into one category, and grouping “5” through “8” into another category. In this case, an increase of roughly .6 in the ranking for media pluralism makes it nearly three times more likely that a nation will be achieve the better ranking for physical integrity rights.

The CIRI variable for physical integrity rights groups together variables for disappearances, killings, imprisonment, and torture. The ranking of “5” in the CIRI dataset indicates full respect for rights regarding disappearances, and partial respect for rights protecting individuals from government killings, imprisonment, and torture. A ranking of “4” indicates full respect for rights regarding disappearances, partial respect regarding government killings, no respect for imprisonment rights, and partial respect regarding the use of torture (Cingranelli and Richards 1999, 414).

In creating these dichotomous variables, I made reference both to coding information as well as to how observations are distributed. In the case of the variable for physical integrity, roughly 35 percent of the observations are ranked “1” through “4.” No perfect midpoint suggests itself in this case, but the ranking of “5” seems to suggest a more consistent observation of physical integrity rights.

Table 5. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Cases of Disappearance.
Observations: 96. Pseudo R-Square: 0.55. Logistic regression.

Physical Integrity	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^b	E ^b StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.67769	3.088	0.002	14.5515	5.9611	0.6667
Income	0.00010	0.594	0.553	1.0001	1.4176	3366.9645
Population	-0.00000	-3.482	0.000	1.0000	0.2217	3.4465e+07

Disappearance is one of the most common of human rights abuses. This human rights abuse also represents a shadowy category, where responsibility for the abuse cannot be proven. Often state agents are responsible and the disappearance of the individual is motivated by some political objective. The governments involved often call the disappeared “terrorists” and maintain that they are threats to national security. Sometimes people are held in clandestine prisons, their captivity unacknowledged by the government. In these cases, the individuals are also counted as among the disappeared.

I created a dichotomous variable in this case as well, grouping together the lower categories for this variable. A code of “0” means that a country has had more than 50 disappearances. A “1” means that the country experienced 1 to 49 such cases. If a country was coded as “2,” no disappearances occurred in the country for that year. I also created a variable that grouped the “2” and “1” values together, but that logistic equation did not return statistically significant results for any of the independent variables.

The modal value for the CIRI variable in this case was “2,” representing roughly 86 percent of the observations. Roughly 9 percent of the observations were in the “1” category and 4 percent were ranked as “0.”

As seen in Table 5, the effect of media pluralism is strong with this dependent variable. An increase of one standard deviation in the ranking for media pluralism makes it roughly six times more likely that the country surveyed would be ranked as having no disappearances for that year.

Table 6. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Free Association Rights. Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.15.

Rights of Free Association	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	E ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.68276	2.799	0.005	5.3804	3.0534	0.6633
Income	0.00005	0.592	0.554	1.0001	1.1932	3378.0542
Population	0.000	0.340	0.734	1.0000	1.0998	3.4324e+07

The regression equation above shows the results of regressing the dependent variable measuring the right to association on the independent variables used in the previous equations. This regression equation also showed significant results for the independent variable measuring media pluralism. The equation was based on 97 observations, and produced a Pseudo R-Square value of 0.15. Neither population nor income had a statistically significant effect in this equation. In this case, an increase of roughly .66 in the rating for media pluralism increases the odds of an improvement in the CIRI rating for freedom of association by roughly 300 percent.

The dichotomous variable in this case was created by grouping the lower two rankings of the original CIRI dataset. In this dataset, a “0” signifies that association rates are severely restricted or denied completely for all citizens. A “1” means that these rights are limited for all citizens or severely restricted or denied for select groups. A “2” means that association rights are virtually unrestricted and can be enjoyed by nearly everyone.

**Table 7. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Rights for Freedom of Movement
Observations: 96. Pseudo R-Square: 0.25.**

Freedom of Movement	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	e ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.84287	3.778	0.000	6.3146	3.3993	0.6640
Income	0.00010	1.045	0.296	1.0001	1.4213	3395.6451
Population	-0.00000	-1.732	0.083	1.0000	0.6220	3.4489e+07

The regression of the variable for freedom of movement on the independent variables media pluralism, income, and population differs from the previous ones examined here in that the dependent variable in the CIRI data already was dichotomous. A score of “0” indicates that domestic or foreign travel was restricted in a given year, while a score of “1” indicates that it was not. This equation was based on 96 observations, and had a Pseudo R squared figure of .2523. The affect of media pluralism is statistically significant here, but the other independent variables are not. Roughly speaking, an increase of .66 in the rating score for media pluralism makes it three times more likely that there will be a positive CIRI score for the right to move freely within and without the country.

**Table 8A. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Electoral Self-Determination.
Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.18. Logit regression.**

Electoral Self-Determination	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	E ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.09898	2.066	0.039	3.0011	2.0730	0.6633
Income	0.00022	2.320	0.020	1.0002	2.1034	3378.0542
Population	-0.00000	-0.317	0.751	1.0000	0.9176	3.4324e+07

**Table 8B. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Electoral Self-Determination.
Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.36. Logit regression.**

Electoral Self-Determination	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	E ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.84883	4.393	0.000	17.2677	6.6178	0.6633
Income	-0.00005	-0.412	0.680	1.0000	0.8474	3378.0542
Population	0.00000	1.325	0.185	1.0000	2.6531	3.4324e+07

The CIRI variable Electoral Self-Determination was formerly known as Political Participation, but the name was changed to better reflect the concept behind the variable. The primary property that the variable is intended to measure is the right of citizens to freely choose their own political system and leadership. In practice, this means citizens enjoying Electoral Self-Determination have the legal right and the real ability to change laws and officials that govern them through regular, free, and fair elections based on universal adult suffrage.

Both regressions above are run on 97 observations, but the Pseudo R-Square statistics are substantially different: 0.18 in the first equation and 0.36 in the second equation. In both cases, neither population nor income has a significant effect, yet Media Pluralism has a significant and large effect. The coding for this variable is the following:

- (0) – Neither free nor fair elections exist.
- (1) – Moderately free and fair elections are held
- (2) – Very free and fair elections are held.

In the first equation, the original variable has been transformed, grouping the values of “0” and “1” together. In the second equation, the dependent variable groups “1” and “2” together. Creating two variations of the dependent variable seemed advisable because the “1” coding was the modal value for the variable; 20 percent of the observations were “0”, 54 percent were “1,” and “24” percent were “2.” A cursory examination of the figures reveals that the results of the two regressions are substantially different. For example, the effect of an improvement in media pluralism by one standard deviation boosts the odds of moving into the category of a “2” by 200 percent. In the second equation, the improvement in the pluralism score by one standard deviation improves the odds by more than 600 percent.

This difference could be interpreted in different ways. For one thing, crossing the threshold into a category where “very free and fair” elections are held is a challenge for many countries that have only recently moved from a completely authoritarian style of government. Improving the level of media pluralism in a country, however, makes it much more likely that at least some level of electoral self-determination is realized, even if it falls short of the highest standards.

Table 9. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Worker Rights.
Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.19

Worker Rights	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	e ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.55901	3.547	0.000	4.7541	2.8127	0.6633
Income	-0.00015	-1.836	0.066	0.9998	0.5264	3378.0542
Population	-0.00000	-1.298	0.194	1.0000	0.6893	3.4324e+07

The Worker Rights variable in part is based on the 1984 Generalized System of Preferences agreement of the World Trade Organization. This agreement states that internationally recognized rights include the right of association; the right to organize and bargain collectively; a prohibition of forced or compulsory labor; a minimum age for the employment of children; acceptable conditions of work in regards to minimum wages, hours of work, and occupational safety and health. Like most of the other variables in the dataset, this measure is coded on a three-point scale:

- (0) – Severely restricted workers’ rights
- (1) - Somewhat restricted workers’ rights
- (2) - Fully protected workers’ rights

The CIRI codebook instructs coders to give the greatest weight to a government’s respect for the right of association and its respect for the right to organize and bargain collectively. If either of these rights is systematically violated, the country in question receives a zero for this measure. To create a dichotomous variable in this case, the

second two categories were grouped together because the highest category only represented about 12 percent of the observations. Roughly 51 percent of the observations fell into the middle category and 36 percent fell into the lowest category. I also created a variable that grouped the top two rankings into one variable, but the regression run with that variable did not produce statistically significant results. As in the previous example, it may be that increased media pluralism is not sufficient to surmount the threshold of reaching the status of “fully protected workers’ rights.”

In this case, an increase of .66 (the standard deviation) in the Media Pluralism rating makes it more than two and a half times more likely that the rating for workers’ rights will be improved from the state of having “severely restricted workers’ rights.”

While these regressions establish some evidence to support the hypotheses I postulated earlier, this analysis does not show that Media Pluralism affects all the human rights measured by the CIRI dataset. Some of these results may be attributed to the nature of the rights or to the fact that the dataset is comparatively small and more vulnerable to outlier effects. For example, the logistic equation for extrajudicial killings, population has a statistically insignificant effect. This may be caused by the small dataset and the fact that the low scores on this variable are comparatively rare. Only five instances of the low ranking are recorded in the dataset, while 36 cases of a “one” rating are recorded and 56 cases of a “two” are recorded. Likewise, Media Pluralism does not appear to have a statistically significant effect on the variable that measures the incidence of torture, although population again has a significant but slight effect. (Roughly speaking, for every increase of 3.4 million people in population, there is a one percent chance of a lower ranking on the scale measuring the incidence of torture.)

The lack of significant effects on some of the human rights measured in the CIRI dataset is not surprising. For example, the CIRI dataset has a set of measures to assess how well the rights of women are respected. These are rights that are supported by cultural norms, factors that may be largely unaffected by the extent of media pluralism within a country. Media Pluralism's effect on women's economic rights, for example, is not found to be significant, although population was found to have a significant and slight negative effect. Likewise, Media Pluralism has no significant effect on women's social or political rights. In these cases, however, per capita income has a significant effect.

Sometimes data presented in graphic form can more clearly illustrate statistical information. Accordingly, I present here five simple graphs that show predicted probabilities for some of the rights discussed above. On the x-axis is the score for media pluralism and on the y-axis is the probability that the relevant dichotomous variable will be positive.

Figure 1. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Free Speech Rights.

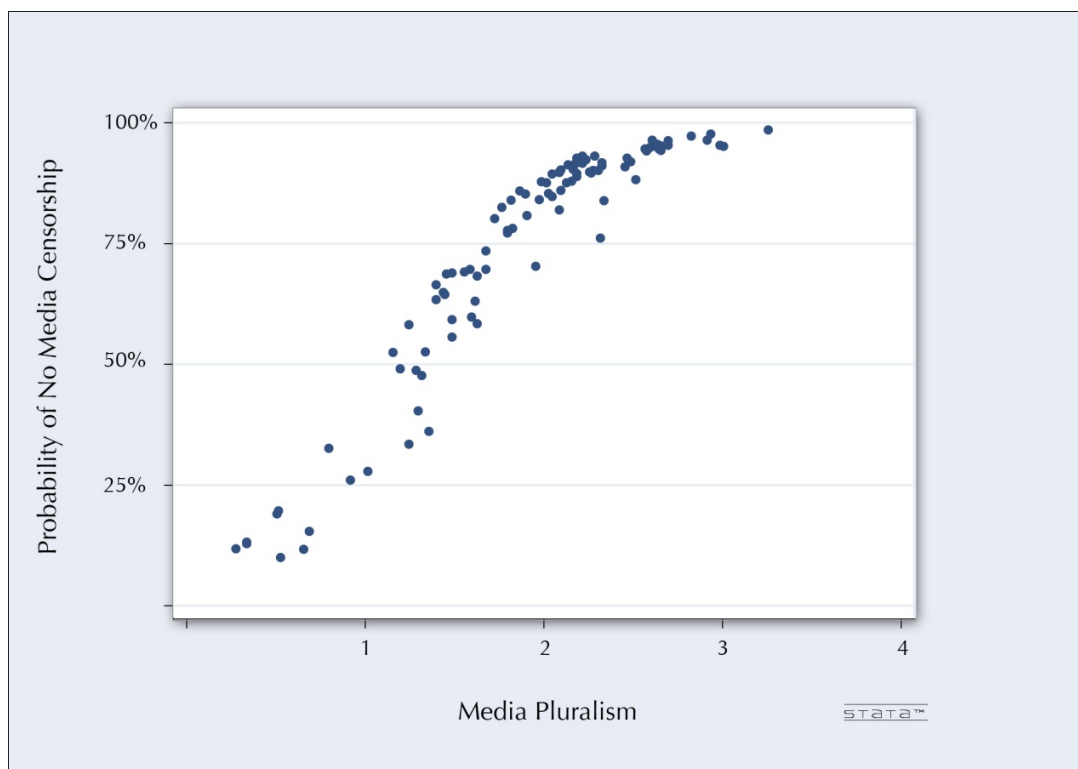


Figure 2. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Self-Determination Rights.

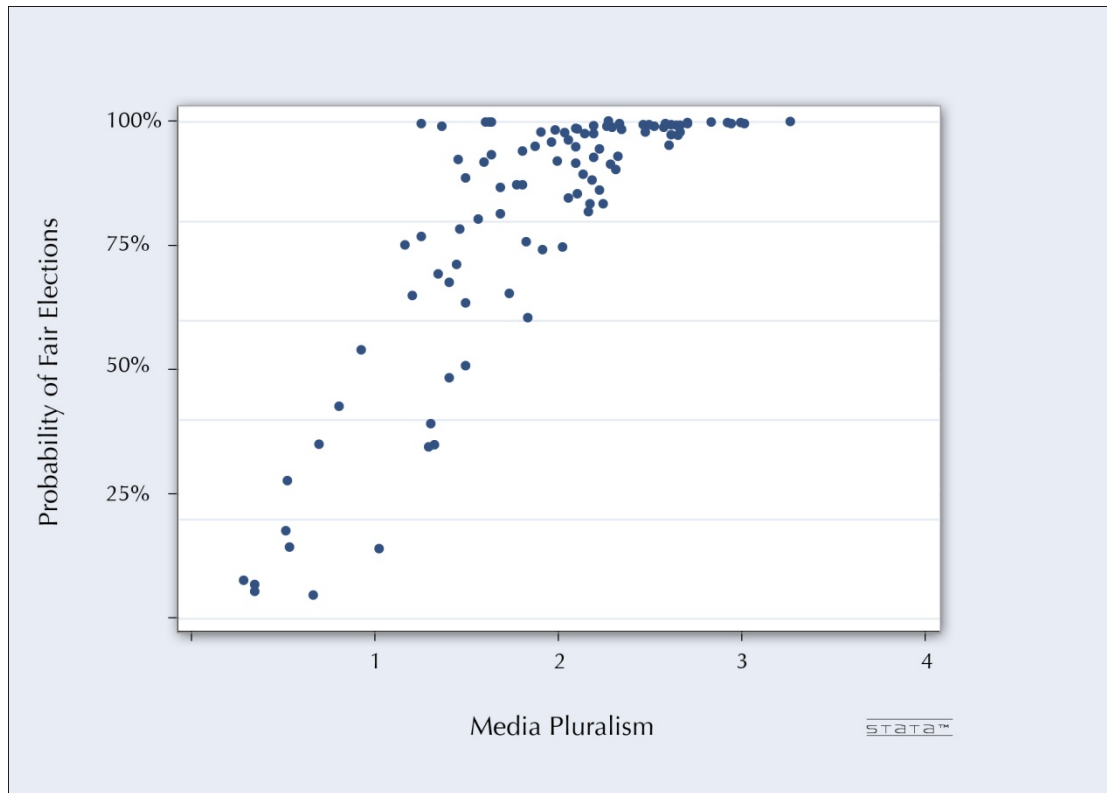


Figure 3. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Right to Free Association.

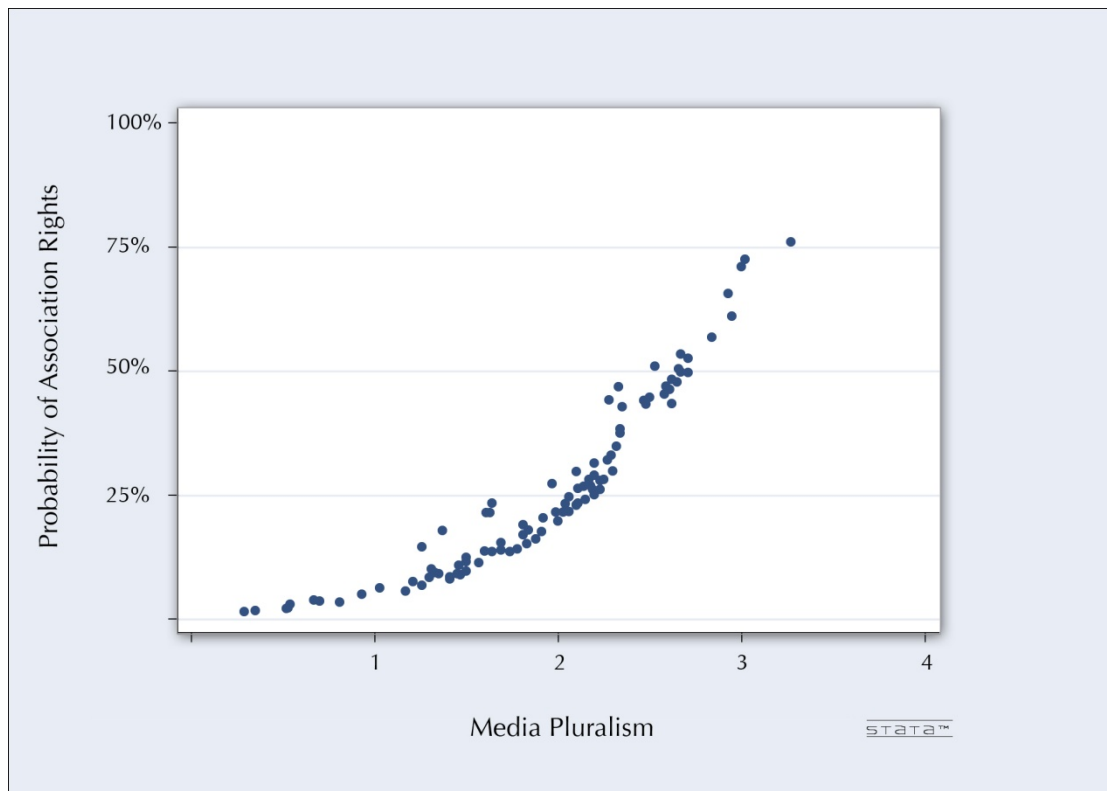


Figure 4. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Likelihood of Disappearances.

