

Great expectations: Elites' democratic demands on the media

Nicklas Håkansson¹
Eva Mayerhöffer²

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¹ Centre for the Study of Politics, Communication and Media, Halmstad University: Nicklas.Hakansson@hh.se

² Institute for Media and Communication Studies, Free University in Berlin: eva.mayerhoeffer@fu-berlin.de

Introduction

Undoubtedly, democratic ideals are central when discussing political communication culture.³ In democratic societies these ideals are embedded in the professional norms of both media and political elite actors. Today there is greater consensus than ever on the core of the democratic ideals pertaining to the media, even on a global scale: we acknowledge the need for freedom of speech and of the press, the significance of transparency of the political processes, and the value of informed citizens.

Some of the ideals concern the system itself: the legal and financial conditions, for example, should facilitate an open exchange of ideas and information. Some ideals are to be regarded as rules of conduct for the actors: politicians are expected to put forth their ideas and proposals in public, citizens are expected to be interested in political matters at least to some degree, and we are all responsible for getting informed about the issues at stake in the public debate.

The media is often singled out as a particularly important institution in a democracy. Considering the media's double role as a political actor of its own as well as an arena providing space for other voices in the public sphere, it is obvious that normative demands concerning its role in a democratic society can and should be posed on the media. When we ask what kinds of tasks the media need to perform in order to fulfil democratic norms we usually get general answers like providing true and relevant information, facilitating debate, scrutinizing and investigating power holders.

In this paper we focus on how pivotal democratic media principles are perceived by media and politics elite actors in nine European countries. Political decision makers and journalists are of particular relevance in our study due to their evident roles as counterparts in the public sphere. The performance norms acknowledged by the journalists form the backbone of their professional roles and standards of conduct. The perceptions of politicians are also

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of interest due to their power over the media system, as their norms and views on the media are likely to influence their media policy actions as legislators and power holders. The joint attitudes of journalists and politicians make up the lion's share of what we with Pfetsch (2003; 2008) consider to be the political communication culture of a country. While journalists and politicians are the two central elite groups who make up this communication culture, in this paper we also include a third group, namely the political consultants and/or spokespersons of politicians. Depending on context the members of this group sometimes embody the function of representatives of politicians in their contacts with the media, while in other circumstances they form a more independent intermediary between political decision-makers and journalists.

By including the three central groups in political communication this study will provide a broader picture on the how elites view the roles of the media. In contrast to what is the case for journalists, which have been surveyed for their perceptions and attitudes concerning their professional roles in several studies (see for example Donsbach & Patterson 2004; Weaver 1998, 2007), we have considerably less information on the normative ideas about the media on the part of politicians and spokespersons.

In the analysis below we will explore the support among the elite actors in journalism and politics for the idea that the media have an obligation to enhance and strengthen democracy. The central objective of the study is to find out if and how this support varies with factors such as media/political system of their respective countries, and in addition, for politicians whether their political affiliations and beliefs are of importance, and for journalists the characteristics of their media organisations. Before going into this possible variation and its causes, it is necessary to somewhat discuss theoretical foundations for the democratic norms and ideals in question. As a starting point for this study, we concentrate on the question "What democratic ideal(s)?" since there is reason to believe that the expectations we have on the media concerning their democratic roles are determined by the kind of general democratic ideals we have.

Representative and participatory democratic ideals

Of course, democracy is not, and has never been, a single, coherent ideal. Democratic theorists distinguish a number of different models, and sub-models, of democracy (see for example Held 1996). Each of them emphasizes different ideas, values and prerequisites. For the purpose of this paper, we argue that it is fruitful to single out two broader democratic ideals sharing some essential core values. A common denominator is that a democracy features some basic institutions such as freedom of speech and association, free and fair elections, equal rights to participate, and the rule of law (Dahl 1989, Rohrschneider 1994, 1996). Furthermore is required that the democratic procedures are respected and followed correctly and that there is room for pluralist competition for power. Sometimes these preconditions are summarised as a basic democratic model in its own right; a procedural or minimalist democracy (Barry 1979; Strömbäck 2005). The role of the citizens in this ideal is rather restricted: their main power rests in their ability to replace rulers if there is enough dissatisfaction with them. Critics of this model claim that this democracy is very 'thin' due to its relative absence of popular involvement, and its focus on elites in the decision making process (Dahl 1989, Premfors 2000; see also Barber 1984).

