

SGI

Sustainable
Governance
Indicators

2015 Media Report

Media Reporting



Indicator

Media Reporting

Question

To what extent do media provide substantive in-depth information on decision-making by the government?

41 OECD and EU countries are sorted according to their performance on a scale from 10 (best) to 1 (lowest). This scale is tied to four qualitative evaluation levels.

- 10-9 = A clear majority of mass media brands focus on high-quality information content analyzing government decisions.
- 8-6 = About one-half of the mass media brands focus on high-quality information content analyzing government decisions. The rest produces a mix of infotainment and quality information content.
- 5-3 = A clear minority of mass media brands focuses on high-quality information content analyzing government decisions. Several mass media brands produce superficial infotainment content only.
- 2-1 = All mass media brands are dominated by superficial infotainment content.

Finland

Score 9

By providing a continuous flow of information and background analysis, the main print media, TV and radio stations in Finland offer substantive in-depth information on government decisions. This provision takes different forms, such as inserts in regular news programs, special features, debates between proponents of conflicting views, debates between representatives of the government and opposition parties, regular broadcasts of government hearings in parliament, and so on. Empirical information about program volume is not available, but subtracting for “infotainment programs,” between five and seven hours a week of television and radio programming is dedicated to governmental issues. daily newspaper circulation numbers remain reasonably high, with newspapers often focusing on high-quality political reporting.

Ireland

Score 9

The Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI) aims to ensure that “the democratic values enshrined in the constitution, especially those relating to rightful liberty of expression, are upheld,” and that broadcasting services are “open and pluralistic.”

The largest TV and radio stations in Ireland are operated by RTÉ, a state-owned public service broadcaster financed by revenue from the mandatory TV license, as well as by advertising. Since 1988, RTÉ has faced competition from privately owned radio and television stations. RTÉ devotes a significant proportion of TV and radio

air time to news and commentary on current affairs and political issues. It also undertakes original investigative journalism. The privately owned TV and radio stations have to devote specified proportions of airtime to current affairs and public service programs. However, in terms of listener hours, music and entertainment outweigh current affairs and analysis.

The main stations produce high-quality information programs and programs devoted to in-depth analysis of government policy and decisions. They provide forums for discussions of current affairs, as well as outlets for opinions and grievances. These programs elicit reactions and responses from politicians. The two largest-circulation daily newspapers provide ample information on and analysis of government decisions.

The Press Council of Ireland provides an independent forum for resolving complaints about the press. In 2012, the United Kingdom's Leveson inquiry mentioned the Irish Press Council as a model and suggested that some of its procedures should be imitated in Britain. There are no developments to report on this proposal.

Irish newspaper circulation (print and electronic versions combined) continued to fall over the review period.

Norway

Score 9

The mass media's treatment of government decisions and policy is accurate and informative. The two largest broadcast-television channels, NRK and TV2, both produce broad-ranging evening news programs that typically devote considerable space and time to governmental and political affairs. Both channels also regularly (almost daily) broadcast debates and discussions on current affairs.

Statistics show news programs and political debates to have a high number of viewers. Both large television organizations have recently strengthened their news coverage, in TV2's case by establishing a new news channel, and in NRK's case by reforming NRK2 into a news and facts channel. Political news is frequently featured on popular televised infotainment shows on Friday nights. The leading radio channels, NRK and to a lesser extent P4, also devote considerable time to political news.

Sweden

Score 9

Together with Norway, Japan and Finland, Sweden ranks very high regarding the news consumption. The overall quality of the political coverage provided by Swedish media is good, if not extremely good.

Public service radio and TV in Sweden is still central to the media system. There have been discussions and Commissions concerning the future of public service but so far no major changes have been put on the agenda.

Compared to many other countries, the coverage is presented by journalists who are experts on Swedish politics. The level of analysis is good and, for most the part, balanced. There is obviously sometimes less professional coverage, too, but taken together, the quality of Swedish newspapers is very good.

Switzerland

Score 9 Radio and TV programs are of high quality in Switzerland. With very few exceptions, radio reports are reliable and analyses performed on an independent basis in a professional way. Some television programming shows a tendency toward infotainment and the personalization of politics.

Canada

Score 8 Canada's main TV and radio stations produce a mix of infotainment and high-quality information programs. Public broadcasters, including the CBC and provincial TV channels such as TV Ontario (TVO), provide extensive and often high-quality coverage of politics and news, with a minimum of five to seven hours per week of in-depth information on government decisions, and often more. Examples of such programs include TVO's *The Agenda* and CBC's *The House*. A 2013 study comparing news coverage in 11 countries found that the share of news content as a percentage of total broadcast time was highest in Canada, both for domestic and international news coverage. The Canadian media coverage is further enhanced by international news channels such as CNN, BBC World News and Al Jazeera, which are readily available through cable networks. One caveat is that there is little competition among public broadcasters; on the other hand, private broadcasters (with the exception of the Canadian Parliamentary Access Channel) are generally focused primarily on infotainment. Private broadcasters, especially the Canadian Parliamentary Access Channel (CPAC), also provide analysis of government decisions. Certain print media, such as the *Globe and Mail*, provide comparatively high-quality and comprehensive analysis of public policy. Others, such as *La Presse*, the *National Post* and other Postmedia publications, provide good coverage of public-policy issues.

