

Media System, Political Context and Informed Citizenship: A Comparative Study

Media systems are changing rapidly as a consequence of the rise of the internet, digitisation and the proliferation of TV channels. Media systems are also becoming more similar as a consequence of increasing market influence. Yet, important national differences – not least strong public service broadcasting in some countries – still persist. One objective of this study is to investigate, in the context of rapid change, the nature of the news diets consumed by different nations.

In many countries, electoral turnout and party membership are falling, prompting concern that citizen involvement in public affairs is declining. And in some countries but not others, there has been a precipitate decline in the audience for TV news that cannot be attributed simply to the rise of the internet. A second objective is to investigate national differences in media use, and the wider societal influences that promote or inhibit news consumption. For this reason, democratic countries have been selected that differ – in terms of whether they have partisan or consensual political cultures, collectivist or individualistic values, inegalitarian or egalitarian social systems, majoritarian or proportional electoral systems, advanced or developing economies.

The third objective is to discover whether national differences in the supply and demand for news influence knowledge of public affairs (including knowledge of major policy differences between political parties). In other words, we are concerned to investigate how changes in the organisation of the media, and in the wider society, are affecting the quality of citizenship.

The countries that form the basis of this 11 nation study are Australia, Columbia, Canada, Greece, India, Italy, Japan, Norway, South Korea, United Kingdom, and the United States. The study will be based on a quantitative analysis of media content and a representative survey in each country. It is co-funded by the Research Councils of the UK (ESRC), Australia, Canada, Japan, Norway, and South Korea, the Universities of Stanford and Madison-Wisconsin, Sky Italia and the Greek Government.

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