Although these basic democratic preconditions usually assume a representative political system, little is said about the relation between the citizens and the elected. An *electoral - representative* ideal puts particular emphasis on just this relation, while it acknowledges all of the general preconditions above. It underscores that different interests in society are channelled through elections in which individuals are chosen to represent the people, in order to give them fair and accurate influence over common affairs. Not only should the elections produce a representative government in the name of the people, the elected officials should represent certain qualities in the population (demographic or social traits, attitudes etc). Where substantive representation has to do with active advocacy of the representatives on behalf of the represented, the idea that societal group characteristics should be mirrored in the legislative assemblies is known as descriptive representation (see for example Pitkin 1967; Jewell 1985:97-99).

A *participatory* ideal would likewise concede to the basic principles of procedures, but has a strong focus on citizen activity and involvement in the democratic process. Even though the

real-life framework may be a representative system, the most important is that politics is made *by* the people themselves and not *for* them by someone else. Furthermore, the participatory ideal holds that democracy is more than a governing technique, it is also a spirit and an ethos which should be nurtured and encouraged (see for example Barber 1984; Putnam 2000; Strömbäck 2005:336).⁴ Defined this way participatory democracy may be regarded as a complement or an extension of electoral/representative democracy, although the two models are also sometimes perceived as opposed to and incompatible with each other.

Henceforth we will argue that individuals have a set of democratic demands on the media, out of which some are more compatible with an electoral- representative model, while others better fit a participatory model of democracy.⁵ It is an open question for this analysis whether the studied elite actors differ in the democratic demands they place on the media according to a pattern consistent with the respective ideals.

Democratic ideals and demands on the media

The general democratic ideals sketched above have implications for how we judge the media and what normative demands we expect the media to satisfy. A common way of addressing normative demands on the media is to start by surveying which functions the media fulfil or ought to fulfil in society.⁶ In the social responsibility notion of the press, a brainchild of the so called Hutchins commission in the USA in the 1940s and later developed by Siebert et al in their *Four Theories of the Press* (1956), the main performance standards for the media were listed. Three of them can be summed up as functions of information access and quality: to “provide a full, truthful, comprehensive and intelligent account of the day’s events”, “presenting and clarifying the goals and values of society”, and “reaching every member of society”. A fourth function is to project “a representative picture of the constituent groups in

⁴ The literature on different democratic ideals and models is indeed immense. For this study we have found the following works useful as general references: Held 1996/1987; Dahl 1989; Schumpeter 1976/1942; Pitkin 1967; Manin 1997; Barber 1984; Pateman 1970; Premfors 2000.

⁵ Hereby we do not exclude other ideas or values pertinent to democracy; for example, democracy theorists often distinguish deliberative democracy as a model separate from the two discussed in this paper.

⁶ The term ‘function’ may imply a functionalist perspective, i.e. an attempt to explain a phenomenon (in this case media performance) in terms of needs or requirements of groups or individuals that the media fulfil. However, in the literature on media functions, the term ‘function’ often refers to more general descriptions of what the media actually do in society, or, as in this paper, as norms of media performance.

the society” while the fifth and last calls for the media to “serve as a forum for the exchange of comment and criticism” (Commission on freedom of the press 1947:20-29).

Media theorists and inquiries have subsequently amended or reformulated the list, but the central ideas are relatively constant. We argue that they can serve as a starting point for outlining particular obligations, or demands, which the media are expected to fulfill; demands that correspond to the ideals of democracy sketched above. First, the *transparency of politics* should be seen as a bottom line to the different theoretical concepts of normative media functions. According to this demand the media should work actively to make political processes visible and easy to follow and understand (Neidhardt 1994). From a theoretical point of view we should expect endorsers of even a minimal definition of democracy to recognize the need for citizens to have a chance to keep an eye on the doings of the political elite (Baker 2002:256). It is of crucial importance that political processes are transparent, as this provides the possibility to monitor that basic democratic principles are upheld in the political processes. Insofar as the media constitute the primary lens for citizens to use for this purpose, we would expect the media to contribute to transparency. To promote transparency, it can be argued, is to facilitate the basic function of providing accurate information, at the same time as we lay the foundation for another embraced journalistic role: the *watchdog* (see for example Norris 2000:28-30).

