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Media systems, digital media and politics

This chapter will analyse how digital media have changed politics in four countries. To do this, we will first need to revisit the theoretical approach developed in the introduction (chapter 1). Next, we will compare Sweden and the United States, examining their respective traditional media systems and then turning to digital media in the two countries. The same comparison will then be made for India and China, again starting with their pre-digital media systems and then looking at how they have been transformed – especially through the use of smartphones. Against this background, chapter 3 will then focus on one area where digital media have played an especially important role in all four countries: the rise of online right-wing populism.

2.1 Theories of digital media and politics

Media, and digital media, as argued in chapter 1, are an autonomous subsystem, a transmission belt between citizens and elites in the political process. 'Citizens' provide aggregate inputs into this process, but it would be equally appropriate to use the labels 'people', 'civil society' or 'publics' (indeed, these labels will be used interchangeably). The term 'public arena' is used, as mentioned in chapter 1, in order to avoid Habermas' normatively laden 'public sphere' (see chapter 1), and this also points to the contestedness within this common but limited attention space. To understand the media and politics, the public (or publics) can be counterposed to political elites (which include civic activists, and also economic elites insofar as they are politically relevant actors). Media elites translate the agenda of political elites, plus 'people', into the media agenda. These political elites consist not just of

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powerful leaders, as Schudson (2011) has pointed out, for the vast bulk of sources of news are government officials. But elites that rule must also set and be responsive to the agendas of the public. And apart from this responsiveness on which the legitimacy of ruling elites is based, there are counterpublics (Fraser 1990), publics that challenge the status quo via media.

The measure of political change is the responsiveness of the political apparatus to citizens, mainly via the media as a transmission belt. For politics, only politically relevant communication and information should be considered, and the yardstick for this is whether they provide a representative and plural set of inputs into the political apparatus.[1] In a democratic society, these inputs should not, as much as possible, be skewed towards powerful elites or towards particularly powerful groups since they should be representative (Dahl 1998). Note, however, that the yardstick of responsiveness can also be applied to non-democratic China, though in this case there is a single, all-powerful elite (the party), which exercises strong control over the media agenda, and publics or counterpublics are kept within bounds.

At this stage we can briefly define 'communication' as comprising two-way one-to-one or one-to-many messages, whereas 'information' means the one-way obtaining of knowledge or data that makes a difference – in this case to how citizens cope with the political environment (or more broadly, makes a difference to how they cope with the physical and social environment – we will come back to this in the discussion of information seeking in chapter 5). 'Media' encompass both information and communication. In focusing on how media constitute the transmission belt of political responsiveness and politically relevant inputs then, an implicit premise – this argument was sketched out in chapter 1 – is that the political system can be separated from the economic and cultural systems (or political power separated from economic and cultural power). This separation is not controversial in mainstream political and social theory (Schroeder 2013; Mann 2013, especially 154–66), and makes sense of the idea (as Hallin and Mancini 2004 have argued) that media systems have become autonomous from market forces and from the political system.

Here we can come back briefly to the idea from chapter 1 that media are a 'subsystem', the transmission belt *within* the political system (even if media subsystems also separately serve the cultural system, as with socializing and information seeking, or the economic system, as with consuming entertainment, for example): their autonomy is from the public, from elites and from the political apparatus – but media serve

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to promote (or not) political change. This is why, although Williams and Delli Carpini (2011), among others, have pointed out that what is considered 'political' has widened with digital media beyond what it was with traditional media, they also say that it is nevertheless still important to delimit what falls within politically relevant media (and responsiveness and input), and I will follow them in this respect. As we shall see, this has implications for being able to delimit the *aggregate* political mediated responsiveness and input across all media, traditional and new or digital, in terms of the overall limits of attention or visibility – and thus for gatekeeping and agenda-setting.

In chapter 1, I discussed the problem that digital media no longer fits the models of mass versus interpersonal communication. This problem has also been discussed specifically with regard to the role of media in politics (for example, Bennett and Iyengar 2008; Neuman 2016). Many studies have analysed individual digital media or examined single countries, but studies to date have failed to contrast traditional and digital media in a holistic way. A possible exception is Castells (2009), who argues that networks have become pervasive, with the central conflict between globally dominant media corporations ranged against resistance by often transnational social movements. This theory crucially leaves out the nation-state within which politics is primarily bounded. Media systems are shaped by nation-states (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and the various economic systems. Further, Castells hypostatizes a 'network society', which, apart from not allowing for different media systems, also subsumes the difference that new technologies make under various types of networks.

However, even if much of political communication and information is moving online, it is worth bearing in mind that the vast bulk of political responsiveness and inputs still take place via traditional media, newspapers and television, rather than through new digital media. Chadwick argues that politics and the media (in the United States and the United Kingdom) are currently in a 'hybrid' transition from old to new: he says there is a 'hybrid media system' that 'exhibits a balance between the older logics of transmission and reception and the newer logics of circulation, recirculation, and negotiation' (2013, 208), with the balance still skewed towards the older logics (2013, 209). But this argument fails to pinpoint how the newer logics depart from the older logics in terms of their effects and workings. Second, Chadwick concludes (for the United States) that 'political communication . . . is more polycentric than during the period of mass communication that dominated the twentieth century . . . the opportunities for

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ordinary citizens . . . are on balance greater than they were . . . [though it] is primarily political activists and the politically interested who are able to make a difference with newer media'(2013, 210). This overlooks, first, the way in which political and media elites (not just 'ordinary citizens') are also able to make more powerful uses of new media to monitor and respond to the public, and second that new media change not just those who are active and interested in politics, but can also shift attention and the agenda to new political forces, including political 'outsiders', who can use new media to circumvent traditional ones – as we shall see in the next chapter.

Another theory that potentially overcomes the focus on individual media is agenda-setting theory (McCombs 2013), where at least some studies have begun to examine how the agenda changes with the shift from old to new media (for example, Neuman et al. 2014). Agenda-setting provides a means of understanding the topics that are foregrounded by the media – not what media make people think, but what they make them think about. But while this theory can gauge agenda-setting across media, it leaves open the question of how the aggregate political agenda is translated between elites and citizens; in other words, it is a theory of media rather than of the media in society (as here). Further, and again as sketched out in chapter 1, this theory leaves out the fact that there is a limited attention space across all media, such that only certain topics become prominent enough to translate into political change. Bimber says that 'competition for political attention [is] growing more aggressive, against a background of largely unchanged habits of political knowledge and learning' (2003, 230), which leaves unanswered the question of what the effect of this greater competition might be.