Citation:

Aalberg et al (2013). International TV News, Foreign Affairs Interest, and Public Knowledge, *Journalism Studies*, 14:3, 387-406.

Denmark

Score 8

As in other democracies, the media plays an important role in Denmark. Some have argued that the media constitutes a fourth power, next to the legislative, executive and judiciary powers in modern democracies; and that journalists play the role of citizen advocates vis-à-vis public authorities. The media partly have power, through editorial decisions, not to cover certain stories, yet obviously they have to be selective. Like media outlets elsewhere, the Danish media shows a tendency to make the news easier for the public to relate to by simplifying or personalizing the stories reported, and emphasizing an element of conflict. In editorial decisions about who or what is covered, there appears to be a tendency to favor top politicians and government representatives. Weaker actors, such as immigrant representatives or ethnic minorities, get less coverage, although immigration stories have become important in recent years and now form part of daily news coverage.

Apart from daily news programs, some television and radio stations offer more analytical programs where issues can be analyzed more in depth. Some of these programs can be quite informative. It is worth mentioning that the education of journalists has improved in recent years.

Overall, it is fair to say that the Danish media covers national news better than international news, including issues regarding the European Union. Like elsewhere in the world, in Denmark the public and media outlets alike increasingly use the internet, with all major media having websites now.

Media access to internal government documents has been a sensitive issue in recent months because of changed legislation regarding the access to such documents (offentlighedsloven). The new law entered into force 1 January 2014. The two aspects of the new law most criticized were the possibility of the government denying access to internal documents exchanged between a minister and experts (Art. 24) and between a minister and a member of the parliament (art. 27). The law will be evaluated after its third year.

Citation:

Peter Munk Christiansen og Lise Togeby, *Magten i Danmark*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.

“Fakta om ny offentlighedslov,” <http://www.politiko.dk/nyheder/fakta-om-ny-offentlighedslov> (accessed 23 October 2014).

“Ny offentlighedslov – ny praksis for journalister,” <http://www.aabenhedstinget.dk/ny-offentlighedslov-ny-praksis-for-journalister-2/> (accessed 23 October 2014).

Estonia

Score 8

By providing a continuous flow of information and background analysis, the main daily newspapers, TV and radio stations offer substantive in-depth information on government plans and policies. There are six national daily newspapers, two non-

dailies, two online news portals, four TV channels and three radio channels in Estonia that together provide information and in-depth analysis of government policy. These media outlets compose the majority of the entire domestic media market, except for radio broadcasting where music takes the major share. Policy-related information takes different forms, including inserts in regular news programs, interviews with experts, debates between proponents of conflicting views, debates between representatives of government and opposition, regular broadcasts of parliament sessions and government press conferences.

However, two shortcomings are evident here. First, the media tends to pay more attention to the performance of political parties as organizations, not to the parties' positions on various policy issues. Secondly, information on government activities is typically provided not in advance of decisions, but only after decisions have already been made.

Germany

Score 8

Public TV and radio broadcasters generally offer in-depth reports on the political process. The market share of the two main public television broadcasters, ARD and ZDF, has declined in recent years, forcing the public broadcasters' head editors to copy the private channels' successful infotainment and politainment formats. Nevertheless, by international standards, ARD and ZDF in particular offer citizens the opportunity to obtain a relatively deep knowledge of political decision-making. The plurality and heterogeneity of the country's television broadcast market is enhanced by the availability of programming from international broadcasters such as CNN, BBC World, CNBC Europe, Al-Jazeera, etc. In January 2014, the newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung and the Norddeutsche und Westdeutsche TV established a research team designed to improve investigative journalism in Germany so as to counter official government information where necessary.

United Kingdom

Score 8

The main TV and radio stations in the United Kingdom – especially those like the BBC that operate under a public charter – provide an extensive array of high-quality news services. Government decisions feature prominently in this programming, and information and analysis on government decisions are both extensive and held to a high standard. There is substantial competition for viewers, in particular between the BBC, ITV, Sky and Channel 4. In addition to news programs, all provide in-depth analysis programs on politics and policy in a variety of formats. The Today Programme on BBC Radio 4 is well-known for its highbrow political analysis and scrutiny, and often sets the tone for political debates; Newsnight is the flagship political-news program on TV.

The style of interview on these programs is often explicitly not deferential, and even quite confrontational – especially toward ministers. This is justified by the need to hold politicians and especially government ministers to account. Local radio and press also have a tangible influence within their localities and an increasing number of people resort to online services, most notably BBC Online, as a source of information on government.

Scandals both in the private sector (News of the World) and the public sector (BBC) may have cost some credibility but have so far had no recognizable influence on the functioning of the media system as a whole. Despite political pressure, The Guardian newspaper played a crucial role in the global surveillance disclosures of 2013, and was awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for its efforts.