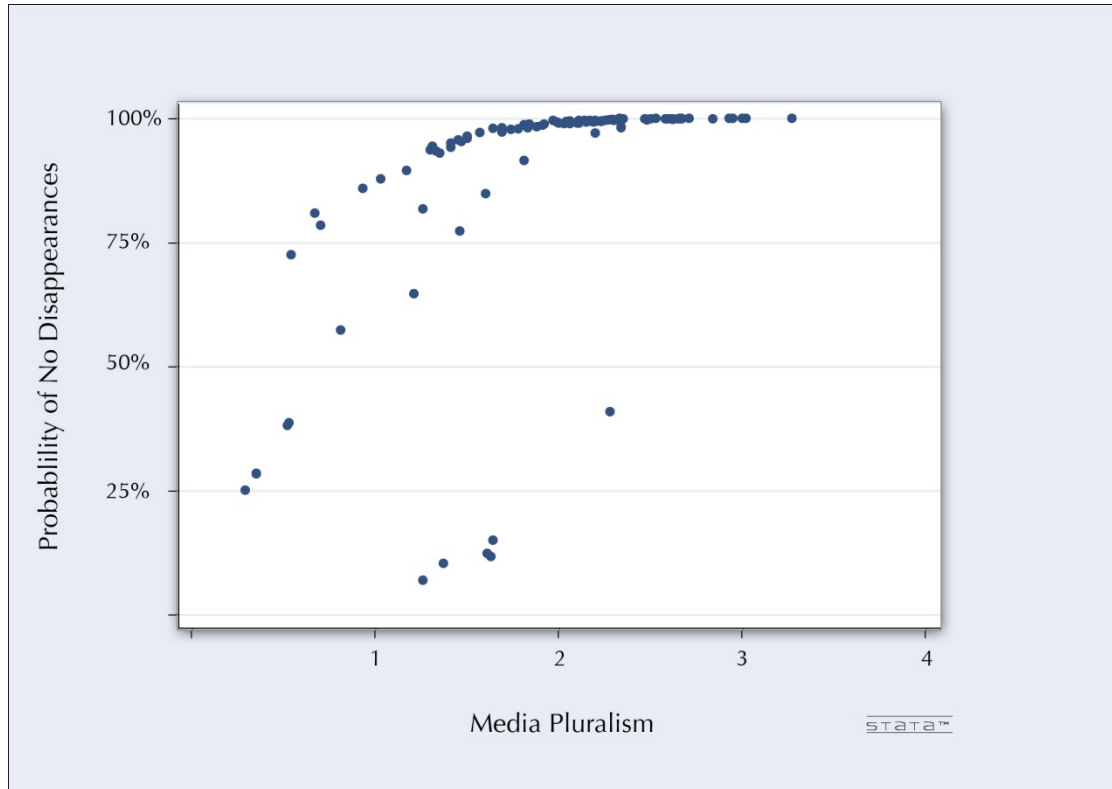
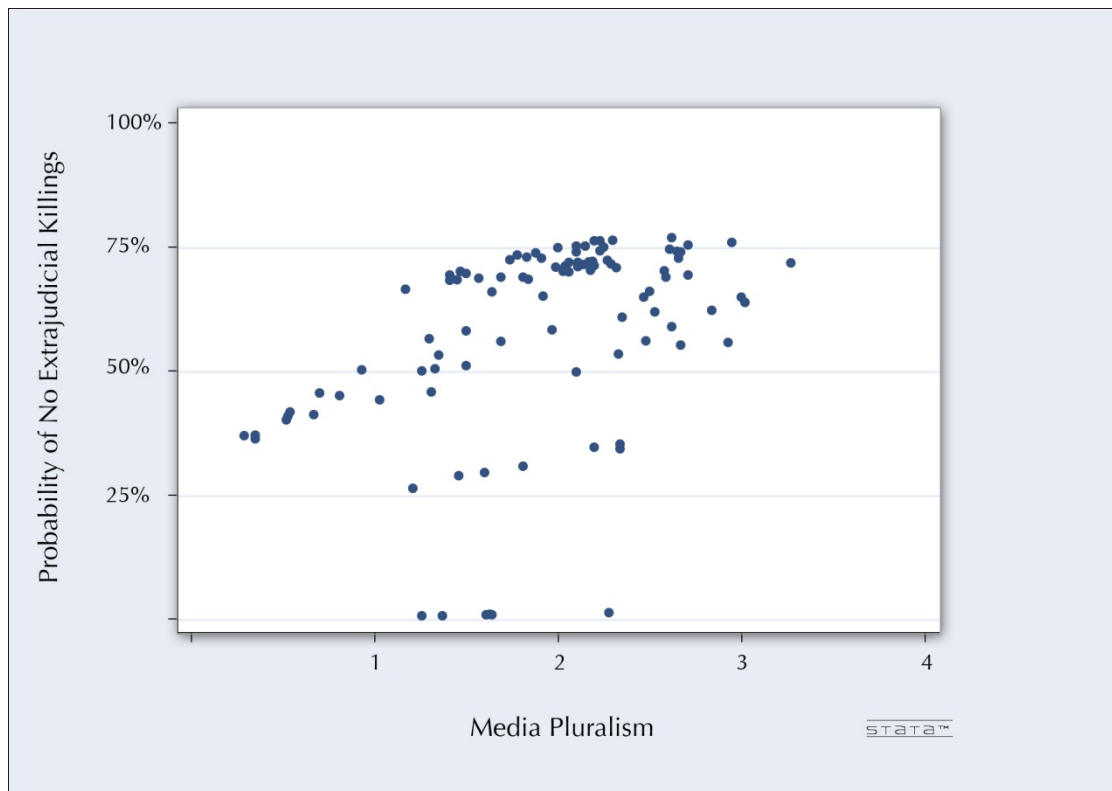


Figure 5. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Extrajudicial Killings.



The preceding graphs show the relationships between the dependent variables and the primary independent variable of interest, media pluralism. The relationships range from tightly grouped predicted probabilities of having rights of free association to the statistically insignificant relationship between media pluralism and extrajudicial killing. The relationship between extrajudicial killing and media pluralism is the only statistically insignificant relationship that is graphed here, but it is clear that some associations are closer than others. The graph depicting the chance of a country not having any disappearances shows that there are a number of outliers that do not fit into the general pattern of association between the two variables. It is important to remember that the predicted probabilities reflect the transformed values of CIRI data into dichotomous variables. Hence, Figure 2 depicts the probability of a country having a “mostly fair” or “completely fair” election, because the upper two values of this variable were grouped together.

It is reasonable to ask whether the results of these regression equations are merely artifacts of the impact that democratization has on the respect for human rights. Accordingly, I used two measures to control for the effect of democratization.

Freedom House, a Washington, DC-based organization that monitors international human rights, compiles another indicator of democracy. Freedom House’s indicator simply ranks a country as not free, partly free, or free.

I also use democracy scores from the Polity IV Project, an established source of data on regimes dating back to 1800. The Polity IV Project is under the direction of Monty G. Marshall at the Center for Systemic Peace at George Mason University. The data collected by the project is extensive, but for my analyses I am using only one measure: Polity. This score is derived by subtracting the score for Autocracy from the score for Democracy. This means that the scores for the countries theoretically can

run from 10 to -10. In the dataset of the countries studied here, the variable runs from 9 to -9, with a mean of 3.12 and a standard deviation of 6.58. The Polity score is ascribed for 80 observations in this dataset.

The scores from the two datasets are correlated at 0.80.

Separately controlling for democracy using the measures of the Polity IV project and Freedom House yields significant results when the human rights indicators are regressed on the measure of media pluralism. Substantial and significant effects are seen on the indicators for freedom of speech, political prisoners, physical integrity rights, disappearances, extrajudicial killing, electoral determination, and freedom of movement. No results are shown on the variables for women's political and economic rights. As in the other regression equations, no results are seen on the variable measuring corruption.

Table 10. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Electoral Freedom.
Observations: 97. Pseudo R-Square: 0.38

Electoral Freedom	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e ^{^b}	e ^{^b} StdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.62625	2.439	0.015	5.0848	2.9410	0.6633
Democracy (Freedom House)	1.73884	2.273	0.023	5.6907	3.5848	0.7342

In the above regression, both democracy and media pluralism show significant effects on the likelihood that a free election will be held. If the ranking of a country for media pluralism rises by one point, the chance that the country will hold a free election increases slightly more than five-fold.

Table 11. The Effect of Media Pluralism on the Incidence of Disappearances.
Observations: 96. Pseudo R-Square: 0.24

Disappearances	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.05653	2.734	0.006	7.8188	3.9397	0.6667
Democracy (Freedom House)	0.01081	0.012	0.990	1.0109	1.0080	0.7380

In the above regression, only Media Pluralism shows a statistically significant effect on the variable measuring the incidence of disappearances. The equation shows that when a country increases its measure of media pluralism by one point, the likelihood that disappearances do not occur there rises by more than 700 percent.

Table 12. The Effect of Media Pluralism on the Incidence of Torture.
Observations: 70. Pseudo R-Square: 0.12

Torture	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	1.71667	2.604	0.009	5.5660	3.0350	0.6467
Democracy (Polity IV)	-0.01857	-0.334	0.738	0.9816	0.8842	6.6257

In the regression equation considering the effects on the variable for torture, the Media Pluralism variable is significant while the Polity IV variable measuring democracy is not. Roughly speaking, the above equation shows that a decrease of one point in the ranking for media pluralism means that torture is more than five times more likely to be practiced frequently in that country.

Analysis of Corruption Data

The rationale behind the second hypothesis postulated is straightforward. A diminished level of media pluralism could cause a higher level of corruption. This assertion is based on established media theory that a vibrant and flourishing free press can serve as a public watchdog, exposing corruption at all levels. (e.g. Graber 1986; Markwardt 2009; Suphachalasai 2005; Ahrend 2002). The data on corruption is

obtained from Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, one of the premier sources for data on the subject. From this data, I created a variable that is lagged one year. The primary independent variable in this analysis is again the rating on media pluralism made by IREX. Because the dependent variable data is recorded on a continuous scale, I use Ordinary Least Squares to calculate the regressions detailed here. The logic behind the hypothesis and the interpretation of the regression analysis are clear. The hypothesis is not supported even minimally by regressions on these variables. I also ran logistic regressions on dichotomous variables that I created from the data on corruption but did not obtain significant results with those regressions either.

Table 13. The Effect of Media Pluralism on Corruption
Observations: 86. R-Square: 0.31. Ordinary Least Squares Regression.

Corruption	Coefficient	Standard Error	T	P> t	95% Confidence Interval
Media Pluralism	-.0288108	.0946406	-0.30	0.762	-.217081 .1594595
Income	.0001077	.0000193	5.58	0.000	.0000693 .000146
Population	-4.04e-09	1.76e-09	-2.30	0.024	-7.55e-09 -5.39e-10
Constant	2.259462	.1814862	12.45	0.000	1.898428 2.620496

While the sign of the coefficient for Media Pluralism is unexpectedly negative, the variable is not shown to be statistically significant. The variables for income and for population are found to be statistically significant, with the variable for population showing the largest coefficient, albeit a negative one. On the face of it, this shows that the larger population countries in this dataset have the greater corruption problems. The equation, which uses 86 observations, obtains a R-Squared statistic of 0.31.

Table 14. The Effect of Media Sustainability on Corruption
Observations: 86. R-Square: 0.31. Ordinary Least Squares Regression.

Corruption	Coefficient	Standard Error	T	P> t	95% Confidence Interval
Average Sustainability	-.0596484	.1124511	-0.53	0.597	-.2833496 to 0.1640527
Income	.0001115	.0000211	5.28	0.000	.0000695 to 0.0001536
Population	-4.17e-09	1.76e-09	-2.37	0.020	-7.66e-09 to -6.75e-10
Constant	2.294477	.1863654	12.31	0.000	1.923737 to 2.665217

In this regression equation, I substituted the average score for Media Sustainability for the value given for Media Pluralism. As described earlier, Media Pluralism is one component out of the whole Media Sustainability Index. This variable also is not statistically significant. Again, the variable for population has a negative slope. In this case, the variable measuring income has a statistically significant effect, but the slope is minimal.

Table 15. The Effect of Media Pluralism and Corruption on Physical Integrity Rights. Observations: 82. Pseudo R Square: 0.40.

Physical Integrity	Coefficient	Z score	P> z	E [^] b	E [^] bStdX	SDofX
Media pluralism	2.32062	3.223	0.001	10.1820	4.6034	0.6579
Income	-0.00011	-0.714	0.475	0.9999	0.6716	3502.4882
Population	-0.00000	-1.349	0.177	1.0000	0.5979	3.6777e+07
Corruption	2.02201	2.100	0.036	7.5535	3.2634	0.5849

Corruption sometimes is theorized to be a factor in the degree to which governments respect human rights. We think of corrupt societies as places where the rule of law is weak and legally defined human rights correspondingly are poorly observed at best. This understanding is supported by the results reported above. In this equation, I regress the variable Physical Integrity on Media Pluralism, Income, and Population. I present the results with the caveat that the results are based on 82 observations and an additional variable is estimated here. In a number of cases, the

data for corruption is missing for the country/year, causing the decrease in the number of observations. The pseudo-R square statistic is .40.

In this equation, it can be seen that an improvement of one unit in the ranking for media pluralism makes it more than 10 times more likely that a country will move into the higher category for physical integrity rights. An improvement of one unit in the variable measuring corruption, meanwhile, will boost those chances by more than seven and a half times. These results are confirmed when the variable for physical integrity is regressed separately on the measure for corruption and the measure for media pluralism. Corruption, however, is not shown to be a statistically significant factor in other regression equations. The variable is insignificant, for example, when examining its effect on the dependent variables for worker's rights, murder, electoral determination, and torture.

The lack of a significant effect of media pluralism on corruption may result from several factors. As discussed earlier, media pluralism is just one factor that may make engaging in corrupt behavior more expensive. Other institutions such as a well functioning legal system and stable social norms against corrupt practices are probably more important. In many of the countries of this dataset, these factors are weak if they are present at all. Given this fact, the lack of statistically significant results is not too surprising. In fact, these results are reminders of how the effects that the media have on a country's politics and society depend on other legal, social, and political factors within that country.

The rule of law, of course, is an expected factor in both the level of respect for human rights and in the level of corruption. Accordingly, I use the Polity ranking of the countries in this dataset. I would expect that the effects of Polity would be consistent across all the types of human rights measured in the CIRI dataset, but this

is not the case. Interestingly, Polity also has a significant effect where Media Pluralism does not exert a statistically significant effect. In areas where Media Pluralism is statistically significant, so is Polity. This can be seen in the following regressions. The first regression examines the relationship between the dependent variable Women's Political Rights and the independent variables Corruption, Polity, Income, and Population. None of the independent variables show a significant effect on the dependent variable. In the second regression, the impact of Polity on Electoral Self Determination is statistically significant, as was the case when this dependent variable was regressed on Media Pluralism. As the second regression equation shows, an increase of a standard deviation in Polity makes it almost four times more likely that a country will be ranked in a higher category for Electoral Self-Determination. The dichotomous variable of Electoral Self-Determination used in this equation is the second variation described earlier, which groups together the higher two values for the original CIRI variable.

Table 16. The Effect of Corruption and Polity on Women's Political Rights
Observations: 73. Pseudo R square 0.15.

Women's Political Rights	Coefficient	z-score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Corruption	-0.15273	-0.140	0.888	0.8584	0.9131	0.5954
Income	0.00037	1.602	0.109	1.0004	3.7890	3633.3653
Population	-0.00000	-0.286	0.775	1.0000	0.8268	3.8404e+07
Polity	-0.12731	-1.388	0.165	0.8805	0.4224	6.7693

Table 17. The Effect of Corruption and Polity on Electoral Self-Determination
Observations: 73. Pseudo R Square: 0.30.

Electoral Self Determination	Coefficient	z-score	P> z	e^b	e^bStdX	SDofX
Corruption	-0.80217	-0.609	0.543	0.4484	0.6203	0.5954
Income	-0.00002	-0.114	0.909	1.0000	0.9251	3633.3653
Population	0.00000	0.055	0.956	1.0000	1.0481	3.8404e+07
Polity	0.35577	3.248	0.001	1.4273	11.1157	6.7693

The correlation between the independent variables of interest used in all of these equations is highest between Polity and Media Pluralism (0.642). A high level of correlation is expected because of the nature of these variables, yet they remain distinct concepts with different effects on dependent variables. The correlation between Corruption and Media Pluralism is 0.3532, while the correlation between Polity and Corruption is 0.5615. The correlation between the transformed CIRI variable for Freedom of Speech and Media Pluralism is 0.52.

Discussion of Results

I regard the results reported above as intriguing evidence generally supportive of my second hypothesis. Across a range of measures for human rights, the variable for media pluralism is shown to be statistically significant and substantively important. The rights where its effect are most pronounced are those concerning Electoral Self-Determination, Disappearances, Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Association, Political Prisoners, Worker Rights, and Physical Integrity Rights. For women's rights, torture, and extrajudicial killings, the effects of Media Pluralism do not appear to be significant when controls for population and national income are included. When controls for democracy are substituted, however, the effects on incidence of extrajudicial killing and torture are significant.

As I have hypothesized before, it is possible that in areas such as women's rights, cultural or economic factors could play a much larger role than that played by the media system of a country. A diverse flow of information may assist in electoral process and may help ensure that governments cannot imprison citizens with impunity. Such a free exchange of information, however, may be less powerful in reversing centuries of sexual discrimination, for example, than in making some progress toward respecting the legal rights of citizens.

The hypothesis about the causal link between corruption and media pluralism is not supported by these data. There may be several causes for this. One problem is that a substantial number of observations are missing from the dataset on this variable. Also, as discussed earlier, Polity is a significant factor in any analysis of Corruption. It may be that the components of that variable, which include measures of press freedom as well as more general characteristics of democratic polity, are simply more significant than media pluralism in the control of corruption, especially in the extreme cases included in this dataset.

Also, as discussed earlier, the effect of media pluralism and press freedom on the control of corruption is at least problematic in many of the most corrupt countries. The media are one institution that can affect the prevalence of corruption and the cost that individuals engaging in corrupt practices are likely to bear. Many other institutions, however, are equally important. If a country has an undeveloped legal system, for example, any efforts to control corruption will be severely limited.

The principal contribution of this analysis, I believe, is that it may serve as an example of how future work on this question can be conducted. The concept of media pluralism is by nature controversial, and so a certain element of subjectivity is inevitable in the construction of a variable measuring this concept. Nonetheless, this

analysis is able to benefit from the longitudinal aspect of the data compiled in the MSI. The data have the advantage of taking into account the complexities inherent in assessing the level of media pluralism within a country. This is not a simple task, and other methods may be developed to accomplish this objective, but the IREX researchers who developed the rankings for media have examined the subject in a systematic and rational way. Similar data compiled among a larger set of more diverse nations could allow a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis. For example, comparisons could be made across other geographic regions that could incorporate the use of fixed effects.

Data analysis is important in establishing empirical support for our hypotheses, yet the numbers alone do not fully describe social and political phenomena. To better depict the effects of diminished media pluralism, I turn next to a case study analysis of one of the countries detailed in the analysis above, Azerbaijan. This country fairly represents a typical course for post-Soviet Republics. While it never fostered the democratic hyperbole that grew around Kyrgyzstan, for example, there was optimism 10 years ago that the country might develop into some sort of model for democracy within a Muslim republic. Those optimistic hopes in recent years have largely been dashed.

Chapter Six

Azerbaijan: Less Media Freedom, More Political Problems

In the set of nations born out of the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has its own individual character but it is not an extreme example of any particular characteristic. It is neither the least nor the most repressive nation in this set. The country has significant natural resources, but it is far from wealthy. It suffers from endemic corruption, but this is typical of all the countries of the former Soviet Union. Because its characteristics do not vary exceptionally from other members of this set of nations, the country in some sense lends itself to a closer examination to further evaluate the relationship between the variables of media pluralism, human rights, and corruption.

The fundamental argument of this work is that diminished pluralism of media – caused either by government policies or by market processes – results in less vigorous political competition, worse human rights records, and higher levels of corruption. In the previous chapter, I presented statistical evidence to support the contention that media pluralism can exert a positive effect in the observance of human rights and political freedoms. Evidence for a causal relationship between media pluralism and corruption appears much weaker in that quantitative analysis, probably because variables other than media pluralism also play an important role. The media are an important institution that can serve to educate the public about corruption problems. Where the other institutional mechanisms for addressing corruption problems are lacking, however, the media's impact in this regard is limited at best.