Thompson (1995) speaks of a 'struggle for visibility', which comes close to the idea of a limited attention space. However, there is no sense of whether there is more space for visibility in this struggle with new media, and visibility overall is open-ended. Yet even if new media expand the diversity and volume of politically relevant information, there is a limited window across all media for fostering political change: on a rolling basis, this is a zero-sum window, unless new social forces – counterpublics – enter politics, or if new technologies generally broaden the input of citizens. As we shall see, they can do so, though within limits, with the rise of new political forces. In any event, even if some agendas cut across countries with different media systems, these systems are the main unit for analysing political communication and allow us to gauge this limited attention space. We can now turn to these.

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2.2 Media systems in Sweden and America

The media systems of the United States and Sweden make for a useful comparison since the two countries have similar levels of technology adoption but they lie at the extremes of the continuum among advanced societies in terms of their politics and economies.[2] They also exemplify two quite different media systems in Hallin and Mancini's (2004) scheme, which contrasts democratic corporatist countries (such as the Scandinavian countries and Germany) with liberal countries (foremost is the United States, although Canada and the UK – partly, because of some public-service broadcasting – also fall into this category).[3] There are many facets to Hallin and Mancini's scheme, but the main contrast for our purposes is between a market-dominated system in the United States and strong state intervention and a tradition of public-service media in Sweden.

We can turn first to the United States, where the impact of the media on politics has been studied in more detail than anywhere else. What gets lost in the research on recent changes is the fact that, apart from a more market-oriented media system, the role of the media in American politics is shaped by political gridlock in a two-party system. The implication is that political news concentrates on the horse race between two antagonistic political ideologies on the one hand and on the antagonism between the president and Congress on the other. Recently, there has been a discussion on whether the media have contributed to the polarization of ideologies and its adherents within this two-party system (Baum and Groeling 2008). Yet this polarization has to be put into the larger context whereby the two parties will continue to dominate, and they must therefore also continue to appeal to the middle ground in order to win elections, no matter how polarized the media and ideology have become.[4]

One analysis related to polarization and the American media system nevertheless deserves detailed discussion: Prior (2007) has made the case, which seems paradoxical at first, that increased media choice results in less political knowledge – at least among a portion of the population. This argument rests on a long-term perspective on American media. As Prior notes, television news made political information more accessible to a broader American population in the 1960s and 1970s since it no longer required the literacy skills needed by newspapers on the one hand and because the news on the three dominant TV channels was the only content available in certain time slots during 'prime time'. In this way, broadcast TV levelled the playing field.

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This levelling ceased to be the case from the late 1970s onwards, when cable TV – and more recently the internet – increased viewer choice, which meant that some viewers turned away from news and to entertainment: 'Summing across all media, the total amount of news and political information that Americans read, watch, and hear has, if anything, increased recently (even on a per capita basis). With regard to all elements of political involvement ... – news consumption, political knowledge, and turnout – the mean has been remarkably stable, while inequality has increased. The latter is the crucial effect of greater media choice' (2007, 265). By 'inequality', Prior means that some watch more news while others prefer non-news content. Put differently, the result of choice is that some watch as much if not more news, but others prefer entertainment and watch less news, becoming less interested in – and less knowledgeable about – politics in the process.

For Prior this is important because those who prefer entertainment are also less partisan about their politics, which in America means, in view of their lesser likelihood to vote, that they are also less likely to curb those who prefer more news and who are more partisan, thus contributing to polarization in elections. Irrespective of this polarizing effect, we can focus on the argument that greater choice leads to parts of the population becoming less politically interested: Prior says that this does not entail a technological determinist argument, but he contradicts himself on this point. He says that technology is not the only factor because it matters how technology is regulated, how it is shaped by the economy, and its uses (2007, 24), but he also says that 'rising inequality in political involvement' is 'a result of voluntary consumption decisions . . . technological progress is the ultimate cause of this rise'(2007, 281). However, consumption decisions depend on the choices that technology makes available in the first place, and in this case clearly it was the advent of cable TV and the internet that enabled these choices (and Prior admits as much when he talks about the 'ultimate cause').

With this in mind, we can turn to Sweden, since the increased choice environment is, of course, not limited to the United States. But the implications might be different in media systems that also have public broadcasting – Sweden has a public broadcast system and the state has also subsidized newspapers, policies that aim to enhance diversity and promote the public interest. An important change nevertheless took place in this media system with the introduction of competition by commercial TV in Sweden in the 1980s. Thus we can ask whether similar changes have taken place in Sweden to those identified for America by Prior. To be sure, there has been growing competition among commercial

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media in Sweden, as in the United States, and this has meant that marketization increasingly overrides the differences between Hallin and Mancini's two types of media systems. Westlund and Weibull (2013) also document similar changes arising from a more market-led 'high choice' environment (as did Prior): using surveys that capture several generations (those growing up before the Second World War, the post-war baby boomers, 'Generation X', and the recent generation growing up with digital technologies), as well as changes in media use over the life course of individuals, they document and analyse changes in news consumption between 1986 and 2011 across all media.

What Westlund and Weibull show is that although the earlier generations stick to public-service media (similar to something we will see with China), there is a shift away from public service to commercial TV and radio among the younger generations. The same applies to print newspapers, with the younger generations shifting to digital versions. Recently there has also been a shift away from paid-for quality newspapers to free ones (Metro) and to mobile news consumption.[5] And their analysis also shows that among 16–29 year olds, a higher percentage read newspapers on mobile devices than in any other format, digital or print (Weibull and Wadbring 2014, 327). So while newspapers and public-service media still dominate among the population as a whole, this is not the case among the younger generation and those at an earlier stage in the life course. Westlund and Weibull point out that this is not a question of complete displacement: the earlier generations add to their repertoire of news consumption with commercial broadcasters and online versions. Nevertheless, there is an unmistakeable shift away from print newspapers and public-service news to more diversified sources of news and online news among the younger generations and for those at an earlier stage in life.

Despite similar shifts towards more market competition and more diversity, the two media systems thus remain distinct: Sweden is a more newspaper-centric society, the United States a more television-centric one (Norris 2000, 85; Norris and Inglehart 2009, 58–9; Aalberg and Curran 2012). In Sweden, public service remains dominant, and in the United States, the three networks still have a large audience share even if people spread their viewing hours rather evenly, including those who watch Fox News or CNN, for example, across many channels in an environment of several broadcast and many cable channels (Webster 2005, 378). However, the two systems have also converged: there is increasing competition for audiences, not just with the rise in choices in Sweden but also in America, with its increasing deregulation. This market orientation

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has attenuated the differences in Hallin and Mancini's typology, but so has the proliferation of technologies – not just satellite and cable, but also online news consumption.