Austria

Score 7

The freedom of the press in Austria is guaranteed by European and national law. Nevertheless, two problems are relevant:

- The Austrian media lack pluralism. The publicly owned Austrian Broadcasting Corporation (ORF) dominates the radio and television broadcast markets, although competition by foreign and privately owned media is growing. In response to criticism of this dominance, the ORF offers guarantees of internal independence and internal political pluralism. The ORF is impartial by law and fulfills its mandate reasonably well, making up for deficits existing elsewhere in the media environment.
- The country's print-media market is highly concentrated. One daily paper, Die Kronen Zeitung, serves more than a third of the country's readership, and uses this dominant position to issue biased political information, often in a simplified manner. Moreover, the expanding role of freely distributed print media, more or less dependent on funds for commercial or political promotion is problematic insofar as it makes it more difficult for readers to distinguish propaganda from information. High-quality political information is available from daily and weekly papers with more limited circulation.

Israel

Score 7

The Israeli media industry is adapting to the global trend of decreased consumption of print and radio news media and the increased dominance of television, internet and social media websites. While Israeli media was joined in recent years by strong independent investigatory websites and blogs which gained considerable attention in professional and public circles, new popular outlets such as the free daily "Israel ha'yom" often times fail to deliver in-depth news coverage. Despite common tendencies to focus on the prominent and popular topics of the hour, the Israeli press,

public television channels and radio shows do offer interpretation and investigatory journalism that inform the public regarding policy decisions and long term strategies. In 2011, a law dramatically increasing the amount of damages for libel suits raised concerns about the future of the free press as an investigatory arena. A current bill proposal seeks to respond to this danger by establishing a national fund to cover legal expenses for journalistic work. The bill passed first call in the parliament and is awaiting further discussion.

Citation:

Goldenberg, Roi, “‘the seventh eye’ website won the Israeli prize for critical media”, *Globes* 28.1.2013: <http://www.globes.co.il/news/article.aspx?did=1000817765> (Hebrew)

Mann, Rafi and Lev-on, Azi, “Annual report: Media in Israel 2012 - agendas, uses and trends”, Ariel University School of Communication The Institute for the Study of New Media, Politics and Society In cooperation with IFAT and Kantar Media (June 2013): <http://aunmedia.org/sites/default/files/research/mediareport2012.pdf> (Hebrew).

Persisco, Oren, “Restraint and prudence”, The seventh eye website: <http://www.the7eye.org.il/9774> (Hebrew).

Italy

Score 7

The space allocated to political themes in Italian media is quite significant in the 10 most important mass media brands (the two main national newspapers, *Corriere della Sera* and *la Repubblica*, who have print and online versions; the three state television channels RAI1, RAI2 and RAI3; the two Mediaset channels 5 and 4; and two other private TV channels –*Skynews* and *La7*). Television time (both public and private) allocated to political themes is substantial throughout the year, averaging more than seven hours per week. A large part of this time is devoted to debates and talk shows involving politicians, journalists and experts, and to covering the most important aspects of current political controversies.

However, detailed, in-depth analysis of government decisions is much rarer, and debates tend to focus on the personality-driven dimensions of power politics. National newspapers provide more in-depth coverage of government decisions, often providing detailed dossiers on their content. Some radio and internet programming gives high-quality information in advance. The broader public has no access or does not seek access to these media.

Japan

Score 7

NHK, the public broadcaster, provides ample and in-depth information on policy issues. It had a near-monopoly in this role until the 1970s. Since that time, major private broadcasting networks have also moved into this field, while trying to make the provision of information entertaining. NHK also operates a news- and speech-based radio program (*Radio 1*). The widely read major national newspapers also provide information in a sober manner and style. However, because of their dense

personal links with political figures, which finds its institutionalized expression in the journalist club system, these newspapers rarely expose major scandals. Nonetheless, their editorializing can be quite critical of government policy. Investigative journalism is typically confined to weekly or monthly publications. While some of these are of high quality, others are more sensationalist in character.

The 3/11 disaster undermined public trust in leading media organizations, while spotlighting the emerging role played by new social media such as Twitter, Facebook and YouTube. According to the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer, trust in the Japanese media declined in 2012 from 54% to 33% in a single year. In 2013 and 2014, personnel changes at NHK, which put in place a leadership that openly declared its intention to steer a pro-government course, and a reporting scandal involving the liberal Asahi newspaper had the effect of further reducing faith in some major media channels.

Citation:

Edelman, 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer (Summary), <http://www.edelman.com/insights/intellectual-property/2012-edelman-trust-barometer/about-trust/executive-summary/>

Luxembourg

Score 7

Luxembourg media outlets offer quality reporting on public affairs. All parliamentary debates are conducted in Luxembourgish and in public. Parliamentary meetings are broadcast on the television channel Chamber TV (also available online), and the activities of the country's two largest local councils (Luxembourg City and Esch/Alzette) can be followed online. Ministers' weekly public press briefings are given more importance than under the previous administration.

In daily and weekly papers, articles are written in the three official languages (Luxembourgish, French and German), and sometimes in English as well. Certain newspapers are printed only in French; an English-language monthly journal is also published. Moreover, the government is reforming the press-subsidy system to include online media in recognition of the shifting media landscape.

Media coverage is often reactive, when issues have already reached the public in the form of draft legislation or through parliamentary debate. Reporters tend not to inquire into the preparatory stages of public policy. But quite often media outlets are used as instruments by interest groups or lobbyists looking to influence government decision-making in its early stages. Such procedures often have a strong influence on government thinking, as political actors need to take into account views and opinions that are published in the media.

