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Sven Engesser and Annika Franzetti

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# Media systems and political systems: Dimensions of comparison

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**Sven Engesser**

University of Zurich, Germany

**Annika Franzetti**

Ludwig Maximilian University Munich, Germany

## Abstract

In social sciences, the interdependence between media systems and political systems is generally not in doubt. However, empirical knowledge about the relation between the two types of systems is rare. A deeper understanding can be gained by an international comparison of media and political systems from a macro perspective using aggregated data. The pilot study presented in this article offers an approach to international comparison based on four dimensions: freedom, diversity, centrality and tradition. These concepts serve as dimensions of comparison for both media- and political systems. The instrument is tested by using an intentionally heterogeneous sample of seven countries from around the world: China, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia and the US. In combination with a pragmatic use of systems theory as a theoretical framework, the dimensions allow more profound insights into the relation between media- and political systems. In sum, the research project prepares the ground for future international large-*N* comparisons.

## Keywords

centrality, diversity, freedom, international comparative research, media systems, political systems, systems theory, tradition, typology

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### Corresponding author:

Sven Engesser, IPMZ – Institut für Publizistikwissenschaft und Medienforschung, Universität Zürich, Andreasstr. 15, 8050 Zürich, Switzerland

Email: s.engesser@ipmz.uzh.ch

## International comparison from a macro perspective

International comparative research rapidly has gained relevance in the social sciences over the past 15 years. Gurevitch and Blumler (2004: 327) have already asserted that this field of research 'has almost become fashionable'. Their statement has been supported by an increasing number of journal articles (for meta-analyses see Chang et al., 2001; Schorr, 2003) and textbooks (e.g. Esser and Pfetsch, 2004; Gudykunst and Mody, 2002; Gunther and Mughan, 2000; Thussu, 2009). Today, research activity is vibrant enough to legitimately put in parentheses the word 'almost' into Gurevitch and Blumler's above quotation.

Nevertheless, there is an imbalance among the specific areas within the field of international comparative research. Most studies follow a micro- or meso-theoretical perspective. In communication science this often implies a concentration on content analysis or survey as methods of research. Although consolidated findings exist about the content (e.g. Strömbäck and Kaid, 2008) and the communicators (e.g. Hanitzsch, 2009) of mass media, deeper insights into different media systems on a macro level are rare. It is hard to find extensive studies on a macro level which analyse structural aspects of multiple states by using aggregated data. This deficit in research activity does not meet the relevance and desirability of such studies.

Two main aspects exemplify the benefit of international comparative research on the macro level. First, comparing structural characteristics of media systems and political systems allows a deeper understanding of commonalities and differences between the two systems. This is a precondition for sampling according to the *most similar systems design* or *most different systems design* (Przeworski and Teune, 1970; Wirth and Kolb, 2004). Second, by offering knowledge about possible influencing factors, research projects on the macro level can serve as an additional benefit to studies that would otherwise remain on a micro or meso level. Such contextual factors can be used to extend existing studies to *multilevel comparisons* (Mughan and Gunther, 2000; Pfetsch and Esser, 2004; Wu, 2007).

Not only are macro-level approaches underrepresented within the field of comparative research, but also interdisciplinary projects do not seem to be very popular. This is surprising, considering the fact that interdependence between two social systems, such as mass media and politics, is commonly assumed (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Siebert et al., 1956). Besides, most studies only offer descriptive findings. This is a typical phenomenon for a relatively new and growing field of research. However, the descriptive exploration of a field of research should be followed by explanatory outcomes. Looking at the variety of studies, one reason for the lack of explanatory results seems to be the narrow geographic range of the studies. The comparisons are mostly two-state analyses and they often look for regional particularities with a focus on the US and Europe. This narrow (western) perspective makes it hard to systematically develop generally applicable theories (Curran and Park, 2003). Therefore, aims of this article are to explore the field from a *macro perspective* using aggregated data, and to follow an *interdisciplinary* approach combining communication science and political science.

The article begins by illustrating theoretical implications about the relation between media systems and political systems. Then, four dimensions are introduced: *freedom*, *diversity*, *centrality* and *tradition*. They serve as an instrument for comparing media- and

political systems of different countries worldwide. The article explains why these dimensions were chosen and shows in detail how these four dimensions can be operationalized. With the introduced measures, a basic analysis of correlations between media- and political systems becomes possible. The article offers the results of a pilot study based on secondary data.

Although the study appears primarily quantitative, it is, to a certain extent, supported by qualitative procedures. As is illustrated later on, this combination allows us to balance the advantages and disadvantages of both methodological approaches. The study sample comprises China, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia and the US. It was used to test the method and instrument for future large-*N* comparisons. Due to its focus on the research design and its preliminary nature, this article should be considered as a contribution to fundamental research within the field of international comparison.

## **The relation between media systems and political systems**

In communication science as well as in political science no serious doubt exists about the interdependence between the media system and the political system of one society (Dahlgren and Gurevitch, 2005; Hallin, 2009). Both disciplines use terms that already imply an interdependent relation between both systems. Such established terms are: 'political communication', 'media policy', or 'media democracy'. These terms not only can be seen as a proof of the common belief that media and politics depend on each other. There are also several theoretical and empirical publications in the field of social sciences which focus on the relation between both systems. Even though most authors make use of the term 'system', only a few of them explicitly refer to classic *systems theory* (Luhmann, 1984; Parsons, 1952). Instead, the meanings of the terms 'media system' and 'political system' vary remarkably in their range. Depending on their specific definition, they embrace institutions, regulatory framework, actors, content, or functions – sometimes all of these and even more.

The reluctance towards systems theory is not surprising, considering the fact that especially Luhmann's approach bears theoretical and practical problems. First, Luhmann disregards the impact of the individual within social systems. Second, Luhmann's theory is hard to prove by empirical research. Third, in Luhmann's view, mass media take a hybrid role within society. On the one hand, they serve as a mediator for the other social systems. On the other hand, mass media can constitute a functional social system itself. This understanding makes it even harder to find a practical transformation of the abstract theoretical work.

Still, it is necessary to consider at least some basic implications of systems theory when an international comparison of the relation between media- and political systems is conducted. However, to be tenacious to the systems theory approach and its implications could obstruct the view of the empirical interdependence between media and politics. Only a pragmatic *modus operandi* allows the reasonable synthesis of relevant theoretical premises and social reality. Pragmatic handling of systems theory in this sense can be found, for example, in the works of Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) as well as Baker (2002). A pragmatic *modus operandi* is necessary in order to analyse media- and political systems on an empirical basis.

Looking at political science, pragmatic approaches of systems theory and recommendations of such can especially be found in comparative studies of political systems. Within this field it is extremely important to transform systems theory into a useful foundation for empirical research. Deutsch (1974) as one of the first scholars in political science adopted systems conceptualizations. Today, his works on international comparative research are mostly regarded from a historical point of view, for they have been repeatedly criticized and modified. However, Deutsch's merits in the field of political system comparison are undoubted and they seem quite useful for multilevel comparative analyses of international media- and political systems. Deutsch's comprehension of social systems (in contrast to Luhmann's and to some degree also to Parsons') appears to be less complex and more feasible.