Overall then, in both countries, there is a continuing diversification: in America, away from the three main broadcast news channels and away from local and print newspapers; in Sweden, away from public television and away from local and print newspapers. These changes are taking place slowly, but even if the shift towards digital visual and textual news consumption is furthest along among younger people, it is a shift that will continue. Mass media, print and broadcast, will fade. The implication is that audiences select their news and political information intake more. However, as argued earlier, there is a limited attention space for mediated politics, so this diversity pertains primarily to *how* material is accessed rather than what content is accessed.[6] Increased selection could lead to an intensification of the 'Prior' effect, but it also means (as we shall see) that elites must cater more to the diversified sources whereby citizens become informed on the one hand, and citizens must take a more active part in managing their needs for political information on the other.

2.3 Digital media and politics in Sweden and America

With digital media, there is an increase in the mediation (or mediatization) of politics: there are more formats, such as disseminating news events via Twitter, sharing content on Facebook, commenting on politics in blogs, and accessing online-only news websites. There is also far more content available. But while the addition of digital to traditional media is not zero sum in terms of consuming media entertainment, there are limits to the effects of digital media on politics: more diverse inputs from society must become part of an overall input into the political apparatus, and this overall input must be managed more in the sense of 'governing with the news' (Cook 2005) from above as well as by citizens. The inputs via media must compete in the 'marketplace of ideas' (Åsard and Bennett 1997), but with the addition of digital media, there is also competition for attention. Political elites and media professionals therefore increasingly, more so than in the broadcast era, actively manage political and media messages. Further, there are structural limits to this attention space, as with the two-party system in the United States or the way the party system has evolved in Sweden, to which can be added the counterpublics and new political forces that shape and challenge them.

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In Sweden, as already mentioned, public-service TV continues to have a large (36 per cent in 2007) audience share (Aalberg et al. 2012, 18). But Swedish public media are also going online (as are American public media, the Public Broadcasting Service and National Public Radio, with much smaller audience shares). A number of studies have examined digital media use among Swedish politicians and journalists. Larsson and Kalsnes (2014) analysed the use of Twitter and Facebook by politicians and found that Twitter is more popular than Facebook, which they see as a mismatch because Twitter is mainly used by media-savvy urban elites whereas Facebook enjoys a wider popularity. They also found that both of these digital media are used more by politicians who are 'underdogs' and who 'tend to be younger, non-incumbents' and outsiders rather than prominent insiders (2014, 12). As for Twitter use during elections, Larsson and Moe (2012) showed for the 2010 elections that the conversation was concentrated among journalists, politicians and political bloggers, with few conversations involving the public and few replies to tweets. This is similar to the finding by Hedman and Djerf-Pierre (2013) that journalists mainly use Twitter for self-branding rather than engaging in conversations with their readers or viewers. The same applies to tweeting in relation to talk shows that feature politicians and current affairs guests: Larsson (2013) examined a whole season of a popular talk show and noted that the top tweeters were all journalists whereas a broader public did not become involved in the programme.

Another perspective is Gustafsson's (2012) study of party and political interest group members (and non-members) on Facebook. He found that Facebook was seen as a useful tool for political engagement in terms of coordinating action, recruiting new members and communication among members. At the same time, he also noticed a reluctance to engage in politics on Facebook because of worries about revealing political preferences to potential employers or friends. As for Facebook use by Swedish political parties, Larsson (2014) measured this in 2013, counting the number of posts and shares and likes as indicators of levels of use. He found that although Facebook use was limited, it nevertheless (again) favoured the smaller parties that might otherwise not receive as much media attention as the major parties.

To these accounts of the uses of new digital media by media and political elites, we can add that more than half of all Swedes aged 26–55 use the internet for news on a daily basis, that all ages do so occasionally, and that those under 46 regard the internet as the most important source of news – with TV far behind (Findahl 2014, 65, 66; Findahl and Davidsson 2015, 82). Yet the total amount of time devoted to reading

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news, both on paper and online, has remained rather constant since the 1980s (Findahl 2014, 66).[7] There are no figures for overall news and political media use, but we can see (from the Westlund and Weibull findings discussed earlier) that there is some displacement and some complementing of traditional media. However, with the exception of the Sweden Democrats, to be discussed in the next chapter (as well as the Feminist Initiative party), there has been no entry of major new political groups into formal political representation as a result of new media, nor a major broadening of the agenda.

For the United States, as mentioned earlier, one of the major debates in relation to digital media has been whether they contribute to political polarization. Analysing Twitter during the 2012 American presidential election campaign, Barberá and Rivero found that 'political discussion in Twitter is mainly driven by citizens with extreme values in the ideological scale, a situation that certainly favors the level of political polarization of the political discussion on Twitter' (2015, 11). Along similar lines, Baum and Groeling (2008) found some time ago that political blog websites (Daily Kos on the Left and Free Republic on the Right) featured far more partisan news stories than the news stories that were top-ranked on the news wires (Associated Press and Reuters, which could be regarded as presenting a balanced set of stories). The polarization thesis remains contentious, however: Messing and Westwood (2014) showed that endorsements of news items via social network sites (such as Facebook likes) could prompt more people to read these items. Hence – since people's social networks are likely to be diverse and their recommendations for news items cut across partisan political lines – these endorsements could help to overcome rather than to increase political polarization.

As in Sweden, the use of Twitter in politics is mostly confined to elites and does not generally lead to more involvement or conversations with a broader public. Golbeck et al. (2010) found that members of Congress used Twitter mainly for self-promotion rather than for engaging with the public. Similarly, having a Facebook site, which had become the norm among candidates for the national election in America in 2012, mainly means that they push information about their activities to their publics (Gulati and Williams 2013). In any event, the most widely discussed use of digital media in politics has been in relation to presidential election campaigns. Bimber (2014) argues that the Obama campaigns of 2008 and 2012 were the most advanced to date in terms of the use of digital tools, including using data analytics or big data to target particularly critical voters (see also Chadwick 2013, 137–58). Obama's campaign team also analysed, among other things, people's social networks,

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including on Facebook and Twitter. Bimber says that this strategy took personalized political communication to a new level, that it has been copied by Republicans, and will be taken even further in future election campaigns in America and elsewhere. Again, we will come to a new political force, populism, and the use of social media (and Twitter in particular), which changed the picture during the 2016 election, in the next chapter.

These findings can be put in the contexts of Americans' use of the internet for politics. Social network sites are becoming increasingly widespread among all generations in America (Duggan et al. 2015), and according to Pew (2015), 61 per cent of millennials, for example, received their news from Facebook.[8] Ideally, as argued earlier, the input from society into the political apparatus should reflect society in an increasingly democratic way, representing its interests more inclusively or accurately. Yet Schlozman et al. (2010, 501) found that higher socioeconomic status groups are more likely to use the internet for various kinds of political participation than lower ones. This finding for the United States can also be put into a broader and comparative perspective: the divide between higher and lower socioeconomic groups applies to news media generally, but it is more acute in the United States than in Sweden. At the end of a study that systematically compared news and political knowledge in the United States with Northern Europe, Aalberg and Curran say that 'the American system, ultimately geared to optimizing high earnings expectations, makes little attempt to shrink the knowledge gap between the privileged and the underprivileged' (2012, 199). In other words, the media system, and in particular its public-service component, makes a difference to how well-educated citizens are in public affairs.