Reporting has during the period lost some of its partisan bias. Most media outlets, especially newspapers, have adopted more balanced reporting to preserve or enlarge their audience. The media does play an important role in uncovering information behind government scandals or issues. One example of this is the extensive media

coverage of the so-called Bommeleer affair (a series of bombings of public infrastructure in the 1980s) that late in the review period was finally brought to court. Another issue that received serious media coverage is allegations of dubious activities of the state Secret Service (SREL), events which were the subject of a special parliamentary inquiry committee. In these two events, media outlets played an active role in bringing light to issues that were not made clear by public prosecutors.

Citation:

<http://www.esch.lu/laville/viepolitique/Pages/seances-publiques.aspx>

<http://www.land.lu/2013/04/26/unter-dem-tresen-des-csv-staats%e2%80%a9/>

<http://www.wort.lu/de/view/das-bommeleer-dossier-5092c3a9e4b0fe37043e8be8>

<http://www.eurotopics.net/de/home/medienlandschaft/luxmdn/>

Netherlands

Score 7

The past decade has seen a large expansion of digital radio and television. This has resulted in a richer supply of broadcasters, bundled in so-called “plus packages” for viewers, that serve their own target groups with theme-specific broadcasts. In the digital sphere, viewers-consumers clearly have more choices.

Dutch public television and radio stations produce on a daily basis high-quality information programs analyzing government decisions. Of the 13 national public broadcasters in the Netherlands, eight may be said to consider it their task to inform the public on governmental affairs and decision-making. The main TV public news channel, NOS (recently changed into NPO), is required to provide 15 hours of reporting on political issues every week. On the radio, the First Channel is primarily tasked with providing information. In recent years, the scope of the First Channel within society has been decreasing. This is not surprising since new media (i.e., the internet) have grown at the expense of more traditional media and are becoming more influential in the provision of news. NOS broadcasts Politiek 24, a digital television channel on the internet that contains live streams of public debates, analyses, background information and a daily political show. As mentioned under “Media freedom,” there are policy intentions to force public media to merge, and limit their broadcasts to issues of information and culture, leaving entertainment to commercial media.

In spite of television, a majority of Dutch citizens (54%) still read a newspaper every day. Newspaper readers are to be found increasingly among the older and more highly educated population segment; digital subscriptions are on the rise, but remain limited in number. Especially regional and local newspapers show strong consolidation and concentration tendencies, with a strong increase in one-paper-cities and even some no-paper-cities.

Due to increasing competition among and across all media, the Netherlands has developed the features of a mediocracy – a democracy governed by those who

exercise power over the media in order to influence the populace. Journalists are said to report only on issues for which they expect to attract a large amount of public attention, which is very different than reporting on politically important issues. This, in turn, influences politicians who act strategically in order to attract journalists' attention. Politicians now more than ever have to react to short-term issues in order to get attention from journalists instead of focusing on the content of political issues that attract less attention.

Citation:

Raad voor Cultuur, Advies Meerjarenbegroting 2009-2013 Nederlandse publieke omroep. Politici en journalisten willen te vaak scoren;

Media monitor, 13 October 2014 (mediamonitor.nl, consulted 27 October 2014)

Poland

Score 7

Government decisions are widely covered by the country's main TV and radio stations. TV and radio journalists often refer to, and make use of, the in-depth information provided by the print media. Despite a tendency toward infotainment, the quality of reporting by the public broadcaster and the two major private TV companies, POLSAT and TVN, has increased. Rzeczpospolita, the second-largest daily paper in Poland, has benefited from a change in ownership and editorial staff, and has become less politically partisan. However, there is still comparatively little public trust in the objectivity of the media. Moreover, citizens do not see major differences in the reliability of the information programs offered by public and private TV broadcasters.

Spain

Score 7

Almost 70% of Spaniards watch TV news every day. This is broadcast on a twice-daily basis from 14:00 to 15:00 and from 20:30 to 21:30, making it the most important source of political information for the average citizen in Spain. Apart from these news programs, which are generally objective and balanced, several infotainment-style debate shows are aired during workday mornings and on some evenings (at weekends) but these are often superficial, focusing on polarized arguments with limited contextualized analysis. The crisis and its consequences for Spaniards have provoked much more interest than ever before in the background of economic and social policies, institutional design and international affairs, but this has not changed the fact that most political programs tend to be talk shows. Nevertheless, the public-television organization Televisión Española (TVE) offers some high-quality information programs, although its audience ratings are decreasing and the political independence of the corporation has suffered since 2012 (see "Media Freedom").

A third of Spaniards also follow the political news via radio stations, which devote many hours a week to political information. All main stations have a morning program combining both background news and political debate (6:00 – 10:00), two main news programs (14:00 – 15:00 and 20:00 – 21:00), and a late-night news program (22:00 – 24:00). Privately owned radio stations are more ideologically biased than the major TV stations (with the participants in the radio debates blatantly biased in favor of or against the government). There are also daily radio programs of reasonable quality focused on business, and therefore on economic policymaking.