Critics of Deutsch mostly emphasize his narrow definition of political system and his therefore quite ingenuous transfer of theoretical terms into practical empirical works. For Deutsch, a political system mainly consists of the governmental system in each country. In his works Deutsch analyses the transformation of such systems following a structural-functional perspective. The basal character of Deutsch's idea offers junctures for a more pragmatic use of systems theory approaches. In particular, the concept of interpenetration between a political system and other social systems seems very useful. Within the phenomenon of interpenetration, Deutsch combines two specified terms: *cohesion* and *covariance* (Deutsch, 1974).<sup>1</sup>

Deutsch's idea of cohesion and covariance as well as his concept of rather flexible transactions between social systems can be applied for a deeper understanding of the relation between media- and political systems. The concept allows a pragmatic approach, but does not ignore relevant implications of systems theory. Other prominent authors (e.g. Easton, 1971) also offer pragmatic uses of systems theory. However, Deutsch's terms of cohesion and covariance appear most useful in the context of this article.

For the thorough analysis of media systems and political systems a broader definition of systems is useful, especially when a mutual interdependence and interpenetration of both systems is assumed. Derbyshire and Derbyshire in their *Encyclopedia of World's Political Systems* (2000: 4) offer such a rather broad definition: 'A country's political system, then, is more than its institutions and more than the formal process of government. It includes the dynamic interplay of people's ideas and interests: the whole process of demand and response which politics represents.'

This definition bears several advantages for the comparative analysis of international media- and political systems. First, the definition is integrative, for it covers actors, institutions of the political apparatus, political procedures, as well as policies. Second, this definition focuses on the national state as one unit for a political system. If one assumes that national specifics of a media- and a political system influence one another, it is not possible to strictly separate both systems. Further, one cannot ignore genuine components of either of the systems analysed. With these implications the above definition by Derbyshire and Derbyshire offers the chance of theoretically combining the terms of cohesion and covariance.

Insofar as it is impossible to find a common definition for the political system, it also seems impossible for the media system. However, the reason for the missing consensus is rather different in the case of media systems. Here, scholars do not face a multiple variety

of definitions, but rather a lack of such (Bastiansen, 2008). The media system, it seems, is not definable by itself. Moreover, it is mostly seen in a context of or even dependence on other social systems, especially the political system. Other approaches see the media system within the entire social system which it serves. Such authors define the media system by discussing its functions within society.

A functional definition can be found in Schneider's (2002) work, where the mass media system, its legal foundation, its organizational and technical prospects, as well as publicized efforts together all establish the conditions for the involvement in political decision-making processes in liberal democratic states. Nevertheless, Schneider (2002: 422) also emphasizes the direct linkage between the media system and the political system of one state. She says that the media system reflects the social and political structures of its society. Most of the times, the definition of the media system implies its dependence on the specific political system of one society. This might be a reason why Hallin and Mancini (2004: 8), with reference to Siebert et al. (1956), argue for a combined analysis of both systems: 'One cannot understand the news media without understanding the nature of the state, the system of political parties, the pattern of relations between economic and political interests, and the development of civil society, among other elements of social structure.'

To summarize, one can state that political systems can be seen from a political science's perspective as functional systems, which interact with other social systems. One important system among these social systems is the media system. Communication scholars define this mostly in terms of mutual dependence with the political system of each society. When assuming a direct interdependence, such as Deutsch's terms cohesion and covariance imply, one can go further and formulate hypotheses on the way certain dimensions and variables shape this interdependence between national media- and political systems. However, the formulation of such hypotheses should be informed by the findings of previous research.

## Literature review

### *Comparing political systems*

Considering the number of publications within the past years (e.g. Almond et al., 2008; Broix and Stokes, 2009; Hague and Harrop, 2007; Landman, 2008), the important role international comparative research plays within political science becomes obvious. However, the approaches are heterogeneous and stand for the variety of perspectives comprising this discipline. The spectrum ranges from the comparison of governmental systems, institutions, constitutions and party systems to election systems. Furthermore, the quality and effectiveness of stable democracies are measured as well as dynamic processes of systems in transformation (e.g. Jakubowicz, 2007).

Most often, the character of early comparative political research was descriptive (Landman, 2008). Later studies reached an explanatory level: a frequent explanatory intent has been, for instance, to identify correlations between specifics of economic and political systems (e.g. Dahl, 1971; Lipset, 1959; Przeworski et al., 2000). The designs alternate between rather separated but parallel single-state descriptions

(e.g. Ismayr, 2009), deeper small-*N* analyses with mostly qualitative approaches (e.g. Collier and Collier, 1991) and broader large-*N* studies based on quantitative data. Some relevant studies from the last mentioned group provide extensive data sets online – a rich source for secondary analysis (e.g. Armingeon et al., 2008; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010; Marshall and Jaggers, 2008).

However, for the aim of the project presented here, it seems important to extract from these studies strategies of operationalization and indicators which can be usefully adopted and, when necessary, modified for the comparison of media- and political systems. Such indicators must fulfil at least three criteria. First, they must be central for comparing political systems. Second, they must be, in principle, applicable to any state. Third, they must have, at least to a certain extent, equivalents in the media system. Yet, across the studies the selection of indicators and the terminologies vary, depending on the specific research questions.

Systematic overviews are rare. Still, Müller and Pickel (2007) indirectly supply one, when evaluating six different democratization indices.<sup>2</sup> Some of the indicators evaluated appear to be especially useful because they fulfil the criteria described above, and they support the operationalization of the four dimensions of comparison which are presented in this article (see the subsection on Dimensions). When examining freedom of a political system, the constitution and bill of rights, as well as their actual enforcement in a country, can help to gain a deeper understanding about liberty and the bondages of a national political system (Derbyshire and Derbyshire, 2000: 15; Hague and Harrop, 2007: 210). Beyond that, the plurality of a national party system may refer to the general pluralistic character and the fragmentation of a political system (Almond et al., 2008: 81). The horizontal and vertical distributions of political power are interpreted as an indicator of the centrality or concentration of a political system. When looking at timelines of law enforcement within a political system, we gain knowledge about its tradition.

The high degree to which the above-mentioned indicators can be generalized for the comparative analysis of media- and political systems can be proved by two significant findings: first, the variety of indicators can be found in almost all broad comparative studies which analyse different political systems; they might be named and modelled in different ways, yet, they occur. Second, not only political science makes use of the indicators presented above, communication science and other social sciences rely on the same indicators. Therefore, the indicators are a fruitful foundation for studies which can be seen as interdisciplinary, such as this study, which combines political and communication science's approaches.

### *Comparing media systems*

The state of research concerning the comparison of media systems shows that scholars face a universal problem: international comparative research, more than other fields of research, has to cope with pragmatic boundaries. These force researchers to consider either only a few countries, but many indicators, or many countries, but only a few indicators. Hence, studies mostly present detailed single-state analyses (e.g. Hughes, 2006; Koltsova, 2006; Zhao, 2008) or cursory multi-state comparisons (e.g. Banerjee and Logan, 2008; Hardy, 2008; McKenzie, 2006). The following paragraphs briefly

introduce studies with a multi-state focus, for the pilot study presented in this article also follows this approach.

A typical example of macro-level and multi-state comparisons was given by Breunig (1994). He compares 'normative foundations' and 'practical enforcements' of freedom of communication in 169 countries around the world. In so doing, he creates subdimensions, such as 'freedom of opinion', 'freedom of information' and 'freedom of the press'. Then, he examines to what extent these rights are guaranteed by the nation's constitutions, or whether these rights are actually limited. Limitations can be seen in government property of media companies, censorship, or governmental influence over media. Breunig analysed both the constitutional texts and the reports of the International Journalism Institute (IJI) from 1988 to 1991. In his results, Breunig (1994: 313) finds a negative correlation between constitutional guarantees of freedom of information and the number of legal boundaries of and assaults against mass media. Unfortunately, he does not support these findings by statistical tests.