While the demand for transparency is a key element of any democratic ideal, it can be argued that both the representative and the participatory democratic ideal set off additional demands on the media. As noted above, a representation ideal stresses the reflection of certain qualities of the electorate in the elective bodies. Transferring this idea into the domain of the media functions, we argue that the descriptive (proportional) representation, that is, the reflection of the citizenry in the decision-making institutions corresponds to the manifestation in the media report of citizens and different collectives. An “accurate” reflection of groups that make up society (in a broad sense: e.g. ethnic groups, classes, gender) in proportion to their occurrence in ‘real life’ would thus be consistent with a fair and proportional representation of different groups. The *proportional representation* demand relates closely to the similarly phrased function of the Hutchins commission (see above), but also to the general principle of media diversity where reflection of reality is one

out of several norms (McQuail 1992:144; 2000: 170-71; Jacklin 1978; Ferree et al 2002: 207; see also Thomass 2003:29-30)⁷.

When starting from a participatory ideal, in contrast, it is clear that the traditional media functions will not suffice for our demands on the media. It is not the mere provision of information, but the media's ability to stimulate and encourage people to learn about society and politics and to take an active part in the democratic processes of society that counts. Additions that have been made to the media functions list often calls attention to this need. Norris (2000:29-35) makes a plea for a mobilizing role of in particular news media (see also Weaver et al 2007; Strömbäck 2005:340). This role easily translates into an *empowerment* demand for the media to supply a content that makes us citizens knowledgeable, interested and motivated enough to attain the power we are entitled to (Ferree et al 2002: 212-13).

In the following we will regard transparency, proportional representation and empowerment as democratic demands on the media which cover principles that should be central to those who embrace two major democratic leanings, the electoral-representative and the participatory, respectively. We ask the question to what extent the elites in political communication pose these demands, and whether there are differences between groups and countries in the support for the same.

For this purpose we use the survey data gathered in the framework of the research project *Communication Cultures in Western Europe*.⁸ All in all 2,499 respondents were surveyed in nine European countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The respondents were divided in three professional groups reflecting the three main elite actors of the national political communication scene: 1) the

⁷ According to McQuail (2000:171) the other diversity requirements are equal access (the chance for many to have a voice in the media), a forum role allowing different opinions to meet and diverge, and relevant choices of content. On a more general level, the demand to proportionally represent groups can also be regarded as pertaining to the truth claim: to give an accurate account of reality.

⁸ The survey consisted of mostly standardized questions with 5- scale alternatives, which were translated into all national languages. The national surveys were carried out from April 2008 to April 2010. A mix of survey modes were used; the main ones being telephone (CATI) interviews, online or mailed questionnaires and face-to-face-interviews. For more details on the survey and other methodological issues see Pfetsch, Maurer & Mayerhöffer (2009) as well as Pfetsch (ed, forthcoming 2011).

political decision makers of the government (cabinet ministers, secretaries of state), of the *parliament* (chairs/vice chairs of standing parliamentary committees, designated party spokespersons for policy areas) and of the main *parties* (party chair/vice chair, members of the governing board/executive committee, party secretaries); 2) the political *media elite* consisting of editors-in-chief, heads of political/current affairs sections in main national newspapers, heads of newsdesks in national radio and television, and political reporters, and commentators in leading newspapers, radio and television, news agencies and online news outlets in each country; and 3) spokespersons and/or communication consultants employed by or associated with the political decision makers.

Do journalists and politicians differ in their democratic demands on the media?

The study starts out with the question whether the three elite groups in political communication – politicians, journalists, and spokespersons – differentiate themselves in the degree to which they pose democratic demands on the media. To determine what the elite actors expect of the media in democratic terms, we asked our respondents whether they agree to three statements concerning different democratic demands that may be posed on the media. On a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) they were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed that

- a) in a democracy, the most important task of the media is to make political decisions transparent to citizens (*transparency*),
- b) a democracy can only function when in media coverage the different groups in society are represented in a proportional manner (*representation*),
- c) democracy works best when the media puts citizens in a position to participate themselves in the political process (*empowerment*).

In table 1 the results are summarised. We expect the demands posed on the media to be of a consensus character, where difference in support is likely to be a question of degrees rather than of absolutes.⁹ We would in any case anticipate few voices *against* the media facilitating democracy in one way or another. Therefore we focus on the extreme alternative where the respondents strongly agree to the three statements a-c.

⁹ This distinction resembles the division between *position issues* and *valence issues* made by Stokes (1963).

Table 1. Support for three democratic demands on the media by professional group (percent who strongly agree + means).