In terms of the internet, there is also an age divide: young people use the internet more for political participation than do older people, but it is unclear whether this is a generational effect or a life-cycle one (with the implication that it will fade over time). It is true, as Nielsen and Schrøder (2014) document, that Americans and Danes (who, in terms of the nature of the media system, are similar to Swedes) have not shifted wholesale to using digital media as a vehicle for news. However, the proportion who share a news story or who comment on a news story in an average week via social networking sites is more than 20 per cent in the United States and more than 10 per cent in Denmark (though in the 15–35 age bracket, digital media have 'surged' as a source of news, to over half; Schrøder 2015, 66).

There have also been a number of studies that compare the content of the two media systems. Some of these confirm that the differences between the two types of media systems have persisted into the era of

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digital media. So, for example, Dimitrova and Strömbäck (2011; see also Strömbäck and Dimitrova 2011) compared election news in America and Sweden, and found that Swedish public television is more issue-focused, while American television (and Swedish commercial television news) frame elections more as a horse race. They also found that election news content is governed more by a media logic in the United States, which foregrounds the role of journalists, whereas in Sweden the political logic is more pronounced and thus more prominence is given to politicians. In both systems, however, both public and commercial news used an 'interpretive' and a 'descriptive' journalistic style equally (though it should be noted that the analysis included only 'functionally equivalent' major news programmes – ABC, CBS and NBC – and excluded round-the-clock news such as CNN and Fox News). In sum, the Swedish and American systems continue to be different, but in both systems, commercial media overlap more.

A different way to compare the two systems is from the side of what audiences take away from the media – rather than what is provided. In this vein, Curran et al. (2009) compared the American market-driven media system with the Scandinavian public-service model. They measured the kinds of TV and print news produced by these systems for a certain period and then gauged public knowledge at the end of this period. They found, among other things, that 'the public service of broadcasting gives greater attention to public affairs and international news, and thereby fosters greater knowledge in these areas, than the market model' (2009, 22). Furthermore, as we have seen, there is less of a gap in knowledge between different socioeconomic groups in Scandinavia compared to the United States.

Much has also been written about the use of digital media for political activism, and this can be briefly mentioned here. It is to be expected that these uses are similar across both media systems (and beyond) since this depends mainly, once digital media are widely used, on a lively civil society. There is agreement among scholars that the internet has changed digital activism somewhat: Earl and Kimport (2011, 10) argue that the main advantages of political online activism are reduced costs and also the aggregation of actions without physical co-presence. And Bennett and Segerberg add that online activism need not be about organized mobilization; digital media also provide 'personal action frames' (2013, 36–40) whereby people can participate in activism on their own terms, sharing issues with distant others beyond boundaries of groups or ideologies that may be required in offline activism. These changes in political activism are similar to the broader changes that have been discussed

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so far: political communication becomes more personalized in a media environment that is more diversified. In addition, there are enhanced possibilities for coordinating activism. But this enhancement is a marginal addition because the media environment (in these two countries at least) is already saturated; activist inputs only add to an already crowded set of media inputs, and within the overall aggregated inputs, there is a limited attention space and competition for visibility. Even so, gatekeeping can be expanded somewhat when new media can circumvent or provide new inputs into traditional ones, as we will see in the next chapter (chapter 3) with other 'marginalized' actors.

The differences between the two media systems thus persist, but apart from marketization, new media have made for an incremental extension of political communication – more mediation – that adds to, displaces and complements traditional media. Hence there is a gradual increase in the density of political communication between political and media elites on one side and citizens on the other in both – and indeed, as we shall see, in all four – countries. But this leads to social change only inasmuch as forces on both sides take advantage of the openings that new technologies provide, which have so far mainly consisted of elites using media more and targeting them better on one side – and more diversified access and lower costs of engagement on the side of citizens or civil society. The difference this makes to the political system is a greater responsiveness to the expanded aggregate inputs from the media system, plus citizens managing their media more. Hence, too, there needs to be more responsiveness to how the agenda is shaped by the public via media. The change is incremental – adding to and complementing traditional media rather than constituting a break with them – because a radical break would require new media to expand and diversify political engagement from either or both sides. As we shall see, right-wing populists meet this criterion since they constitute a new social force that is less visible in traditional media, and new media are used to bypass traditional gatekeepers.

Still, one way to highlight that the change is only incremental in media-saturated societies (or where there is a limited attention space) is by contrasting this with the situation in non-media-saturated societies. In societies where media adoption is still limited or constrained by an authoritarian political system, new digital media can reshape the flow between publics and the political system (Howard 2010). We will see how this applies to China and India shortly, where new media play more than an incremental role (at least potentially, insofar as they are not curbed) because they add to inputs to the media subsystem, which is

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otherwise constrained for traditional media. The question in these two cases, however, will be whether the autonomy of media is expanded by escaping party or elite control.

In Sweden and the United States, again, there is limited scope for new digital media to make a difference – given that an increased flow would need to significantly enhance political informedness or engagement or the responsiveness of the political system to citizens. But this enhancement is limited, since macro-sociology also tells us that, overall, political change from below has been constrained in advanced democracies in recent decades (Mann 2013; Schroeder 2013). And in certain respects, as we have seen, new digital media diminish news consumption and political knowledge. Digital media thus allow some degree of circumvention of gatekeeping institutions everywhere, but in a political communication environment with many channels and formats, and where the balance of media power between political elites and people is relatively stable, large-scale changes cannot be expected, even with greater density of mediated politics.

Further, even if responsiveness is changing incrementally, the result is also that this responsiveness can be used by political elites to enhance their legitimacy, unless citizens can express their political demands more forcefully. The importance of this limitation can be highlighted: politics plays the central direction-giving role in society, and citizen inputs into this process take place mainly via media. As Luhmann put it, in a claim that is only slightly exaggerated, 'what we know about our society, or indeed about the world in which we live, we know through the mass media' (2000, 1). If this seems a trivial point, it can be noted again that in countries such as China, where digital media have rapidly become a more powerful vehicle than traditional media for expressing forceful demands, the implications are different: in countries like these, unlike in developed democracies, the political system has to be much more active in managing these demands in order to contain them. Further, as Tang (2016) points out, in democracies, once elected, rule is guaranteed until the next election, whereas in China, the party-state must be constantly attuned to public opinion. In other words, in these countries, the role of digital media is more important – both on the side of more forceful inputs or demands and on the side of the need to contain them, unlike in developed democracies.