Another approach is presented by Voltmer (2000). She investigated the plurality of international media systems in 24 OECD member states. Here, plurality of the media is measured by the 'diversity of actors' and the 'diversity of opinions'. For the first indicator Voltmer counts newspaper titles and broadcasting stations by using data from the UNESCO and the World Association of Newspapers (WAN). Measuring the second indicator seems to be more complicated. Voltmer uses the range of political tendencies of newspapers, relying on the *Political Handbook of the World* (edited by Banks et al.), combined with the 'formal diversity' of broadcasting organizations. For her, the existence of public stations or commercial stations alone represents a monopolistic system; the existence of both represents a pluralistic system. The used data mainly consist of findings from the *Internationales Handbuch Medien* (edited by Hans-Bredow-Institut) and similar publications. In sum, Voltmer (2000: 42) creates a typology of press systems and broadcasting systems with either high or low inherent diversity. The two studies illustrated above mainly offer descriptive findings based on univariate analysis. In the following, studies which analyse bivariate correlations are presented.

Gunaratne (2002) assumes a positive correlation between freedom of the press and access to media content, on the one hand, and political participation, on the other hand. For measuring freedom of the press, he used the rankings by Freedom House (FH), while he measures media access relying on the Human Development Index (HDI), published by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Political participation is also measured by using the HDI. Here, Gunaratne compares voter participation in national elections. However, he cannot find a significant correlation between freedom of media and voter participation in the 188 countries analysed (Gunaratne, 2002: 360).

Norris's (2004) methodical design is quite similar. She also examines the dimensions freedom of the press and access to media, using data from FH and the HDI. Beyond that, she looks at the dimension 'good governance', relying on the judgement of experts who were interviewed for a study of the World Bank. Her sample includes 135 states. Norris (2004: 129) finds significant correlations between the variables for the freedom of media and those for good governance. Nevertheless, both studies base their predications on only a few independent variables and therefore, their degree of explanation must be seen as rather limited.

An even broader focus is offered in a group of studies which are recognized for their typologies of media systems. Probably best known in the field are Siebert et al. (1956). In addition, the works of Altschull (1984) and Hachten (1987) are often quoted. There have been meritorious efforts to revise and update these typologies (Nerone, 1995, 2004), especially in response to the transformation of media systems in Asia (e.g. J Becker, 2004; De Smaele, 1999; Huang, 2003; Yin, 2008). However, most of the typologies remain based on normative argumentation and subjective assumptions of the authors. Therefore, they are difficult to verify on an empirical level. Rarely, classifications are substantiated by systematic analysis and aggregated data. Two remarkable exceptions were presented by Stevenson (1994) and Hallin and Mancini (2004), who consider several variables and data sets for their studies.

Still, the research desideratum to develop and analyse a typology of media systems which is founded on empirical data from multiple states around the world, remains (Norris, 2004: 135). The empirical study presented in this article tries to combine the advantages of both study types illustrated above: aggregated data and a variety of indicators. The multi-state comparisons introduced thus far as well as the typologies of media systems can be regarded as steps towards a *universal* (i.e. global) typology and theory of media systems. For such a future theory, the following study aims to deliver additional concepts and findings.

## Research design

### *Dimensions*

In general, there is a plethora of possible dimensions and variables for the comparison of media- and political systems. The media system can be characterized by superordinate dimensions such as ‘commerciality’ as well as subordinate variables such as ‘existence of public broadcasting’ and ‘advertising revenue’. Also, for the description of the political system, dimensions such as ‘stability’ as well as variables such as ‘number of government changes’ can be used. However, as a starting point for a macro-level and multi-state design, four dimensions of comparison seem to be especially useful: *freedom, diversity, centrality and tradition*.

These dimensions offer five main advantages. First, they have a wide range of connections to media and political theory. Freedom and diversity are considered as two of the most important criteria for the assessment of media- and political systems (McQuail, 2008). In contrast, centrality and tradition have been widely neglected in international comparison. Nevertheless, the spatial dimension of media- and political systems and, especially, its subdimension of centrality (frequently described by the dichotomy of core and periphery) constitute central characteristics of media- and political systems (Galtung, 1971; Wellhofer, 1989).<sup>3</sup> Analogically, the temporal dimension, and thus, the tradition of media systems, plays an important role in the analysis (Bastiansen, 2008). This knowledge should also inform international comparison (Stöber, 2007).

Second, the four dimensions allow direct comparison of media systems on the one hand and political systems on the other hand because they can be applied to *both* types

of systems without additional theoretical effort. This would not be the case for a dimension such as media commerciality and a variable such as advertising revenue, for which it is more complicated to find accurate equivalents in the political system (or vice versa for the dimension of political stability or the variable of government changes).<sup>4</sup>

Third, the dimensions cover structural aspects that can be regarded as fundamental characteristics of the respective systems and stand as *pars pro toto* for a whole range of further, related variables. For instance, the variables of centrality can be regarded as indicators for the whole spatial distribution of a given media- or political system.

Fourth, for the most part, the dimensions allow a relatively high level of measurement and thus, they establish the potential to calculate correlations between media- and political systems. This would only be possible to a limited extent for dichotomous variables such as 'existence of public broadcasting'. In this pilot study, the correlations have to be estimated manually due to the small sample size. However, it will be possible to support or undermine them by statistical tests in future large-*N* comparisons.

Fifth, the aggregated data needed for the dimensions is available and (more or less) reliable. Fortunately, commercial and academic research activity concerning the chosen dimensions is strong enough, so sufficient quantitative data sets and qualitative single-state analyses can be found and used (see the subsection on Measurement and data).

Indeed, additional dimensions and variables could be included in the research design (e.g. the afore-mentioned commerciality and stability). Also, the chosen dimensions could be transferred to the meso or micro level. For instance, one could analyse the diversity of media content or the tradition of political parties. For future studies, it would be highly desirable to extend the catalogue of criteria as well as to combine macro-, meso- and micro-level analysis. However, the creation of advanced instruments requires additional theoretical work and should be informed by comprehensive knowledge about the macro structure of each system. Therefore, it has to be left to subsequent studies.

## Sample

The country sample of this study is intentionally heterogeneous. This has two main reasons: first, it was principally drawn to find out if it is possible to apply the introduced dimensions of comparison, in principle, to *all* the countries of the world pursuing the long-term objective of creating a global typology of media- and political systems. Second, it was used to prove the hypothesis of a *universal* interdependence between media- and political systems. Therefore, the countries within the sample had to represent a broad spectrum of systems to guarantee a relatively high degree of variance for the variables. Thus, seven states from three continents were chosen: China, Germany, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, Russia and the US.

Unfortunately, the sample bears a few deficits. It contains only industrial and emerging nations, but no developing countries. There is no Islamic country and no countries from Africa and South America included. With the Netherlands, there is only one small state and no very small state (such as Liechtenstein or Fiji) taken into account.<sup>5</sup> These deficits are due to the lack of available and reliable data. Countries such as Brazil, Egypt, Israel, Nigeria and South Africa were considered at an early stage of the study, but they had to be abandoned. These states, for instance, are not covered by the IP (2008) data set.

Besides, there are no sufficiently credible, up-to-date and comprehensive single-state analyses available about them, at least not (yet) for the English-speaking scientific community. Finally, at first glance, the sample ( $N = 7$ ) appears to be relatively small for a quantitative analysis. This is because the article presents a pilot study and can be considered as a report on work in progress.