Statistical analyses are useful in the process of finding evidence for causal relationships, yet such quantitative work can always benefit by qualitative analyses to

provide context and narrative support. In this chapter, I examine Azerbaijan as a case study of how restrictions on media pluralism are inextricably linked to human rights abuses and political repression. Since its independence nearly 20 years ago, the nation's media has experienced a nearly steady decrease in media pluralism. The repressive policies that have diminished media pluralism have been accompanied by decreased respect for human rights, diminished political competition, and ever increasing levels of corruption.

A Brief History of the Country

Map 1. Azerbaijan. (Copyright 2010 Lonely Planet).



A minimal understanding of a nation's history is necessary in order to place current political phenomena into context, so I will attempt here to summarize thousands of years of history within a few pages. While the First Republic of Azerbaijan was declared only in the beginning of the 20th century, the Azerbaijani culture developed over millennia. Successive empires have dominated the area known now as Azerbaijan. By the 16th century, the Assyrians, the Persians, the Turks, and the Mongols had all taken their turn invading and sometimes briefly governing the region. Its geographic location on the western shore of the Caspian Sea, between the

continents of Europe and Asia, made the area of Azerbaijan a natural bridge for invading armies and cultures. From ancient times, the region also lay on the fabled Silk Road, and numerous Azerbaijani cities played crucial commercial roles in the trade between the East and West.

In the early 1700s, at the beginning of the modern era, local khans ruled much of the region, filling a political void as the Persian Empire collapsed. These khans, however, exerted incomplete control over the area, to the detriment of trade. Among those affected by the region's instability was Russia, Azerbaijan's neighbor to the north. Russian merchants sailed the Caspian Sea, and the instability on shore allowed pirates to base their operations in the area. When the merchants' complaints reached the ear of Peter the Great, the time appeared to him fortuitous for a military expedition into the region. The Persian Empire had been further shaken by an internal dispute about the succession to the shah and the Russians at that point had relatively good relations with the neighboring Ottoman Empire.

Seizing the initiative, the Russian army in the summer of 1722 conquered 5,000-year-old city of Derbent, which now lies within the borders of Russia. The Russian forces then penetrated into the interior of what is now Azerbaijan. They withdrew from much of this area before the end of the year, but continued to hold much of northeast Azerbaijan until 1735, when the Persian troops regained control of the area. Persian control, however, was fragile, and an alliance of warlords largely succeeded in expelling foreign troops from the region by the middle of the 1700s. The confederation of warlords had its own weaknesses. Torn by dissension and mistrust, the warlords' rule allowed civil unrest and banditry to flourish (van der Leeuw 2000).

The Persians, meanwhile, had not forgotten about the Caucasian region. In the early 1780s, Shah Agha Muhammad began a campaign to conquer neighboring

Georgia. This assault prompted the feuding khans to unite, albeit with limited military effectiveness. The ruler of Georgia responded to the threat by requesting military assistance from Russia, submitting his country to the rule of Catherine II. The incursions of the Russians into modern-day Azerbaijan at that point were limited. By the reign of Alexander I, however, the presence of the Russian army in Azerbaijan had become more menacing. The Persians, then ruled by the Qajar Dynasty, attempted to expel the Russians but they were overmatched and the Russians began conquering large parts of the region, seizing Baku in 1806. A peace treaty in 1813 concluded what is sometimes referred to as the First Russian-Iranian War, with Persia ceding large sections of northern Azerbaijan. In 1826, the Qajar rulers made another attempt to regain the territories during the Second Russian-Iranian War, but they were decisively beaten again and two years later they sued for peace, ceding the territory of Nakhchivan and the western khanates of the Azerbaijan region (Swietochowski 17, 1995).

With the defeat of the Persians, the presence of Russians in Azerbaijan was formalized, with important consequences for the country. The Sunni branch of Islam was dominant in the areas acquired by the Russians, while the Shi'ite sect dominated in the south. The Sunnis, however, began to immigrate to Turkey, especially after Russia subdued the mountain tribes of Azerbaijan. Balancing this emigration, new immigrants began to settle in the Russian-held areas: Russians, Germans, and Armenians. This last group especially increased dramatically, as the Armenians fled their homelands after the Crimean War and the 1876-78 war between Russian and Turkey. By the end of the century, the population of the Armenians in what was referred to as Transcaucasia had grown to 1,243,000. (Swietochowski 1995, 19-21).

Aside from some administrative reforms, the Russian conquest of Azerbaijan territory at first did not greatly affect the populace. The population and economy was largely rural and agricultural methods were generally primitive. The region had valuable and easily accessible oil deposits, however, which the Russians and other Westerners began to develop. In 1859, the first kerosene refinery opened in Baku, but the industry grew slowly at first. The oil extraction began to boom, however, once government policy changed to allow long-term leasing to the highest bidder. In the first year after the reform, the first oil well was drilled, resulting in a gusher. While previously local Muslims had owned the majority of extraction rights, the policy change shifted the balance of economic power. Russian, Armenian, and Western investors became the dominant players in the field. The Nobel Brothers Company and the Paris Rothschilds were among the Western companies to find fortune in the oil fields of Baku were . With greater investment came greater productive capacity and by 1898, the output of the Azerbaijan oil fields exceeded that of the United States (van der Leeuw 2000, 100).

The growth of the oil industry dramatically changed the economy and the culture of the country. While Azerbaijan had depended primarily on agriculture for centuries, an urban workforce was needed to work in the oil fields. Azerbaijanis performed the bulk of manual labor, but Armenians and Russians usually held the higher management positions. Records shows that in 1907, 48 percent of the industrial workers in Baku were Russians and Armenians, ten percent were Turks and the remaining 42 percent were principally Daghestanis, Azerbaijanis, and Iranians, with Azerbaijanis representing only about 10 percent of the workforce. (van der Leeuw 2000, 105)

Industrial development fueled rapid population growth in the region. Baku grew from 14,000 in 1863 to 206,000 in 1903, becoming the largest city in Transcaucasia. This growth transformed what had been a sleepy town by the Caspian Shore. The growing working class provided fertile ground for labor organizers. The influx of foreigners also fostered ethnic tensions, particularly between the Armenians and the Azerbaijanis. In 1905, communal violence between these two groups broke out. Sometimes referred to as the Tatar-Armenian War, the violence claimed between 3,100 and 10,000 lives. By all accounts, the Azerbaijanis suffered the most casualties, probably because their society was less technologically advanced and the Armenians were better organized. While the violence began in Baku, the mountainous region of Nagorno-Karabakh was the locus of the majority of the fighting (de Waal 2003).

Labor unrest worsened in this period, centered in the industrial regions of the country. Ioseb “Koba” Jughashvili, who later became known as Stalin, played a prominent role as a labor organizer for the fledgling Bolshevik party. After his second arrest, however, Jughashvili was sentenced to exile in northern Russia, and the revolutionary workers’ movement became less active (Ulam 2007, 56-60). With the onset of World War I, however, and the instability in the Russian government that it created, separatist movements within Azerbaijan gained new energy. The Transcaucasian Federation, consisting of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia, was created in February 1917. On January 5, 1918, however, the federation’s parliament was dissolved because of internal discord. After futile attempts to revive the federation, the independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan were announced in May 1918.

Because Baku was administered by a socialist “commune” and was not under control of the new Azerbaijan government, the ancient city of Ganca became the capital of the state. When the new government, run by the Mussavat Party, declared an offensive to take Baku, the Communist leaders of that city chose to take the battle to the new government. In the process, thousands of innocent civilians were killed as anarchic armed forces pillaged in the countryside. The offensive on Ganca, however, was halted before it reached the destination. After futile attempts to forge a governing compromise, the offensive on Baku resumed. An ill-fated attempt by British troops to defend the city was abandoned on September 14, and the next day the city was seized by the troops of the new government. By the time order was restored three days later by regular Turkish troops, at least 9,000 people had died in the violence (Kazemzadeh 1951, 130-132).

Despite its violent genesis, the new government of Azerbaijan was notable and positive in several respects. It was the first democratic state founded in a Muslim country. Furthermore, the constitution of the new state granted suffrage to females. When the new parliament was formally inaugurated in December 1918, it was a genuinely multi-party body, although the Mussavat Party dominated it.

The new democracy was highly fractious and unstable, however. Party leaders could not depend on support from their own members. Six cabinets governed the First Republic of Azerbaijan during its two years of existence. Economically, the new government was hampered by continuing obstruction by the British government, intent on protecting its access to Azerbaijan’s oil wealth. Meanwhile, the Communist opposition continued to find supporters amid the thousands of people who were impoverished by the chaos and desperate for leadership. After the British withdrew its troops from Baku in the summer of 1919, the military position of the

government was weakened further. The leadership declined the offer to establish an alliance with the new Atatürk government, leaving it dangerously isolated as the Red Army consolidated its power within Russia. On April 21, 1920, the Red Army began its invasion of Azerbaijan; the same day, the leadership of the republic announced the dissolution of the government. The Bolshevik party began to seize control of Baku on April 24, and by April 27, the Mussavat Party was declared illegal. (van der Leeuw 2000, 121).

The following decades conformed generally to the pattern of other regions seized by the Bolsheviks. Opponents to the new rule were brutally suppressed, even if those opponents were local Bolsheviks. In all, an estimated 100,000 were killed in the purges between 1920 and 1925. Despite this repression, opposition continued. When the order to collectivize all the land in the Soviet Union was issued in 1929, a rebellion began. Troops and several squadrons of aircraft were brought in to quell this rebellion, which cost the lives of at least 20,000 Azerbaijanis. Rebellion continued until 1935. When the collectivization was judged to be complete, agricultural production was about a third of what it had been, adding famine to the woes of the country (Altstadt 1992, 90-120).

As in other republics of the USSR, economic planners focused on developing particular crops or products, making general self-sufficiency nearly impossible. In Azerbaijan, the agricultural focus was on the production of cotton. Oil and petrochemicals were the focus of its industrial production. Production of both of these, however, imposed high costs on the environment of Azerbaijan. The oil refining areas of the country became among the most polluted regions on earth, while large stretches of the interior became poisoned by the overuse of fertilizers for cotton cultivation.

In general, the attitude of the USSR toward the Soviet Socialist Republic of Azerbaijan was characterized by benign neglect at best. While the oil fields of Baku continued to produce through the Soviet period, their output was hindered by underinvestment and poor extraction techniques. As the exploration of the Siberian oil fields began in the 1960s, the deposits in Azerbaijan lost their significance. By the 1980s, oil from Azerbaijan represented about 3 percent of the Soviet Union's total. The economic doldrums were reflected in the income data from the period. While income grew in the Georgia republic and the Armenian republic at a rate of about 5.5 percent between 1960 and 1978, in the Azerbaijan republic the rate was stuck at about 3 percent. For the Soviet Union as a whole, the growth rate was about 6.3 percent. While income may have remained stagnant, the population did not, growing from 3.5 million in 1959 to 6.8 million in 1989 (Swietochowski 1995, 179). The effect of the economic stagnation and the growing population was increased unemployment and chronic underemployment.

As the central power of the Soviet government weakened in the 1980s, the centrifugal forces began to tear apart the relations between the member republics of the USSR. In the case of Azerbaijan, the long subdued conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh first broke into civil unrest and then organized warfare. While detailing the conflict would require an entire monograph, it is impossible to understand the current dynamics of modern Azerbaijan without taking into account the ongoing war. The contest over the territory reignited in 1988, when the leadership of the Armenian republic took advantage of the instability in Moscow to formally make its claims to the mountainous territory. While the demands were rejected by Moscow, massive street demonstrations in favor of reuniting the lands with Armenia were organized. Reciprocal outbreaks of violence broke out in cities in Azerbaijan and

Armenia. Thousands of refugees fled from Azerbaijan and Armenia, destabilizing the situation further.

As political forces responded to the conflict and to the growing instability in Moscow, Soviet forces made one last attempt to crush the movement for secession from the USSR. The Popular Front party had been spearheading moves for independence, and the group was gaining support in 1989. The party took over the government of one of the southern districts of the country at the end of that year. After the Armenian government included the Nagorno-Karabakh in the national budget and allowed residents to vote in its national elections, Azerbaijanis reacted sharply, demanding that the republic sever ties with the USSR. The anger was also directed at Armenians living in Azerbaijan, especially those living in Baku. With the expressed purpose of restoring order, 26,000 Soviet troops entered the city on January 19, 1990, storming barricades erected by the Popular Front, but also indiscriminately killing civilians, according to independent observers. More than 130 people were killed in the violence (de Waal 2003, 93). If the crackdown was supposed to squelch the independence movement, it failed utterly. For 40 days, mourning and protests followed the massacre. Later that year, the Supreme Council of the Azerbaijan SSR declared itself sovereign and adopted a new flag. In 1991, the council adopted a declaration of independence, which was then approved by national referendum in December, the same month in which the USSR was officially dissolved.

In May 1992, Ayaz Mutallibov, who had assumed the country's presidency following independence, was forced to resign. Abüçlfaz Elchibay, a former Soviet dissident and leader of the National Front, became the first democratically elected president in June 1992. His tenure of roughly 15 months was marked by civil strife

and setbacks in the Nagorno-Karabakh War. Full scale fighting had broken out in the winter of 1992, and Azerbaijan mounted an offensive in the summer of that year. By the autumn, however, the offensive had weakened, and by the spring of the 1993, Azerbaijan was on the defensive again as the NKR Defense Army seized new ground. Amid these setbacks, Surat Huseynov, a colonel in the Azerbaijan Army led an armed rebellion. As troops advanced on the capital, Elchibay invited Heydar Aliyev, who had served as First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Azerbaijan Communist Party, to negotiate with the rebellious colonel. Elchibay himself departed for his native region of Nakhchivan in order to prevent more bloodshed (Rasizade 2003).

Aliyev wasted no time in taking control, becoming chairman of the Azerbaijan parliament and assuming temporary presidential powers. He also appointed Huseynov as prime minister. Aliyev, who previously had directed the KGB in Azerbaijan, was elected in his own right as president in October 1993, after Elchibay was stripped of his presidential powers in a referendum in August of that year. The turnout for the referendum was reported to be 92 percent, with 98 percent of the citizens voting to oust Elchibay. Lopsided nature of these results caused protests, but to no avail (van der Leeuw 2000, 177-180). Aliyev was firmly in control.

The war in Nagorno-Karabakh continued amid the political crisis, with increasingly dire consequences for Azerbaijan. In two offenses in 2004, Azerbaijan took as many as 5,000 casualties. The country was exhausted, emotionally and economically from the warfare and the turmoil. On May 16, 1994, the leaders of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Nagorno-Karabakh signed a truce, rather than a complete peace agreement. (Croissant 1998, 97). Sporadic violence on the border

with Nagorno-Karabakh continues to the present day and the Azerbaijan government regularly inveighs against the seizure of its national territory.

The circumstances in which Aliyev took power were not auspicious for democracy. A former regional boss, KGB official and member of the Soviet Politburo, Aliyev had no love for Gorbachev's policies of glasnost or perestroika. Despite his association with the discredited Communist Party, Aliyev benefitted from the fatigue of populace in Azerbaijan. He was seen to be a strong leader, capable of restoring order to the country. Part of this rule was a measure imposing "military censorship" on the media. The law prohibited not only disclosure of military information but also publication or broadcast of any material that would be "damaging to the sense of dignity of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its head of state" (Library of Congress 1994).

In order to better consolidate his power, Aliyev also founded his own political party, the New Azerbaijan Party (known by the Azerbaijani acronym "YAP) in 1992. Although the constitution prohibited the president from being a member of a political party, Aliyev nonetheless served as chairman of the party until his death. After taking power, he was re-elected in 1998 in an election that was recognized by outside observers as falling far short of democratic standards. Aliyev had a heart bypass operation in 1999 and his health began to fail rapidly. Following his collapse while giving a speech in April 2003, he stood down from the presidency that autumn, appointing his son Ilham as leader of YAP. Ilham Aliyev subsequently ran for president in that year, winning an election that was roundly criticized by outside observers and critics within the country. He won re-election in 2008 with more than 88 percent of the vote. The 2008 election was boycotted by the opposition, which

complained that electoral rules had been manipulated by the government (Tavernise 2008).

The first parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan were in 1995, and delivered a decisive victory for YAP. These elections, however, were tainted by claims of violence, intimidation, and fraud. The same was true for the parliamentary elections in 2000, which were so flawed that the results for 11 electoral districts were annulled. The 2005 elections also provided suspect results. Following demonstrations that drew thousands of protestors, the Central Election Commission cancelled the results in 10 constituencies (Chivers 2005).

Many people regard the 2005 parliamentary elections as the last time that the opposition in Azerbaijan had a chance to shake political power loose from the Aliyev family. Even at that point, of course, Ilham Aliyev had begun to systematically consolidate his political power. For example, on March 26, of that year, Ilham was elected as the ruling New Azerbaijan Party chairman. The opposition denounced this because, as noted above, according to the law on political parties, the president should have no party affiliation. The law had been ignored when Heydar Aliyev held the party post; the law was also ignored for his son.

The culmination of the contest for power that year occurred when Rasul Guliev, the exiled leader of the Azerbaijan Democratic Party (ADP) and former parliamentary speaker, attempted to return to the country. At the request of the Azerbaijan government, however, Ukrainian authorities detained him and his return was aborted. The government carried out mass detentions and the military and police personnel dominated Baku. On the day of Guliev's announced return, October 17, the police arrested hundreds of his supporters. Following this potential threat from a former insider, many high-level government officials were dismissed and a

government minister and his brother were accused of an attempted coup d'état and arrested (Ismailova 2005).

In contrast to those elections, little opposition – organized or otherwise – was evident in the months prior to the election in 2008. Not too long before the election, the main opposition parties announced they were boycotting the election. Some critics of the regime decried this decision because the boycott was seen as an acknowledgment of the impotence of the opposition. The opposition parties argued, however, that it was impossible to conduct a competitive campaign when the government effectively controlled the media and even meetings by the opposition were tightly restricted (Ismayilov 2008).

Following the president's re-election in 2008, 92 percent of voters voted in a referendum to amend the nation's constitution, removing term limits from the presidential office. Opposition leaders had again called for a boycott, citing numerous violations of election rules such as ballot box stuffing, intimidation, and repeat voting. The opposition in any case had little time to prepare for the vote. The referendum was announced in December but the official campaign on the changes lasted only one month, with little time given by the state media to debate the changes proposed for the constitution (RFE/RFL 2009; Nichol 2009).

Media in Azerbaijan

The mass media in the Azerbaijan developed when the republic was part of the Soviet Union and so the media developed along Soviet lines. Rather than objectivity, the media focused on transmitting the information deemed to be essential by the Communist Party. As the policy of glasnost was implemented by Mikhail Gorbachev, general secretary of the Soviet Politburo, the effects began to be felt

within Azerbaijan, albeit more gradually than in Russian metropolitan areas like Leningrad and Moscow.

One of the first tests of how the media would respond to new freedoms was the outbreak of violence between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijanis, both within and without the region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Despite the importance of this topic to its audience, the media in Azerbaijan provided little news about the violence and the flow of refugees caused by the violence. Because little or no local reporting occurred, the public in both Armenia and Azerbaijan perceived that the Moscow-based media was supporting the enemy. Eventually, samizdat press developed in Armenia and Azerbaijan, specifically created to provide information about the brewing conflict. To address the dearth of information in Azerbaijan, in the summer of 1989 the Committee for People's Aid to Karabakh founded *Azerbaydzhan*, the first independent newspaper in the country. At about the same time, television programs in the country began discussing the issue (Grigoryan and Rzayev 2005).