This point can be put differently: as mentioned in chapter 1, the idea of a limited attention space, or competition for visibility (Thompson 1995), provides the constraint for how politics is communicated. More diverse sources of political information and engagement

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do not necessarily make a difference unless they expand the scope and forcefulness of inputs vis-à-vis the regime. However, if we think about where we can find such expansion, it is where digital media have rapidly become more important than traditional media and where, at the same time, politics is most unsettled. In Sweden and America, as we have seen, this expansion has been incremental but significant. We shall see that when new actors such as populist right-wing forces come onto the scene, reshaping politics, they do so by taking advantage of new digital media to circumvent traditional media, though again, this effect is shaped by the respective media systems (public media in Sweden, audience competition in the United States). Communicative responsiveness has become somewhat denser, but it is still subject to a limited attention space.

A limited attention space pertains not just to the political agenda set by elites, but also to the inputs that feed from the public or from citizens into the political apparatus via media. Denser mediated relations mean that political elites, including media elites, have to become more responsive to greater input. Insofar as these inputs have expanded beyond traditional media, this expansion demands a response to a more complex set of media inputs. But it is not just politicians who can better target the electorate, nor just citizens who can select more news and other politically relevant information and provide more differentiated and more mediated inputs into the political apparatus. It is also the case that news media and politically relevant information sources can target their audiences more accurately, as we shall see in chapter 6.

To give just one striking example of this media targeting: Bright and Nicholls (2014) have shown, in the case of five major UK news websites, that the 'most read' articles stay on the front page longer than the 'less read' articles, which is an indication of a new 'populism' (in the sense of audience-drivenness) whereby editors cater to the wishes of their audiences. This closer yoking of content to audience demands is in tension with a 'patrician' view of the media, which has been particularly associated with public-service media, whereby the media should tell the public what is most important, but it is also in tension with the autonomy of the media system, whereby journalists rather than audience metrics shape the news agenda. At the same time, the idea that the media should promote the common good is more pronounced in systems with public media (and as we have seen, public media also produce greater political knowledge). Yet this yoking could also be seen as allowing greater responsiveness to citizens, in this way benefiting democracy, as long as citizens are becoming more aware of – and engaged in – political issues.

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However, there is little evidence of such an overall increase in political engagement due to internet-related changes in media (in addition to the references discussed so far, Hindman 2008 also makes this point). And the effect could also be the opposite: monitoring the public could lead to a skewing or misrepresentation of the public because what is being monitored represents a more mediated digital realm than the aggregated realm of all (traditional media and offline) inputs (so that users of mainly traditional media could be underrepresented, for example). In other words, the increasing reliance on the measurement of publics via digital media rather than on votes or surveys and the like produces a new type of responsiveness (again, within the constraints of being shaped by various media systems).

A final point is that limited attention and visibility apply not just to content produced and agendas purveyed, but also to content consumed. 'Selection' (or 'self-selection', a term used by Castells 2009) is misleading in the sense that it implies unlimited content. But news consumers or audiences are also limited by the time they devote to political news, which is higher mainly when there are elections and where the amount of content devoted to public affairs is more than audiences typically want as opposed to what journalists provide (Boczkowski and Mitchelstein 2013). The discrepancy between what journalists provide and what audiences want to read and watch (and hear) also comes across in research that compared agenda-setting in traditional news media with online news media. The study, by Neuman et al. (2014), asked: do social media (in this case, Twitter, blogs and discussion forums) differ in terms of agenda-setting compared with traditional media? What they found was that 'social media are more responsive to public order and social issues and less responsive to the abstractions of economics and foreign affairs' (2014, 7). What we can see here is a gap opening up between what audiences want and what digital news media provide for them.[9] In view of the displacement effect identified by Prior and by Westlund and Weibull (discussed earlier), and since people's total use of political media is not simply expanding with each new medium, it is clear that there has been a shift in content as well as in format or channel.

What, then, are the dangers and opportunities of digital media? The main danger is that elites react more to media signals than to non-mediated demands, becoming skewed to the potentially more misrepresentative inputs of digital media. The main opportunity is for the agenda to shift more closely to issues or groups that have been overlooked in traditional media, and this includes challengers or outsiders of all stripes (including populists, as we shall see in the next chapter).

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The combination of the two could be – not polarization, but differentiation, whereby more diverse content and simply more content could enrich the public arena in some ways and impoverish it in others. The bias of political communication research and research on new technologies is to tell us that a more diverse and content-rich media environment should lead to more political participation and better-informed citizens. Yet the result could also be the reverse: more mediation could leave politics the same if the impetus to engagement and the level of interest in politics is the same or declines, or if media become more responsive to extreme political forces. Further, the extent and quality of mediation could leave (some) citizens less engaged and less informed, a constant worry in media research. And if the input into the agenda-setting process from the public is more diffuse, this could give more power to political elites, as could a more diffuse media input into the political process by media professionals. The position advanced here is thus that political elites are able to manage their communication more and target their messages more powerfully, and the same is true for media professionals. Enhancement also applies on the side of awareness and engagement among some citizens, as well as some underrepresented groups and their leaders – all of them limited by competition within a limited attention space or a limited space for visibility. Hence the benefits of new digital media in coordination and selection are balanced by the diffuseness of engagement and by the constraints of attention.

The crucial change in the political agenda promoted in the media is not that this agenda has become more fragmented or narrower with digital media. Instead, it has shifted somewhat and become more diversified and differentiated in format and content, even as the overall breadth of this agenda has stayed the same or increased only marginally because of the limited attention space on the one hand, but also the lack of major new social forces to broaden it on the other, though some of the forces that will be discussed in the next chapter – the populist right – may yet make for a new political direction. The shift has thus meant that the added element of public opinion and inputs must be catered for, a coupling that occurs because of a more accurate gauging of public opinion and inputs that can at the same time be skewed towards certain sources. Again, these patterns are part of a longer-term trend towards a greater responsiveness to ever more mediated inputs by the public. But we should be wary of equating this greater responsiveness with a more fundamental democratizing change due to digital media.

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2.4 Media systems in China and India

India and China together account for well over a third of the world's online population. They are also often seen as two quite different models for the future role of the internet in developing societies. Research about the social implications of the internet in India is still embryonic, partly because internet penetration is still low. There is more research about mobile phones in the country, but far less about smartphones. In terms of China, many publications have looked at the internet and politics, but the vast bulk have concentrated on the internet and censorship, and to a lesser extent on online protest (Qiu and Bu 2013). These are important topics for China, but censorship and opposition to the regime also need to be seen in the wider context of how old and new media together contribute to liberalization or reinforce the regime's control. As already indicated, the main argument here will be that, in both countries, the most important factor with regard to digital media is that they represent some civil society forces more powerfully by circumventing traditional media, even if digital media are also used for greater control in China and they are heavily skewed towards elites in India.

