

# POLITICKÉ VEDY / POLITICAL SCIENCES

Časopis pre politológiu, najnovšie dejiny, medzinárodné vzťahy, bezpečnostné štúdiá / Journal for Political Sciences, Modern History, International Relations, security studies

URL časopisu / URL of the journal: <http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/politickevedy>

**Autor(i) / Author(s):** Goda Samuel  
**Článok / Article:** The Power of Media in Politics or the Politics' Influence on Media  
**Vydavateľ / Publisher:** Fakulta politických vied a medzinárodných vzťahov – UMB Banská Bystrica / Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations – UMB Banská Bystrica

**Odporúčaná forma citácie článku / Recommended form for quotation of the article:**

GODA, S. 2012. The Power of Media in Politics or the Politics' Influence on Media. In *Politické vedy*. [online]. Roč. 15, č. 4, 2012. ISSN 1335 – 2741, s. 129 – 134. Dostupné na internete: <[http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/4\\_2012/GODA.pdf](http://www.fpvmv.umb.sk/userfiles/file/4_2012/GODA.pdf)>.

Poskytnutím svojho príspevku autor(i) súhlasil(i) so zverejnením článku na internetovej stránke časopisu Politické vedy. Vydavateľ získal súhlas autora / autorov s publikovaním a distribúciou príspevku v tlačenej i online verzii. V prípade záujmu publikovať článok alebo jeho časť v online i tlačenej podobe, kontaktujte redakčnú radu časopisu: [politicke.vedy@umb.sk](mailto:politicke.vedy@umb.sk).

By submitting their contribution the author(s) agreed with the publication of the article on the online page of the journal. The publisher was given the author's / authors' permission to publish and distribute the contribution both in printed and online form. Regarding the interest to publish the article or its part in online or printed form, please contact the editorial board of the journal: [politicke.vedy@umb.sk](mailto:politicke.vedy@umb.sk).



## THE POWER OF MEDIA IN POLITICS OR THE POLITICS' INFLUENCE ON MEDIA

Samuel Goda\*

---

**STREET, J.:** *Mass media, politics and democracy (2nd edition)*. London: Palgrave and Macmillan, 2011. 387 pp. ISBN 978-1-4039-4734-5.

---

Professor **John Street** joined University of East Anglia in early 1980. Previously, he studied at the University of Warwick and Merton, and Nuffield College, Oxford. Since that time he worked continuously in UEA as well as in other academic institutions, such as Oxford University for instance. His rich research activities are focused on the relationship between politics and mass media and popular culture. He teaches undergraduate and postgraduate students and supervises their work and research on politico – media issues.

The publication *Mass Media, Politics and Democracy* is the second edition of his first book published in 2001. In that time, as he stays “...none of us owned an iPod or an iPhone; there were no social – networking sites like Facebook or video streaming sites like YouTube to occupy our time; we had not heard of Twitter or Wikipedia. ...Obama was teaching constitutional law at the University of Chicago.” As we see, this light and quite simple quotation is very meaningful and of wide comprehension. Since 2001 many areas of world politics have changed, and even more have changed in the area of mass media communication. Many theories in Political Science or in the field of International Relations put stress on the interconnection between the politics and policy and mass media. As the modern world and technologies are not stable but very dynamic, the world of politics has to reflect this situation. In foreign literature there are numerous attempts to „catch“ or to overwhelm the process of transformation between politics and media and the interdependence between them. Usually, we understand the role of media in politics through the

---

\* Mgr. Samuel Goda is an internal Ph.D candidate at the Department of International Relations, Faculty of Political Sciences and International Relations, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, e-mail: samuel.goda@umb.sk.

term of „propaganda“. This is still an actual question, but as the author points out, the issue is much more complex and comprehensive and propaganda is only one of many areas in politics and media.

Professor **J. Street** makes a very readable and high quality overview of the role of media in politics and democracy and vice versa. This publication is divided into three big chapters and each contains various subchapters. This makes the publication easily understandable, compendious, with full logic ideas put together in one coherent piece. For the students of Politics, International Relations and broader public asking themselves „Why?“, „Who?“, „On whose behalf?“ in the field of media – this publication is a very good way to get the answers.

