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Today we are all conscious of living in the midst of a communications revolution. Over the past couple of decades there have been breathtaking advances in communications technologies and in the ways of applying them—a few short years ago no one could have foreseen the explosive growth of Facebook or Twitter. What is more, these kinds of innovations seem to be continuing at an accelerating pace. Today's young people have been born into a transformed world—they can hardly imagine what life was like before the emergence of the Internet and the cellphone. Even in poorer countries where Internet penetration is still limited or curtailed, cellphone use is growing by leaps and bounds.

In numerous ways, the new digital media are clearly transforming people's everyday lives. To take a personal, but I suspect not unrepresentative example, my own daily routine has been totally revolutionized by the advent of email. What used to be "office work" now follows us everywhere, even on vacation, with email as its instrument. It has undoubtedly brought huge gains in timeliness and efficiency, but it has also utterly changed the rhythm of our lives. Gone are the days when one could arrive at the office in the morning, have a cup of coffee while reading the newspapers, and wait for the postal service to deliver the mail. It would not be hard to draw up a long catalogue of the facets of human existence that have been changed by the Internet, ranging from professional activities like journalism and scholarly research to such intimate aspects of our lives as friendship and courtship.

The new media are also having an impact on politics and on democracy, but I would say it is still too early to know how fundamental or transformative that impact will be. During the halcyon post–Cold War decade of the 1990s, some cyberenthusiasts claimed that the Internet would dramatically alter the character of political life, that it would usher in a "borderless world" in which wired virtual communities would trump old-fashioned nation-states and horizontal networking would leave in the dust all hierarchical modes of organization. It quickly became apparent, however, that such a far-reaching transformation was not going to occur any time soon, as nation-states showed that they were quite capable of imposing real limits on the Internet. To date, in fact, the consequences of new media for political life have been less significant than those that have stemmed from the emergence and the now pervasive influence of television. Indeed, a case could be made that, even in recent years, the growth of satellite and cable television (a subject to which I will return) has been more politically consequential than any advances in digital media.

None of this is meant to deny that the new media have already had significant political effects, or that they are likely to have even more dramatic effects in the future. As is demonstrated by the use of new media during the recent Arab uprisings, these technological advances clearly have added effective new tools to the arsenal of people challenging authoritarian rule—even as their oppressors are hard at work seeking ways to use these same tools to thwart them.

The new technologies are also leading to changes in some aspects of the politics of democratic countries, notably political campaigning and fundraising. Above all, the new media are affecting the way in which public opinion is formed and transmitted. The growing popularity of online media in the long-established democracies is largely responsible for the decline in the readership and profitability of newspapers. While printed publications had managed to retain a key, if somewhat diminished, role despite the rising influence of broadcast media, their long-term ability to survive now seems to be in question. Still, it would be rash at this point to predict the demise of the newspaper, especially as circulation is still growing in other parts of the world, including in countries such as India and Brazil.

Indeed, it would be folly to presume to know along what path emerging communications technologies will take the media in the years ahead. But precisely because change is occurring so rapidly and the future is so uncertain, it is an especially appropriate moment to open a broader inquiry about the relationship between democracy and the media. This is a subject that has not received as much scholarly attention as might be expected, especially from political scientists and other students of democracy.[1] In the pages that follow, I offer some initial reflections about the relationship between democracy and the media, the ways in

which it has been addressed by some leading political thinkers in the past, and the changes that it has undergone with the progress of modern democracy and technology.