Discussion of the internet in these two countries tends to differ from what has been discussed so far: it has often been tied to a developing world discourse about how information and communication technologies (ICTs) lead to economic development (ICT4D). For India, the emphasis has been on economic development and for China it has been on political opening or otherwise (Rangaswamy and Benny 2015). Yet there has also been a recent backlash against ICT4D. Anthropologically informed researchers have argued, for example, that the ICT4D research agenda is biased: why should scholarship for the developing world focus on economic and social development, when the main uses of old and new media, here as elsewhere, are for socializing and leisure, which surely deserve equal attention (Rangaswamy and Arora 2015)? At the same time, the regimes themselves envision a high-tech ICT-led future. The Chinese government, for example, has the so-called 'Internet Plus' policy to promote uptake of digital services, just as the Indian prime minister has embarked on a 'Digital India' programme. Both aim to 'leapfrog' more advanced parts of the world.

The arguments about economic development will be left to one side here since the main focus is on new media and politics (and in later chapters on everyday life and on the online economy mainly related to big data). Yet there is a larger question about convergence and divergence and development, and here the argument against modernization

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(convergence) has been made by post-colonial (India) and post-socialist (China) theorists. Against modernization or convergence, post-colonialists argue that modernizing elites who try to impose a modern Western rationality on India are being resisted by local indigenous forces. Similarly, post-socialists argue that the indigenous legacy of a communist developmental path will resist an entirely capitalist and democratic future. As we shall see, these arguments can be improved upon by identifying specific elements of convergence and of divergence. In any event, it is important to bear these discourses and debates in mind to put the politically relevant uses of media into a broader context.

We have already encountered some of the debates about the media or the internet and politics, but we can briefly revisit them in this context: as mentioned, these debates have been dominated by two approaches, one focused on democracy and the public sphere (Habermas 1982) and the other on how capitalism skews democracy towards powerful economic elites (Castells 2009). Yet the public sphere, as Habermas recognizes, does not exist in a vacuum, and one of his main arguments is that the public sphere has been progressively 'colonized' by the forces of capitalism. For India and China, this poses immediate problems: for China, especially, an *autonomous* 'public sphere' barely exists, and for India, this autonomy is limited by the disproportionate role of economic and political elites in the media. Similarly with capitalism and how it impinges on media: even if market forces have in recent decades increasingly shaped media in both countries, this has not overridden how media continue to be subject to distinctive political forces and media systems, not just in China, but also in India, with its legacy of a public-service broadcasting system.

Still, the yardstick for media and politics in both countries, as elsewhere, is whether they contribute to more responsiveness by the government – or the opposite, more elite control? This yardstick can be seen as a measure of modernization or convergence. And as mentioned, China's media system is commonly seen in terms of censorship and authoritarian control. But as a number of commentators have pointed out, this is too simple. A broader question is whether the party-state, via China's media, is responding more to input from society, or moving to constrain input and exercise more centralized control via media? The consensus among scholars is that the party shows little sign of relinquishing its power and maintains control of the media to this end (Brady 2008; Brady 2016). At the same time, the party-state is pushing media to become a tool for gauging public opinion in order to maintain social order. And recent work by Chen et al. (2016), for example,

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has highlighted the fact that the authoritarian state permits and even encourages government to become more responsive to citizens, at least on a local level. Moreover, the idea of responding to public grievances and guiding public opinion for the social good has a long history in China. As we shall see, digital media have also to some extent created an environment for social protest and expression, which have pushed the boundaries of control. So beyond censorship and propaganda, it is important to consider how the state is responding to the pressures coming from new media.

India's media system, on the other hand, has been shaped by strong collusion between economic and political elites. This means that the autonomy of Indian media, a key characteristic that distinguishes different media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004), is weak. It is also thus because public-service media have not been independent of government influence, and because journalists have often been unduly influenced by owners of private-sector media. It has been argued that from the 1990s onwards, global neoliberalism has been the main force shaping the Indian media system in favour of the interests of capitalist economic elites (Chakravarty 2004). Yet this, again, is too simple: while market forces have certainly driven the expansion of media offerings in recent decades, the influence of politicians on media has been just as strong for news as the influence of economic interests. Further, for India, any discussion of media must also take into account the broader issue of the lack of reach of media due to a weak sociotechnical infrastructure (Doron and Jeffrey 2013). Nevertheless, the internet has been a powerful force among a small, mostly young and urban, part of the population. And, as we shall see, even 'low-tech' mobile phones can be used for political mobilization. Unlike in China, however, where digital media are the most unconstrained part of the media environment, in India smartphones have yet to reach the majority of the population, and online politics is shaped by how smartphone adoption fits into the broader – skewed – media landscape.

It will be useful, again, first, to sketch the background of the two media systems. Then we can focus specifically on where the internet makes a difference: in China, for circumventing how people obtain news outside of traditional media, and secondly for enabling certain groups to spread ideas outside of official channels. In the case of India, examples of circumventing traditional media include the ways in which mobile phones have made a difference in elections. This is not a like-for-like comparison, however: China does not have democratic elections, and in India there is not the same need to obtain news outside of state-controlled

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media. Nevertheless, in both cases, new media go beyond traditional media, and there are lessons to be learned from comparing the two.

Any account of the two current political and media systems must provide some background about their longer-term historical trajectories. This will not be possible in any detail, but some major features can be sketched. For India, it has been argued that there was an incipient public sphere even before the imposition of colonial rule (Bayly 2009). The empire and its colonial government then imposed a media infrastructure that was shaped by capitalism and by the needs of administering a large territory (Jeffrey 2002). After Independence (1947), the new government reacted against this foreign infrastructure by developing a national public-service media system that would strengthen the government's modernizing aims. By the 1980s however, partly due to the advent of satellite broadcasting, public media had to compete with the private sector, especially for television audiences, and this liberalization and deregulation has continued to the present day.

