Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective

Political journalism is often under fire. Conventional wisdom and much scholarly research suggest that journalists are merely cynics and political pundits. Political news is void of substance and overly focused on strategy and persons. Citizens do not learn from the news, are politically cynical, and are dissatisfied with the media.

Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective challenges these assumptions, which are often based on single-country studies, with limited empirical observations about the relationship between news production, content, and journalism’s effects. Based on interviews with journalists, a systematic content analysis of political news, and panel survey data in different countries, the book tests the way different systems and media-politics relationships condition the content of political news. It shows how different content creates different effects and demonstrates that under the right circumstances citizens learn from political news, do not become cynical, and are generally satisfied with political journalism.

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Politics and relationships among individuals in societies across the world are being transformed by new technologies for targeting individuals and sophisticated methods for shaping personalized messages. The new technologies challenge boundaries of many kinds – between news, information, entertainment, and advertising; between media, with the arrival of the World Wide Web; and even between nations. Communication, Society and Politics probes the political and social impacts of these new communication systems in national, comparative, and global perspective.

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(continued after the index)
Political Journalism in Comparative Perspective

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Preface

During our first years at the University of Southern Denmark, two of us, Erik Albæk and Claes H. de Vreese, fantasized about creating a large-scale comparative study of political journalism that would show how different conditions can produce different types of news, which in effect will have different implications for citizens’ functioning in democracies. With a grant from the Danish Social Science Research Council (grant number 275–06–0038) and the arrival of Arjen van Dalen and Nael Jebril as PhD students in this project, the fantasy became a reality. From 2008 to 2012 we worked on the project, which led first and foremost to interesting conversations about journalism, media effects, analyses, and writing styles, and also to journal publications, two PhD dissertations, and this book with Cambridge University Press. We believe that the book tells an interesting and important story, and we hope that colleagues, politicians, and journalists will strenuously debate what we have written so that the field of political journalism research is advanced.

We are indebted to several people and institutions. In a non-systematic and non-exhaustive list, these include: The Danish Social Science Research Council and The Educational Fund of the Danish Press (Pressens Uddannelsesfond) supported the project financially with grants of 4.4 million Danish kroner and...
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