Representative Government and the Press

Democracy was born in the cities of ancient Greece, where there were no media in our sense of the word. These cities, to be sure, had poets, rhapsodes, dramatists, and rhetoricians, and the arts of spectacle and persuasion were refined to a high degree. But political discussion and debate in the Greek *polis* were carried out face-to-face in the popular assembly (*ekklesia*), which both made the laws and decided on all questions of public policy, including issues of war and peace. In part because democracy was understood as requiring the citizen body to assemble and deliberate in person—the Athenian assembly met on a single hillside called the Pnyx—this form of government was long considered feasible only in city-states. As late as the middle of the eighteenth century, such eminent political thinkers as Montesquieu and Rousseau contended that only very small polities could function as democracies.[2]

Modern democracy, by contrast, is based on the new principle of "the representation of the people in the legislature by deputies of their own election."[3] Representative democracy was born in the era of print media. The term "media" itself, of course, did not come into use until much later. For centuries people spoke instead of "the press," using a term describing the technology of printing to refer to various means of communication based upon the printed word. Today we think of this now-anachronistic term as referring primarily to periodicals and newspapers. But initially it also included books, as is still reflected in the names of contemporary publishing houses like the Oxford or Harvard University Press.

The great seventeenth-century battles in England in favor of the liberty of the press, waged by such towering figures as John Milton and John Locke, focused on the licensing of printers. As is clear from both Milton's public 1644 pamphlet *Areopagitica* defending "the liberty of unlicensed printing" and Locke's private 1695 memorandum opposing the renewal of the Licensing Act, the enemy of the freedom to publish was the ecclesiastical authorities as much as the state.[4] The Licensing Act, which was actually renewed by Parliament in 1692 *after* the Glorious Revolution but then allowed to lapse in 1695, was meant to forestall the publication of heretical and schismatic works as well as seditious or treasonable ones. The struggle to support the liberty of publishing was intimately connected to the great liberal project of the Enlightenment.

But Enlightenment-oriented support for a free press by no means implied a call for unfettered individual liberty, let alone for democracy. Among the early philosophic champions of the Enlightenment, only Spi-

noza explicitly linked freedom of expression to democracy: The final chapter of his *Theologico-Political Treatise* is entitled "That in a Free State every man may Think what he Likes, and Say what he Thinks," and Spinoza clearly indicates that democracy, as the "most natural form of government," is also the one best-suited to achieve this goal.[5] David Hume, by contrast, in his 1742 essay "Of the Liberty of the Press," argues that the freedom "of communicating whatever we please to the public" is particularly at home in mixed governments like that of Britain, as opposed to those that are "wholly monarchical" or "wholly republican."[6]

The extent to which support for liberty of the press was separable from support for democracy is apparent in what is generally considered the first law explicitly providing for press freedom—a 1766 Swedish royal "Ordinance Relating to Freedom of Writing and of the Press." It begins by noting "the great advantages that flow from a lawful freedom of writing and of the press," in that "an unrestricted mutual enlightenment in various useful subjects not only promotes the development and dissemination of sciences and useful crafts but also offers Our loyal subjects greater opportunities to gain improved knowledge and appreciation of a wisely ordered system of government." Though it abolished prior censorship, however, this royal Ordinance also affirmed severe legal penalties for publications that "contain blasphemy against God" or "disparaging opinions of Us and of Our Royal House."[7]

If we turn, however, to one of the earliest official North American affirmations of the principle of liberty of the press, an October 1774 letter from the First Continental Congress to the people of Quebec, we find very different political language and the inclusion of several political aims besides that of Enlightenment. The letter lists five rights "without which a people cannot be free and happy," beginning with the right of the people to have a share in their government through representatives of their own choosing. The inclusion of the fifth right, the "freedom of the press," is explained as follows:

> The importance of this consists, besides the advancement of truth, science, morality, and arts in general, in its diffusion of liberal sentiments on the administration of Government, its ready communication of thoughts between subjects, and its consequential promotion of union among them, whereby oppressive officers are shamed or intimidated, into more honourable and just modes of conducting affairs.[8]

The specifically political functions attributed to the press here include not only spreading "liberal sentiments" about government, but also facilitating communications as well as unity among the people and exposing and hence constraining the behavior of public officials. In the ancient *polis,* these latter functions would not have required written or printed media. But something like a free press is needed

to perform them if a people spread out over a large territory seeks to govern itself.