The first chapter is entitled *Representing politics* and it is focused more on the very bases of the content of the particular media and given information. The author tackles the way we analyse the media and media text by operating the bias in media. However, there are specific types of bias, it has to be understood not only in terms of bias (or frames, as broadly used term) – but as content arguably mainly oriented to capture the viewers' (readers') attention and feeling, as well as to provoke any response.

Even if there are different types of political systems or political culture of particular countries the role of media remains generally the same in the field of politics – to create a narrative of political process. However, this narrative is not an objective one; it is shaped by the political and media processes (commercial, political, professional...).

The other part of politics in media – politics as entertainment – is further discussed. This alternative but important point of view shows the politics beyond the traditional news or discussions and talks about the politics in our daily life, where we mostly prefer less stress and more entertainment. Although the media effects are probably one of the most important agenda when talking about media and politics there is broad accordance in assumption that media have and do exercise power.

Nowadays, in democratic countries where the politicians are about to exercise the peoples will and are elected by them many questions arise regarding the role of media in this process. Media play an important role in the voting behaviour of voters and political behaviour of candidates in campaigns. Author says these aspects of media effects should not be analysed in isolation and there is a need to involve other areas of study as psychology, ethnography, etc., because this term becomes very complex. „The media are viewed not as

having a distinct influence which allows particular texts to generate particular effects, but rather putting a set of ideas into circulation, as normalizing a set of practices and attitudes, representing common sense.“

The publication goes very continuously to the second chapter entitled *Political economy of media*. Media, news, information are often considered to be a part of mass consumption. Therefore, author considered it very important to look closer at this issue. Therefore, this chapter represents probably the most important part of the book, very attractive to the reader. It gives simple and clear answer to the question "who gets the use or benefit from it, and who has access to media power?"

As mentioned above, the role of media is to create a narrative and to "sell" it. It is crucial for the complex analysis to find out what interests are behind this process of creating a narrative and the audience as well. However, often the first notion coming up in mind when discussing the media and politics is the state involvement in the media process and the state propaganda. This, usually, is operated in two manners – whether the state is dominating the media to pursue its own interest, or the media are in the opposition, in the rival position to the state (commonly narrowly represented as the difference between the democracy and dictatorship). Author sets four types of the involvement of state in media through censorship, secrecy, regulation and propaganda. These types of state involvement are quite different from each other and author very precisely shows the exact examples of every particular type. However, one may ask the author if there are any types of positive role of state in the media because the mentioned selection sounds arguably negative.

Author offers an innovative selection of different media systems on regional and global level. As author has stated, the state is not the only important actor in establishing the mass media infrastructure. It is beyond doubt that the media are in private ownership as well. This fact, the existence of large corporations and conglomerations, leads to the next analysis of the power and influence of the media owners. The difference between the state influence in media and the influence of the owner lies in its scale – state power is limited on national level while the conglomerations may play an international role on global level. „Newspapers and broadcasting institutions sell products and services; newspapers and television programmes are commercially manufactured products, news itself is a product that has a tradable value in the market place“ – we may consider this authors´ point as a „alpha and omega“ when talking about the content of media (public media may be sometimes an exception), or,

more precisely, media business.

The relation between the politics and the economic interests of media are crucial. This issue, however, is more complex and there is no simple correlation between them. The person of Rupert Murdoch is used as a practical example for the theory by the author. The people as Murdoch or Berlusconi are mostly linked with their power inside the particular media exercised, for example, through the right of hire and fire the editors or the involvement in editorial policy. On the other hand, the editorial policy plays a second role when it comes to commercial policy where the owners are closely involved. However, author, while assuming that Murdoch has direct access and power to influence the medial output, also asks a question: „Does he use these powers to pursue a particular political line?“ The answer may depend but in general even Murdoch has its own political preferences, which author gives as examples, in favouring one part of political process directly or indirectly. This leads to the other part of the influence exercised by the owner, represented in the media output that is demonstrated outside the media to the other areas of social and political system or process. We can say, however, that the exercise of power in media, represented by Rupert Murdoch in this publication, is very complex and open to different interpretations of particular statements.