### *Measurement and data*

Measuring the four dimensions is rather complex. The test of an instrument for large- $N$  samples forces researchers to measure manifest facts, such as written laws, numbers of parties in government and opposition, or market shares. Consequently, genuinely qualitative and normative dimensions (freedom, diversity, centrality and tradition) of social systems are operationalized into quantitative data. In this case, quantitative researchers have to deal with the substantial critique that social reality may get lost behind numbers. However, such scepticism can be countered with a combination of quantitative and qualitative research.

Deutsch (1960) and Sartori (1979) already acknowledged the benefit of combining quantitative and qualitative methods in comparative political research. Landman (2008) goes further and argues that even the differentiation per se of the two methods is incorrect because they follow the same goal and logic of inferences. Caporaso (2009) argues that qualitative causal inferences may overcome the mechanistic interferences induced by quantitative measures. Following him, qualitative research has a verbal and hermeneutic character, or, in other words, is closer to reality. In order to prevent mechanistic interferences, and, at the same time, to prepare the ground for further large- $N$  comparisons, this study consists of two pillars: the major pillar of a quantitative design and, where needed, the supporting pillar of additional qualitative research.

Reliable data and perfectly calculated correlations are indeed worthless when manifest indicators represent a distorted picture of reality. Even if, for instance, the civil right of freedom of speech is ratified there might still be laws which foil human rights enforcement in reality. Hence, manifest facts must be objectively collected, but they also must be subjectively interpreted. In the sensitive case of media- and political systems, quantitative research must be combined, wherever necessary, with qualitative methods, in order to compensate the disadvantage described above. For the study presented here, this combination was crucial for the dimensions freedom and diversity of the political system, centrality of the media system and tradition of both types of systems.

To be more specific: numeric data do not show that an apparent multi-party system is actually not really functioning because power is held by only one party over decades. Manifest data about geographic media centres do not explain whether different media companies in different cities actually belong to the same holding. To gain knowledge of such key aspects, relevant literature that goes beyond the mere numbers was examined. However, a profound qualitative analysis requires the researcher to be, at least to a certain extent, an expert on every country involved. This is already hardly feasible for the seven countries of this pilot study and it becomes even more difficult with increasing sample size. Therefore, the qualitative analysis has to remain superficial in comparison to detailed single-state analyses.

Even though supporting qualitative methods can balance some of the problems of quantitative data, there is another problem to be aware of: most often, multi-state analyses are secondary data (or even tertiary data) surveys. The quality of secondary data research depends to a large extent on accessible and reliable data. The data should at least meet three criteria of quality: up-to-dateness, comprehensiveness and equivalence. Therefore, several data sets were used for verification and control. However, the data are not completely comprehensive, therefore at some points, reductions had to be accepted. The following paragraphs offer a brief definition and description of the four dimensions, their measures and the data used.

*Freedom of the media system.* In this context, many ways of operationalization and data sources can be found. Rather prominent seem to be the studies and rankings of Freedom House (FH) (2009) and Reporters sans Frontières (RSF) (2009), which have been frequently used in previous studies (e.g. Gunaratne, 2002; Norris, 2004). This is probably due to the fact that they are updated annually and include almost all the countries of the world. However, using these rankings is not without problems (LB Becker et al., 2007). Hence, this article tries to attain a higher level of control by using both rankings (FH and RSF) and combining them into an *index* of media freedom, which expresses the average rank of a country.

*Freedom of the political system.* To measure freedom of a political system forces any researcher to work on an empirical level with a normative term. Freedom can hardly be quantified and manifested. For example, the legal framework of a country may guarantee freedom in many ways, but in reality all these liberties may be strictly limited. In fact, freedom is mostly indirectly measured, when the quality of a democracy is explored (Croissant, 2004), or the transformation of states into democracies is analysed (Welzel, 2000). Common indicators are the guarantee of fundamental rights in national constitutions and their differentiation into freedom of the press, of information and opinion. This differentiation can for example be found in the studies of Breunig (1994). Relevant for the comparison of media systems and political systems are also the governmental capabilities to limit the freedom of the media: censorship, occupational ban, or governmental media ownership, etc.

The study, presented here, basically follows Breunig (1994). His data are used and updated. For a numeric representation of the freedom of a political system, an index of freedom is created. If freedom of the press, freedom of information and opinion is guaranteed by a country's constitution, code '1' is selected. The same code is given to countries which prohibit censorship, occupational bans and keep distance between government and media. In cases where legal guarantees are limited and the government might have options to interfere with the media, code '0.5' is given. Code '0' is selected when such laws do not even exist. The sum of all codes results in the index for each country. Unfortunately, the real enforcement of rights can hardly be analysed with data from the political system alone. Therefore, qualitative research formed a supporting pillar, as described earlier.

*Diversity of the media system.* In order to operationalize the diversity of a media system, this dimension can be divided into the *range of media products* and the *concentration of the media market*. For measuring the first subdimension, the number of daily newspapers and the number of TV channels (domestic or foreign with a local advertising window) are gathered. The number of TV channels seems to be a better measure than the number of TV stations because it can be easily applied to countries with a TV network system and to those without. For measuring the concentration of media markets, most studies rely on the density of newspapers (Voltmer, 2000: 17–18). This is usually calculated by the number of newspaper *copies* per thousand (k) inhabitants. Additionally, this study takes into account the number of newspaper *titles* per million (m) inhabitants which, in our opinion, reflects the concept of diversity in a more accurate way.<sup>6</sup> Both measures have the advantage that they include the size of a country, at least in terms of its population size.

Furthermore, a common approach to measuring the concentration of a national media market is followed. In general, the *concentration ratio* for the five (or rarely 10) largest media outlets is calculated (Djankov et al., 2003; Hughes and Lawson, 2005). Accordingly, in this article, the five largest daily newspapers of each country are identified in order to add their market share based on circulation. Analogically, the market share of the five largest TV channels based on viewing time is added. These figures are combined to create an average index of concentration for each country.

Even though this approach has proven its value, it is not without problems. First, the market share of media products tells us nothing about the market share of the adjacent media outlet or about content diversity. Second, it is generally complicated to accurately define the relevant market (here: viewing time or circulation) in order to calculate different market shares.

The data sources used in this context are the annual publications of the World Association of Newspapers (WAN) (2009) and the International Marketing Committee (IP) (2008). They had to be complemented by single-state analyses where data were missing (e.g. Gomez Garcia and Sosa Plata, 2009). Although their data collections meet high professional standards, WAN and IP themselves have to rely on national data sources (e.g. newspaper associations or market research institutions). Therefore, some deductions in equivalence and reliability have to be accepted.

*Diversity of the political system.* For the political system, it is necessary to measure diversity in politics as well as in polities. In concrete terms, the separation and distribution of power is measured by the number of parties within the legislative branch and by the number of parties, which share the executive power. These figures tell the researcher how many political players actually influence the process of decision-making and how large their influence actually might be. Political science usually differentiates party systems using the classification ‘one-party system’, ‘two-party system’ and ‘multi-party system’ (Landman, 2008). For the verification of the data collected, several sets of data are used and critically compared (e.g. Armingeon et al., 2008; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010; Marshall and Jagers, 2008).

*Centrality of the media system.* In this article, we argue that the centrality of a media system can be measured by the number of geographic newspaper and TV centres.

These centres are defined as cities or metropolitan areas from which a *significantly large amount* of domestic newspaper or TV content originates and is distributed. The critical question is what to consider a significantly large amount. A quantitative threshold as decision guideline would be useful (e.g. if 50 percent of a country's newspaper circulation originates from a city, it is regarded as newspaper centre). However, due to the lack of quantitative research on the geographic distribution of media outlets, this study is based on qualitative assessments. As sources, a wide range of detailed single-state analyses were used (e.g. Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2009; Koltsova, 2006; Zhao, 2008).