The main newspapers (El País, El Mundo, ABC, La Vanguardia) provide a fairly significant amount of background information and contextualized op-ed analysis on government decisions, despite their partisan preferences. However, the number of print-media readers is falling, and the impact of print publications is thus limited. However, a growing number of readers have begun following politics-themed blogs (“Agenda Pública”, “Politikon” and “Piedras de Papel,” to name a few), which offer high-quality information in their analysis of the Spanish policy process. This is the most interesting recent development regarding political information, though political debate in the Spanish blogosphere is still followed by only a minority of Spaniards.

Belgium

Score 6

Television news programs provide a relatively reasonable level of information, with greater insight on content and lower personalization than in Italy or France, for example, but the economic crisis in the media sector is accelerating the trend toward high-sensation but lower-quality information, and a growing inability to lead in-depth investigations, in particular to monitor policymaking.

Almost all television channels, public and private, organize political debates on weekends but, again, programming substance is superficial at best. Pure “infotainment” programs are more widespread on Dutch-speaking than on French-speaking channels, but the French-speaking media are the ones that suffer the most from low information quality.

Also, media from each linguistic community focuses mostly on their own community, with little attention paid to events, personalities and perceptions in the other linguistic community.

Czech Republic

Score 6

The main TV and radio stations provide daily news programs and some deeper discussion and analysis programs on a weekly basis. However, much of the commentary is superficial, and debates are usually structured to represent the views of the main political parties. The quality of information on government decisions has

improved with the digitalization process. Czech TV established CT24, a channel dedicated to news, which also broadcasts online and offers continual analysis of domestic and international events. The Czech Republic's commercial media sector tends to eschew in-depth analysis of current affairs and instead follows an infotainment or scandal-driven news agenda. The transfer and concentration of media ownership in recent years into the hands of powerful business elites with political ambitions threaten the quality of media reporting.

France

Score 6

Mass media, notably morning (radio) and evening programs, offer quality information concerning government decisions. As for print media, the crucial issue is the division between local and national media. A few quality daily papers and weekly papers provide in-depth information. However, in many instances, the depth and magnitude of information is dependent upon the level of polarization of the government policy. Instead, in local newspapers, information is often superficial and inadequate. The same division applies to private and public audiovisual channels. Some private channels offer only limited, superficial and polemical information. On the whole, economic information is rather poor.

Iceland

Score 6

Iceland's main TV and radio stations provide fairly substantive in-depth information on government decisions. Radio analysis typically tends to be deeper than that found on television. The small size of the market limits the financial resources of TV stations. Critical analysis of government policies by independent observers, experts and journalists is a fairly recent phenomenon in Iceland. The Special Investigation Committee report had a separate chapter on the media before and during the 2008 economic collapse. The report criticizes the media for not being critical enough in their coverage of the Icelandic banks and other financial institutions before the 2008 economic collapse. The report argues, on the basis of content analyses of media coverage of the banks, that the media was too biased toward the banks. This bias is associated with overlapping ownership of the banks and media companies. For example, Jón Ásgeir Jóhannesson, who was one of Iceland's richest business figures and was deeply connected to the 2008 economic collapse, continues to hold a near majority share in the ownership of Iceland's largest private media company, 365 Miðlar, which owns a TV station (Stöð2), several radio stations (including Bylgjan), one daily newspaper (Fréttablaðið) and the Internet website Visir.is. Jóhannesson's wife holds more than 90% of 365-miðlar stocks. However, Jóhannesson has relinquished his ownership of the respective bank.

Portugal

Score 6 As a result of the increased interest in policy with the bailout, media reporting has improved somewhat. That said, analyses of government decisions fail to carry out systematic in-depth policy analysis. Moreover, policy analysis is carried out by expert commentators, with little or no journalistic work on policy issues. One interesting trend of 2011 – 2013 has been the increasing commentary time allotted to former politicians, especially on television – the main source of political information. An analysis in early May 2013 indicated that there were 69 hours of political commentary per week on the four free-to-air channels and three main cable news channels. Of a total of some 97 regular commentators, 60 of these were politicians. The current crop of commentators includes, for instance, the previous prime minister, José Sócrates, and the former leader of the Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata, PSD), Manuela Ferreira Leite. This profusion of politician-commentators does not appear to contribute to greater policy analysis, not least as many of these commentators are engaged in a political career.

Slovenia

Score 6 In Slovenia, the majority of both electronic and printed mass media fail to provide high-quality information on government decisions and mostly focus on superficial subjects. However, there is a clear distinction to be made between the private and public media here. Whereas the private media, especially private electronic media, tend to focus on non-political information and infotainment, the public media, especially television and radio broadcasters, put much more emphasis on providing high-quality information about government decisions. They even devote some attention to the debates preceding these decisions. This particularly applies when debates are initiated by the government.

United States

Score 6 For the interested citizen, it is easy to find a large volume of serious, high-quality reporting on government and policy, with balanced, reasonably objective treatment of issues – in print, on the Internet or on television. But such qualities do not describe the majority of major news outlets, nor the outlets used by the largest audiences. A majority of citizens obtain most of their news from television rather than newspapers or the Internet, and the quality of the national news broadcasts has been declining. However, reputable news reporting and news analysis programs are available on radio and TV networks. The information quality of talk shows varies, ranging from “infotainment” to the serious discussion of policy issues with reputable experts. C-Span 1-2 offers in-depth coverage of political proceedings in Congress

and of political events in the wider sense, including proceedings at think tanks and academic institutions.