Censorship in the USSR was formally abolished in the autumn of 1989, and before long independent newspapers in Azerbaijan were founded to take advantage of the new press freedom. These publications sharply rejected Soviet dogma, but did not necessarily aspire to maintain journalistic objectivity. These publications frequently were established to advance certain political objectives. *Azadliq*, for example, was the party organ of the Popular Front, one of the most powerful opposition groups during this time. When Azerbaijan declared its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, a large number of independent newspapers were founded, some of which exist to this day. *Ayna*, *Zerkalo*, *Seher*, and *7 Gün* continue to publish in Azerbaijan, although the independence of the newspapers has been tightly circumscribed. The new political parties that arose in this period each had party

newspapers to publicize their programs, leading to the establishment of *Yeni Musavat*, *Istiqlal*, and *Millet*. The independent news agency *Turan* also was founded during this time. Cinqiz Mustafayev, a journalist who provided explosive coverage of the violence in Nagorno-Karabakh, established 215 KL, the first independent television station (Grigoryan and Rzayev 2005).

The war brewing in Nagorno-Karabakh provided the fledgling media with a *raison d'être*; it may also have sowed the seeds of media repression. The war was a key factor in the attempted coup that unseated Abüçlfaz Elchibay. When Heydar Aliyev succeeded Elchibay, he used the war as an excuse for the repressive measures imposed on the media. When the national emergency was lifted in September 1993, the news media censorship was eased, and in November that year the legislature refused to approve a measure proposed by Aliyev that would restrict media in order to ensure national unity. Nonetheless, the government found effective means to silence independent media. For example, the government began restricting the supply of printing material to independent publishers. By early 1994, the price increases had resulted in a drop of more than 50 percent in newspaper and magazine subscriptions. In any case, Azerbaijanis continued to favor television as a news source, and the government controlled the only national channel (Library of Congress 1994).

Not surprisingly, the ownership of the media in this case had a profound effect. In a content analysis of 126 articles in the period following the 1993 presidential election, a period roiled by street protests, the coverage provided by the state-run newspapers was considerably more biased than that given by independent newspapers. During the protest rallies, one person was killed and police arrested more than 625 people, including at least 85 officials from opposition parties. “In

contrast to the independent outlets where protestors tended to be worthy victims, the state owned media as a loudspeaker of the government tried to frame the protestors as rioters” (Khudiyev 2005, 25).

When Ilham Aliyev assumed the presidency, some Western observers expressed hope that the new president would take a more liberal approach than his father. After all, the younger Aliyev had traveled extensively in Europe. His reputation before taking power was that of a playboy. (In 1998, his father had ordered the closure of Baku’s casinos reportedly in part because of the Ilham’s fondness for gambling.) As became clear relatively quickly, however, Ilham’s lack of KGB experience did not mean that he was more of a democrat than his father. Since ascending to power, Ilham Aliyev’s regime has been marked by progressively repressive policies and actions. One of the most notable events occurred in 2005 when unknown assailants shot down journalist Elmar Huseinov in the lobby of his apartment building. While the crime remains officially unsolved, Huseinov clearly had incurred the anger of government officials for his journalism. Particularly galling to authorities was his investigation of allegations that Azerbaijani troops were themselves responsible for some of the casualties of one of the most infamous massacres of the war. Less than two years earlier, Huseinov had been imprisoned for his coverage of political protests following the election won by Ilham Aliyev (Walker 2005).

Television was already firmly under the control of the government during the regime of Heydar Aliyev, but under the younger Aliyev the government began to more actively try to repress or control dissemination of information over the Internet. In 2007, the government shut down the site www.susmayag.biz, which was launched in order to gather signatures of people protesting utility rate hikes (Abassov and

Gahramanov 2007). In 2008, the BBC and Radio Liberty were forced from the airwaves within Azerbaijan. In the summer of 2009, two bloggers were arrested and convicted of hooliganism, prompting international condemnation (Drucker 2009).

First Hand Descriptions of the Media Environment

In order to better assess the current state of journalistic freedom, media pluralism, and democracy in Azerbaijan, I conducted interviews with a variety of journalists and civil society activists from 2008 to 2010. After receiving a Knight International Journalism Fellowship from the International Center For Journalists, I worked in Azerbaijan from March 2008 until March 2009, establishing training programs for journalists across the country. In the course of my fellowship assignment, I worked with journalists young and old, idealistic and jaded. I sought not only to train journalists in modern investigative techniques but also to assist in the dissemination of their work. In seeking to achieve this latter goal, I became acquainted with some of the most independent journalists now working in the country.

I also saw first hand the conditions of the journalists working in the country. A general strategy of self-censorship had become second nature to seasoned journalists, and even young journalists knew that certain subjects could not be reported. The journalists casually mentioned that they preferred not to meet in certain cafés because these were the haunts of “KGB” agents, referring to the former Soviet secret police. Many people automatically lowered their voices when voicing criticism of the government, even when at home.

In an environment like this, the goal of improving independent journalism had real limits because any news coverage challenging the local or national authorities carried substantial risks for the journalists who reported these stories. One

of my students, for example, was expelled from his university on trumped up charges after he wrote an article detailing corruption in the university system. In the same town, I listened to a group of Soviet-era journalists describe the ballot-box stuffing they still witness, but do not report. I thought then about how these journalists needed much more than technical training. They also needed fundamental changes in government policies to allow greater media freedom and pluralism.

As a whole, the interviews I conducted with journalists in Azerbaijan reveal a profound disillusionment in the current ability of the media in Azerbaijan to effect positive political and social change. As my hypotheses would suggest, the general impression gathered from these conversations is that in the last decade as the media have become more constricted and controlled, the politics of the country have become increasingly repressive and corrupt.

Witness to History

Mirza Xazar, 62, is one journalist who has experienced first hand the trajectory of changes that occurred in Azerbaijan over the last 30 years. While he was based outside of Azerbaijan for most of his career as a journalist, he is a sort of national hero for his role in bringing news to the world of the 1990 massacre by Soviet troops in Baku. Xazar is now semi-retired, and lives in Germany.

A native of Baku, Xazar began his journalism career working for Radio Liberty after emigrating from the country in 1976. After working several years for that news outlet, he took a position as director of the Azerbaijan news service for the Voice of America in 1985. The news service in those days transmitted on the shortwave radio band and was frequently subject to jamming by the Soviet authorities. As Gorbachev's policies of glasnost began to be adopted, Xazar's job

became a little easier. The jamming of broadcasts became less regular and restrictions on journalists became lighter.

“Azeri journalists responded to these changes very smartly. They started to discuss the faults that had been covered up by other governments - the Stalin Terror and other subjects that could never be discussed before. They were talking to the Azeri public and using the tools they had quite actively. It was really a renaissance for the media” (Xazar 2010).

Events outside the border of Azerbaijan, however, changed the tenor of the times, Xazar said. The ethnic fighting in Nagorno-Karabakh shifted the focus of the media. Instead of exposing past crimes of the Communist regime, the media paid more attention to the growing conflict. The rhetoric used politically and in the media became more nationalistic. At the beginning of 1990, Xazar’s station was using a direct radio link with Baku, a valuable tool that allowed immediate access to local journalists. On January 19, 1990, the station broadcast news that Soviet troops were on the edge of the city, but many observers believed they were there just to threaten the political opposition in the city.

“On the evening of January 19, I went home in the evening, but I used to come back to the office about nine or ten, just to check on what was going on. I came back, and was told that tanks had entered the city. The soldiers were firing with machine guns at the people. These were the first reports to the world about what was happening in Baku. These were really the only reports” (Xazar 2010).

After the massacre, the momentum toward independence in Azerbaijan appeared irreversible. Along with the political freedom, journalists were taking advantage of loosened restrictions to found new publications and news outlets. Xazar remembers the period as especially exciting and vibrant. The feeling began to change markedly, however, when Heydar Aliyev came to power in 1993. As Xazar puts it “Since then, things have moved in a different direction” (Xazar 2010).

“Of course, they couldn’t ban all the opposition newspapers. But a campaign against journalists began. That was effective. Even with this, there was less repression than after 2003. There seems to be a difference of approaches by Heydar and Ilham. In my opinion, Heydar was more soft. But the young one, he is not so soft” (Xazar 2010).

The diminished media pluralism and other restrictions on journalism that have been imposed in the last decade have had clearly identifiable effects on politics and society in Azerbaijan, according to Xazar. For example, the media play no meaningful role in the control of corruption or in ensuring that human rights are observed, he said. In 2009, Transparency International ranked Azerbaijan 158th out of 180 ranking in global corruption, and corruption is widely acknowledged within the country to be severe problem. The ability of the media to expose corruption, however, is severely undermined because the media in Azerbaijan is itself is corrupt, Xazar said. The corruption includes news outlets being paid for the coverage they provide, negative and positive.

“They are doing it themselves. They are corrupt. That means that they cannot fight against corruption. They cannot be a platform for fighting corruption” (Xazar 2010).

Professor and Journalist

The perspective of Zeynal Mammadli, 57, a professor of journalism at Baku State University, also spans nearly a full circle of repression, openness, and repression again in Azerbaijan. After beginning to work as a television reporter in the mid-seventies while still a student, Mammadli has worked in a wide variety of positions over the last three decades. He began teaching at the university in 1981, but has always been involved in the practice of journalism as well, serving as a consultant for newspapers and radio producer among other positions. Currently, he produces a radio program for Radio Azadliq, which is generally recognized as the

only independent news outlet in the country. (This outlet itself was forced from the domestic airwaves in 2008, although it still broadcasts outside of the country and publishes news on its website.)

When Mammadli began to work as a journalist, the rules about what was permitted and what was forbidden were primarily informal. Journalists could not criticize the head of the Communist Party, but lower officials could be criticized. In the regions relatively far from the capital of Baku, greater freedom of expression was allowed. Just because there was some freedom for criticizing lower government officials, however, did not mean censorship did not exist. Censorship was a reality for journalists, and they knew that the decision of an editor to censor a story, for example, was indisputable. In those times, the primary avenue for expressing criticism was through literary journals, he said. The criticism in these cases was not expressed directly, but the readers of these journals understood it.

With the ascension of Gorbachev in the Soviet Union, the environment for journalists in Azerbaijan began to change rapidly, Mammadli said. Journalists could argue with their editors about coverage, for example. When the nation achieved its independence in 1991, a profusion of independent newspaper began publication. The journalists were subject to “conditional censorship,” which was imposed for a limited number of subjects, mostly concerning the ongoing military conflict. Mammadli identifies 1992 as the ideal time for journalists in Azerbaijan. The following year, the freely elected president was forced from office, and after Heydar Aliyev took office, a censorship system was imposed again.

Still, Mammadli said, journalists still had some freedom under Heydar Aliyev. As in Soviet times, the leader of the country was exempt from criticism, but general critiques could be published. The current situation is substantially worse than those

years, Mammadli said. In fact, in some ways the current situation is even worse than the Brezhnev years, when Azerbaijan was a republic in the USSR. At least in those years the literary journals provided a venue for indirect criticism. Nowadays, those literary journals are for the most part gone, the newspapers are controlled through several methods, and broadcasting is completely controlled by the state, said Mammadli.

One change that developed during the years of the presidency of Ilham Aliyev is the use of advertising as a control. The advertising market used to be somewhat transparent, but now the market is used primarily for political purposes. Government authorities regard the purchase of an ad in a newspaper as a political act. If a business purchases an ad from an opposition newspaper, that business could find itself targeted by government agencies such as the tax police. Because minimal pluralism or press freedom exists, the population in Azerbaijan in general is exposed to only one-sided information, he said.

“There is no conversation about important subjects. No conversation about what sort of Azerbaijan we want. There is far less talk about democracy” (Mammadli 2010).

Imprisoned for Conscience

While Xazar and Mammadli practiced their craft without suffering serious consequences from the repressive conditions in Azerbaijan, this is not the case for Shahbaz Xuduoglu. Now the owner of a struggling printing company, Xuduoglu, 41, worked for many years as a journalist. Aside from facing the everyday pressures of working in a country like Azerbaijan, Xuduoglu was also imprisoned because of his journalism. Tactics such as prosecutions, physical intimidation, violence, and financial pressures have effectively quashed the diversity and vitality of the media in Azerbaijan, he said.

Xuduoglu began work as a journalist in 1989, but began to get noticed when he started working as an editor at the daily newspaper Qanun in 1992. In Azerbaijan, however, being recognized as a journalist is not necessarily positive. In September 1998, for example, he was arrested and beaten by police while covering an opposition rally. Xuduoglu was not alone in suffering the attention of the police at that time; according to the Special Rapporteur for the UN Commission on Human Rights, more than 30 journalists were arrested in that incident alone (Commission on Human Rights 1999).

In 2001, Xuduoglu was singled out for more specific attention. He had become editor of *Milletin Sesi*, an independent weekly that published an article alleging corruption at high levels of the government. A district judge found that the paper had defamed two officials, and ordered the closure of the newspaper. While Xuduoglu pledged at the time to appeal until all resources were exhausted, the newspaper ceased publication entirely not long after losing a separate case. Xuduoglu was found guilty of defamation and spent six months in prison before being pardoned by the president in honor of the 10th anniversary of the nation's independence (Committee to Protect Journalists). He was imprisoned with the journalist Elmar Huseynov, editor and founder of the *Bakinsky Bulvar*. As Xuduoglu noted, Huseynov was murdered in Baku in 2005 after he was freed from prison. No one has been indicted yet for committing that crime.

After his imprisonment, Xuduoglu established a printing company to print independent newspapers. While the challenges facing journalists were considerable earlier in the decade, he dates 2003 as the turning point for press freedoms. The death of Huseynov, who is widely perceived to be a victim of government violence, was an additional indication of how dangerous open criticism can be, said Xudoglu.

His murder and other acts of violence committed against journalists have effectively intimidated the local press.

“The death of Elmar marked the final blow against a free press. The mood here now is of pessimism. We have no one to defend us. No one local and no one from abroad” (Xudoglu 2010).

There are journalists in the country who are respected, he said, but those journalists are in prison. The journalists who are now writing or broadcasting in the country are not respected. Nonetheless, he said, the populace knows about the policies of the government. People also know that it is useless or dangerous to oppose the policies, Xudoglu said. The tools of dissent are quite limited. Some people have touted the advantages of social networking as a tool to build alliances, but Xudoglu said he is skeptical.

“So, you might have 500 friends on Facebook. How many are going to come out to the court (if you’re arrested.) No one – in the real world (Xudoglu 2010).

In fact, Xudoglu sees few chances of change in the near future. The West has shown little inclination to pressure the government to observe human rights, including the rights of journalists. He acknowledges that changes must occur eventually, but so far there is little sign of them. The key factor is that the government still controls the oil production in the country, so this gives it a steady income to keep it in power. The changes in the last decade have been dramatic and harmful for press freedom, he said. The only possible ways to obtain different ideas is from books and the Internet. The independent newspapers have been quashed and the television stations are either entirely owned or tightly controlled by the government, said Xudoglu.

“After 2003, everything got worse. Before, about 20 newspapers came out every day. They were independent and they had big circulation. Now, there are only three papers, and they have a maximum circulation of about 8,000” (Xudoglu 2010).

Clinging to Independence

Elchin Shikhlinsky, editor-in-chief of *Zerkalo*, a Russian-language newspaper cited by Xazar as one of the few balanced newspapers still published in Azerbaijan, said in an interview that the government uses multiple means to control and subjugate the media. The courts have shut newspapers. The government has prosecuted journalists for crimes such as libel or sometimes has made up entirely fictitious cases. (At the time of this interview, a journalist who had written pieces deemed objectionable by the government was facing anonymous allegations of homosexuality, a serious problem in a socially conservative country like Azerbaijan.) The remaining papers such as *Zerkalo* that attempt to remain independent face constant political pressure.

Shikhlinsky's career also dates back to the former Soviet Union. The son of a famous Azerbaijani poet, Shikhlinsky was an official at the Education Ministry of the Soviet Republic of Azerbaijan. After founding *Zerkalo* in the period following independence, Shikhlinsky has also served as chairman of the Azerbaijan Journalists Union.

During my interview, Shikhlinsky demonstrated his point by opening up a series of newspapers published in Baku. Many carried very little advertising, evidence of the subsidies that they receive. Opening a copy of the paper he edits, he pointed to the few large advertisements carried. The advertisements, subscriptions, and newsstand sales provide the income for *Zerkalo*. This economic model, however is not easy to maintain. Shikhlinsky said his advertisers regularly faced pressure from government figures trying to get them to shift their advertising to publications that only published viewpoints that supported the president's administration.

Opening up one newspaper filled with larger color advertisements, Shikhlinsky noted that it is owned by “the family.” This term, he explained, refers to the network of businesses that are either owned outright or effectively controlled by the family of President Ilham Aliyev. The businesses include media properties, real estate, and commercial properties such as the main downtown shopping mall in Baku.

The Internet Entrepreneur

If Shikhlinsky and *Zerkalo* represented one of the bright spots in Azerbaijan’s “old media,” Elnur Baimov of *day.az* was for a period representative of the hope people had that the Internet might provide a more pluralism within Azerbaijan’s media market. Baimov began his Internet news portal in 1993 with a very simple objective: to make money. Baimov’s business originally was just to stream music over the Internet site, but over time, he added to the content and to the staff. By the time of my interview with him in 2008, *day.az* employed 15 people, not counting the roughly 10 part-time reporters who often used pseudonyms for their reporting.

The offices of *day.az* were completely unmarked and the news portal used a mirror site to evade interference by the government. Baimov, however, had no illusions about invulnerability. If the government wanted to shut down the site, it would be easy, because an Internet site requires people to maintain it. People can be easily found. In fact, when interviewed, Baimov recalled that the site had been shut down once already, although officially the government did not take responsibility for the shutdown. Subsequently, the site was shut down again in the spring of 2009, after the news portal carried a piece that was unflattering about Vladimir Putin, the former president and current prime minister of Russia. At that time, technical problems were again blamed for the problem, and visitors to the site were promised that the site

would be up soon. *day.az* did return within several days, but the editors of the site seemed chastened, and the content was less controversial.

Even this level of operation, however, evidently was deemed to be unacceptable within the year. In February 2010, the principal investor in the company, Anar Mamdkhanli, removed Baimov as editor-in-chief, appointing in his place Ilgar Huseinov, who had directed the *Trend* information agency, an organization widely seen to be a government propaganda mouthpiece. Later that year, Baimov founded *NEWS.AZ* as a site for neutral information. The site does include a section regarding politics, but judging from a regular examination of the site, controversial subjects are avoided. A review of political news in the first quarter of 2010 shows no articles regarding corruption or human rights abuses within Azerbaijan. The majority of the articles concern foreign affairs such as statements by the foreign ministry and the signing of economic agreements. A substantial number of articles also take a position explicitly backing positions claimed by the Azerbaijan government.

Does A Radio Station Have To Broadcast?