	Transparency		Representation		Empowerment	
	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdv)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdv)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdv)
Journalists	69.8	4.57 (.78)	23.0	3.30 (1.32)	51.4	4.24 (.97)
Politicians	55.4	4.45 (.73)	19.2	3.37 (1.19)	42.3	4.13 (.95)
Spokespersons	55.6	4.40 (.81)	19.7	3.28 (1.26)	35.7	4.00 (.99)
Total (mean)	62.7	4.50 (.77)	21.2	3.32 (1.27)	45.8	4.17 (.97)
Lowest n	397	2448	378	2386	397	2440
Cramer's v	.120***		.069**		.093***	

Note: significance on * .05 , ** .01 and ***.001 levels. n/s= not significant on .05 level

Table 1 provides us with several pieces on information on the media demands in question: First, a clear hierarchy appears. Transparency is the most embraced of the three demands in all professional groups. On average, nearly three out of four journalists and a little above half of the politicians strongly agree that providing transparency is an important task for the media. The empowerment demand draws somewhat lower support, although here too, around half of the respondents indicate that they agree strongly. Proportional representation shows the lowest scores by far. Less than one out of four of the journalists and around one-fifth of the politicians strongly believe that different groups in society should be represented according to their importance. Nevertheless, even this least agreed upon issue shows an overall mean score on the positive side (3.32 on the 5 point scale).

When looking specifically at respondents who strongly agree to the respective demands, we find significantly higher agreement among journalists compared to politicians, while the levels of agreement for spokespersons generally resemble those for the politicians. The greatest difference between professional groups is to be found for the question of transparency. A possible interpretation is that this particular demand evokes feelings of being under scrutiny among politicians, while at the same time journalists connect transparency with the – for political journalists – central watchdog role. It should be noted,

though, that a majority of politicians and spokespersons agree strongly to this demand as well. Also, when we compare the means scores for the three elites the differences more or less disappear (between group differences in means for transparency=+0.17; representation=-0.07 and empowerment=+0.24). Thus we conclude that despite a weak tendency for journalists to be more supportive than politicians and spokespersons, there is a general consensus on the merits of democratic media demands among European media and political elites.

Bringing the question of group differences down to the country level (table 2) does not alter our conclusions. Journalists and politicians show their greatest disagreement on the transparency demand, where differences are significant in six out of nine countries. The representation demand provides only two significantly differing scores (for Germany and Slovenia), while no statistically significant differences are found for empowerment. Germany stands out somewhat as the country with the highest combined discrepancy between politicians and journalists.

Table 2. Differences of support for survey alternative “strongly agree” between journalists and politicians (percentage points).¹⁰

	Transparency		Representation		Empowerment	
	<i>Diff journ – pol</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Diff journ - pol</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Diff journ - pol</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Austria	+23	**	-5	<i>n/s</i>	+9	<i>n/s</i>
Denmark	+9	<i>n/s</i>	+9	<i>n/s</i>	+18	<i>n/s</i>
Finland	+23	**	-2	<i>n/s</i>	+11	<i>n/s</i>
France	+7	*	-2	<i>n/s</i>	+13	<i>n/s</i>
Germany	+23	***	+17	**	+13	<i>n/s</i>
Slovenia	+9	<i>n/s</i>	+11	**	+5	<i>n/s</i>
Spain	+7	<i>n/s</i>	-3	<i>n/s</i>	+13	<i>n/s</i>
Sweden	+17	**	+6	<i>n/s</i>	+3	<i>n/s</i>
Switzerland	+11	**	+1	<i>n/s</i>	+2	<i>n/s</i>
[mean]	+16		+5		+8	

Note: weighted by professional group. Positive values= higher values for journalists, negative values, higher values for politicians. Significance on * .05 , ** .01 and ***.001 levels. *n/s*= not significant on .05 level.

¹⁰ In the country comparative analyses a weight variable has been introduced to control for the varying proportions of professional groups between countries.

Explaining differences: do context factors matter?

As stated above, one of the objectives of the study is to get a better understanding of factors that can explain the varying degrees to which the elite actors agree to the democratic demands on the media. The results reported in table 1-2 show that the studied demands on the media are fairly uncontroversial. Elites are generally in favour of strong democratic demands on the media. Nevertheless we believe there is systematic variation in the strength of those demands. For that reason we introduce explanatory factors on three levels:

- Democratic demands on the media may vary due to political and media system factors.
- Democratic demands on the media may vary due to the organisational environment the individual works within.
 - political parties with different ideological outlooks which may affect their norms concerning the media in democracy.
 - type of medium, especially whether public service or commercial
- Democratic demands on the media may, finally, vary due to personal political ideas, occupational background, gender, etc.