The idea of the large or "extended" republic is an eighteenth-century American political innovation that receives its first comprehensive articulation in the *Federalist* papers. Arguing against the traditional association of republics with small polities, the authors of the *Federalist* contend that by "extending the sphere" of republican government, one makes it less vulnerable to the dangers of faction and hence better able to secure the rights of its citizens: As James Madison puts it in *Federalist* 51, "the larger the society, provided it lie within a practical sphere, the more duly capable it will be of self-government." The sphere that Madison proposed to extend had to be, by its very nature, a "public sphere"—not in Jürgen Habermas's class-bound but high-flown sense of a rational-critical "bourgeois public sphere,"[9] but simply an arena in which self-governing citizens are able to discuss the political issues confronting them. And for this the press was indispensable.

Curiously, the *Federalist,* though it was itself originally published as a series of newspaper essays, has almost nothing to say about the role of the press. Even in a chapter devoted to refuting the objection that the Union would be too large for republican government, Madison stresses geographical factors such as the ability of representatives to assemble in the capital and points to prospective improvements in transportation rather than discussing the role of the press in facilitating communications among different parts of the country.

One early work by an eminent political thinker which explicitly makes this connection between freedom of the press and the large size of modern states is Benjamin Constant's *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments* (1810). Constant does not restrict his argument to democratic or even free governments. As he puts it, "In the large-scale polities of modern times, freedom of the press, being the sole means of publicity, is by that very fact, whatever the type of government, the unique safeguard of our rights." He notes that in ancient Rome a victim of injustice could display in the public square the wrong that was done to him. "In our era, however," Constant adds, "the vastness of states is an obstacle to this kind of protest. Limited injustices always remain unknown to almost all the inhabitants in our huge countries."[10] Only a free press can enable the people to be aware of the abuses that their governments may be committing.

Political Parties, Media, and Civil Society

The first serious and sustained analysis of the press's role in modern democracy of which I am aware is provided by Alexis de Tocqueville in his *Democracy in America*. Part One of the first volume of this work, which was published in 1835, deals with state and local govern-

ment and the three branches of the federal government established by the U.S. Constitution. Then, at the very beginning of Part Two of the first volume, Tocqueville asserts that, having examined America's institutions, written laws, and forms, he will now consider the sovereign power that stands above them all—that of the people. There follow three chapters devoted, respectively, to political parties, the press, and political associations.[11]

These three domains—today we generally refer to them as political parties, the media, and civil society—provide the channels through which the opinions of the people are formed and transmitted. They are not formally part of the government and go unmentioned in the U.S. Constitution, except insofar as the Bill of Rights prohibits the federal government from infringing upon the freedoms of press, association, petition, and assembly. Yet despite the subconstitutional or extraconstitutional status of parties, the media, and civil society, experience has shown that modern democracies cannot work without them and that they have profound effects upon the quality and sustainability of democracy. It is not surprising, then, that contemporary programs of international democracy assistance are to a great extent focused upon supporting democratic political parties, media organs, and civil society groups.

Why does the Constitution not explicitly recognize or provide for these three domains linking society with the state? There are several possible explanations. First, the central role that political parties would come to play was not anticipated—indeed, it would not have been welcomed—by the U.S. Founders. Second, parties as well as the press and political associations would have been regarded as belonging primarily to the private sphere rather than to the institutions of state whose structure and powers are laid down in the Constitution. Third, and related to this, is the fact that the institutions belonging to these intermediate realms are not necessarily meant to remain largely fixed, as are the institutions of the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government. In fact, the composition of the intermediate realms has undergone enormous change over time. New media organizations, political parties, and associations of all kinds are often created, and most old ones eventually pass away. As these three domains are interlinked, changes in one of them usually affect the other two. Moreover, alterations in the shape of the wider society inevitably have an impact on the character of these informal institutions.

This is especially true with regard to the media, which also are powerfully influenced by economic developments and by advances in technology. That, of course, is why the traditional term "the press" has been superseded by references to "the media," reflecting the transformative emergence of radio and television broadcasting (and now also the Internet) as leading channels for conveying news and opinion.