As of the spring of 2010, Khadija Ismayilova directed what most objective journalism professionals consider to be the only organization doing investigative reporting in Azerbaijan. Ismayilova is bureau chief of the Baku Bureau of Radio Azadliq, which now disseminates the news gathered by its reports over its website. Originally, the website was secondary to the news that Radio Azadliq broadcast but on January 1, 2009, the station was forced off the air in Azerbaijan. Now, the Radio Azadliq website is the main way in which the news from the bureau is disseminated within the country. The Azerbaijan National Television and Radio Council ruled that

foreign-owned stations should be prohibited from broadcasting within the country. The BBC was forced off the air at the same time.

Radio Azadliq is the Azerbaijan news service of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a private, non-profit organization funded by the U.S. Congress through the Broadcasting Board of Governors.

Ismaylova, who has been directing the Baku bureau since July 2008, said the changes in the journalism environment have been dramatic even since she started in her profession in 1997. Markedly more pluralism existed among the providers of news coverage at that time. In 1997, discussing criticizing government policy issues was not taboo. Now, any criticism other than that of lower or local authorities is strictly forbidden. This prohibition, however, is generally informal. The censorship that is imposed is harsh but for the most part informal, she said.

In the estimation of Ismaylova, the turning point for journalism in Azerbaijan came in 2003, when the government reacted harshly to demonstrations against the presidential elections and coverage of the protests. Aside from imprisoning journalists such as Xudoglu, the government began creating financial problems for the newspapers it found objectionable, discouraging advertisements in such newspapers and restricting the supply of newsprint. The 2005 murder of Huseynov, termed by Ismailova as editor of the most courageous independent newspaper of the period, sent an unmistakable message. In 2006, another newspaper editor was kidnapped, driven to the outskirts of the city, where his captors drove over his feet repeatedly with a car. All of these actions had the net result of creating a media environment with very little pluralism and a community of journalists who feared challenging authorities in any way.

“This is the government style of Ilham. He has no contacts with local media. He ignores the media in the country. That’s the difference between him and his father. His father would answer questions. His father was more self-confident. He didn’t hesitate to talk to the media. Ilham is ignorant and arrogant to criticism” (Ismaylova 2010).

By the spring of 2010, Ismayilova judged that no real independent newspapers and very few opposition publications operated. (While Shikhlinsky represented his newspaper *Zerkalo* as independent, Ismayilova considered that newspaper to be subject to “self-censorship.”) As a consequence, the press cannot operate as a watchdog, according to Ismayilova . This in turn allows the climate of corruption in the country to flourish.

“They don’t want people to see how the oil money is being wasted in this country. There is more money to steal now, and they don’t want the media to serve as a watchdog” (Ismayilova 2010).

By 2010, the government campaign against *Radio Azadliq* had become aggressive and unceasing. The government press attacked the station as being “unpatriotic.” The web page regularly faced “filtering” attempts by the government, leading to problems for people in Azerbaijan trying to access and read information from the site. Nonetheless, Ismayilova said the staff at the bureau continues to report on issues that are avoided by other outlets, exposing corruption in the country. Earlier in the year, for example, one reporter won an international journalism prize for an investigation that revealed that government ministries in the country routinely bought service vehicles that cost more than \$100,000 a piece. The report showed how the government as a whole spent more than \$69 million to buy service vehicles, more than twice the annual budget for medical supplies, scientific research, and educational stipends combined (Akifqizi 2009).

The media is just one institution that has been systematically attacked by the government, said Ismayilova . The government is also weakening or destroying

independent civil society organizations throughout the country. The government has cancelled the registration of non-governmental organizations that were formed to monitor elections, for example. The result of these policies toward civil society and the media is that the public's faith in political means to solve the nation's problems has diminished markedly.

“The people are depressed. They don't feel that they can fight for their rights because they believe that everything has been decided. They are more fatalistic. This has raised the number of people who are involved with religion. They are looking for justice from God, because they cannot get it on Earth” (Ismayilova 2010).

Despite the daunting problems facing journalists, Ismayilova said there are some reasons for hope. There are current discussions about creating a new television channel that will be beamed into the country from outside Azerbaijan's borders. Because it will be using satellite technology, it will be difficult if not impossible to jam. A television station will be preferable to using the Internet to disseminate information because the mass of the public in Azerbaijan does not read news – either in newspapers or on the Internet.

Using New Tools For Journalism

Anar Orujov is attempting to reach people over the Internet, but he is attempting to use the Internet as a platform for webcasting. Orujov, director of the Caucasus Media Investigations Center, uses the Internet to transmit both audio and video reports of news in Azerbaijan. This effort faces a large obstacle of limited bandwidth capacity for Internet usage in much of the country. The organization he directs also trains young journalists and works with other groups in conducting investigations. As a journalist and as the director of a non-profit organization, however, Orujov has found his ability to work greatly circumscribed by government policies.

Orujov began his career in journalism in 1996, after studying journalism at Baku State University. Repression of journalists had started in earnest by the time he graduated, but Orujov said the situation under the current administration is “10 times worse” than it was under President Heydar Aliyev. Now the government has taken control of all the television and radio broadcasting companies within the country. The opposition newspapers have either been bribed or intimidated not to provide any negative coverage of the president’s administration. Roughly \$12,300 was allocated to fund the newspapers *Bizim Yol*, *Huriyyat*, and *Baku Khabar*. This does not mean that government in general is exempt from all criticism. Lower officials such as the director of the city’s mass transit agency and the head of the joint stock company providing water to the company have come in for criticism. These officials attempt to impose their own pressure on the media (Orujov 2010).

Another approach the government takes toward the media is analogous to the tactic sometimes taken against opponents in elections. Because the Internet has been identified as a potential source of critical information about the government, the government itself controls six news portals: *day.az*, *today.az*, *trend.az*, *milli.az*, *lent.az*, and *apa.az*. (*day.az* is the site formerly edited by Elnur Baimov.)

“It means that popular web sites are controlled by government or people close to government. Web sites are more critical than papers now about government. So that’s why they are trying to control them, and to start up their own competition” (Orujov 2010).

While the educated sector of society understands that the media is being manipulated and controlled by the government, this is not necessarily true of society as a whole. Many people do not seriously question the information that is delivered to them over the mainstream media within the country. The priorities set by these media generally are accepted to them. While the media will cover obvious abuses of human rights on occasion, the perspective of the coverage never extends the

criticism to any higher officials. For example, coverage of a police crackdown on a religious demonstration focused on the culpability of individual officers, rather than policy decisions made by high-ranking officials. In this situation, Orujov said it is difficult for the public to believe that the opposition to the President Ilham Aliyev will be better for the country. The opposition is too weak, and many believe that whoever replaces the current administration would be just as corrupt.

Seeing Hope in Youth of Today

Like Orujov, Emin Husenynzade is one of the new breed of Azerbaijani journalists equally at home with media using conventional platforms or communication over the Internet. Husenynzade currently serves as the Caucasus Project Manager for *Transitions Online*, an Internet news service funded by the Open Society Foundation. Formerly, he was a journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. While Husenynzade puts considerable faith in the Internet as a means for the public to get access to information that might otherwise be forbidden, he also noted that the government's efforts to control or censor content on the Internet. The abilities of the government, however, might not match its intent. While the authorities are beginning to filter web sites, Husenynzade doubted that this will be possible to the extent that filtering is done in China, for example.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe actively monitors the performance of the Azerbaijan government in the field of human rights, but Husenynzade said he was skeptical about this organization's real effect on government behavior. More important, he said, was how the Russian government acts toward the Azerbaijan government. The Russians, after all, are critical allies for Armenia, with which Azerbaijan remains at war over the issue of Nagorno-Karabakh (Husenynzade 2010).

Aside from policy changes outside the country, Husenynzade said the educated youth represent the best hope for democratic change in Azerbaijan. While the future appears daunting, Husenynzade expressed optimism that positive change can occur despite the obstacles. The changes, however, will be “small, not large” (Husenynzade 2010).

The Blogger Returns Home

Arzu Geybullayeva, 26, fits the profile of the youth that Husenynzade describes as being the future of the country. A native of Baku and a prolific blogger in her own right, Geybullayeva lived a year in the United States prior to receiving her undergraduate degree in Turkey and earning a master’s degree at the London School of Economics. While she is not employed in the media, she works closely with the media in her capacity as a program officer at the National Democratic Institute in Baku. Her job consists of consulting with political parties in the country, most specifically with the Emerging Leaders Program. (Geybullayeva 2010).

Because of the government’s policies, government-run newspapers and television currently dominate the media, she said. These media are blatant in the one-sided coverage of events, always emphasizing the greatness of the president, often to an absurd extent. Even newspapers such as *Zerkalo*, which occasionally carries articles that are critical of the government in general, never carries critical articles about people specifically. Because the media are controlled, the ability of opposition political candidates to reach the people is hampered. In such a situation, the goals of the opposition are exceedingly modest. One opposition member recently told Geybullayeva that he hoped that the opposition members would gain 15 seats in the nation’s parliament in the next election. At the moment, the opposition only has six elected representatives in the 125-seat parliament, called the Milli Majlis.

“Opposition leaders have problems with reaching out to the people. They could use newspapers like Yeni Musavat and Azadliq for campaigning but that is not too effective, and when it comes to having public debates on TV, it’s costly and not all TV channels allow for opposition party members come and talk there. It looks like the best and quickest solution for them at the moment is the door-to-door campaign. But I don't think there will be fair elections” (Geybullayeva 2010).

As a whole, the media poorly informs the public about politics and the problems of the country in general, she said. However, Geybullayeva said she is uncertain how much the public wants to be informed. Many people are still frightened by the effect of the protests that occurred five years ago after the previous parliamentary election.

“I think and I believe that they are afraid of getting involved, so everyone is concerned about their families and surviving. Repression definitely works here” (Geybullayeva 2010).

Rather than informing the public about politics, the news coverage offered tends toward celebrity news. Very few people as a whole read newspapers, and Geybullayeva said that overall even the youth of the country are “not that revolutionary. They are concerned with business, getting married, finding a rich husband, and staying out of all this mess” (Geybullayeva 2010).

A Mixture of Cynicism and Idealism

Ali Novruzov, 24, is another example of the type of Azerbaijani youth expressing his opinions and even publishing original reporting and analysis over the Internet. Still earning a graduate degree in diplomacy in Baku, Novruzov writes prolifically in his own blog, *In Mutatione Fortitudo*, as well as earning some freelance income from journalism. Aside from his native Azerbaijani, Novruzov is fluent in English and Russian. He uses these skills to comment on media broadcast and printed in all three languages.

Novruzov holds the media in Azerbaijan in extremely low regard. His comments echoed that of other professionals in the field: the independent and opposition media is nearly non-existent in Azerbaijan, deprived of funding when not repressed violently. “New media” such as that distributed over the Internet exhibit some integrity but they are “weak.” As such, they have little effect on the political processes in the country (Novruzov 2010).

“The only successful working version of independent media is Radio Azadliq’s website - its online version. Thus, here is the solution – to set up websites funded by independent foreign foundations and located at foreign servers. As far as traditional media, maybe they can be printed abroad by expat Azerbaijanis and then smuggled in? In any case, only non-profits and the foreign-funded can survive” (Novruzov 2010).

Working around the System

One news outlet similar to what Novruzov described began to carry news early in 2010. This small news portal is based out of the country but uses local journalists to cover subjects and events that might be taboo for other news outlets. Its profile remains low. Such measures are necessary to provide uncontrolled media coverage in a country ruled by an increasingly authoritarian regime, said Shelly Markoff, chief of party for the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX) in Azerbaijan. Such measures are necessary to provide uncontrolled media coverage in a country ruled by an increasingly authoritarian regime. Markoff came first to the country in 1995 as a consultant and took his current position in 1998. The “degradation of the media” has been steady over that period, but it has accelerated since the ascension of Ilham Aliyev to the presidency.

“When I first arrived, there were trials for slander. They’ve moved beyond that now. Government has become much more bold. They’ve taken the stance that it’s their country. They’re in a state of denial” (Markoff 2010).

Because television is the main news medium in the country and because the government controls television either directly or indirectly, the public is not exposed to alternative viewpoints or political challenges to the current regime, said Markoff. Often the intervention is quite heavy-handed. Markoff remembered a candidate who also owned a television station outside of the capital region. When he announced his candidacy for parliament, the television station was taken away from him.

Prior to taking the position of Chief of Party in Azerbaijan, Markoff held this position for IREX in Albania. The contrast between the two former Communist countries is stark. In Albania, the electorate is bitterly divided but it is engaged in the political system. The media is similarly deeply partisan, split between the democratic and socialist factions. While the media may be biased in Albania, it is not repressed, Markoff said. In his six years of working in that country, he heard of lawsuits against media outlets but he knew of no government closures. Albania, however, is hard to compare with Azerbaijan in so many ways, Markoff noted.

“What sort of political competition is possible here? It is difficult to have political parties in a kingdom. This is a kingdom with its own line of primogeniture” (Markoff 2010).

Indeed, the consensus among observers interviewed in Azerbaijan is that the observance of democratic norms, media freedom, and human rights is likely to get worse in the country before it gets better. Vague hopes are invested in abstractions such as “young people” and “the Internet,” but the practical ways in which basic reporting or political organizing can be practiced become more constricted every day, said Markoff.

At the moment, perhaps no better symbol of the current political situation in Azerbaijan exists than that of Emin Milli, 30, and Adnan Hacizade, 26. The two men, founders of the OL! youth movement, were eating dinner in a downtown Baku

restaurant when they were assaulted and severely beaten by two men, according to witnesses. When Milli and Hacizade went to the police station to file a complaint about the assault, the police arrested them, charging them with hooliganism. Despite international condemnation, the authorities in Azerbaijan proceeded to try the two young men and on November 11, 2009, they were both found guilty. Milli was sentenced to two year and six months; Hajizade was sentenced to a term of two years.

The charges of hooliganism against Hajizade and Milli are widely rejected among the domestic public and international observers. Both were political activists, but their political activities were entirely non-violent. In fact, the political and media tools they used were exactly the type that are sometimes touted as having transformative power. Using YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, the two activists spread information about the political and social situation in Azerbaijan across the globe. One of the last videos created by OL Media may have been the particularly galling to the Aliyev administration. The video featured a mock press conference with one of the donkeys purchased by the Azerbaijan government for \$41,000, according to local press reports. The case provoked international condemnation. Amnesty International, Reporters Without Borders, and a number of embassies protested the prosecution of the two activists, but to no avail. The message sent by the government was clear: it takes all challenges seriously.

Miriam Lansky, a senior program officer at the National Endowment for Democracy, told the New York Times that the arrests sent a distinct signal because they targeted the well-educated and comparatively affluent youths who were using the Internet to receive and spread information. “This is saying to that cream of the

crop of young people that you can't express yourself. This is a country that is really trying to hold onto these kids. This is also a message to them" (Barry 2009).

Assessing the Recent Past and Looking Ahead

In this chapter, I have presented a case study of one country that shows the relationships between media pluralism, political phenomena, and social phenomena. No case can serve as a perfect example to demonstrate the topics I have discussed, but Azerbaijan exemplifies quite well a number of the phenomena and relationships discussed earlier in this study.

As described here, the government of Azerbaijan has restricted the pluralism of the media by measures such as closing newspapers and forcing broadcasters off the air. Since 2000, the MSI media pluralism score of Azerbaijan has fallen from 2.06 to 1.72, a decline of about 17 percent. The concrete cases of illustrating this decline are easy to find. For example, former newspaper Shahbaz Xuduoglu discussed how the government closed his newspaper explicitly because of the content of the news coverage. In the case of Khadija Ismayilova, bureau chief for the Baku affiliate of Radio Liberty, the repression was not so explicit. Her station was forced from the air for reasons that were clothed in nationalist logic. The presidential administration argued that the nation had no need of a news source that was not funded by Azerbaijan. Internet entrepreneur Elnur Baimov faced restrictions that were still more opaque. After his Internet site closed at least twice because of "technical reasons," a close political ally of the presidential administration acquired the site. The site that Baimov currently manages stays far away from any topics that might be deemed controversial or objectionable by the presidential administration.

These measures to restrict media pluralism by closing news outlets, however, occur simultaneously with measures to intimidate or bribe journalists. These

techniques also can effectively diminish media pluralism because the journalists operating in that country will be less likely to challenge official dogma. Elchin Shikhlinsky, editor of *Zerkalo*, pointed out how the government has effectively intimidated businesses that have advertised in opposition newspapers.

Simultaneously, the government has either overtly or covertly financed newspapers and broadcasters that support the presidential administration. For example, the state-financed AzTV was established as a public broadcasting system and by charter is supposed to have editorial independence from the government. This independence, however, is widely perceived to be a complete fiction. AzTV received \$37 million from the state in 2009, while independent television stations received no funding at all (IREX 2010).

An additional tool used by the government is the violence against journalists that effectively inhibits their inclination or ability to challenge the government's positions or interpretations of events. The willingness of the Azerbaijan government to use violent means of repression against journalists is well documented.

As detailed in this chapter, journalists have been murdered after publishing controversial material and the government has imprisoned journalists on charges that widely denounced as flimsy. Xuduoglu was imprisoned under the regime of President Heydar Aliyev; Internet bloggers Emin Milli and Adnan Hacizade have been imprisoned under the regime of Heydar's son, Ilham Aliyev. Currently, at least eight journalists are behind bars in Azerbaijan (IREX 2010).

Parenthetically, I must note that violent and reflective nationalism is one of the most pernicious effects of the decreased media pluralism in Azerbaijan. As described earlier, any serious questioning of the established position on Nagorno-Karabakh is met with extreme sanctions, including murder. In this environment, the

media in general routinely serve as ardent purveyors of ethnic slurs against Armenians. With dissenting voices extremely rare in the media, this hatred festers within the population as a whole.

While the repressive policies of the government have restricted media pluralism and the overall freedom of the press, the administration has methodically enacted measures that allow it to solidify its political control in the country. Some of these measures have quite obvious motivations. For example, shortly after the president won re-election in a campaign that was widely condemned for a variety of electoral irregularities, the administration pushed through the parliament a measure that removed term limits for the president. Voters overwhelmingly approved this measure in a referendum, although outside observers widely condemned this referendum too for irregularities. Other measures that solidify the control of the central government have less dramatic effects. For example, changes in administrative regulations have steadily abridged the ability of independent non-governmental organizations to operate in Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, the government has impeded the ability of even native independent non-governmental organizations to operate in the country.

In sum, the Azerbaijan government has closed in one fashion or another many of the media outlets that demonstrated the initiative and willingness to challenge government positions. Those media that function in Azerbaijan are painfully aware of how their news coverage must be limited. In this environment of restricted media pluralism and an intimidated press, the electorate as a whole responds to political questions with cynicism and apathy. A widely repeated opinion among ordinary Azerbaijani citizens is that while the current government is surely corrupt and undemocratic, its replacement would not be any better. In this view, one

rationale for maintaining the status quo is that the thieves in power already have stolen enough to fill their pockets. The thieves that might replace them will come to power with empty pockets. With the media in Azerbaijan effectively bullied or controlled, the populace is unlikely to receive messages that challenge this attitude and the country as a whole sinks deeper into a morass of apathy, corruption, and authoritarianism.

Chapter Seven

The US Media: More Channels, More Choices. So What?

Looking at Azerbaijan, the effect of diminished media pluralism is clear. The choice of information for the public in that country has become increasingly limited as a consequence of government policies. As less information about public affairs becomes available, the civic discourse in the country becomes increasingly apathetic, cynical, and debased. Human rights abuses occur frequently, but the nation's media publicize these abuses rarely, or when abuses do receive publicity, they are framed in ways to excuse high-ranking authorities from any responsibility. Corruption in the country continues to worsen as even the media watchdogs are implicated in illegal or unethical schemes. While these causes and effects may appear obvious in the case of Azerbaijan, the reader may legitimately ask: What does this have to do with more established democracies like the United States?