The nine countries of our study all show similarities in many respects. They are all European stable democracies which place themselves among the most affluent societies in the world. Unlike for example the United States, they are (mostly) representative parliamentary multiparty systems. However, there are differences in media and political systems that can be relevant for our research questions.

Media system factors

The status of public service media in a society may influence the level of adherence to the different democratic demands on media. As public service media have been established to strengthen and uphold democratic ideals of the public sphere, we may expect higher levels of support for the idea that the media have a crucial democratic function in systems where public service plays an important role, as opposed to systems where public service media have a less prominent position. All countries in the study have public service broadcasting organisations on a national level which play an important part in the public sphere. All our

three media demands are also fairly well incorporated in the professional ethos of journalists as well as in various national regulations for the media in Western Europe (see for example Kevin et al 2004; Donsbach and Patterson 2004:251; McQuail 2000), while at the same time the countries in question experience a tendency toward media commercialization (Hallin & Mancini 2004). Nevertheless there are notable differences. Hallin & Mancini (2004) differentiate between on the one hand a *polarized pluralist* political communication model characterized by a high politicization of press and public broadcasting, as well as a high degree of state interventions in the media sector, combined with a relatively weak professionalization of the media sector; and on the other hand a democratic *corporatist model* distinguished by less politicized newspapers and more independent and less regulated public service media.¹¹ The former model is typical of Mediterranean nations, while the latter is to be found in many Northern European countries. Pfetsch, Maurer & Mayerhöffer (2008) elaborate on this division by making a distinction within the Northern European group, based on the fact that the Nordic countries (e.g. Denmark, Finland, Sweden) have public service media organisations more detached from government and less susceptible for political pressures, as compared to a German-speaking group (Austria, Germany, Switzerland) (Pfetsch, Maurer & Mayerhöffer 2008; Hallin & Mancini 2004:165-170; Donsbach & Patterson 2004).

A tentative assumption would be that we find stronger emphasis on the democratic demands in countries where strong and independent public service media operate, thus in particular in the Nordic countries, followed by the German-speaking group, with the Mediterranean countries (France, Slovenia, Spain) as the bottom group.

Political system features

Since the focus of our study lies on similarities and differences concerning values related to representative and participatory models of democracy it is of particular interest to look into the extent to which elements of direct democracy are practiced in our otherwise representative democracies. A wider use of referendums, popular initiatives, etc in the decision-making processes within a political system may contribute to higher support of

¹¹ The last model, *the liberal*, to be found in particular in the USA and to some extent in Britain, is of less relevance in this paper, since

participatory values among both politicians and journalists, and thus a corresponding demand on the media. In particular Switzerland distinguishes itself with a wide use of referendums on national as well as regional and local levels (LeDuc 2002; 2003; Petersson 2009; Kriesi 2005), but the spectrum of available direct-democratic modes of participation also varies between the other countries under study. In Slovenia and Denmark, citizens have at least partly the possibility of initiating national referendums, while in France, Spain, Austria and Sweden, direct-democratic procedures exist but are essentially plebiscitary in nature and/or very seldom used. Finally, in Finland and Germany, there are hardly any traces of direct-democratic procedures at the national political level (Gross and Kaufmann 2002).

Table 3 reports the aggregate scores for each country concerning strong support for transparency, representation and empowerment, as well as the country means for each media demand.

Table 3. Support for three democratic demands on the media by country (percent who strongly agree + means).

	Transparency		Representation		Empowerment	
	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)
Austria	71.0	4.66 (.62)	20.5	3.38 (1.24)	48.8	4.15 (1.02)
Denmark	64.1	4.53 (.73)	19.5	3.20 (1.32)	36.3	4.02 (.99)
Finland	66.7	4.61 (.63)	14.9	3.07 (1.25)	37.7	4.14 (.85)
France	39.9	3.99 (1.11)	20.3	3.29 (1.31)	51.2	4.33 (.85)
Germany	74.6	4.70 (.60)	30.1	3.72 (1.17)	48.3	4.14 (1.05)
Slovenia	58.3	4.43 (.80)	24.5	3.37 (1.35)	42.0	4.07 (.99)
Spain	62.8	4.52 (.72)	12.6	3.16 (1.11)	55.5	4.34 (.94)
Sweden	49.8	4.35 (.79)	8.2	2.72 (1.18)	36.8	3.98 (1.02)
Switzerland	76.3	4.71 (.58)	38.5	3.90 (1.13)	54.4	4.31 (.93)
Mean	62.7	4.50 (.77)	21.2	3.32 (1.27)	45.8	4.17 (.97)
Lowest n	168	2448	165	2386	168	2440
Cramer's v	.231***		.213***		.144***	

Note: analysis weighted for professional group. Lowest n. Cramer's V computed for dichotomy "strongly agree" versus not "strongly agree" .