Though the term "media" was not widely used outside of advertis-

ing circles until recent decades, it was given official international status earlier than one might have expected. Article XIX of the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights makes no explicit mention of the liberty of the press, but states:

> Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers.

The rise of radio and television, however, also brought a new justification for governments to play an active role in overseeing the media. While anyone could build and operate a printing press without impinging on others, the limited nature of the broadcast spectrum meant that entry into this field had to be restricted. In many countries, broadcasting was established as a state monopoly. The United States, instead, maintained public ownership of the airwaves, but developed a licensing system to make frequencies available to private and commercial broadcasters. Thus democratic governments took on responsibilities for running or regulating the broadcast media that they had largely abandoned with respect to the printed press.

It is worth noting in this regard that the silence of the U.S. Constitution about the governance of the media is often not observed by more recent democratic constitutions. For example, Ghana's 1992 Constitution (which also includes a subchapter regulating political parties) contains a full chapter entitled "Freedom and Independence of the Media." This guarantees the freedom and independence of the media, but it also identifies responsibilities of the press, and it details the structure of a National Media Commission charged with overseeing the press and appointing the board members of state-owned media. The trend toward creating constitutionally authorized bodies to oversee the media deserves greater attention from students of constitutionalism. There is also a need for comparative study of how the various "commissions," "councils," and "authorities" established for this purpose in countries around the world have been performing.

Media Systems in Europe and the United States

Among the long-established democracies of Europe and North America, it is clear that there is significant variation in the character of the media, and that in all these countries it has experienced marked changes over time. As Paul Starr shows in his excellent 2004 study *The Creation of the Media,* in the United States the media developed quite differently than in Europe and underwent a number of transformations from the colonial era up through the twentieth century.[12] And as Daniel Hallin

and Paolo Mancini show in their book *Comparing Media Systems,* also published in 2004, the media have been structured along quite different lines in different areas of the Western world.[13]

One key variable that distinguishes media systems both across countries and over time is the way in which they interact with the related domains of political parties and civil society. American newspapers went from striving to be neutral among political points of view during the colonial era (when they were more dependent on government goodwill and revenue), to espousing a political line during the Revolution and its aftermath, to forging direct ties with political parties in the 1830s, to becoming increasingly independent toward the end of the century. The emergence in the first half of the twentieth century of the broadcast media, under the regulatory control of the federal government, provided further incentives for nonpartisanship.

In most European countries, by contrast, a more partisan press continued to flourish well into the twentieth century, before beginning to decline. Hallin and Mancini use the term "political parallelism" to describe "the extent to which the media system reflects the major political divisions in society." Among the most striking examples of this phenomenon they present are Denmark in the early twentieth century, "when each town had four newspapers, representing the four major political parties," and the Netherlands as late as the 1960s, where a long tradition of separate Catholic, Protestant, and Socialist publications was even incorporated into the public broadcasting system, with time on the public radio channels divided among groups linked to these communities. The latter pattern yields what Hallin and Mancini call "external pluralism," in which individual media organs represent the views of particular segments within the society, but the media system as a whole embodies a wide range of diversity. By contrast, countries where each of the leading media organs aims at balance and diversity within its own reporting are said to embody "internal pluralism."

Hallin and Mancini identify three broad models of media systems: 1) the "Polarized Pluralist Model" characteristic of Southern Europe, 2) the "Democratic Corporatist Model" of Northern Europe and German-speaking Central Europe (including Austria), and 3) the "Liberal Model" of the North Atlantic countries. They argue, however, that globalization and other factors are generating a worldwide convergence toward the Liberal Model. This is a model characterized by a politically "neutral" and commercial press, internal pluralism, information-oriented journalism, and strong professionalism. And indeed, that is the direction in which things seemed to be tending at the time that they wrote, with U.S.-style journalism at the height of its global prestige and increasingly making inroads in other parts of the world. Today, however, there are growing signs that this model is being eroded in the United States itself, partly as a result of new technologies. So if

the United States remains at the leading edge of media development, it may well be that the Liberal Model is not destined to supersede the others after all.