The differences between the two media environments are obvious.

Azerbaijan's per capita GDP of \$9,564 in 2009 was less than a quarter of the United States' per capita GDP of \$46,381 (World Bank 2010). Azerbaijan is a Muslim republic, while United States was founded on explicitly non-religious grounds. The most important factor, of course, is that the United States has democratic institutions that, while imperfect, nonetheless have functioned to protect the rights of individuals and allow political competition for more than 200 years.

Despite these differences, the phenomenon of diminished pluralism is at least arguably present in both polities. In Azerbaijan, the reduction in pluralism is obvious; in the United States, the degree to which pluralism has been reduced is fiercely argued. On one hand, critics of the current media system in the United States point to

a media environment that is increasingly dominated by a decreasing number of media companies. On the other hand, supporters of the status quo argue that the current media environment in the United States provides consumers with an unprecedented level of choice. Never before have consumers had the ability to choose from so many cable channels. The Internet alone offers virtually an unlimited breadth of information and opinion to everyone. The status quo defenders argue that complaints that the public is inadequately served by the current media system are disingenuous at best.

In this chapter, I will review both arguments in an attempt to fairly consider a controversial and important topic. The provision of civic information, after all, is widely acknowledged to be essential to a functioning democracy. Because the media perform such an important function, I believe that it is better to err on the side of being unduly concerned rather than being unduly complacent about the health of our media system. In addition, I consider how other political institutions and regulations affect the impact of media ownership consolidation in the United States. After all, the issue of media ownership cannot be considered in isolation from the other institutions that can either foster democratic values or autocratic rule. Finally, I consider how the market-based model of media provision interacts with technological developments to produce a situation where public affairs information continues to be provided by the U.S. media but in a manner that encourages increasing partisanship among media providers and media consumers.

Re-examining the Core Concepts

As I observed earlier, the concepts of diversity, pluralism, and concentration lend themselves to a wide range of interpretations. Roughly speaking, we might say that diversity and pluralism are synonymous and inversely proportional to concentration. This does not, of course, resolve the question of how these terms are

going to be interpreted more precisely. Furthermore, even when agreement is reached on interpretation, empirical measurement systems can differ widely.

At the most basic level, there is the question of which aspect of the media are we measuring. Are we measuring the content of the media? Their ownership? The variety of formats available? One definition of media diversity is “the extent to which media content differs according to one or more criteria (van Cuilenburg and McQuail 1983, 145-162). The criteria we choose to evaluate media diversity are influenced by our preconceptions and research preferences. As described by van Cuilenburg (2007), media diversity can be measured at four different levels: the level of individual units of information, the level of content bundles of a media outlet, the level of specific medium, and the level of the communication system within a society as a whole. Beyond these distinctions, there are two normative methods of conceiving of the issue of diversity or pluralism. For example, a distinction can be made between “reflective diversity” and “open diversity” (de Bens 2007, 20). Reflective diversity describes the manner in which the media meet the expectations of the media market, reflecting the preferences of the consumers. Open diversity interprets the concept normatively and qualitatively, starting from the position that the media are vital social phenomena affecting people and politics. From this vantage point, the media should reflect divergent preferences and opinions more or less equally, giving approximately equal weight to the diversity of opinions and preferences in society.

The approach taken by European policy makers and regulators tends to privilege open diversity. In Europe, the continuing provision of media diversity is most likely to be achieved through media regulation and subsidies, such as those provided to public broadcasting. European policymakers tend to understand media diversity in four main dimensions: diversity of formats and issues, diversity of

content, diversity of people and groups, and diversity in terms of geographical coverage and relevance, such as the mix of international, national, regional, and local content (McQuail 1992, 144).

The approach in the United States in contrast tends to rely on the marketplace to create the reflective diversity needed for society. This emphasis in turn means that the focus for policymakers in the United States most often is on maintaining source diversity, usually by policies to encourage competition within the media market. From this competition, it is assumed that a diverse set of media sources will arise. This source diversity in turn will generate content diversity as well as diversity in the types of media to which audiences are exposed.

Because of this emphasis on source diversity, when examining the level of pluralism or diversity in the United States we must attempt to quantify the concentration or diversity of media ownership in this country. This is no small task, but one advantage in the United States is that the ownership data is comparatively more transparent and accessible than it is in other parts of the world.

Measuring Diversity

Some of the measures of concentration used to examine media markets have wide application in other areas of the social sciences. For example, the Lorenz curve measures inequality by ranking entities according to size and drawing a curve of the cumulative share. The Gini coefficient is the ratio of the area under a Lorenz curve to a perfectly equal distribution. If all the competitors in a market had an equal share, the Gini coefficient for that market would be zero.

Another method to measure concentration that is used in the field of antitrust law is to combine the market share of the four firms for an industry. The resulting figure, called the C4 Index, is defined by the aggregate total market share percentage

of the four largest four companies in an industry. If the shares of the top 4 firms in a market were 40, 30, 10, and 10 percent, with the remainder of the firms representing only one percent each, then the C4 Index would be 90. The problem with this measure, however, is that it does not distinguish between situations where one firm heavily dominates the market and situations where the top firms are roughly the same size.

One of the most used indices when analyzing the concentration of media ownership is the Herfindahl-Hirschman Index (HHI), developed by economists Orris C. Herfindahl and Albert O. Hirschman. The index is widely used to calculate market concentration. The figure is derived by squaring the market share of each firm competing in the market and then compiling the total of those sums. If a market has four firms competing in it, for example, and the market shares of those firms are 30, 30, 20 and 20 percent, then the HHI is 2600. When a large number of roughly equally sized firms compete in a market, the HHI will approach zero. The HHI increases as the number of firms competing in the market decreases and as the inequality of the competitors' size increases. If a single company dominates the entire market, then the HHI will be 10,000.

The US. Justice Department considers markets of between 1000 and 1800 points on the HHI to be moderately concentrated. When the HHI is over 1800, the market is considered to be concentrated. If a transaction, such as a merger, increases the HHI by more than 100 points in concentrated markets, it will automatically be subject to review under the Horizontal Merger Guidelines issued by the U.S. Department of Justice and the Federal Trade Commission.

In 2003, the Federal Communications Commission developed its own index to measure concentration. The Diversity Index was supposedly a response to more than

half a million comments and 20 months of hearings. According to the FCC, the Diversity Index and the accompanying regulations were intended to protect viewpoint diversity, promote competition, affirm localism as a policy goal, promote minority and female media ownership, and put real limits on ownership concentration (FCC 2003).

The FCC calculated the DI by determining the market share of the media in a particular market and then assigning weights to the different outlets within the same media. Each owner's share of the total availability of one class of media was then multiplied by its share of the total media market. The shares of properties that are commonly owned, such as a radio station and newspaper, are added and then squared. The DI is the sum of all squared ownership shares. The FCC said that its index was superior to previous attempts to measure diversity because it explicitly incorporated measures of cross-media analysis. In compiling the index, the FCC implied that a level of substitution between media was possible for the dissemination of opinion and news, hence grouping the media in this area into one media market was justifiable.

The FCC used data gathered from Nielsen Media Research in assigning weights to the different news media. The data purported to show what media sources people used to get news and public affairs information. From this data, the FCC assigned the following weights: broadcast television 33.8 percent, daily newspapers 20.2 percent, weekly newspapers 8.6 percent, radio 24.9 percent, and Internet 12.5 percent. Beyond the differing weights, however, the FCC took the view that all independent outlets within a type of media were considered to be equal in size, regardless of their real market share or the audience reached by that outlet (Just 2009).

Whatever the motives behind the creation of the FCC's index, the reaction by consumer advocates to this proposed index was blistering. The Consumer Federation

of America and Consumers Union charged that the Diversity Index was an intentional distortion of market analysis produced to justify greater media consolidation.

The Media Ownership Order is riddled with contradictions, misstatements of empirical fact and unrealistic or unsupported assumptions about market conditions. The inconsistencies occur within the discussions of each rule, as well as between the arguments present for each of the rules. These inconsistencies and flaws result in an analytic framework that produces absurd results (Cooper 2003, 7).

The FCC, in fact, faced a firestorm of criticism not only from consumer advocacy groups but from the general public as well. This criticism in turn sparked congressional scrutiny of FCC policy. In September 2003, the Third Circuit Court of Appeals stayed implementation of the rules pending review. The following year in the case of *Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC*, the Third Circuit Court remanded a portion of the new regulations to the FCC for “additional justification or modification of numerical limits for television ownership, local radio ownership, and cross-ownership of media within local markets” (*Prometheus Radio Project v. FCC*, 2004).

The obvious question posed by the use of any index is how we are to define particular markets. It may be that a portion of the overall market increases significantly in concentration, while the market as a whole is not concentrated. One way to address this issue is to weight the relevant averages, assigning weights to the terms based on the respective revenues of the industry segments. Another method is to use a Local Concentration Index (LCI), which accounts for the extent to which various media provide local information to individuals in the market.

The HHI, C4, and Gini Coefficients are all methods to measure concentration on the horizontal dimension, but as mentioned earlier, concentration can also occur on the vertical, and diagonal dimensions. Other measurements have been devised to measure these types of concentration. For example, the Participation Index (PI)

provides a measure of a company's economic presence in all the industries relevant to the final product. The Sector Share Index (SSI) is a score that measures the firm's share in the information sector. The Company Power Index (CPI) score gives a company's weighted HHI and is intended to show the company's ability to leverage its position. In addition, the Media Ownership Concentration and Diversity Index (MOCDI) has recently been developed in order to more precisely measure the salient aspects of media markets in the United States. This new measure consists of dividing the HHI by the square root of the number of voices within any one media market (Noam 2009, 415).

Even if we constrict our research question to the assessment of whether or not ownership of media is becoming more concentrated, the answers are not necessarily simple. In one of the most recent analyses of the question of media ownership and concentration in the United States, Eli Noam of Columbia University sketches an upward sloping straight line, crossed by another undulating line to describe the overall media environment. The point he makes is that the overall ownership trend continues steadily toward concentration, but within that overall trend there are periods where the concentration appears to slow or even decrease (Noam 2010).

In *Media Ownership and Concentration in America*, Noam systematically compiled the ownership concentration in a broad range of information industries, including music, film, television networks, consumer electronics, and even the computer and software sectors. The underlying thesis is that the dynamics that affect different aspects of what may be called the information industry also affect each other, and hence cannot be examined in isolation. This is a legitimate point, although the scope of Noam's work far exceeds what I attempt to do in this study. In the information sector as a whole, Noam presents data showing that concentration as

measured by the HHI fell from 2,108 in 1984 to 1,631 in 2005, with considerable variations in that period. These variations affect the conclusions drawn about trends toward concentration. If the baseline year is considered to be 1984, then concentration has not increased recently. If the baseline year is 1992, then concentration appears to have increased (Noam 2009, 419).

Within the mass media sector, which is the primary focus of my work here, the measurements conducted by Noam and his team of researchers show a considerable trend toward concentration in the last 30 years, especially relative to other sectors of the information industry. In 1984, the mass media HHI concentration was calculated to be about 27 percent of the concentration level for the rest of the overall information sector. By 2005, the concentration level of the mass media was 71 percent of that level (Noam 2009, 421). The concentration levels of the mass media are roughly described as “s-shaped,” with the overall trend showing increasing concentration. In 1984, the top four firms accounted for one third of an average mass media industry, but by 2005, they accounted for roughly one half. (Which firms are dominant, of course, differs from sector to sector within the area of the mass media.) Put in terms of the HHI figures used by the Justice Department to measure monopoly power, the HHI in the mass media sector has increased from 564 in 1984 to 1,160 in 2005. The current HHI describes a concentration level that would be described by the Justice Department as “moderately concentrated.” Overall, the general statistical picture of current concentration within any one sector of the mass media is that the leading company represents about 23 percent of the market, and the top three firms hold 10 percent of the market. Nine smaller firms hold about 6 percent each of the market, while a number of small companies represent the remaining two percent of the market (Noam 2009, 421).

Benjamin M. Compaine of Northeastern University presents a considerably different interpretation of the situation. Compaine, who wrote *Who Owns the Media?* (1979), one of the first systematic ownership studies of the media in the United States, is optimistic about both the trends in the mass media concentration and about the current state of the mass media. In his recent monograph *The Media Monopoly Myth* (2005), Compaine takes direct aim at critics who find that the growing level of concentration in the media is depriving consumers of choices.

“The empirical reality does not support the notion that in the United States, in 2004, consumers of content via the media have fewer choices of sources or fewer choices than have been available to them in the past. Just the opposite is true for television: viewers have more choice from more sources than at any time in the history of the medium” Compaine 2005, i).

Compaine takes issue with the critics of the current media system on several points. First, he disputes that ownership concentration has increased in general, although he acknowledges that the ownership of radio stations has become more consolidated. Second, the whole notion of ownership concentration has been transformed by the advent of the Internet, allowing myriad viewpoints to spread across the World Wide Web. The Internet, in fact, has become a real and formidable competitor to “old media” companies such as the television networks. Lastly, Compaine points out that the effects of ownership are unpredictable. Some research has found that the editorial slant of independent newspapers and those owned by media groups differ only slightly (Compaine 2000, 18-20).

Effects of Competition and Consolidation in the United States

In fact, competition and consolidated ownership has been shown to have a range of effects in a mix of media. First, I will consider here the effects of ownership types and competition levels on the U.S. media themselves. Second, I examine the

evidence for how these effects in turn cause certain changes in political behavior and political discourse in the United States.

As discussed earlier, the consolidation of ownership has two important effects on the media themselves. First, by definition it reduces the diversity of independent sources of information that are available within the media. Second, it reduces the competition within the media to provide information to media consumers. While both of these effects seem common-sense conclusions, reasoned counterarguments can be made to them. For example, it is sometimes argued that in a competitive market, the media providers will provide products that meet the needs of the median media consumer. Little incentive will exist to serve the needs of the audiences outside of the mainstream. A single media provider, on the other hand, would have incentives to offer content to serve a greater range of the media consuming public (Hamilton 2004, 21-23).

Much, but not all, research supports the contention that competition among media outlets benefits consumers. In newspapers, for example, Lacy and Martin (2004) find evidence that intense competition increases investments in the newsroom and improves the quality of the news coverage. Also, competition for advertising decreases the cost of that advertising. Merging newspapers to form geographic “clusters” had the effect of reducing competition, quality, and the penetration of the newspaper into the market. The researchers found not only evidence of these effects, but also determined that the level of newspaper competition in the United States has decreased sharply. At the time of the study, roughly 30 cities had either two or more separately owned dailies or joint operating agreements. As discussed earlier, this figure has continued to decline in the six years since the study was completed. The authors estimated that the number of dailies adopting a “cluster” strategy had

increased from 27 percent to 33 percent in 1988. In that period, an additional 153 dailies stopped publication.

Some evidence suggests that the effects of competition may not be uniform across different types of media. Coulson and Lacy (2003) took a national sample of 303 television reporters across different markets in the United States. The study found that the respondents were closely divided about whether television competition increased their production of stories about city government. The study did find that competition from daily newspapers, as opposed to competition from other television stations, was more likely to have an impact on their city hall reporting.

While competition in general is understood as a factor that leads producers to improve quality or innovation in the search for customers, some analysts believe that this is not necessarily true in the media business. Zaller (1999), for example, argues that market competition can drive down the quality of news provided. He draws upon several anecdotal accounts and observations, including comparisons with British Broadcasting System news and the news provided by television stations in the United States.

“For example, British TV news, which has until recently enjoyed a state monopoly and still has a subsidy, is usually considered “higher quality” than TV news in the United States, where numerous providers compete for the news audience. The U.S. produces some high quality TV journalism, but it is mainly on PBS, where it is shielded from competition by a subsidy. Meanwhile, the lowest quality TV is produced in the most competition news sector, namely, local television. Moreover, the very worst TV news is produced, as we shall see below, in the local markets that are the most competitive” (Zaller 1999, 1).

Zaller in this case does not address the fundamental difference between the media systems of the United States and the European Union. As discussed earlier, the general approach within the European Union emphasizes content diversity, while the

United States approach focuses on source diversity. Because of this difference in approach, it is insufficient to merely compare the quality of news coverage while ignoring the underlying philosophical approaches toward provision of news coverage.

The Project For Excellence in Journalism (2003) took a more systematic approach in a five-year study specifically targeted at television news, finding that ownership type does make a difference, but in ways that are not entirely consistent with the predictions of critics or defenders of the media system. For example, smaller stations by a significant margin produced higher quality newscasts than those owned by larger companies. The quality of network-affiliated stations produced much higher quality newscasts than the stations owned and operated by networks. The study did not find evidence all on the “small is beautiful” side of the ledger, though. When the parent company of a station also owned a newspaper in the same market, the newscasts were higher quality. Also, locally-owned stations produced very poor newscasts, as well as newscasts of good quality.

One of the areas of a station’s performance that is of paramount interest for the FCC and others concerned about media’s role in a democracy is the diversity in programming. The study by the organization found that ownership type apparently made no difference as far as the diversity of the people depicted in the news. The type of subjects covered also was little affected by the ownership type. Instead, the study clearly depicted a media environment of remarkable uniformity around the country in terms of what is defined by local television stations as news. The study findings depict a complex relationship between ownership and quality.

“Taken together, the findings suggest the question of media ownership that is more complex than some advocates on both sides of the deregulatory debate imagine. Some of the arguments favoring large companies are unsupported by the data – even contradicted. On the other hand, some of the arguments for the merits of local control appear similarly difficult to prove. And some of the arguments for

synergy, in particular cross-ownership, are reinforced by the findings. But overall the data strongly suggest regulatory changes that encourage heavy concentration of ownership in local television by a few large corporations will erode the quality of news Americans receive” (Project for Excellence in Journalism 2006, 1).

It must be noted that researchers have conflicting evidence regarding claims that any one form of ownership yields superior results for consumers. As Picard and van Weezel (2008) note, different forms of ownership have different assets and liabilities. Examining in turn private, publically traded ownership, non-profit, and employee ownership structures for newspapers, the researchers on balance endorse private ownership, albeit with reservations.

“Based on these factors, it would appear that private ownership is theoretically the most effective form overall across a broader array of ownership-related issues. It is the form in which the values of the owner are most likely to be reflected in the newspaper and its operations. Of the forms of ownership idealized as less commercially or market-oriented (employee and not-for-profit ownership), employee ownership is conceptually preferable to not-for-profit ownership because of better performance incentives, financing opportunities, and monitoring abilities.”
(Picard and van Weezel 2008, 29).

While some economic modeling appears to show that increased competition could reduce individual firm expenditures on the content of media when relative expenditures on content determines market share (Waterman 1989; Wildman and Siwek 1988), it is essential also to consider the social, institutional, and regulatory environment in which the media operate. The conditions provided by individual environments also will help to determine how competition and ownership affect content. For example, Jacobsson and Jacobsson (2003) and Hollifield (2006) both find that media markets in developing countries may often be characterized by hyper-competition, which has the effect of both lowering the amount of resources available to produce journalistic products and driving media owners to focus on sensationalist coverage to increase market penetration. Whether the media are located in developing

countries or in established democracies, the market itself may be the critical factor in determining how owners respond to changes in competition. Studies such as that of Mullainathan and Schliefer (2005) have shown that the publishers of newspapers respond to the biases of their readers. Hence, in a competitive market individual media outlets can choose to slant the presentation of news to appeal to specific parts of an audience. Ideally, enough different news organizations will compete for readers in the market, offering a range of interpretations of news and public affairs information.