*Centrality of the political system.* Like diversity, centrality is also measured on the polity level and the politics level. A typical variable for the measurement of centrality is the federalized or centralized character of the political system. Almost all studies in comparative politics measure these indicators in some way. Ismayr (2009), for instance, examines federalism and centralism at different points: the constitution, the parliamentary structure, the government and its executive offices, as well as regional and local political characteristics of one country. Derbyshire and Derbyshire (2000) combine these structural indicators in their analysis of each constitution. In contrast, Almond et al. (2008: 107) use the concept of 'geographic distribution of government power'. Knowledge of the distribution of power is especially fruitful if horizontal as well as vertical aspects are considered (Jahn, 2006: 73)

Following this, it is also necessary to consider the separation of power. Here, one can distinguish strict separation of power, partial separation of power and non-existing separation of power. Such classification often leads to the distinction between parliamentary and presidential political systems. This again helps to find out more about the real distribution of power. In this study, political systems are classified into parliamentary democracies, presidential democracies, semi-presidential democracies, parliamentary monarchies and partisan dictatorship. As sources, different data sets were used (e.g. Armingeon et al., 2008; Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2010; Marshall and Jagers, 2008).

*Tradition of the media system.* Considering tradition of a media system, this research project is orientated on the ideas of Stöber (2007) about the international comparison of historical periods. In his view not only technical inventions, but also their *social adaptation* must be recognized in any historical comparison. In this article, we argue that social adaptation can be measured by the year when a new type of media was implemented. This refers to the actual beginning of media content production. While it is relatively easy to determine the year of implementation for most of the media products (e.g. *The New York Times* started in 1851), it is much harder to identify a media product as first representative of a new type (e.g. newspaper, mass press, online media). Therefore, several historical sources had to be consulted and to be critically compared (e.g. Darling, 2008; Esser, 1998; Hans-Bredow-Institut, 2009).

*Tradition of the political system.* Measuring the tradition of a political system is executed by the use of historical data. In political science no definite categories exist for the systematic analysis of the development of a political system. Historical analysis most

often only serves as background to a study with another focus. Then, political, cultural, economic and social developments are illustrated in a mere encyclopaedic way. In contrast, this study is orientated on the work of Ismayr (2009), who concentrates on the historical development of national constitutions. This implies the possibility of finding definite indicators which allow one to draw connections to the media system of one country. As sources of information, the constitutions themselves as well as Breunig's (1994) data were used. In a qualitative procedure we double-checked the dates when the specific constitutions were ratified and when their fundamental rights were established and integrated.

## Hypotheses

The selection of dimensions and their operationalization required an extensive theoretical and qualitative analysis. At the end of this stage, working hypotheses can be formulated. Each dimension can be applied to the media as well as to the political system. For the generated specific indicators of one system, equivalents were found for the other system. Theoretical derivations of the interdependence (cohesion and covariance) of both systems (Hallin and Mancini, 2004) lead to the first and guiding hypothesis: *There is an interdependence between media systems and political systems (H1).*

Freedom of a political system is based to a great extent on civil rights and their enforcement. One sustaining element of freedom consists of the rights with regard to mass media and its democratic functions, such as freedom of speech, information and opinion. Freedom and liberty of both systems cannot exist independently of each other, as historical development shows (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). This leads to the second hypothesis: *Freedom of the media system and the political system positively correlate (H2).*

Diversity of a political system consists of a variety of opinions that can be articulated. Articulation in modern society consists of mass media. Diversity of the media system, to a certain extent, depends on rules and traditions of the political system. Hence, the third hypothesis follows: *Diversity of the media system and the political system positively correlate (H3).*

Centrality of a political system can be seen in the structure of a state and the distribution of power vertically and horizontally. When power is concentrated, then there is an obvious centre of power, such as in centralized countries with no federal structure. The media system depends on the political system because the political sets the legal framework and political elite supplies much news and content to mass media when addressing the public. Therefore: *Centrality of media system and the political system positively correlate (H4).*

Tradition as a dimension is connected to historical social developments of a nation and its media systems (Bastiansen, 2008; Hallin and Mancini, 2004). At the point when mass media were established and when they became entrenched in society, ancient structures and hierarchies were doubted and criticized. Only the invention of printing and the distribution of mass media allowed enlightenment and demand of liberties. *The tradition of the media system and the political system correlate in a way that the establishing of modern media was followed by major changes in the political system, such as the enforcement of civil rights (H5).*

**Table 1.** Freedom of the media system and the political system

State	Media system			Political system <sup>c</sup>						
	RSF rank <sup>a</sup>	FH rank <sup>b</sup>	Index	Freedom of press	Freedom of information	Freedom of opinion	No censorship	No occupational ban	Autonomy from state	Index
NL	7	8	8	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
DE	18	18	18	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
US	20	24	22	1	1	1	1	1	1	6
JP	17	37	27	1	0	1	1	0.5	1	4.5
MX	137	115	126	1	1	1	1	0.5	0	4.5
RU	153	174	164	1	1	1	1	0	0	5
CN	168	181	175	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Sources: <sup>a</sup> RSF (2009); <sup>b</sup> FH (2009); <sup>c</sup> Breunig (1994).

## Results

The following results should be regarded as preliminary. In some aspects, the sample may lead to predictable results. Still, the advantages of the research design outweigh the disadvantages. The composition of the sample allows applying the instrument to countries from all over the world. The instrument can be used to pretest the hypotheses formulated above and the findings can well guide a future large-*N* study. The pilot character is not a regrettable outcome but rather a sought and well-calculated one. Still, some results are surprising and may challenge researchers to build on them.

### Freedom (see Table 1)

Concerning media freedom, the Netherlands are outstanding due to their persistent top 10 position in FH and RSF rankings. Placed 8th on average – no other country in the sample reaches this. At the other end of the ranking, China is located, with an average index of 175. At first glance, the rankings of RSF and FH appear highly consonant. This synchronism was already observed in previous studies (LB Becker et al., 2007). However, here, Japan outperforms Germany and the US in the eyes of RSF. This is due to the fact that Japan, since 2005, rose from 42 to 17 in RSF rankings, while it remained stable in those of FH. According to RSF (2007), a decreasing number of attacks by militant nationalists on the media is responsible for this change. Such a development shows that it would also be interesting to investigate the relation between media- and political systems over time and extend this pilot study to a longitudinal analysis.

Freedom of the political system is at least formally guaranteed in almost all states in our sample: freedom of the press, freedom of information and freedom of opinion are all ratified constitutional laws. Yet, Japan does not guarantee freedom of information and can be seen as an exception in this respect. China does have constitutional paragraphs on fundamental rights. But in these same laws, these liberties are strictly limited. Media content that would argue against collective interests is strictly prohibited

**Table 2a.** Diversity of the media system: range of media products

State	Inhabitants (k) <sup>a</sup>	Newspaper titles <sup>a</sup>	Newspaper titles per m inhabitants	Newspaper copies (k) <sup>a</sup>	Newspaper copies per k inhabitants	TV channels (public/commercial/pay) <sup>b</sup>
US	303,825	1453	4.78	51,389	169	110 (1/92/17)
DE	82,217	358	4.35	20,079	244	82 (18/31/33)
MX	109,955	462	4.20	4,590	42	14 (2/6/6) <sup>c</sup>
RU	140,702	533	3.79	n/a	n/a	23 (7/10/6)
NL	16,405	35	2.13	5,309	324	31 (3/14/14)
JP	127,066	110	0.86	67,290	530	29 (5/22/2)
CN	124,612	1005	0.81	107,514	86	n/a

Sources: <sup>a</sup> WAN (2009); <sup>b</sup> IP (2008); <sup>c</sup> Gomez Garcia and Sosa Plata (2009).