Country variations appear to be greater as compared to the group differences reported above. Two extreme cases emerge: On the one hand Switzerland, where support is highest for both transparency and representation, and second (after Spain) for the empowerment demand; and on the other hand Sweden, which shows the lowest level of strong support for the three demands taken together. In Germany, and to a lesser extent also in Austria and Slovenia, elites tend to feature high agreement with the media demands, whereas Denmark and Finland join Sweden to form a low-support group, with below average support on the three items in question. Spanish elites are also less inclined than others – Sweden excepted – to expect the media to contribute to transparency and to feature proportional representation, while Spain has the highest support among all countries for the empowerment demand.

Having noted these patterns of country differences it is also important to emphasize the general consensus we find. Just as assumed, transparency is a highly embraced demand, which is very hard to argue against.¹² The same is true for empowerment, although the support turns out to be somewhat lower. Proportional representation, on the other hand, is a less self-evident quality in the media report, on which there is greater diversity among the respondents (as indicated by the higher levels of standard deviation).

To conclude the findings reported in table 3: Country differences are most evident when it comes to proportional representation. Here it is possible to interpret the pattern as a Nordic exceptionalism insofar the Nordic elites consistently give less support to the idea that the media accurately should represent groups in society. As the standing of public service media is relatively strong in all three Nordic countries, the results are contrary to the expected. Results for the countries with comparatively weaker and less independent public service media, as France and Spain are at best mixed. On the other hand, the strong support for democratic demands on the media from Swiss elites, journalists and politicians alike, is in line with our assumptions. The remaining countries – between which differences in direct-democratic modes of participation are less pronounced – however do not differ consistently according to their degree of direct-democracy on the system level.

¹² All in all, only 71 respondents out of 2499 express that they disagree (strongly or to some extent) with the idea that the media should make political decisions transparent.

Meso-level factors: media organisations and political organisations

Moving down from the macro level to the organisational context, we identify the divide between publicly and privately owned/controlled media organisations as one organisational factor with possible importance for the democratic media demands of journalists. Although a ‘public service ethos’ can be expected from professional political journalists regardless of their employment, we expect journalists working in public service TV or radio with explicit goals concerning their role in contributing to a democratic public sphere to express stronger devotion to democratic media demands than their privately employed colleagues. A comparison between public and private media journalists is found in table 4.

In general, the only difference worth noting is found for representation. Public service journalists hold the value of representing groups proportionally higher than privately employed journalists. The result is not repeated for all eight countries, but is quite pronounced in half of them: Austria, Germany, Slovenia and Switzerland. The remaining two demands concerning transparency and empowerment only occasionally diverge with the type of media organisation. One example in this respect is Spain, where publicly employed journalists stress the empowerment value more than their colleagues in private media. However, there are no overall significant differences for the two items.

Table 4. Journalists’ support for three democratic demands on the media by status of media organisation (percent who strongly agree).

	Transparency			Representation			Empowerment		
	PUB	PRIV	sig	PUB	PRIV	sig	PUB	PRIV	sig
Austria	85.5	79.3	n/s	27.4	14.1	*	51.6	56.0	n/s
Denmark	72.7	66.1	n/s	20.0	27.3	n/s	40.9	45.0	n/s
Finland	79.2	76.3	n/s	12.5	14.7	n/s	39.1	45.5	n/s
France	56.2	40.2	n/s	25.0	18.8	n/s	75.0	55.4	n/s
Germany	93.7	79.4	**	50.0	26.4	**	58.2	48.1	n/s
Slovenia	81.2	62.4	*	44.7	23.1	**	58.0	42.5	n/s
Spain	62.2	62.3	n/s	11.4	11.3	n/s	83.3	50.9	**
Sweden	55.8	59.8	n/s	16.7	7.4	n/s	38.5	39.6	n/s
Switzerland	82.4	84.1	n/s	50.0	33.0	*	60.8	53.3	n/s
[mean]	77.7	69.1		32.9	19.8		55.7	48.4	
Lowest n	24	53		24	53		23	53	
Cramer’s v		n/s			.143**			n/s	