Two other features set India apart in terms of the history of media technology: one is the country's high newspaper readership – among the highest worldwide (Jeffrey 2000). Although, as elsewhere, television has become more important as a source of news than newspapers, the latter continue to play a relatively prominent role in India. In terms of both newspaper readership and television viewership, regional languages are growing faster than Hindi and English, though Hindi is the dominant language for political media and English for business media (Ninan 2007; Mehta 2015). The second distinctive feature is 'small' technology (Arnold 2013): it has been argued that India's social development relies more on technologies that are not based on extensive infrastructures, but rather on standalone technologies that do not depend on large-scale capital-intensive networks. The spinning wheel, bicycles and now mobile phones (at least if cellular phone networks are compared to cable networks) are good examples. The media landscape in India today is thus highly diverse, shaped by a legacy that, unlike the strong states in the West and in East Asia, produced only a weak ICT infrastructure. The current government, like earlier ones, is attempting to overcome this weakness and strengthen economic development by means of promoting ICTs. Yet apart from grandiose plans for smart cities (and the 'Digital India' programme, already mentioned), the most visible part of this strategy is the country's Universal Identification Number system (UID, also known as the Aadhaar system, discussed in chapter 6), which is mired in legal controversy and undergoing as yet piecemeal implementation.

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A different perspective on India's media system is in terms of the responsiveness of the government to the increasingly mediated demands of civil society. Before broadcast or mass media, India's public arena was tightly controlled by its colonial rulers, but there was also a nascent sphere of media contestation. The era after independence brought the mobilization of media on behalf of nation-building, following a Nehruvian model of modernization by means of technological infrastructure development. In this case, the effort concentrated on developing what some would see as a paternalistic public broadcasting system during the era of Congress Party rule, which aimed to educate the population and revive classical Indian culture. Yet with the marketization and liberalization of the 1980s and 90s, Athique says, 'the old, bourgeois culture of the neo-colonial class, and its autocratic socialism, has been supplanted by a more emotive, populist and middlebrow culture' (2012, 146). The more commercial orientation of the media that has been promoted by recent governments also fits well with the political and economic elites' vision of a high-tech India competing in a global digital economy.

The upshot of this thumbnail sketch is that the interlude of the state's attempt to modernize via the media system has been eclipsed. Public broadcast media now have a far smaller reach than commercial media. With marketization, the television audience in India is highly fragmented, with no television station attracting more than a 20 per cent share of the national market. Many politicians own television stations to promote themselves, and there is much corrupt money in television ownership (Mehta 2015). Yet Doordarshan, the public broadcaster – the largest broadcaster in the world by number of employees, larger than China Central Television (CCTV) – now has only a tiny audience share (Mehta 2015). In any event, the cronyist relationship between political elites and newspaper and television proprietors skews media influence towards the mutual benefit between parties and powerful economic interests. This relationship is hard to pin down systematically, yet a number of accounts attest to the cosy and often corrupt relationship at the level of national politics (Mehta 2015). On the local level, too, politicians promote themselves via advertising in newspapers and television, while news media have become dependent on this advertising for revenue (Ninan 2007). Still, in India, TV has become the main source of news. And the independence of media from the state, despite being encoded in law, is still not properly enacted, so there is much state manipulation of the media sector and of telecommunications, and again, extensive corrupt practices, as evidenced by the scandals surrounding the auctions of telecommunications spectrum.

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In China, too, there are unique trajectories of media technology: the public has historically sought redress from the state (Yongming 2006; Thornton 2007) and the state tried to extend its military-logistical reach, especially via ICT infrastructures. The colonialist impact was much weaker in this case than in India's, leaving the historical media tradition more intact. Yet before the communist regime took power in 1949, there was a brief period when a Westernizing drive meant an efflorescence of an open and private media sector in China, though the development of autonomous media was also severely curbed by the civil war and the Japanese invasion. One question therefore concerns the extent to which the current liberalization of media harks back to this 'modernist' period, or if it is shaped by the longer-term history of how emperors responded to people's demands, or by the newer strong state control of the Communist party-state. As we shall see, it is a mixture of all three.

Again, seen from the vantage point of responsiveness to civil society, before the advent of mass media in China in the twentieth century, there was an ethos whereby a benevolent emperor and a meritocratic stratum of mandarins should guide people's morals and govern their well-being. This tradition has continued under communism, with regimes mobilizing the population to improve the nation. The media system has been increasingly central to this guidance of the population, and the tradition has continued into the pro-market reform era. Current efforts to gauge public sentiment via social media can be seen as an extension of this process, as are uses of media to promote social stability and promote a high-tech economy. The flipside of this is the elimination of discontent and disorder. The regime sees the media as a threat, particularly in the light of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Tiananmen Square protests. The question then is to what extent the regime's aims have come into tension with the recent commercialization of media and the widespread uses of social media.

As in India, television still sets the political agenda, but in this case, there is one dominant player: 'CCTV is still the main source of news and information for most mainland Chinese' (Zhu 2012, 7). This is partly because, by government edict, only CCTV can cover national-level news, but it is also partly because watching CCTV is a holdover in the more rural and remote regions and among an older population from past viewing patterns when there were no alternatives. Among an urban and younger population, on the other hand, CCTV is passé. But while the Chinese generally do not trust the state broadcaster, this does not necessarily mean that they are critical towards the regime: quite the reverse; much of the

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population supports the regime's maintenance of social stability and control over the media for this purpose.

The tension between critical media and supportive media also extends to journalists. As in other media systems with public broadcast media, media professionals have been imbued with a public-service ethos but also with the Anglo-American ideal of impartiality and objectivity (Zhao 2012) – the basis of an autonomous media system. But in this case, there is also an ethic of guiding the nation and providing its moral compass, which stems from a longer-term self-image that Chinese intellectuals have traditionally had (see Zhu 2012, 59, 102).The same applies to the party, which, as Zhu says, 'believes much more in "guidance *of* public opinion" rather than "supervision *by*" public opinion' (2012, 253). At the same time, journalists have begun to see themselves in a watchdog role within the limits of where the regime tolerates or promotes this role (Hassid 2016). But journalists at CCTV have come to feel conflicted: since CCTV now relies almost entirely on advertising income (more than 90 per cent) and it has ever more competitors, journalists feel under pressure to provide entertaining news that is popular with audiences, rather than in-depth serious investigative coverage or media content with an educational or morally guiding function (Zhu 2012). CCTV is thus squeezed between the regime's straitjacket, which has loosened somewhat over time, and commercial competition for audiences, which has intensified (Stockmann 2013).