Even though one can find ratified constitutional laws about human rights, the dichotomy of the variable (existing/not existing) does not allow any statement about the real enforcement and protection of these rights. This problem has also to be considered when examining the government's rights to sanction and influence the media. Therefore, it was necessary to qualitatively analyse the appropriate literature, such as extensive country reports (e.g. Andeweg and Irwin, 2009; Ismayr, 2009).

As expected, in China, legal status and reality do not even come close, while Russia and Mexico, both emerging states, seem to face the typical difficulties of transforming processes (Waisbord, 2007). Here, governmental influence exists, but it appears to be rather diffuse and inconstant. Additionally, both countries still have to cope with a relatively high level of corruption.

## Diversity

A first impression of media diversity can be gained by looking at the range of media products (see Table 2a). Here, the US is exceptional with the widest range: 1453 different newspaper titles circulate on the market and 4.78 titles per million inhabitants. In addition, 110 TV channels exist. Of these, one is broadcast by a public station, 92 by free commercial stations and 17 by pay-TV stations. However, the newspaper density in the US is lower than in Germany, the Netherlands and Japan. While copies per thousand inhabitants in the US numbers 169, the figure in Germany is 244, in the Netherlands 324 and in Japan 530.

Regarding the range of media products, Germany comes second behind the US. Interestingly, Japan has a rather low number of newspaper titles per million inhabitants (0.86) and it barely exceeds China (0.81). China offers a high number of newspaper titles in absolute terms. But in proportion to its number of inhabitants, China brings up the rear. Regrettably, there are no reliable data available at the moment to determine the circulation of newspaper copies in Russia or the number of TV channels in China.

It is worthwhile to compare Mexico and Japan directly: Mexico offers a relatively high number of newspaper titles per million inhabitants – 4.20 vs 0.86 in Japan. At the

**Table 2b.** Diversity of the media system: concentration of the media market

State	Daily newspapers <sup>a</sup>	TV channels <sup>b</sup>	Index of concentration
CN	10 ( <i>Cankao Xiaoxi, People's Daily, Guangzhou Daily, Qilu Evening News, Information Times</i> )	32 (BTV1, BTV4, CCTV6, CCTV 1, CCTV 3) <sup>c</sup>	21
US	13 ( <i>USA Today, Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Los Angeles Times, New York Daily News</i> )	33 (CBS, ABC, NBC, Fox, CW)	23
DE	27 ( <i>Bild, WAZ, Kölner, SZ, Rheinische Post</i> )	56 (ARD, ZDF, RTL, SAT1, PRO7)	42
NL	34 ( <i>De Telegraaf, AD, De Volkskrant, NRC Handelsblad, De Limburger</i> )	56 (NED1, RTL4, SBS6, NED2, NED3)	45
RU	n/a ( <i>Moskovsky Komsomolets, Komsomolskaya Pravda, Vechernyaya Moskva, Rossijskaya Gazeta, Trud</i> )	69 (Pervy, Rossiya, NTV, CTC, TNT)	
MX	27 ( <i>Esto, La Prensa, El Universal Grafico, El Universal, Reforma</i> )	94 (Televisa, Azteca) <sup>d</sup>	61
JP	41 ( <i>Yomiuri, Asahi, Mainichi, Nikkei, Chunichi</i> )	84 (NTV, CX, EX, TBS, NHK)	63

Notes: <sup>a</sup> Market shares of the five largest daily newspapers based on circulation (percentage). <sup>b</sup> Market shares of the five largest TV channels based on viewing time (percentage). <sup>c</sup> Referring only to the Beijing area due to lacking national data.

Sources: <sup>a</sup> WAN (2009); <sup>b</sup> IP (2008); <sup>c</sup> CMM (2009), <sup>d</sup> Gomez Garcia and Sosa Plata (2009).

**Table 2c.** Diversity of the political system

State	Political party system	Political parties in parliament	Political parties in government
NL	Multi-party	10	2 (CDA, CU)
JP	Multi-party	9	3 (DPJ, SDP, PNP)
MX	Multi-party	8	1 (PAN)
DE	Multi-party	5	2 (CDU, FDP)
RU	Multi-party	4	1 (United Russia)
US	Two-party	2	1 (Democrats)
CN	Single-party	1	1 (Communist Party)

Sources: Armingeon et al. (2008); Bertelsmann Stiftung (2010); CIA (2010); Marshall and Jagers (2008); Vanhanen (2000).

same time, it shows a very low newspaper density of 42 (Japan: 530). This means, a Mexican newspaper reader can benefit from a relatively wide range of different titles to choose from but there are far fewer copies available to him or her. Thus, in terms of newspaper diversity, Mexico seems to be better off than Japan.

Another rather surprising figure is the high number of pay-TV channels in Germany in comparison to the US. A possible reason for this finding might be that the German pay-TV market is still evolving and consolidation is in a relatively early stage, while in the US the pay-TV market is already highly concentrated.

The lowest media concentration (see Table 2b) was found in China and the US. Here, the five biggest companies hold only 21 and 23 percent, respectively, of average market share. Germany and the Netherlands are placed in the middle of the spectrum with almost equal figures, while Mexico and Japan show a relatively high level of concentration. In Mexico, the two broadcasters Grupo Televisa and TV Azteca form a duopoly. In Japan, the 'big five' newspapers *Yomiuri*, *Asahi*, *Mainichi*, *Nikkei* and *Sankei* dominate the market. Unfortunately, because of a lack of total circulation figures, it was impossible to calculate the market share for the Russian newspapers. However, it appears plausible that this country can be sorted between Germany and the Netherlands on the one hand, as well as Mexico and Japan on the other hand.

A well-developed diversity seems to be characteristic for the political systems of the Netherlands, Japan and Germany (see Table 2c). Especially, the party system in the Netherlands is extraordinarily pluralistic. The Dutch parliament counts 10 different parties. All three countries are governed by coalitions of democratic catch-all parties. In Japan, almost uninterruptedly for 54 years, the conservative LDP held the majority. Only for 10 months in 1994, was this constant power broken. Since the last general elections in August 2009, the government consists of a coalition of the Democratic Party, the Social Democratic Party and the People's New Party. Consequently, this pluralistic system shows a rather constant concentration of power.

The US differs from the other democracies because of its two-party system, which causes a polarization in politics and society. Russia and Mexico, both considered semi-presidential systems, have a multiple-party system, and in their parliaments, several parties are represented. However, here again, reality does not meet the formal criteria. The governing parties formally have democratic structures. In reality, they are not free from corruption and could be classified as parties of dignitaries.

While in Russia, a democratic process of political decision-making is hindered by the extensive power of the president, Mexico suffers from diffuse power distribution. In 2006, President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa was re-elected by a small margin of 244,000 votes. His challenger, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, doubted this outcome and contested the validity of the election. Ever since, the situation has been unstable and polarized. China represents the opposite end of the pluralistic spectrum. Political diversity simply does not exist and the system is defined as partisan dictatorship.