Note: ‘PUB’= public service media organisation; ‘PRIV’ = Private/commercial media organisation. Significance on * .05 , ** .01 and ***.001 levels. n/s= not significant on .05 level

Turning to the political elite, *ideological differences between parties* are likely to produce differences between politicians in their democratic demands on the media. In particular, we may expect parties to the left to be more in favour of participatory democratic ideals than those to the right. In order to account for possible political differences we therefore bring in political party of the politician into our analysis. In table 5 parties are grouped according to the broad party groups in the European Parliament, with the addition of the group ‘Right wing populists’ which are not members of any EUP party group.

Table 5. Democratic demands on the media of political actors (politicians +spokespersons) by party group and strategic position (percent strongly agree + means).

Party group	Transparency		Representation		Empowerment	
	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)	Agree strongly (percent)	Mean (stdev)
Socialists	63.1	4.56 (.68)	24.6	3.45 (1.25)	54.5	4.33 (.94)
Social Democrats	58.7	4.50 (.65)	19.2	3.28 (1.25)	40.5	4.10 (.98)
Greens	68.5	4.62 (.62)	13.6	2.86 (1.25)	43.5	4.15 (.90)
Total LEFT	61.4	4.54 (.65)	18.9	3.22 (1.26)	43.3	4.15 (.95)
Liberals	52.9	4.46 (.66)	18.6	3.24 (1.20)	37.2	4.15 (.83)
Chr Dems/Cons	47.8	4.28 (.87)	18.5	3.42 (1.16)	38.1	3.98 (1.05)
Right wing populists	63.8	4.51 (.80)	32.4	3.68 (1.27)	41.4	4.12 (.95)
Total RIGHT	51.7	4.37 (.80)	20.3	3.39 (1.19)	38.2	4.06 (.96)
<i>Mean</i>	56.4	4.45 (.74)	19.7	3.31 (1.22)	40.9	4.10 (.96)
Lowest n		67		66		67
Cramer's v (left-right)	n/s		n/s		n/s	
Government	51.5	4.37 (.78)	16.0	3.17 (1.22)	36.7	3.99 (1.02)
Opposition	59.6	4.52 (.69)	19.8	3.35 (1.19)	42.9	4.19 (.88)
Lowest n		321		318		323
Cramer's V	.125*		n/s		.105*	

Note: analysis weighted for professional group. Significance on * .05 , ** .01 and ***.001 levels. ns= not significant on .05 level

Besides party ideology, it is also possible that the party's strategic position in the party system has an impact on the individual politicians' demands on the media. A relevant division in this study is between parties in government and parties in opposition. Governing

and opposition parties may have differing experiences of the media report, and consequently evaluate the actual behaviour of the media differently. Therefore it is not far – fetched to assume that being in power or not may influence ideas about what the media should do (table 5).

Taken as a whole, the differences between political parties on the aggregate left-right level are at best small, or even negligible. For example, Christian Democrats and Conservatives place themselves lower than average, but their scores are similar to those of politicians to the left, in particular Social Democrats. Looking closer, we see that the right-wing populist parties blur the picture of a left-right dimension of the demands on the media. In particular, the politicians of this group stand out with almost twice as many strong supporters of proportional media representation as the average. It is also evident that the fringe parties (those farthest to the left and farthest to the right) expect more from the media than the rest. These parties are typically also not represented in the cabinet of their country, although they may function as parliamentary support for governments. This leads us to the comparison between opposition and government, which is also reported in table 5. Here we find that for the two demands (transparency and empowerment) representatives of parties in opposition give significantly higher levels of support than those of the government in how strong demands they place on the media. This may indicate that the strategic position of one's party has some influence on what to expect by the media. It is important however, to recall that differences are small and barely significant, and that the picture is unclear when looking at single countries and parties, for which the number of respondents are very low.

In addition to turning to the possible explanatory variables above, it is also of interest to assess whether some *individual* factors have an effect on elites' media demands. *Support for direct democracy* is associated with the participatory ideal. We assume that elites who believe popular direct influence on decision-making is crucial for democracy also pose stronger demands on media to fulfil participatory functions (the empowerment demand). Moreover, to incorporate variation in socialization we ask whether *gender* and *personal experience of working in the 'opposite camp'* (journalists with experience as politicians and vice versa) can account for different views on media demands. The latter question is of relevance since values and norms are partly internalised through the belonging to a

profession. The ‘change of sides’ is also a fairly common phenomenon, as around 25 percent of the politicians state that they have been working as journalists. The equivalent figure for journalists with past experience in politics is 13 percent.