The hierarchical scheme of the particular media shows who is on the top and who is above him or her – the editors and journalists. Journalism itself is a term used by the author in the work in different passages, because it is difficult to explain this term in few sentences. As author says, the solution of the journalism problem may not be in eliminating spin doctors (regarding to the discussion about media and politics) but in reforming the conditions of journalism using, for instance, legislative tools – „the revival must address the commercial pressures that make „ratings and profits“ of greater importance than „performance and public interest“. Professor **J. Street** continues, „...the key lies in the opportunities created by new technologies, in the guise of sites like WikiLeaks making investigation an online activity, an making all of us citizen journalists.“ Civic journalism (very similar or same is public journalism) is an interesting agenda offering, particularly in the process of election, to give and provide alternative information (by the voter himself for instance) and to counter the political management of the news.

The whole chapter ends with discussion about the power of globalizing trends that shape the mass media communication nowadays. Author analyses the global players in media industry and the technologies they are using.

Globalization is a very specific and very important process of modern history. It touches not only politics, economics, society but the media as well. There are new technologies and new possibilities for mass media to use and maybe to challenge the existing order. In the book is very nicely painted out the twin effect of globalization on national level and then on the culture.

In the last chapter, *Mass media and democracy*, the relation between media and democracy is discussed – even though this issue is mentioned throughout the entire book. This time, however, the issue agenda is tackled in more detail. When people talk about the media, their ownership and the picture created by them the first worry is about their negative influence on present status quo and maybe erosion of democratic features, even their own freedom and the execution of power. The rise of political marketing and celebrity politics is one of the most discussed areas when talking about media and politics. Professor **J. Street** took comparative approach how the political communication has changed since recent decades. The rise of celebrity politicians is one of the most visible aspects of this process. There are voices in favour of this „style“, on the other hand, others are against the politics directed this way. As all of us are "politically literate"; we can analyse the political marketing of a particular party or person. However, there still will be a discrepancy between our points of view – political marketing may be very good for one, and the same may be the worst for the other. In general we can find some features that can be objectively discussed, the rest is on the personal preference of each reader or viewer – that is political marketing as well – in general it can be simply good or bad.

The rise of the Internet is a very big phenomenon of present days. We all should be thankful to live such extraordinary experiment. Together with the explosion of the use of the Internet arises the question about the transformation, changes and political impacts of the new way of communication. Despite the theory of democracy people are mostly just passive recipients in political process. People are readers and viewers of the news, not their creators. Through the Internet there is a possibility to change, to reform a traditional point of view of democratic participation of the masses.

Author points out five ways in which the new media are changing the politics – the operation of government, the conduct of election and impact on campaigning, in political and social movements and political activism, journalism and the role of state as a „big brother“. These and other aspects shape the peoples' behaviour and their opinion on the new media; there are optimists, sceptics and pessimists. However, the very important and actual is the debate

on „e-democracy“. In present times there are many examples of using the Internet on the state level, i.e. for the e-procurement. Even online voting is possible on specific occasions in some countries. The question about e-democracy is arising – would this way be possible and better? Author analyses the arguments in favour of the e-democracy and arguments opposing it. "The politics of e-democracy are also the politics of technology and both are tied intimately to the fact that forms of communication are also systems of power."

There is a continuous debate on democracy and media. However hard the solution is, the media does not implicitly mean democracy and vice versa – the restriction on media are not themselves restriction on democracy. „Democratic media do not, in and of themselves, create democracy“. **John Street** gives an open discussion about what kind of contribution the mass media can make to democracy. As author concludes, „... it is not a matter of politics and media, of two separate entities, but rather of a complex network of relations, in which politics and media cease to occupy discrete categories but form part of multiple networks, bringing into conflict and alliance seemingly firm distinctions between public and private, politics and pleasure, individual and communal.“

This publication is not just a pure theory about the relation between mass media and politics. Every theoretical statement or assumption is represented with clear and simple example – this makes the book very attractive for broader audience. In Slovak literature there are some publications dealing with the above mentioned issue. **John Street**, however, sets forth a very readable analysis that masters not only Slovak equivalents, but those Anglo-American publications as well. I strongly recommend this book to everyone interested in present and dynamic features of changing politics through media as a high quality contribution to the current discussion.