### Centrality (see Table 3)

In Japan and Mexico, most of the relevant daily newspapers and TV channels as well as their adjacent media outlets are centred in the nation's capital: Tokyo and Mexico City. To a lesser degree, this is also true for Russia and the Netherlands (Moscow and Amsterdam). However, these two countries have an additional second city (St Petersburg and Rotterdam/Hilversum) that can be regarded as newspaper/TV centre. As a matter of course, all four countries also offer a wide range of decentralized newspapers. The Netherlands, for instance, is home to the regional newspaper *Dagblad De Limburger*, which is one of the largest titles and is located in the southern periphery of the country. However, the *relative* majority of the relevant daily newspapers originates and is distributed from the above-mentioned centres.

**Table 3.** Centrality of the media system and the political system

State	Media system <sup>a</sup>			Political system <sup>b</sup>		
	Newspaper centre	TV centre	State	Powers	Government	Political centre
JP	1 (Tokyo)	1 (Tokyo)	Centralized	Partially separated	Parliamentary monarchy	Tokyo
MX	1 (Mexico City)	1 (Mexico City)	Federalized	Partially separated	Semi-presidential democracy	Mexico City
RU	2 (Moscow, St Petersburg)	1 (Moscow)	Federalized	Partially separated	Semi-presidential democracy	Moscow
NL	2 (Amsterdam, Rotterdam)	2 (Hilversum, Amsterdam)	Centralized	Partially separated	Parliamentary monarchy	Amsterdam/The Hague
CN	5 (Beijing, Chengdu, Hong Kong, Guangzhou, Shanghai)	1 (Beijing)	Centralized	No separation	Partisan dictatorship	Beijing
US	> 10 (New York, Los Angeles, etc.)	1 (New York)	Federalized	Separated	Presidential democracy	Washington, DC
DE	> 10 (Hamburg, Berlin, Munich, etc.)	> 10 (Munich, Cologne, Mainz, etc.)	Federalized	Partially separated	Parliamentary democracy	Berlin

Sources: <sup>a</sup> Authors' research and assessment; <sup>b</sup> Armington et al. (2008); Bertelsmann Stiftung (2010); CIA (2010); Marshall and Jagers (2008); Vanhanen (2000).

In China, daily newspapers and TV channels are agglomerated around the five major cities and metropolitan areas. In the US and Germany, media products and outlets are even more widely spread. Effectively, there are more than 10 newspaper centres. Germany differs from all other countries in the sample because it also has more than 10 TV centres. The federal structure of the broadcasting system in Germany causes the channels to be located all over the country. In sum, it can be noticed the national centre of economy is a preferred location for media products and outlets. However, the Dutch public TV centre Hilversum is exceptional.

The Netherlands, which appears to be politically pluralistic, is at the same time rather centralized: the 12 existing provinces are quite limited in independent policy-making (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009: 192; Lepszy and Wilp, 2009: 418, 440). In contrast to other European monarchies, the Dutch Queen enjoys continuous popularity. Yet, her influence appears diffuse: although she holds no formal political authority she meets with the prime minister weekly. Sometimes politicians even complain about her assumed interference (Andeweg and Irwin, 2009: 18). The pluralistic society remains represented by the plural party system. However, centrality in the Netherlands is not simply a geographical concentration of media production and political power at the same location.

This phenomenon can also be found in Japan, where political power and media production are concentrated in the nation's capital. Meanwhile, Russia and Mexico are federally organized. Therefore, no strict centrality can be identified. Russia's federalism is due to its many states with partly different cultural roots and languages. Such a country is hardly governed by a strict centrality. However, in Moscow a strong political influence in all parts of the country is obviously wanted and advocated. Germany and the US are least centralized. As outstanding appears the strictly enforced separation of power in the US. This separation of power is part of the system of checks and balances which was implemented to balance the occasionally strong power of the president. China is the most centralized nation. Unexpectedly, the media are not centralized in Beijing, the centre of political power. Perhaps there is no necessity to geographically control the media, since an absolute central control functions anyway within this partisan dictatorship.

### *Tradition (see Tables 4a and 4c)*

Germany has by far the oldest tradition of newspapers. Already in 1609, the first newspaper *Aviso* was published. In contrast, the first state TV was founded in Russia in 1938. All other categories are lead by media pioneer the US. There, the first penny-press title was sold. Also the first commercial TV broadcaster and the first online media were founded in the US. Remarkably, the first newspapers in China and Japan were established by foreigners. The British missionary Robert Morrison produced the first newspaper in China, while the US-American Joseph Heco did the same in Japan. Shortly after his engagements, Japan's press had already entered the era of mass media. It is rather difficult to define this period in China. There, the driving force was the party newspaper and mouthpiece of the government, *Remnin Ribao*. In the Netherlands, the era of mass press began when the newspaper tax was abolished in 1869.

Germany, the Netherlands and Russia first had public/state TV, commercial broadcasters entered the market later. The same can be said, at least to a certain degree,

**Table 4a.** Tradition of the media system: emergence of media types

State	Newspaper	Mass press	Public/state TV	Commercial TV	Online media
DE	1609 ( <i>Aviso</i> )	1883 ( <i>Lokalanzeiger</i> )	1952 ( <i>Das Erste</i> )	1984 (PKS)	1995 ( <i>Schweiner Volkszeitung</i> ) 1995 (NOS)
NL	1618 ( <i>Courante uyt Italien</i> )	1869 (Abolition of newspaper tax)	1951 ( <i>Nederland 1</i> )	1989 (RTL)	
US	1690 ( <i>Publick Occurrences [sic]</i> )	1833 ( <i>The Sun</i> )	1952 (NET)	1928 (W3XK)	1994 ( <i>Palo Alto Weekly</i> )
RU	1702 ( <i>Wedomosti</i> )	1908 ( <i>Gazeta Kopejka</i> )	1938 (MTVC)	1992 (TV 6)	1994 ( <i>Novaja Gazeta</i> )
MX	1722 ( <i>Gazeta de México</i> )	1895 ( <i>El Imparcial</i> )	1958 (Canal Once)	1950 (XHTV)	2001 ( <i>EL Universal</i> )
CN	1815 ( <i>Cha Shisu Meiyue</i> )	1948 ( <i>Renmin Ribao</i> )	1958 (Beijing TV)	1998 (TV reform)	1996 (CCTV)
JP	1861 ( <i>Kaigai Shimbun</i> )	1874 ( <i>Yomiuri Shimbun</i> )	1953 (NHK)	1953 (NTV)	1995 (TBS)

Sources: Authors' research and assessment.

**Table 4b.** Tradition of the political system

State	Constitution	Freedom of communication
US	1787	1791
NL	1983	1848
MX	1917	1917
JP	1946	1946
DE	1949	1949
RU	1993	1993
CN	1982	–

Source: Breunig (1994).

about China, where the TV reform in 1998 prepared the ground for an increasing profit-orientation of the state-controlled TV broadcasters. In the US and Mexico, the organization of TV developed the other way around. Here commercial broadcasters were followed by public service. In Japan, public and commercial stations arose at the same time. In China and Japan, broadcasting companies were the first to discover the internet for further activity, while in the other countries, the press appeared as early adopter. Mexico, however, remained a bit of a media laggard.