The level of profit earned by a media firm may well determine its ability to respond to competition (Lacy and Riffe 1994). In some situations, this means that as competition increases and profits fall, the ability to invest in better news quality decreases (Lacy and Blanchard 2003; Lacy and Martin 1998; Lacy, Shaver, and St. Cyr 1996). On the other hand, economic modeling shows that monopoly markets can produce the highest level of profit for media firms, but this does not mean that the highest quality of information will be provided for consumers. The firms may have the resources, but the dearth of competition means that they will have scant incentive to invest those resources (Hollifield 2006). One recent international study of the subject found a curvilinear relationship between quality and competition; both hyper-competition and low competition were found to be negatively associated with the quality of the news and information provided by the media (Jacobsson et al. 2008).

Mapping the Impact

As discussed earlier, the potential impact of media ownership changes can be varied. In this section, I will review recent research about what the political effects of these changes may be in the United States. I will also consider some of the political

effects of technological changes that are occurring simultaneously with the general trend toward ownership consolidation.

At the most basic level, ownership consolidation may result in American communities losing established news sources as mergers eliminate competitors. As the independent sources of information decrease, diversity of viewpoints and of information also decreases. This effect can be manifested as a dearth of public affairs information in the media. Fewer sources of information may also privilege the news that emanates from government sources, as there will be less incentive to challenge government interpretations of current events. The media consuming public therefore is afforded less information as it attempts to independently assess the conduct and functioning of its representative government, and the sources that do exist exert proportionately more influence with media audiences.

In the United States, the most striking area of diminished news coverage is in the realm of print journalism, where the decrease in the number of newspapers has accelerated in recent years. From 1945 to 1980, about 1,750 newspapers were published regularly in the country. By 1980, the number began to decrease rapidly, and by 2002 the number of newspapers had dropped to 1,457, a decline of roughly 17 percent. In the two decades since then, the number of newspapers has continued to drop nearly one percent a year (Smolkin 2009). The newspapers remaining also may perform different functions, according to some industry observers. Conboy and Steel (2008) point out that newspapers are devoting more attention to commentary and identity politics, reflecting trends that are occurring in other areas of the media.

The closure of a newspaper, in any case, does not generally deprive a community of all news coverage. After all, the steady decline in newspaper publishing has coincided with the growth of other news media such as cable television

or Internet-based news sources. The closure of a news outlet, however, is the silencing of a potential independent source of information and another viewpoint on public affairs. The closure of news outlets, often the effect of increasing consolidation of ownership within the news media, means that the real diversity of views and information sources within a community is also reduced.

Aside from reducing the amount of news disseminated, ownership changes can also cause an actual change in the content of the media provided to consumers. This can occur because the lower level of competition within the media market can free media owners from the need to invest in the quality of their product (Waterman 1989; Wildman and Siwek 1988). For example, a media outlet owner may offer cheaper programming because the consumers in the relevant market have no other choice of media provider. This content also can have political effects, as people make political decisions based on the information received through their news media.

Ironically, these two effects of ownership changes are occurring even as U.S. media consumers are in some sense being offered a broader variety of media choices. “Media choices,” however, does not mean “sources of good information about public affairs.” With a larger media universe, a smaller percentage of the media consumed by the public falls into the category of public affairs programming or news. Furthermore, a larger portion of the news and public affairs information is dominated by overtly opinionated sources such as talk shows and blogs. While this shift is not necessarily dependent on increasing ownership consolidation, it is consistent with a free-market media model in which the market is the de facto arbiter of the information that is presented to the public.

The theoretical foundation of the argument for a diverse media is familiar and commonsense, but it bears repetition. Sometimes the argument is simplified thus: In

order for information consumers to be best served, the market for information should be free and the purveyors of information should be unfettered. The argument was expressed more than 200 years ago by the Marquis de Condorcet in the so-called “jury theorem.” Roughly stated, this theorem states that as the number of individuals involved in decisions increases, the majority is more likely to select the better of two alternatives. In the context of the media and the electorate, we can assume that if a greater number of voters are informed about any one issue, the likelihood of a good decision being made about that issue increases (McLennan 1998). As discussed earlier, some critics object to the absolute nature of this argument, pointing to economic factors that also affect the ability of competitors in the media market to provide good information to the public. (e.g. Zaller 1999; Liu, Putler, and Weinberg, Dunaway 2008). Nonetheless, this reasoning provides the foundation of most arguments for press freedom, as well as a substantial amount of the foundation for arguments against consolidation of media ownership. Researchers have effectively used rational choice theory to analyze the question of information provision and its effects on valuation, decision-making, and markets (e.g. Baron 2004; Das, Levine, and Sivaramakrishan 1998; Akerlof 1970; Milgrom 1981). While these works do not concern the news media, per se, they do analyze the role of information in decision-making, markets and public welfare.

The approaches of these analyses vary widely. Milgrom and Roberts (1981), for example, analyzes the how decision makers evaluate information sources. In the game described, Milgrom considers different classes of decision makers: well-informed or sophisticated decision makers and poorly informed or unsophisticated decision makers. In the first case, competition among the information providers is unnecessary. In the second case, competition alone may not be sufficient to ensure

that good decision is made. If, however, the sources of information have strongly opposed interests, the decision maker's need for strategic sophistication or prior knowledge of the relevant variables may be obviated.

Das, Levine, and Sivaramakrishan (1998) examine the behavior of financial analysts and their use of information. Firms that have erratic earnings histories prompt greater demand for non-public information than do the firms that have earnings that can be accurately forecast with public information. The researchers make the assumption that optimistic forecasts make access to non-public information more likely, and conclude that firms will make more optimistic forecasts for low predictability firms than for high predictability firms. Their hypothesis is supported by the statistical analysis of firms and predictions issued by financial analysts.

Gentzkow and Shapiro (2008) specifically address the news media in their analysis and provide one of the more thorough examinations of the question from the rational choice vantage point. The authors point out that the greater the number of independently operating firms providing information to an audience, the lower the distortions in the supply side of that market. As noted earlier, the higher the competition among the providers of information, the lower the ability of governments to manipulate news coverage. Furthermore, when news providers themselves have interests in distorting news coverage and manipulating opinions of the media consumers, competition can lower the risk that countervailing information is suppressed. The competition may also increase the incentives to invest in providing good information to the media consuming public. The authors conclude: "Overall, we argue that there are robust reasons to expect competition to be effective in disciplining supply-side bias" (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2008, 134). The researchers attempt to

make an economic rationale for the importance of competition in news markets that rests on the incentives of competing firms to gather, verify, and report news.

A rational choice analysis of the response of the public to the diminished diversity of media offerings further illustrates how a smaller range affects how people evaluate the information available. Gentzkow and Shapiro (2006) start their Bayesian analysis of the problem of evaluating information with the assumption that consumers of information naturally favor sources of information that fit with their prior knowledge. In this environment, it is in the interest of a source to provide information that fits with the assumptions and biases of its consumers. Media outlets desire to establish a reputation for accuracy, and so they tend to provide information that fits with the consumer biases. Given the assumptions of the authors, the information providers will be judged by how closely their content matches the preconceptions of the audience, rather than by how well they accurately describe the real state of the world.

“If the quality of the information a given firm provides is difficult to observe directly, consumer beliefs about quality will be based largely on observation of past reports. Firms will then have an incentive to shape these reports in whatever way will be most likely to improve their reputations and thus increase their future profits by expanding the demand for their products. Our first set of results shows that firms will tend to distort information to make it conform with consumers’ prior beliefs. To see why, consider that a noisy or inaccurate signal is more likely to produce reports that contradict the truth. An agent who has a strong prior belief about the true state of the world will therefore expect inaccurate information sources to contradict that belief more often than accurate ones” (Gentzkow and Shapiro 2006, 282).

In this universe, where the incentive is to provide biased, rather than accurate, information, diversity of information sources attains even greater importance. While firms have an interest in presenting information that conforms to prior biases, firms’ reputations are also vulnerable if competing sources of information show that they

provide inaccurate information. Consequently, the model predicts less bias when information is concrete and outcomes can be quickly and easily verified, such as cases like weather predictions, sports scores, and stock information. When the information is less easily verified, such as news about foreign conflict, environmental questions, and the effects of governmental policies, bias in news reports is much more likely.

An interesting variation tested by Gentzkow and Shapiro concerns the joint ownership of the information sources. This theoretical situation resembles the current state of media ownership in the United States and many other developed countries, where overlapping corporate interests, cross ownership, and joint operating agreements coexist with a nominally oligopolistic competitive environment (e.g. Bagdikian 2004, McChesney 2008, Chomsky and Hermann 1988). In this environment, the media outlets will confirm each other's reports, rather than challenge them and potentially damage the reputation of the other firms.

Incidentally, it is important to note that evidence also exists to support the contention that arrangements such as cross-ownership do not diminish diversity of viewpoints expressed by media (e.g. Pritchard, Terry, and Brewer 2008; McGarry 1994). McGarry's work is a linguistic study that concerns newspaper coverage of a scandal with ethnic overtones in Africa. Pritchard, Terry, and Brewer's work is more conventional in scope, and purports to assemble evidence disproving the one-owner, one voice premise that forms much of the foundation for the ban on cross-ownership.

In general, I argue that that as media pluralism declines and the diversity of news sources decreases, the bias of these sources attains proportionally more significance. The sources achieve greater significance because there is less opportunity to independently assess their veracity or slant. Furthermore, the media audiences consuming biased information are more likely to offer political support to

parties, candidates or policies based on that biased information. According to one set of researchers, new information from the media can modify the expected utility of the media consuming public if it meets five conditions. The information must be received, be understood, be credible, be clearly relevant to evaluating policies, and differ from previous beliefs. Even with these restrictions, the researchers found that television news had a profound impact on public opinion, accounting for more than 90 percent of its variance (Page, Shapiro, and Dempsey 1987). Researchers in the United States continue to gather more empirical evidence supporting the importance of news sources in shaping public opinion and political behavior.

DeVigna and Kaplan (2006), for example, examined the effect of Fox News' entry into the cable market in an attempt to quantify the political impact of the media source on the political environment. While Fox News presents itself as "Fair and Balanced," Rupert Murdoch, an avowed conservative, owns Fox News. Furthermore, Fox News was founded and is still led by Roger Ailes, a former Republican consultant. Numerous media critics and scholars have described the political bias of Fox News (e.g. Rendall 2003; Wells 2003; Plotz 2000). In fact, DeVigna and Kaplan found that Republicans gained .04 to .07 percentage points in the vote share of the 2000 presidential elections in communities where Fox News was introduced. The results, which are robust to town-level controls, district and country fixed effects, and alternative specifications, also showed that Fox News had a significant effect on the Senate vote share and on voter turnout.

Another recent study examined how the content of newspapers' editorial pages shaped the decisions that voters made in assessing candidates for a U.S. Senate seat (Druckman and Parkin 2005). The study was unusual in that it focused on a single campaign and a single market with two competing and editorially distinct

newspapers. The researchers combined comprehensive content analysis of the newspapers with an exit poll taken on Election Day. The results of the analysis showed that content of the newspapers had both direct and indirect impacts on how voters were assessing the candidates. The slant of the newspaper coverage had a direct impact, for example, in the evaluation of a candidate, but it also had an indirect impact on readers on how they evaluated integrity and empathy. In general, the study identified a “meditational process” that “influences image perceptions that in turn affect evaluations” (Druckman and Parkin 2005, 1045).

Researchers also have documented the effects of biased coverage on the ways that the public assesses government policies and issues in public affairs. For example, Johansen and Joslyn (2008) examined how news coverage immediately prior to and in the initial phase of the Iraq War affected the opinions about that war. Starting from findings that CBS and FOX News provided the most biased reporting on this issue (Rendall and Broughel 2003; Lichter and Lichter 2003), the researchers then analyzed survey data to assess the opinions of the media consumers on issues relating to the war. The researchers found that that the viewers of FOX and CBS reported higher levels of factually incorrect information. Furthermore, the marginal effects, which determine the impact of a unit change in the independent variable, showed that exposure to FOX News was a major determinant of factual misinformation about the war. Perhaps most disturbingly, the study found that while education reduced the level of misinformation held by media consumers of the other news outlets in the study (ABC, PBS, CNN, and NBC), education did not appear to significantly diminish the level of misinformation held by viewers of the FOX and CBS networks.

The study by Barker and Knight (2000) also focused on general public affairs, rather than a particular election. In this case, the research focused on the effect of one

of the most prominent radio broadcasters, Rush Limbaugh. The analysis showed that listening to the broadcaster was independently associated with attitudes toward subjects emphasized by Limbaugh, but showed no independent covariance with attitudes toward subjects that the broadcaster ignored. In an attempt to overcome the inherent problem of a selection effect, the researchers also probed the attitudes of listeners toward Ross Perot, a figure that in general would be respected by a conservative audience but a figure disparaged by Limbaugh. The listeners to Limbaugh displayed greater negativity toward Perot than would have been otherwise predicted.

As noted earlier, while diminished diversity does not necessarily dampen competition between news outlets, lower levels of competition are often the result. These lower levels of competition also can affect the propensity of media owners to invest in their news organization. Understandably, the level of investment in the organization has an effect on the quality of news provided to the media audience. The lower level of investment can be manifested in numerous ways within a media outlet. One simple manifestation is the choice about how much news content to provide. News coverage is expensive relative to other types of content, requiring skilled reporters and editors. However, even if a media outlet decides to devote a certain amount of space or time to news coverage, choices must be made about the quality of the coverage. For example, local television stations have increased their usage of video news releases in recent years as a method of obtaining free content for broadcast. In one study of 33,911 stations from 1998 to 2002, the percentage of material originating from these sources grew from 14 percent of all material to 23 percent. During the same period, the number of stories that used a local correspondent fell from 62 percent to 43 percent. The conclusion of the researchers was that “local

broadcasters are being asked to do more with less, and they have been forced to rely more on prepackaged news to take up the slack” (Farsetta and Price 2006, 12).

Another study outlines the general effect that occurs when ownership of broadcasters shifts from the local level (Yanich 2009). In general, this research shows consolidated media ownership decreased the production of local content on local newscasts. The largest factor affecting local news content was whether the television station was owned-and-operated by a network and whether it was part of a market dominated by just two broadcasters. In these cases, the local news content dropped by over six percent.

It is difficult to determine how lowering the information content of the media affects the public, but some evidence exists that the level of civic knowledge in the United States has dropped dramatically. According to one study, the level of political knowledge possessed by college graduates today is no greater than that possessed by high school graduates in 1950 (Galston 2001, 222). This development could be caused by causes other than changes in the nation’s media system, of course, but the media also play a role in the political education of the public. Logically, when the quantity of civic information is reduced, the information that is provided assumes proportionally greater importance for the media consuming public. In general, current analysis of media affects is based on the competence-based perspective on socialization, viewing the socialization process as an interactive process. The individuals in this process attempt to develop the abilities to participate as competent members of society. The extent to which they participate in political processes depends on how effective they feel their participation can be.

Other research in the United States finds that the provision of information is important, even if the coverage is superficial and tinged with “negativism”

(Pinkleton, Weintraub, and Fortman 1998). The results of this research lend support for concerns about the tendency of the media to cover politics in a superficial and image-oriented manner. The data from their research show that negativism toward media election coverage reduced media use. Consequently the subjects had less political involvement and lower voting rates.

“To the extent that media become the target for negative citizen attitudes, they appear to reduce their potential role as catalysts in the democratic system via their ability to test the truth of campaign rhetoric and provide balanced information to citizens regarding important issues ((Pinkleton, Weintraub, and Fortman 1998, 47).

Of course, if lower levels of information in the media affect voters, then this effect in turn has an impact on the behavior of elected representatives. Anecdotal information on this topic abounds, yet little systematic research in the United States has been conducted on this topic. If voters are less informed about the conduct of government, then the argument could be made that their elected representatives might be less responsive to constituents or less conscientious in performing their duties. In fact, Zaller, Cohen, and Noel (2003) find in their study of newspaper coverage in congressional districts that the lower the level of local news coverage in a representative’s district, the more likely that representative will stray from the preferences of the median voter. The reason that members of Congress fail to respond to median voter opinion in their districts is that the majority of voters lack enough information about the activities of their representatives to hold them accountable, the authors conclude. This is yet another example of the monitoring that the new media can provide is an essential element ensuring that the actions of the agent do not diverge too far from the preferences of the principals.

In his own extensive study of local newspaper coverage of members of Congress, Arnold (2005) finds that this paucity of information about the

representatives' activities is the norm, rather than the exception. In general, only the incumbents or challengers in the most competitive election races, races where extremely large amounts of money are spent in the campaign, receive extensive press coverage.

Framing the question in terms of a principal-agent relationship may be helpful here. The agents are the elected politician or appointed official and the members of the public are the principals. Clearly, the probability that the agent will act in accord with the preferences of the principal varies directly with the monitoring capacity of the principal. Assuming that the preferences of the principal and the agent are not completely congruent, then the actions of the agent must be monitored to ensure that they faithfully match the preferences of the principal. Monitoring of the performance of government is one of the traditional roles performed by the news media. As that role is increasingly avoided or ignored by the news media, the level of monitoring to which the agent is subjected declines. Predictably, the degree to which the agent acts in accord with the preferences of the principals also declines.

One of the conclusions of Zaller, Cohen, and Noel (2003) is that in the current political environment, the limited media attention to congressional politics adds to the polarization of the political parties in the United States. This line of argument recently has been developed further by a number of other researchers who focus on how the fragmentation of the media fosters greater political polarization in the public.

One argument sometimes made to defend the current state of the media is that the proliferation of cable channels and the growing use of the Internet have opened up a range of options for obtaining information that would have been unimaginable 20 years ago (e.g. Compaine 2005; Cooper 1999). At one level, this is certainly true.

With this growth in choice, however, a trend has developed toward increasing partisanship and segmentation in the media market. Explored extensively by Prior (2007), this trend is manifested in the growing popularity of news outlets with content dominated by an increasing proportion of “analysis” or opinion, rather than news reporting. Current examples of this trend in the United States media are television shows such as *The Glenn Beck Program*, *The O’Reilly Factor*, and *Countdown with Keith Olberman*. This highly partisan content is found on television, on the radio and in blogs. The providers of such content are frank in their intention to provide partisan angles on the news, rather than balanced reporting.

This growth of highly partisan media is not necessarily problematic, per se. What Prior and others have identified, however, is that the increasing amount of choice of media options creates growing inequality in political involvement, polarizing the democratic process. In his experimental research in this area, Prior demonstrates that greater media choice and the increasing partisanship it engenders reduces voter turnout among the members of the public who see choose to watch entertainment programming, but increases turnout among fans of the news.

“Together, the growing turnout gap and the close correlation of entertainment preference and strength of partisanship generate the following prediction: The spread of cable and Internet increased partisan polarization among voters by changing the composition of the voting public because less partisan entertainment-seekers drop out, while more partisan news fans vote even more reliably than before. Although measures of entertainment preference do not exist for past decades, it is at least possible to verify that predicted change in turnout patterns occurred” (Prior 2007, 228).

Just as the decreasing pluralism of the media within Azerbaijan has allowed an authoritarian government to increase its dominance of the political environment, so too do developments within the United States interact with the existing political institutions of the country. The United States has strong democratic institutions that to

an extent can mitigate the power of media conglomerates. The trend identified by Prior, however, may have a particularly pernicious effect on governance within the United States because of its political system.

