

# Mass Media and Political Communication in New Democracies

*Edited by*  
Katrin Voltmer

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## Series editor's preface

After a hopeful start, the 'third wave' of democratization seems to have lost its momentum. Many emerging democracies reached a 'stand-off' or 'cease fire' between democratic and non-democratic forces, resulting in hybrid forms of illiberal democracy. Elected governments defend free multi-party elections, but frequently fail to regulate or take control of powerful groups in society. Yet the spread of democracy around the world continues. In its Annual Report of 2004, *Freedom House* concludes that since the beginning of global action against terrorism in autumn 2001, 51 countries showed overall progress in their attempts to improve democracy, while 27 slid back. Most improvement has been made in central and eastern Europe, and in east Asia; least in the Middle East, north Africa, and central Asia. After the initial enthusiasm, then, emerging democracies struggle with the further development of democracy – and some of them are much more successful than others.

Despite the fact that the crucial importance of mass media for the endurance and improvement of every democracy is hard to overlook, the role of the media has not drawn major attention from the scholarly community dealing with democratic transformations. Modern political communication strategies increasingly rely on the use (and manipulation) of media presentations of candidates and their characteristics and backgrounds. The contributors to this volume differ in their research interests, study designs, selected material, and the scope of the analyses presented, but they all deal with the impact of mass media in emerging democracies around the world. Furthermore, they reject the conventional metaphor of the role of the mass media as a 'marketplace of ideas'. Instead, an interactionist approach is used based on the recognition that mass media, political actors, and the audience all produce, receive, and interpret political messages. The organization of the volume in three parts reflects this attention for (i) mass media and journalistic practice, (ii) political parties and governments, and (iii) the audience. In this way, the relationships between political communication and democratization are analysed from different perspectives without losing sight of their interdependencies.

Before the specific analyses are presented, Katrin Voltmer summarizes the major questions and approaches in her introduction to this volume by discussing the advantages of an interactionist approach for the study of political communication in emerging democracies (Chapter 1). The five consecutive contributions address mass media and journalistic practices in several countries. Carlos Barrera and Ricardo Zugasti examine how the majority of Spanish newspapers supported the transition to democracy in the late 1970s (Chapter 2). Results from a detailed analysis of the potentially antagonistic relationships between press freedom and democracy in Russia are presented by Hedwig de Smaele (Chapter 3). Herman Wasserman and Arnold de Beer focus on the significant changes in South African mass media after the successful transformation to democracy, and the continuous difficulties of repositioning the media in accordance with the new social and political situation (Chapter 4). The role of the mass media as a 'watchdog' and the need for apolitical and fact-based journalism are critically evaluated by Silvio Waisbord in a study of the decline of trust in media in Latin America in the last two decades (Chapter 5). The opportunities for new media in new democracies are studied by Natalya Krasnoboka and Kees Brants in their study of the considerable differences between newspaper and Internet publications in Ukrainian elections (Chapter 6). The next four contributions deal with political actors and electoral campaigning. Roberto Espíndola discusses the role of mass media in political campaigning in democratic consolidation processes in Argentina, Chile, and Uruguay (Chapter 7). A very different situation is analysed by Gary Rawnsley who focuses on the professionalization of election campaigning after Taiwan's transition from a single-party system to a regular democracy (Chapter 8). The last two contributions in this part direct the attention towards the role of television and Internet communication in new democracies. Sarah Oates argues convincingly that Russian media do not only promote parties, but create them as well (Chapter 9). Ming-Ying Lee shows that, although the Taiwanese government embraced e-government, no expansion of democratic participation can be observed (Chapter 10). The final part of the volume consists of three contributions on the role of citizens. The first two chapters deal, again, with the very interesting Russian case. Ellen Mickiewicz points out the specific discourses and framing processes used by Russian citizens confronted with state-controlled news programmes (Chapter 11), whereas Stephen White and Ian McAllister concentrate on the advantages for incumbents in situations where the media are controlled by the very same political actors (Chapter 12). Katrin Voltmer and Rüdiger Schmitt-Beck compare the impact of mass media on the development of democratic orientations in Bulgaria, Hungary, Chile, and Uruguay, showing clearly that the extent of media impact depends on the historical development of the political system in specific countries (Chapter 13). Finally, Katrin Voltmer returns to the major problems and prospects in her concluding chapter. While

the various chapters concentrate on specific countries or regions, the concluding chapter focuses on thematic topics (Chapter 14).

The results obtained from an interactionist approach to the study of the close relationships between political communication and the problems of ongoing democratization used in this volume underline the need for differentiated and careful interpretations and considerations. From a global perspective, democracy is certainly on the rise. Yet emerging democracies are faced with very serious obstacles that are closely related to their specific historical experiences. Spain is not Russia, and Taiwan is not South Africa. What these emerging democracies have in common, however, is the crucial role the mass media plays in processes of political communication. Establishing free elections opens the door for sophisticated campaign strategies and the use of mass media that do not only have the long-term benevolent consequences presumed by most observers of Western democracies. Only if a balance can be found between the interests of political actors, the mass media, and the citizenries in specific countries will emerging democracies have a chance to survive and to overcome the transitory phase of illiberal democracy.

Jan W. van Deth, Series Editor  
Mannheim, April 2005

# Preface

This book originated in a workshop on 'Political Communication, the Mass Media, and the Consolidation of New Democracies' which I conducted with Slavko Splichal at the 2002 Joint Session of Workshops of the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR) in Turin. All authors have extensively revised and updated their papers for publication. In addition, in order to achieve a broad range of both issues and countries additional contributions have been included that were not presented at the Turin workshop. I wish to thank the European Consortium for Political Research for having made this workshop and its publication possible. I would also like to thank Rebecca Reid for her meticulous assistance in editing this volume.

Katrin Voltmer  
December 2004

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