The Fading of the Liberal Model

I would argue that the Liberal Model reached its apogee in the United States during the last third of the twentieth century. In 1972, in my only previous venture into media analysis, I participated in a study of television news coverage of the Democratic Party's hotly contested presidential-primary elections. In those days the political influence of the half-hour evening news programs of the three commercial broadcast networks—CBS, NBC, and ABC—was enormous. Most Americans received their news from television, and these three programs played a key role in shaping the political agenda and the dynamics of election campaigns. The study in which I took part did not turn up significant differences in coverage among the three networks. In fact, they often seemed to follow one another's lead. But what our study did reveal was a kind of ongoing tension, even antagonism, between the candidates and the journalists.

The network news departments undoubtedly aimed at objectivity, although a case could be made that their sensibilities and worldviews broadly reflected those of the center-left portion of the establishment. But be that as it may, the antagonism between the candidates and the newsmen was mostly not a partisan or an ideological one. It came rather from the efforts of the reporters to fit what the candidates did and said into the dramatic themes or "narratives" that the journalists used to shape their news stories.

When candidates tried to put forward their policy views, the reporters typically either ignored them or interpreted their statements chiefly as efforts to improve their competitive position or to win over a particular group of voters. And when the newsmen asked questions of the candidates, these most often focused on why the latters' campaigns were doing worse or better than expected—with the expectations, of course, having first been established by the media themselves. The candidates were understandably frustrated at their inability to present their messages to the voters without having them filtered and often distorted. And the overall tendency of the coverage—its clear drift being to view the campaign mainly as a game or "horserace"—was plainly likely to foster a sense of cynicism among voters. In future years, of course, the candidates and their aides would become much more adept at "spin," but this only led the newsmen to make greater efforts to expose the insincerity of their claims, with results that were hardly more edifying.

During this period, the prestige of journalists soared, and the media not only put greater stress on their watchdog role in uncovering scan-

dal and malfeasance, but staked a broader claim to represent the people against the government in power. In a sense, the media sought to take upon themselves the role of the opposition, which had once been occupied by the party out of power. Of course, their proclaimed commitment to objectivity and nonpartisanship did not permit them to put forward alternative policy choices, but they did not shy away from efforts to set the political agenda. Although voices on both ends of the political spectrum attacked the "hegemony" of the mainstream media, this criticism largely failed to gain traction. The predominant understanding—and above all, the self-understanding—of journalists that emerged was of a noble caste of high-minded and objective professionals dedicated to taking the side of the people against incompetent or malign authorities in governmental and other institutions. This is the model that, propelled by the portrait of heroic journalists uncovering the Watergate scandal and driving a corrupt president from power, began to spread to other democracies.

Today, however, the situation is beginning to look very different, at least in the United States, with newspapers steadily losing circulation, partisan cable news shows gaining audiences at the expense of the networks, and the Internet and new media rapidly gaining more influence. The old self-confidence, even arrogance, of what some now label the "legacy" or "dinosaur" media is giving way to uncertainty and self-doubt. The new media heroes are bloggers and "citizen journalists." Many more voices, representing a much wider spectrum of views, are able to find their way into the public discussion. Politicians are experimenting with new ways of circumventing the major media outlets and more directly reaching the voters. For the moment, at least, the technological and economic trends that are driving these changes show no signs of being reversed. The result promises to be a much more diverse and pluralistic public sphere. In the context of U.S. history, one might even speak of a kind of return toward the more fragmented and partisan media landscape that prevailed in the nineteenth century, when newspapers were often highly and openly opinionated publications whose tone and approach could be compared to that of today's weblogs.