The United States is generally classified as an aggregative party system, meaning that one or two broadly based centrist parties contest for the favor of the median voter (Powell 2000; Diamond 1996). Such a system can confer considerable stability of governance, but it also has its drawbacks. For example, Powell (1981) finds that such systems are usually associated with low voting rates and low citizen participation. This characteristic is in general manifested within the United States, where turnout rates are low compared to other democracies.

In recent years, some political observers have raised concerns that because of declining citizen participation in the political process and the way the U.S. primary system works, partisan extremists have gained disproportionate influence in both the Democratic and Republican parties (e.g. Collie and Mason 1999; Rohde 1991). The trend toward increasing partisanship of the media could have an especially large impact within the United States because the existing political system confers such power to party activists and primary voters. The 2010 primary elections in the United States, for example, saw the election of a relatively large number of primary candidates who adhered to views decidedly out of the mainstream (Keisling 2010; Kiely 2010). The candidates nominated in these primaries may not be elected in the general election, but they show how political positions that used to be deemed extreme have gained political traction, particularly within the Republican Party. In response to this pressure from the right-wing of the party, elected Republicans such as Sen. John McCain have shifted their positions on issues such as immigration and gays in the military.

Prior views the growing polarization in the media audience as being caused principally by technological developments – digital technology that allows the proliferation of cable channels and, of course, the introduction of the Internet as an information source and media provider. Nonetheless, ownership of media, the main focus of my research, also is a factor in this development because profit is the primary motivation in programming choices in a primarily privately owned media system. The owners of the media outlets do not provide content out of any sense of altruism or good citizenship. The most likely reason that the owners of the media outlets provide highly partisan content is because this programming is judged to be profitable. It is a good business decision. Hamilton aptly describes the fundamental problem of depending on an essentially for-profit media system to deliver the necessary information to sustain a democracy.

“What sets media markets apart from other types of exchange is the relationship between news and democracy. Yet this link is often far from the minds of those who participate in the market for public affairs information. Owners and managers in media companies seek profits; anchors and reports try to fashion and further careers; readers and viewers seek entertainment; and the politicians covered search for re-election. The pursuit of individual self-interest here will not add up to the best of all worlds. Readers and viewers will not calculate the broader benefits to society of becoming informed about political issues, which translates into reduced incentives for journalists and owners to cover these topics. This is a classic case of positive externalities, where many of the benefits to knowledge remain external to the decisions by voters about how much to learn about candidates and government. Economists have fashioned many tools to deal with markets, characterized by positive externalities. These tools include taxes, subsidies, direct regulation, government provision of the good and the definition of property rights aimed at encouraging individuals to consider the externalities in their decision making” (Hamilton 2004, 245-246).

The problem, of course, is that to address the fundamental inadequacies of the current media system requires confronting that system, a network of corporate entities that has acquired huge political and economic power in the United States. In the past,

media owners have used this power quite effectively to mobilize public opinion and to protect their own economic interests. (Gilens and Hertzman 2000; Pratte and Witing 1986; Snider and Page 1997). This does not mean that modifications to the current media system cannot be made to make it better perform its normative democratic functions, but it does mean that changes will not happen easily. Because of the difficulties of the task and because of its importance, I believe a concerted effort must be made to address the growing difference between the media system we are currently provided and the media system a well functioning democracy requires.

Chapter Eight

Observations, and Recommendations for Policy and Future Research

In *Tomorrow Never Dies* (Broccoli and Wilson 1997), the eighteenth James Bond movie, Elliot Carver, the arch villain, is a global media magnate, intent on manipulating governments through his power to form public opinion with his media empire. Carver, who is prone to speak as if he were framing headlines, aims to complete his global domination of the world's media by getting his company into China, which heretofore has resisted his advances. Fortunately, James Bond thwarts Carver's plans to create war between Great Britain and China, Carver's improbable business ploy to enter the Chinese market. And the world is saved until the next James Bond movie. At the close of the movie, James and his "girl" are enjoying some romantic time together, floating in the wreckage of Carver's media empire.

The plot is appealing. The idea of the public manipulated by evil masters is evocative, inspiring scores of other films ranging from *The Manchurian Candidate* (Frankenheimer 1962; Demme 2004) to *Network* (Gottfried 1976). Some people might regard the works of McChesney, Chomsky, Bagdikian, and other media critics as being similarly inspired fiction betraying an overwrought fear of corporate masters. People, after all, are free to choose the media they consume, so no one is forcing anyone to believe any particular ideology. No one is molding public opinion into any particular shape. People are not automatons or puppets who can be directed by the owners of television stations and newspapers.

In this dissertation, I have tried to convey the complexities of the issues involved in analyzing the relationship between media ownership and politics. In the story I tell, no single media magnate is directing news coverage from a corporate

bunker. James Bond cannot single-handedly resolve the conflicts between corporate media ownership and democratic principles. Just because the story told here lacks a single villain, however, does not mean that the conflicts are not serious. The research I describe shows how the interests of private media owners frequently conflict with the best interests of a society that aims to govern itself democratically. The owners of the media frequently shape the content of broadcasts and publications in order to safeguard profits or to present a worldview that reflects that of the media owners. Media ownership, however, is not monolithic and the control of media owners over content cannot be absolute, given the number of people involved in the production of newspapers, magazines, and broadcasts. Furthermore, to the extent that pluralism within the media exists, the public is offered countervailing sources of information that compete with each other on the quality of the content provided. For democratic governance to function well, that pluralism within the media sphere must be protected and fostered. Furthermore, as discussed earlier, because media content is a product with a special political and social significance, we cannot depend on the market to provide the quality and quantity needed for democratic governance. Rather, the government must provide some sort of subsidy sufficient to ensure that the market provides enough of the positive externality required by democratic governance. I hope that in this dissertation I have explained exactly why this is necessary.

To establish the framework of my research, I look in the first chapter at the causes and effects of media ownership concentration. As described here, media outlets have grown and merged in large part because of the inherent characteristics of the product they provide. The media business exemplifies an enterprise with increasing returns to scale. This means that profit margins in the media business grow as the amount of media produced increases. This tendency alone will incline media

firms to grow because their profit level increases as the volume of their production grows.

Media products also have special characteristics that affect their provision and the role they play in society. Many media products are judged to be “public goods,” meaning that they are “non-rivalrous” and “non-excludable.” An example of the “non-excludable” characteristic means that it is impossible to prevent someone who has a radio from listening to a radio broadcast, for example. By the same token, to the extent that the media is “non-rivalrous,” its consumption by one person does not affect the consumption of the same product by another. The enjoyment of a radio broadcast by a listener does not affect the enjoyment of the same broadcast by another listener.

Most public goods, such as national defense, public education, and roads, are funded through taxes levied on the population that consumes the public good. Many of the media, however, are funded through advertising. These media are understood to operate in a “dual product market” (Picard 1989). This means that they deliver content to consumers, but they also provide an audience for their advertising clients. The inherent problem of this market, however, is that the interests of the media consumers and the advertisers diverge.

The interest of consumers may be to receive complete news coverage of their immediate environment. This news, however, may include information that an advertiser would rather not share. The media owner must negotiate this conflict somehow. If the media owner operates in a truly competitive environment, the owner risks losing credibility with the media consumers if the news is censored to favor advertising clients. This could affect the ability to sell advertising in the future. If the media owner acts contrary to the preferences of the advertiser, the owner risks losing

that advertising account. To the extent, however, that the media environment is non-competitive, media consumers are less likely to know that the content they consume does not match their preference for accurate and complete information. The media owner can provide content that matches the preferences of the advertiser, who provides the bulk of the funding, and the media consumers remain blissfully unaware that the information they receive falls far short of providing an accurate description of the world around them.

If media content had no effect on people, however, then media content would not affect political phenomena. In the second chapter, I review research on how media affect their consumers and on how ownership of the media affects the content of that media.

While the assertion that the media affect consumers' political views may seem commonsense, for years researchers in the field held the contrary view. In the so-called "minimal effects model," the media played an insignificant role in the formation of people's political beliefs. Subsequent research, however, has cast doubt on this view, and most researchers in the field now accept that the media play an important role in the formation of people's opinions. This impact of the media on people's opinions differs considerably according to the subject matter. Simply put, the farther the subject is from a media consumer's immediate experience, the more important the media is in the formation of opinions about that subject. On issues such as foreign affairs or environmental policy, the impact of the media on public opinion can be quite large.

The methods by which the media affect the public are usually described with the terms "setting the agenda," "priming the audience," and "framing the issues." The media can set the agenda for the public and in turn for policy makers by their

decisions on what to devote attention. By devoting a lot of attention to a subject such as crime, budget deficits, or the environment, the media can raise the salience of that issue in the minds of the media consumers. While the attention paid to a topic may be explained by events, in other cases the decision to devote attention to a subject may reflect elements of the media owner's agenda. Researchers have found, for example, media attention to street crime and youth crime is out of proportion to its real incidence (Graber 1980; Dorfman 2004).

Priming can be looked at as a variety of agenda setting. The media are said to "prime" their audience when they raise certain issues as methods to judge politicians or policies (Ansolabehere et al. 1993). The media provide the public with ways to gauge the success of these politicians and policies, in effect allocating different levels of importance to different issues. A newspaper may, for example, devote a continuing series on the clean-up of a toxic waste dump or on efforts to reduce the national debt. In either case, the media audience is being primed to evaluate government officials on the particular issue.

The media are said to "frame" an issue by the way they present it, defining the consequences of certain actions positively or negatively. Framing also apportions responsibility to certain individuals or societal forces. How an issue is framed has a considerable impact on how the subject will be evaluated by the media audience. Is the question of gun ownership a matter of public safety or personal rights? Is abortion an issue of privacy or morality? How policies regarding these questions are evaluated depends in large part on how they are framed.

I review then some of the ways that changes in ownership can affect these three methods of influence. Sometimes, ownership can affect the way the news is presented; sometimes it can affect what is omitted from news coverage. For example,

Gilens and Hertzman (2000) find that the owners of newspapers exhibited considerable differences in the way the 1996 Telecommunications Act was reported. The newspapers owned by media companies that stood to gain because of the legislation were much less likely to mention the negative consequences of the legislation for the consumer, when compared to newspapers owned by companies that would not profit because of the new law.

“In short, very different pictures of the likely effects of this legislation were being painted by the different newspapers examined, pictures that served to further the interests of the newspapers’ corporate owners rather than the interests of their readers in fair and complete coverage of an important public policy issue” (Gilens and Hertzman 2000, 383).

As mentioned earlier, however, the diversity of sources can mitigate effect of biased individual sources. If sufficient choice exists within the media, the media consumer will have the ability to verify information from multiple sources. In the second chapter, I review the logic and the empirical findings on this, including a game theoretic approach to the question. When pluralism and media diversity are large, the media respond to competition by exhibiting less bias, most likely because media owners know that their reputation for accuracy can suffer in an environment where their information can be independently verified.

While many of the sources cited earlier focus on the U.S. media, the concern about media pluralism is really international. In Chapter Four, I examine the media in Europe, which has a unique set of media issues. In contrast to the United States, where regulatory issues surrounding the media are centralized within a couple of agencies, in Europe regulatory concerns span international borders and the lines regulatory authority are often unclear.

Within Europe, media issues are contested on several dimensions. On one hand, Europe also exhibits the same tendency toward ownership concentration that

concerns political observers in the United States. Europe, however, also contends with issues of nationalism that are largely absent within the United States. In addition, much of Europe in recent years has made the transition from a public broadcasting system to a privatized broadcast system.

Europe contains examples of the three models of media that are identified by communications scholars: the Polarized Pluralist Model, the Democratic Corporatist Model, and the Liberal Model (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Each of these models is distinct and reflects the history of the media and the culture within the country within which they operate. In recent years, however, the differentiation between the media systems of Europe has diminished as the Liberal Model has attained primacy. (This is the model that broadly speaking describes the media in the United Kingdom and the United States.)

A still more dramatic change has been occurring in Eastern and Central Europe, as formerly communist countries have seen the state-owned media privatized. The transition to private ownership prompted fierce competition for the media resources of the state and for media audiences who were hungry for fresh content. The results of the transition have been decidedly mixed. In some cases, such as Estonia, considerable care has been taken to ensure that high-quality and relatively unbiased media content is provided to the population. In other cases, such as Moldova or Poland, the political elite have made heavy handed efforts to influence content of the media, particularly in the remnants of the public broadcasting system.

In the fifth chapter, I take a closer look at the former communist countries of Europe and Asia, performing a quantitative analysis of the relationship between media pluralism, human rights, and corruption in these countries. Using logistic and ordinal logistic regression, I show that lower levels of media pluralism have a

substantively and statistically significant effect on the observance of human rights. The effect of pluralism on human rights, however, is not uniform across the human rights surveyed. Also the effect of media pluralism on corruption is not found to be statistically significant. The lack of significant results in this area, I hypothesize, could be related to both characteristics of the politics of the dataset and the relationship between corruption and media pluralism. The results provide another illustration of how the effects of media pluralism are conditional on the effects of the other institutions that operate within a country.

Following the quantitative analysis of the former communist countries, I conduct a qualitative analysis of one of the countries included in the data. Azerbaijan has exhibited many of the characteristics of the former republics of the USSR and its satellites. The country experienced a brief period of relative media freedom beginning with the policy of glasnost declared by Mikhail Gorbachev when he became the USSR's General Secretary. This relative openness continued following Azerbaijan's declaration of independence, but began to be steadily restricted under the presidency of Heydar Aliyev, a former KGB officer who was appointed in 1969 to lead the Soviet republic of Azerbaijan. As Aliyev consolidated his political power following his election as president in 1993, the media faced ever-increasing restrictions.

When Heydar Aliyev died in 2003, some observers hoped that that his son Ilham would lead the country to greater democratization. Ilham, who had won a special election two months earlier, had traveled extensively in Europe, but this was not sufficient to make him a democrat. His first election to the presidency was widely protested as undemocratic. Parliamentary elections in 2005 prompted street violence, to which the Aliyev administration responded with yet more repression.

To research this topic, I conducted interviews with a wide range of journalists and activists within Azerbaijan over the course of the last two years. I also spent a full year traveling around Azerbaijan and establishing journalism-training programs there. When I arrived in the country in the spring of 2008, the situation for journalists and for media pluralism was grim. At least half a dozen journalists were imprisoned on trumped up charges. The few independent newspapers that existed operated on meager budgets while publications that favored the ruling party were favored with nearly unlimited funding. When I left the country one year later, the only independent radio broadcaster had been forced from the airwaves. On the day that I left in February 2009, the government for undisclosed reasons shut down an Internet news portal that disseminated relatively unbiased information. Shortly thereafter, the electorate overwhelmingly voted in a hastily called referendum to abolish term limits on the president. In short, as the pluralism of the media diminished, the authoritarian tendencies of the government steadily grew. In this chapter, I let the Azerbaijani journalists and activists themselves share their reflections on this discouraging trend.

In the penultimate chapter, I bring the focus of my research back to the United States. Assessing the concentration of media ownership and media pluralism requires some agreement on the means of measurement. I review the most commonly used methods to measure these phenomena, and also present the results of recent research on the topic. One of the most authoritative sources in the field confirms the fact that the media in the United States are, in fact, becoming steadily more concentrated (Noam 2009). According to this measurement, their level of concentration may fall short of the picture painted by media critics such as McChesney and Bagdikian, yet even these more sanguine observers see real reason for concern. The media, after all, perform a sensitive and important function within a democracy. Nothing less than our

ability to govern ourselves effectively rests on their ability to provide us with good quality information. If this function is affected by growing concentration, we have cause for concern, even if a “media monopoly” does not yet exist.

I also review how technological developments are reshaping the provision of media content, with serious implications for public policy and governance. The growth of the Internet and the proliferation of cable television channels have changed the system that used to provide at least minimal public affairs and political information for many media consumers. People now can easily choose media content that is completely devoid of public affairs or political information. Gone are the days when large numbers of the public were exposed to such media content just because the local news was broadcast before their favorite television program.

Recent research shows how trends in the media have made the politically apathetic members of the public less likely to become informed, while individuals who are interested in politics can obtain increasing amounts of information ever more easily. Simultaneously, the partisanship exhibited within the media has become sharper, fostering greater partisanship within the electorate and elected officials. I hypothesize that this trend toward greater partisanship within the media may create more serious problems for governance in the United States, given its aggregative party system and the roles played by primaries in this system. It is, after all, party activists who are the most likely to vote in party primaries, and these party activists are most likely to be affected by the increasing partisan nature of the media in the country.

This last point reflects the overall conclusion of this dissertation. Changes in media ownership can affect the content of the media and hence political developments within a country, but the effects of those changes are themselves conditional on

existing political and regulatory institutions operating within that country. If a country has strong democratic institutions, then the tendency toward media ownership consolidation will itself be checked to an extent by democratic institutions. Media mergers in the United States have been challenged in court, for example. Media activists have successfully petitioned to prompt action by federal regulatory bodies. In countries where democratic institutions are weaker, however, diminished media pluralism has proportionally greater effects and the consolidation of ownership is less likely to be challenged. The effects of diminished pluralism can be manifested by a higher level of human rights abuses, as documented in my quantitative analysis, or by greater concentration of power by the central government, as seen in my case study of Azerbaijan.

Because of the scope of this study, I do not offer specific policy prescriptions here because what may be appropriate in the United States would not be sensible in Europe, for example.

In general, I am skeptical that the free market alone will provide the optimal amount of public affairs information and news that is necessary for good governance. In the United States, non-profit organizations such as ProPublica, a donor-funded journalistic effort, may provide a greater portion of news coverage for the public. Other observers call for greater government involvement in the effort to provide high quality media content. McChesney, for example, has called for an emergency stimulus plan that would create multiple newsrooms across the country (McChesney 2010).

The problems that Europe faces in coming to terms with diminishing media pluralism are different. On one hand, blind faith in the ability of the free enterprise to solve problems is not as strong, so the possibility of solutions like McChesney's may

be more likely. On the other hand, the coordination problems in arriving at any united policy in Europe are formidable, as the continent grapples with multiple media system and political agendas. As noted, there exists in Europe little agreement on common goals or even common definitions.

As far as the countries without stable democratic institutions, the general policy I would advise is augmented international attention to the problems of media pluralism. While not a panacea, media pluralism is an important factor in improving the observance of human rights and strengthening the hands of democrats. The journalists operating in fledgling democracies are often poorly trained, underpaid, and vulnerable to political pressure. They are also frequently courageous, motivated by outrage at corruption and abusive authorities. These journalists deserve the support of the international community, especially when they are imprisoned or persecuted, as is so often the case.

Aside from these general policy recommendations, I believe much more research into the effects of media pluralism should be conducted because of the importance of this topic. In a world that grows increasingly complex, electorates in democracies depend on the media to deliver higher quality information. This requirement will not be met if current trends toward media consolidation continue unchecked. As I have shown, when media pluralism declines, the media are less likely to play the institutional role required of them in democracies. Further statistical analysis of this question can be done with greater aggregation of international data on media ownership, data that is currently being assembled but is not yet available. This data on the primary independent variable can then be used with other indicators such as the World Values Survey and the Comparative Manifesto Project to measure the effect of media concentration on variables such as opinions about democratic

processes or the breadth of political discourse. Academic research into this subject should inform policy makers as they act to protect and encourage media pluralism across the globe. Without a vibrant and competitive free press, the hopes for a democratic future are dim indeed.

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