The most damaging trend for public understanding is the decline of journalistic standards. Some media exhibit pervasive ideological biases and often reckless inaccuracy – tendencies that are not confined to identifiable commentary or opinion segments, but also affect news reporting. Their broadcasts amount to outright polemical campaigning for or against certain political positions and their advocates.

Of course, the United States has had polarized, partisan media before (especially in the 19th century), and there are counterweights to the hardline conservative media, such as the left-leaning MSNBC. The polarization of the media both reflects and reinforces the general polarization of American political discourse. It may tend to enhance citizens' attention to and participation in politics, but at the cost of creating deeper, more severe divides.

Australia

Score 5

Television and radio stations vary in the time they devote to substantive information on policy issues and government decisions. Commercial broadcasters devote relatively little time to such matters, but the state-owned broadcaster, which has one national television station and a number of radio stations, devotes a considerable amount of time to high-quality analysis of government decisions. Newspaper coverage is likewise variable, with the popular newspapers providing superficial coverage and the quality “broadsheets” providing more in-depth coverage and discussion. While Australia used to have more quality newspapers in the past, concentration processes have contributed to less diversity and quality in printed media. To some extent countering this decline has been the emergence of a number of online-only news providers. While the impact of these news outlets is difficult to assess, it is clear that at least several of them have risen to the status of mass media outlets, being widely read by members of the Australian community.

Croatia

Score 5

As a result of the rise of media conglomerates and the dominance of foreign owners, the Croatian media sector is highly commercialized. Entertainment genres prevail in both the electronic and print media. Croatia lacks a great, serious daily newspaper comparable with Delo in Slovenia or Politika in Serbia. Nevertheless, the newspapers Jutarnji list and Vecernji list provide good coverage of Croatian political, economic and social affairs.

Cyprus

Score 5

The media landscape is dominated by infotainment programming, and media organizations largely fail to provide in-depth analyses. The capacity to analyze and evaluate policies is hampered by a low level of issue knowledge, partisan approaches and low awareness of the code of journalistic ethics. Some also criticize media organizations for their connections to financial interests, which create an additional obstacle to their work. However, financial difficulties within the media are likely to increase dependency on these interests.

Though political issues dominate print and electronic media coverage, little insight is offered. In-depth information is only occasionally provided by academics or experts invited to debates, in particular by the public broadcaster. Analysts often belong to specific ideological camps, but fail to disclose their links with political parties. Most journalists do little to limit the impact of their personal views and preferences on their work. In the period under review, the current government benefited from media coverage that was less critical than that faced by its predecessor, as its actions have been considered to be a necessary evil in tackling the serious crisis in spite of disagreements.

Finally, political figures' polarizing rhetoric and tendency to avoid nuances in their public statements persisted. This creates a further obstacle to providing high-quality information and in-depth analyses.

The lack of transparency in print-media circulation figures and media ownership data are additional factors affecting the quality of information.

Greece

Score 5

The most popular TV and radio channels are privately owned and provide infotainment rather than in-depth information. Such channels may offer in-depth information only in cases in which the economic interests of private media owners are affected by a prospective government decision. Media owners often change sides, now favoring the government, then the opposition.

The state-owned TV and radio channels – which cater to a small audience and cannot really compete with private channels – offer somewhat more sophisticated information and analysis. However, the sudden shutting down of the national broadcaster (ERT) by the government in June 2014 led to a gap in public broadcasting. A transitional, understaffed, public broadcaster functioned until May 2014 when a new public broadcaster (NERI) fully replaced the old one. Syriza's party cadres reject all invitations by NERIT and demand the re-opening of ERT. In NERIT, the quality of information and analysis depends on the professionalism of producers and journalists.

On the other hand, the circulation of dailies is comparatively low. Sunday newspapers have a larger circulation and Sunday newspapers feature articles based on investigative journalism. Most people inform themselves through TV programs or various news websites. In a few websites, one may follow debates provoked by an informed contributor. Such debates often revolve around the causes and consequences of the economic crisis and the management of the crisis. In short, one may find interesting in-depth information by browsing Greek websites.

Latvia

Score 5

A minority of the 10 most important mass-media brands in Latvia provide high-quality information. The majority of reporting is a mix of quality information and infotainment programs. The financial constraints on the media brought about by audience shifts to internet-based sources and budget cuts to public broadcasting have had a negative effect on the provision of high-quality content.

Nevertheless, some newcomers to the media scene have succeeded in meeting a high standard of quality. The weekly magazine *IR*, established in 2010, provides in-depth information on government policy plans. Investigative reporting on public and private television stations fulfills a watchdog function. Sustained analytical focus on issues of public concern is provided by *Re:Baltica*, founded in August 2011. *Re:Baltica* is a non-profit organization that produces investigative journalism in the public interest. Since its establishment, it has focused on issues such as the social costs of economic austerity, consumer protection and drug-money flows. By cooperating with the mainstream media, it has succeeded in moving these issues onto the public agenda.

Economic constraints on the media have exacerbated the media's tendency to allow financial pressures to influence content. Research indicates that hidden commercial advertising can be arranged in any media channel in Latvia. Hidden political advertising is denied by the Latvian-language media, but acknowledged by the Russian-language media.