But as many observers, and not just members of the legacy media, are noticing, these developments, even if one regards them as positive in many respects, also have a significant downside. The media that dominated the latter half of the twentieth century had some significant virtues. They did encourage high standards of professionalism and genuine efforts at objectivity—qualities that are not as likely to be cultivated by cable-news pundits or amateur journalists using the new media. Moreover, the media of the late twentieth-century offered generally reliable sources of information and fostered an arena of public discourse that encompassed a wide range of citizens. There is reason to fear that the more fragmented media world now emerging will lead to ever more specialized niche audiences, and to citizens getting their information only from

sources that reflect their own predilections and political views. These concerns are prompting a new appreciation for an older but mostly forgotten function of the media in a democracy—bringing citizens together and giving them the sense that they are part of a common enterprise.

There is reason to think hard about what could be done to counter media tendencies that threaten to erode the shared civic arena essential to democracy.

As I stated at the outset, we cannot know where today's communications revolution will lead. My speculation that we are heading toward a more pluralistic but also more fragmented media environment, even if it is well founded, may reflect only a momentary trend. But if this trend continues to gain strength, it will pose some real dangers. So there is reason to think hard about what could be done to counter media tendencies that threaten to erode the shared civic arena essential to democracy. At the same time, reflection on the historical relationship between the media and democracy also cautions against excessive alarm. For this relationship has undergone many transformations over the centuries, and yet democracy has continued to survive and to prosper.

NOTES

1. Over the years, the *Journal of Democracy* has probably published fewer articles on the media than on any other key aspect or institution of democracy. This partly reflects the paucity of manuscripts on the media that have been submitted to us. My guess is that this may be related to the predominance of political scientists among our academic readers and contributors, since so much of the study of the media takes place in schools of communication or journalism. The latter have developed their own approaches, their own jargon, and their own journals. It is still somewhat puzzling, however, that political scientists do not devote greater attention to the role of the media. Perhaps this will change with the surge of interest in new media. It is notable that some think tanks now have full-time fellows who write primarily about issues related to the Internet and new communications technologies.

2. Montesquieu, *Spirit of the Laws,* bk. VIII, ch. 16; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Social Contract,* bk. III, ch. 15.

3. *Federalist* 9.

4. John Milton, *Areopagitica,* available at *www.dartmouth.edu/˜milton/reading_room/areopagitica.* John Locke's 1695 "memorandum" critiquing the proposed renewal of the Licensing Act may be found in Lord Peter King, *The Life of John Locke* (London: Henry Colburn, 1830), reprinted in Justin Hughes, "Locke's 1694 Memorandum (And More Incomplete Copyright Historiographies)," *Cardozo Arts & Entertainment Law Journal* 27, no. 3, *http://cardozoaelj.com/wp-content/uploads/Journal%20Issues/Volume%2027/Issue%203/Hughes.pdf.*

5. Spinoza, *Theologico-Political Treatise,* trans. R.H.M. Elwes (New York: Dover, 1951), ch. 20.

6. David Hume, "Of the Liberty of the Press" (1742), reprinted in Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), *http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_speechs2.html*.

7. King Adolphus Frederick, "His Majesty's Gracious Ordinance Relating to Freedom of Writing and the Press" (1766), trans. Peter Hogg. Available at *http://rtieng.wordpress.com/2011/07/29/the-worlds-first-freedom-of-information-act*.

8. "Continental Congress to the Inhabitants of the Province of Quebec" (26 October 1774), reprinted in Philip B. Kurland and Ralph Lerner, eds., *The Founders' Constitution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), *http://press-pubs.uchicago.edu/founders/documents/amendI_religions20.html*.

9. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991).

10. Benjamin Constant, *Principles of Politics Applicable to All Governments* (1815), trans. Dennis O'Keeffe, ed. Etienne Hofmann (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2003), bk. VII, ch. 3, 110–11. See also ch. 4, 112.

11. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans., ed., and with an introduction by Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

12. Paul Starr, *The Creation of the Media: Political Origins of Modern Communications* (New York: Basic, 2004).

13. Daniel C. Hallin and Paolo Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).