Undoubtedly, the US was the precursor in guaranteeing fundamental rights and liberties. Freedom of the press, freedom of information and freedom of opinion served as exemplarily laws for other constitutions worldwide. The Netherlands ratified these rights almost as long ago as the US. Yet, they enforced a major reform of their constitution in 1983, and therefore, there is a disruption in their constitutional tradition. In Germany and Japan such disruption took place after the Second World War. At its ending, democracy and fundamental rights were finally established, and they seem to have remained stable ever since. Mexico ratified its constitution after the revolution in 1917. Since this time, liberties have been part of the written constitution, but do not meet reality. China's constitution from 1982 is the fourth since 1949. Human rights are guaranteed, but must be regarded as a maculation. Therefore, the corresponding cell in Table 4b was left empty. Russia's constitution is the youngest of the sample. In 1993, after the fall of the USSR, the constitution was ratified and fundamental rights and liberties were integrated. Freedom of the press, freedom of information and freedom of opinion were mostly implanted in these countries' constitutions at the same time and they are summed up in Table 4b. Russian and Mexican dates for the implementation of the fundamental rights and liberties are italicized because the rights are formally guaranteed, but poorly enforced.

## Discussion and conclusion

Based on the results of this pilot study, definite conclusions about the relation between media- and political systems cannot be drawn. In order to formulate such conclusions, research has to be quantitatively broader and qualitatively more profound. The main purpose of this study was to test an instrument that quantitatively measures and qualitatively interprets the interdependence between media- and political systems. The theoretically established and empirically tested hypotheses should guide future research

projects. For the generation of such hypotheses, a pragmatic understanding of systems theory and the application of the four dimensions freedom, diversity, centrality and tradition proved to be fruitful.

Starting with the dimension of *freedom* we postulated a positive correlation between media- and political systems. This is also indicated in our data. There is a consistent synchrony between the FH and RSF indices, on the one hand, and the measures for the political system, on the other hand. One could argue that, in this context, there is no strict differentiation between media- and political system. This basic problem arises whenever systems theory is conferred onto an empirical research design. We admit that measures on both sides partly overlap. However, the RSF index, especially, deals with the reality of the media system, while the basic law reflects the political system. Therefore, one can state that political systems guaranteeing stable liberties also have a free media, while states limiting political freedom also limit the liberty of the media. Accordingly, hypothesis 2 should be maintained.

Concerning the dimension of *diversity*, we hypothesized a positive correlation. However, the data do not confirm this. Instead, they rather indicate the opposite. Japan and Mexico show high diversity in their political systems. Here, many parties are represented in the parliaments and, therefore, taking part in the process of political decision-making. Nevertheless, their media systems appear less diverse. At the same time, the US, which has a small political diversity within its party system, benefits from a large diversity on the media market. Consequently, one could tentatively assume that political diversity in free countries may render it difficult for the political system to strictly control the media market. Less pluralistic states may control the media market more easily. Here, diversity of the media market can be protected by the government. Perhaps, diversity in one of the two systems compensates for the missing plurality in the other. Therefore, hypothesis 3 should be rather discarded than maintained. Extended research should help to define the direction and intension of this correlation.

In terms of the dimension *centrality*, the assumed positive correlation is not clearly reflected in the data. Nevertheless, some countries show tendencies towards this direction. In Japan, the political system is strictly centralized and the media are geographically concentrated in the nation's capital, Tokyo. Also, Mexico's centres of political power, economic power and media production are located in the capital. In contrast, the US and Germany have neither a centralized media system nor a centralized political system. Looking at the totally centralized political system of China, one would assume the media system would be just as centralized. In fact, this is not the case, possibly because the absolute political ruling makes a geographical centrality of the media system redundant. Consequently, we should cautiously maintain hypothesis 4. Beyond that, we exploratively observed signs of a negative correlation between diversity and centrality. The reason for the US's and China's low, as well as Mexico's and Japan's high level of media concentration might be related to the decentrality and centrality of their systems, respectively.

Regarding the dimension *tradition*, theory and empirical data both hint towards a positive correlation between media- and political systems. Countries with a long historical tradition of liberties and freedom also show early activity in adopting new types of mass media. Obviously the US takes the role of a pioneer. This finding can be strengthened by

the analysis of the stability of the constitution and the political system it serves. For example, the 200-year-old constitution of the US was only 27 times modified, while Germany has a 60-year-old constitution that has been changed about 60 times. A long tradition of liberties and stability of such seem to correlate with the establishment of new types of mass media. Accordingly, hypothesis 5 should be maintained.

In sum, the hypotheses for three of the five dimensions should be maintained. The observed interdependencies can be interpreted in the sense of *covariance* as Deutsch formulates it, and therefore, the guiding hypothesis 1 could be confirmed. Whether, besides covariance, *cohesion* exists within this interdependence cannot be answered at this point. Definite statements about the causal directions cannot be made either. However, the hypothesis of an existing cohesion could be confirmed by a longitudinal analysis, maybe with a special focus on tradition. This way, perhaps even causalities could be identified.

This study offers several benefits to the field of international comparative research. First, it has introduced the theoretical background and an extendable instrument for describing and explaining the interdependence of media- and political systems. Second, the study has identified surprising structural commonalities and differences between the countries in the sample. This might be an impetus for more research activity in fields such as election campaigning or journalistic cultures. International commonalities and differences in these areas could be better understood. Future multilevel comparisons could benefit from the theoretical background of the four dimensions. Third, this study might assist in composing samples for international comparisons because it shows in which aspects of the four dimensions nations might be similar or different. This knowledge helps working with *most similar systems design* or *most different systems design*. Fourth, the combination of two methodological pillars may enhance the popularity of a primarily quantitative design supported by qualitative analyses.

An ideal subsequent study would be a large-*N* comparison with a special focus on the four dimensions: freedom, diversity, centrality and tradition. The instrument could even be extended to additional dimensions such as commerciality, stability, or participation. The study could refine the measures, especially for the dimension of centrality. Furthermore, it could include a longitudinal analysis. Such a project could verify, falsify, or qualify the hypotheses formulated and tested here. At the same time, it could fulfil Norris's (2004) demand to create a universal typology of media- and political systems. While the status of accessible and reliable data remains insufficient at the moment, the increasing popularity of international comparative research may finally lead to the creation of the required comprehensive database.

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## Notes

1. For Deutsch, cohesion is the direct connection between two units (A and B): if unit A is acting, unit B is directly affected. Cohesion, Deutsch (1974: 144) says, is 'related to causality'. In contrast, covariance means that both units transform depending on one another: if unit A changes, so does B. Hence, covariance is less intense than cohesion, and any cohesion by definition

- implies some sort of covariance. But, covariance does not automatically imply cohesion. Deutsch's concept can be applied to the media- and political system of any country, using a simple example. If unit A (the political system) by law prohibits the advertising of alcohol and tobacco, this action will influence unit B (the media system). In this case, we can speak about cohesion. If political system A changes from a communist regime to a democratic one, the media system B is likely to change as well. Here, covariance exists, which implies the transformation as an action of A. Combined, both phenomena constitute interdependence between two social systems and this interdependence can surely be of asymmetrical appearance.
2. The indices considered by Müller and Pickel (2007) are: the Bertelsmann Transformation Index, Polity Index by Jagers and Gurr, Freedom House Index, Index of Democratization by Vanhanen, Index of Defect Democracy by Croissant and Thiery, and Democratic Audit by Beetham.
  3. Recently, numerous studies have emphasized the role of spatiality in communication science (e.g. Althaus et al., 2009; Mersey, 2009; Sylvie and Hsiang, 2007). Koltsova (2006) exemplarily illustrated the importance of geographic (de-)centrality in the Russian media system.
  4. One would have to face the same problems for variables of voter participation and good governance.
  5. For the advantages of considering small states, see Puppis et al. (2009).
  6. We argue that, in terms of diversity, it is more relevant to answer the question how many different titles a newspaper reader can choose from than how many copies (regardless of the title) he or she can come into contact with.

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