Table 6. Correlations between support for direct democracy and three democratic demands on the media (Pearson’s correlation coefficients)

	Transparency	Representation	Empowerment
	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation
Support for direct democracy	+ .140**	+ .186**	+ .145**
n	2433	2373	2426

Note: analysis weighted for professional group. Significance on * .05 , ** .01 and *** .001 levels. Support for direct democracy was measured by a survey item phrased as follows: ‘It is crucial for a democracy that people exert direct influence on political decision-making, e.g. through referendums’.

Table 6 reveals that support in direct democracy, here measured as the degree to which respondents consider it crucial for a democracy that citizens exert direct influence on political decision-making, is positively correlated with all three democratic demands, and not only with empowerment. This suggests that support for direct democracy may be a more general indicator of high expectations on democracy, which is reflected in strong demands on the actions on the media in this respect. The results are sustained also after controls for professional group and country.

The control for gender effects gives a negative result. Men and women show almost exactly the same support for all the media demands. Neither is professional experience of ‘opposite camp’ related to any of the democratic media demands.

Then, what about the demands concerning representation and empowerment -- do they stem from different democratic ideals? In our data, it is clear that the two demands are not contradictory; quite contrary, they go rather well together. Overall the correlation between the empowerment and proportional representation, respectively, is *positive* (Pearson’s $r = .177$) and statistically significant. The fact that elites’ belief in direct democracy is positively

associated with all three democratic media demands (table 6) also strengthens the interpretation that the empowerment, representation and transparency measures together stand for a combined general demand on the media concerning their role in democracy.

Preliminary conclusions

When studying political communication we will sooner rather than later be brought up against the issue of the significance for democracy of the media. There are strong requirements on the media to fulfil functions with the aim to strengthen democracy. This notion is also evident in professional norms of journalists. When we set out to explore variation in elites' demands on the media to function in a democracy-enhancing manner, we start with the expectation that there is a great deal of consensus. Certainly the analysis shows that a great majority of the surveyed political communication elites agree that the media ought to contribute to transparent political decision makings, to facilitate for citizens to take part in politics, and, to a lesser extent, to provide a fair and balanced coverage in which different groups are represented in accordance to their societal importance.

In the point of departure of this paper rests a curiosity about whether there nevertheless is a variation in how strongly elites believe the media should be democratic actors; a variation which could be explained by systemic factors, organisational belonging and/or more individual traits. Against this background the analysis reveals some interesting differences – as well as similarities – to discuss.

First, the democratic demands posed on the media by the respondents do not show a pattern pertaining to differing democratic ideals, e.g. whether one believes more or less in direct democracy. The tendency is that the stronger demands one expresses on the media to contribute to a particular democratic value such as representation, the stronger demands one also puts on the other: transparency and empowerment.

Journalists differentiate from politicians and spokespersons by placing stronger demands for transparency, representations and empowerment. Country differences, however, generally turn out to be bigger than those between professional groups. The efforts to interpret this diversity give a mixed result. On the one hand a pattern that distinguish Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) from German-speaking ones (Austria, Germany, Switzerland)

emerges, but the lower expectations on the media expressed by the Nordic elites in relation to their counterparts further south is contrary to the assumptions.

Even though the results could not unambiguously be connected to media system factors, there is at least one systematic finding that points in the direction that the public service/commercial medium divide matters: journalists employed in public service organisations are consistently more prone to state that the media should represent social groups proportionally, than journalists in commercial media; a result which is expected given the particular remit of public service media.

For the part of the politicians the question was asked whether political party influences the view on the democratic role of media. No consistent patterns were found, at least not interpretable in terms of left-right differences. Possibly strategy is more important than political ideology as a slight tendency could be seen that politicians of opposition parties are more demanding over the media than their government colleagues.

While this paper reveals some interesting variation, and lack thereof, concerning the normative demands on the media among political communication elites, these demands are not exclusively or predominantly studied for their own sake. For journalists and political actors alike, expectations towards the role of the media in a democracy may be of importance in their role definitions as well as in their evaluation of how the media works. Further studies will reveal whether democratic demands concerning the media are determinants for how one judges the actual behaviour of the media, and moreover which relation, if any, these demands have to the self-perceived roles of the elites in political communication.

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