Citation:

Rožukalne A. (2010), Research Paper on Hidden Advertising Issues in the Media, Available at (in Latvian): http://politika.lv/article_files/21_17/original/slepta_reklama_mediju_p_rakse.pdf?1343212009, Last assessed: 20.05.2013

Lithuania

Score 5

A minority of mass-media organizations, whether TV, radio, print or online, provide high-quality information content analyzing government decisions. Since it is quite expensive to provide high-quality analysis within Lithuania's small media market,

the state-funded National Radio and Television is in the best position to undertake in-depth analysis of government decisions. Other mass-media brands tend to produce infotainment-style programming. Although the Lithuanian media are regarded as quite independent, they are not widely trusted by the public; indeed, in late 2014, only 38.8% of respondents in a national survey said they trusted the media.

Citation:

<http://www.vilmorus.lt/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=2&cntnt01returnid=20>.

Malta

Score 5 As media outlets are essentially dominated by Malta's two major political parties, much of the information published by the media is often deemed "infotainment," or seen as sensational and/or superficial. Detailed reports on government policy or issues are seldom produced, although some media outlets have greatly improved with regard to this aspect of reporting.

Mexico

Score 5 The quality of the media is mixed. The quality of some Mexico City newspapers and magazines is high, but the rest of the press, particularly radio and TV, focuses mainly on entertainment. One problem is that journalists are not always well educated, and sometimes fail to understand or explain complex issues accurately. Journalists are also sometimes targeted by criminal gangs, and fear can inhibit some kinds of reporting. A televisual media reform is on the government agenda. The main reform proposed is to expand the number of TV channels provided. This change would probably be good for public revenue, but is unlikely to improve the intellectual quality of the media. On the other hand, media diversity is increasing (if one includes online media), and Mexicans do have access to high-quality offerings if they are interested.

New Zealand

Score 5 Not all television and radio stations produce high-quality information programs, but both Television New Zealand (TVNZ) and Radio New Zealand provide a regular evaluation of government decisions. TVNZ's TVOne has three news programs per day, each lasting between 30 minutes to one hour, as well as a lighthearted daily current affairs magazine-style program. It also has an hour-long current affairs program, "Q and A," which screens once a week and focuses on domestic politics. TVNZ 7, a station established in March 2008, offers a range of programming, 30% of which focuses on news programs that offer background information. Although the channel attracted a small but loyal audience, it has since been closed. A second

television network, TV3, offers a similar news and current affairs schedule to that of TVNZ. Radio New Zealand has four extensive news features per day in addition to hourly news programs. Newspapers provide information and analysis on government decisions and policy issues –although many articles report government statements verbatim and such stories tend to be relegated to the inner pages – with law and order and celebrity stories dominating the headlines.

Citation:

TV One: <http://tvnz.co.nz/tv-one> (accessed October 9, 2014).

Radio New Zealand: <http://www.radionz.co.nz/news/programmes> (accessed October 9, 2014).

Slovakia

Score 5

The quality and professionalism of media reporting in Slovakia is not extraordinarily high. The public TV and radio stations have lost market shares. Moreover, the commercialization of nationwide broadcasters, with a consequent negative impact on public-interest news and current-affairs coverage, has not left the public stations untouched. During the period of review, an alarming development in the print media was evident. The financial group Penta acquired two additional publishing houses, Trend Holding and 7 Plus, and will thus control top-selling magazines and periodicals such as the Trend business weekly, the third-biggest daily tabloid Plus Jeden Deň, and the Plus 7 Dní tabloid weekly. As of the time of writing, there were reports that Penta was working on a number of new acquisitions, including a purchase of the news-only TA3 television station. In October 2014, Penta took over a 50% share of publisher Petit Press from German co-owner Rheinisch-Bergische Verlagsgesellschaft (RBVG). The flagship project of Petit Press, and Slovakia's major daily newspaper, is the non-tabloid Sme. Sme's editor-in-chief, Matúš Kostolný, along with his four deputies Tomáš Bella, Lukáš Fila, Konštantín Čikovský and Juraj Javorský, resigned following the acquisition and started a new daily, Denník N. This decision was positively perceived by the public, and many individuals made monetary contributions to help the new publication achieve an initial financial security.

South Korea

Score 5

Taking into account not only freedom of the press, but also media pluralism and quality, the main problem with South Korean media is the low quality of many outlets in terms of their ability to serve as facilitators of public debate or civic culture. Part of the problem here is the country's strong commercialism and associated weakness in political journalism. The main TV programs produce a mix of infotainment and quality information about government policies. Beginning in 2009, the Lee Myung-bak administration instituted a biweekly radio address in which Lee explained government policies.

Evening news programs are extensive, but a large portion is devoted to various scandals and scoops. Deeper analysis of information exists, but is rare on television in comparison to public radio stations, such as KBS 1. In the last four years, TV and radio organizations have shifted their programming in the direction of entertainment and infotainment. Political programs have either been replaced or their teams shuffled. In December 2011, four new cable channels run by South Korea's main newspapers began broadcasting. As commercial programs, they tend to favor infotainment. On the other hand, however, their connection with major newspapers may prove to be a good basis to produce quality information. Some mass media intentionally conceal or distort the information to help the president and ruling party in politically sensitive news.

Bulgaria

Score 4

Bulgaria's media sector is characterized by three main features. First, it suffers from heavy bias, focusing on sensationalism and scandal as a means of gaining public attention rather than producing in-depth and consistent coverage and analysis of important societal processes. Second, during the years of economic crisis, the mainstream media (both press and electronic) has become heavily dependent on government money for advertising and information campaigns, a fact that enables the government to exert influence. Thirdly, most print-media organizations can be considered as appendages to their owners and publishers' businesses; as a consequence, high-quality journalism definitely takes a back seat relative to other business interests. In their coverage of government policies, most major media organizations concentrate on short-term sensationalist aspects. They tend to frame government decisions as personalized power politics, diverting attention away from the substance of the policy toward the entertainment dimension. Usually there is no coverage of the preparatory stages of policy decisions. When coverage begins, basic information about a given decision or policy is provided, but typically without any deep analysis of its substance and societal importance. Exceptions – such as the very substantial and in-depth discussion of the South Stream gas pipeline project in 2013 and 2014 – are rare.

Chile

Score 4

Although locally produced news programs are generally of high quality and draw large audiences – particularly through radio – Chile's newspapers and the main public TV stations report tabloid news, and employ the bold headlines and techniques with strong popular and infotainment appeal. Furthermore, statistics released by the National TV Commission (Consejo Nacional de Televisión) show that on average, less than five hours a week per channel or radio station is spent

discussing in-depth political information. More than 50% of the news presented through publicly accessible channels is dedicated to sports and crime events. Surveys indicate that the Chilean audience would prefer less sports news and more focus on national and international politics. Due to the biased media landscape, there is a strong ideological framing regarding political information and policy discussion. Chile's largest free TV channel (TVN) is state-owned, and by law is required to provide balanced and equal access to all political views and parties – a regulation which is overseen by the National Television Directorate (Consejo Nacional de Televisión, CNTV). Although La Nación and TVN are state-owned, they must operate according to market rules; they have to self-finance by relying on advertising and high audience ratings. Since the print edition of the La Nación newspaper was eliminated under former President Sebastián Piñera's administration, the quality of its reporting and in-depth information on government decision-making has dropped dramatically.

Citation:

http://www.cntv.cl/prontus_cntv/site/artic/20130723/asocfile/20130723171104/pluralismo_en_la_televisi_n_p_bli_ca.pdf

Hungary

Score 4

The sharp polarization of political life in Hungary has facilitated a replacement of in-depth analysis by a preoccupation with scandals, whether real or alleged. There is relatively little in-depth analysis of government decisions and the performance of the government in the government-controlled media, or in those outlets close to Fidesz. Aside from the influences of camp bias and a weak coverage of international affairs, however, some of the print publications close to the parliamentary opposition have kept up a relatively intensive coverage of government actions. As a reaction to the government's attempts at controlling the media, social media and Internet editions of established print publications have gained in importance. In the months since the 2014 parliamentary elections, the establishment of the government's National Communications Office and the announced advertisement tax have raised concerns about a further decline in the quality of media reporting. At the same time, the rifts in the Fidesz camp that emerged in the second half of 2014 might ultimately lead to a greater degree of media pluralism.

Romania

Score 4

Media coverage of government decisions and action on the television stations and in the newspapers with the largest market shares is highly partisan, largely focusing on political scandals and key politicians' personalities rather than providing in-depth policy analysis. While government officials often appear on political talk shows to discuss government plans and decisions with political analysts, the format and style

of these shows (where participants often interrupt each other and primarily try to score rhetorical points) is not very suitable for providing nuanced and contextualized analysis of government decisions. Nonetheless, there is a clear minority of mass-media brands, such as the Digi 24 television station and HotNews.ro, an online news source, that produce higher quality, less partisan and more in-depth information. These sources – as well as some of the more serious print media (such as 22 magazine) – have much smaller market shares than do television stations specializing in political infotainment, particularly the Antena 3 television station.

Turkey

Score 4

Despite the pluralistic media scene in Turkey, the Turkish media (TV channels, newspapers, etc.) seems increasingly split between proponents and opponents of the AKP government. In consequence, it is difficult for citizens to find objective or substantive in-depth information on government policies and government decision-making. The dominant media-ownership structure, the government's clear-cut differentiation between pro- and anti-government media, and the increasingly polarized public discourse make it difficult for journalists to provide substantial information to the public. This is true even of the main news agencies, such as Anadolu, ANKA, Doğan and Cihan. Superficial reporting and self-censorship are widespread within the major media outlets. Thus, few newspapers, radio or TV stations offer in-depth analysis of government policies or their effects concerning human rights, the Kurdish issues, economic conditions and so on. Social media has recently become a major means of communication, but is limited in its reach to urban, primarily young segments of society. Moreover, it is restricted by the government.

Citation:

Derya Sazak, *Batsın Böyle Gazetecilik (İmralı Zabıtları / Gezi / 17 Aralık)*, İstanbul: Boyut Yayın Grubu, 2014.
Open Society Foundation, *Digital Journalism: Making News, Breaking News*, July 2014, <http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/mapping-digital-media-overviews-20140828.pdf> (accessed 5 November 2014)

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