2.5 Digital media and politics in China and India

Against this background, we can turn to the discussion of digital media. For China, the main point to begin with is that, despite common perceptions in the West that China's regime suppresses online activity, in fact, the use of digital media for political engagement is extensive and highly complex, even if it is ultimately kept within bounds. One way to make this point is to draw on the study of the online public sphere by Rauchfleisch and Schäfer (2015), who carried out an in-depth examination of the microblogging platform Sina Weibo. Sina Weibo used to be the dominant microblogging service in China, though it has recently been overtaken by WeChat. But what Rauchfleisch and Schäfer argue for Sina Weibo applies to other online media. The authors point out that, even for a single mode of online expression such as Sina Weibo, it is too simplistic to take an either/or view – that either there is a growing public sphere, or this public sphere is increasingly repressed. Instead, there are

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multiple public spheres on Weibo – seven, in their view – and it is useful to list them briefly to give a flavour of the variety they found by analysing Weibo content: 1. thematic discussion of issues, such as environmental issues, which is continuous; 2. event-focused discussion, as with natural disasters; 3. 'encoded', whereby certain techniques are used to evade censorship, such as the use of undetectable homonyms or images containing censored words; 4. discussions pertaining to local issues, such as contention over building regulations; 5. debates about world affairs; 6. content that has been censored online but is stored on mobile devices for sharing; 7. discussion about censorship, a 'meta' discussion.

It is easy to see that most of these topics could not be discussed in traditional broadcast media, or that they would in any event be subject to greater control. At the same time, as Rauchfleisch and Schäfer point out, the party-state can – through its influence with internet companies as well as direct control – steer people in their uses of different social media platforms. The migration of users away from Sina Weibo and towards WeChat, where there is far less possibility for public expression and sharing content on a large scale, is one example. It is not clear whether this migration took place because of the better functionalities of WeChat, or if users left Sina Weibo for other reasons such as restrictions on content sharing and perceptions of censorship. Howsoever, WeChat continues to be a forum for political discussion, even if certain topics are heavily censored (Ng 2015). One point needs adding: internet companies in China generally did not achieve their success in dominating the Chinese markets because of the state's economic protectionism or censorship policies. Pan (2016) argues that Chinese social media such as Baidu (the equivalent of Google), WeChat (Facebook or Twitter) and Alibaba's Taobao (Amazon or eBay) were simply better at knowing the Chinese markets and meeting its needs. However, they still face the problem that they cannot expand into foreign markets because they do not have the legal or political policies in place to do so, especially for data protection.

In terms of censorship, one useful approach has been to focus not on the state's efforts at repression but on how people curb themselves. Thus Stern and Hassid (2012) talk of 'control parables', stories that circulate about how people may have got into trouble for what they said, and which keep others from doing the same. They make the point that it is often the uncertainty about what is going on – that it is not known whether or which repressive measures were used – that keeps people in line; for example, for fear that they may lose their livelihoods as journalists. Along similar lines, Arsène (2011) uses the term 'self-censorship' to argue that criticism of the regime is not expressed in the first place

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because of the fear of repercussions. These arguments point to a general issue: that it is difficult to gauge how much criticism of the regime remains unexpressed because of uncertainties about consequences, or if critics are resigned to leaving things unsaid.

It is also worth noting how digital media have shifted this problem: for broadcast media, it is journalists who do the self-censoring, and it is well known that they do so (for example, the top CCTV presenters interviewed by Zhu 2012). In the online world, we can distinguish between opinion leaders (famous business people, cultural celebrities and the like, who are very popular on Chinese social media) and grassroots activists. For both groups, self-censorship is not (or is less) tied to losing their positions due to party control, but rather is a self-imposed censorship for fear of reprisals. And in China, as elsewhere, the Chinese microblogosphere is dominated by a few users who make the vast number of posts. Svensson has therefore argued that microblogging is mainly used for 'visibility and witnessing rather than mobilization and activism' (2014, 179). Further, even for putting certain issues in the spotlight, the attention span of microblogs is short, which is of course true for microblogging compared to other media generally. Finally, it is difficult to gauge how many are critical of the regime. Brady (2008) has argued that the state's propaganda has been successful, and that most Chinese favour political stability, which can be assumed to include agreeing with muting voices that would threaten it. Along similar lines, Leibold (2011) suggests that most Chinese are in general supportive of the state's control of the internet, particularly as there are so many scams and wild rumours online. But to say that Chinese publics have adapted to being muted online is not to say they are uninterested in politics: according to Stockmann (2015a), more than 40 per cent have contributed to political discussions, and this can be broken down further into users of bulletin board services (BBS), who tend to be nationalists, and users of social media, who tend to be more in favour of liberalization. Like Rauchfleisch and Schäfer (2015), she argues that there are a number of different online publics.

This brings us to what political discussion and political protest in China are about. A number of scholars have documented censorship (King et al. 2013) and the rising number of online protests in China. Yang says that 'although hundreds of Internet protests occur every year, the main issues focus on corruption, social injustices against vulnerable persons, and abuse of power by government officials' (2014, 111). He notes the similarity between authoritarian China and Russia, with protests aimed at government abuses and oversights, whereas in democracies, protest is

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aimed more at government policies. He also says that the Chinese regime has adapted to these protests by learning to 'manage' them more effectively. Again, online activism and how the state responds to it must be understood conjointly.

Online activism must also be put in the context of prevailing political views or ideologies and, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to gauge these in China. But Pan and Xu (forthcoming) have recently made an attempt to do just that: to elicit the range of political views in China – its 'ideological spectrum'. They did this by making use of a large-scale survey that asked respondents a wide range of questions about politics. What they found is a split between younger, more urban, more well-off and well-educated 'liberals', which in the Chinese context means those in favour of more freedom and democracy (and which also includes more 'liberal' views on cultural issues such as homosexuality, but not a pro-market view), as against conservatives, who support the state's authoritarian socialism and a return to pre-reform policies, from the left.

This is a good moment to contrast the role of political ideology in the media in authoritarian China and in democratic societies generally. First, and most obviously, the valence of political ideology is reversed: Chinese leftists would be on the right in Western democracies, and its rightists would be on the left. But there is also a more fundamental difference: in China, this ideological spectrum can be seen as a measure of public political opinion, whereas the official and only legitimate ideology of the regime, including in the media, is that of the party, which sits 'above' right and left public orientations (although there are right/left factions within the party, but again, this is different from the situation in democratic multi-party societies). This point allows us to turn to the main contrast: in democracies, including India, political ideologies also arise from the public and they are articulated within parties and in the media; in addition, they compete for legitimacy and power.

In China on the other hand, as long as the party-state remains in power, the public's political orientations or ideological preferences influence the regime in the sense that it uses them to enhance the party-state and the nation. This harnessing of public opinion influences the direction of the state only indirectly, via the party. Public opinion may also strengthen or weaken competing factions within the party, and may soften the regime's control. But we should note the fundamental difference: in democracies, media, with an autonomous media system, are a transmission belt for ideologies, whereas in authoritarian regimes they are less autonomous and function as a thermostat that is used – but also kept within bounds – by the regime. At the same time, as the discussion

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of new media has suggested, the online public arena is where many go for news and political engagement to circumvent traditional media, which they know to be far more controlled by the state. And this applies particularly to certain parts of the population rather than others, which makes digital media far more important relatively (and relatively autonomous compared to traditional media) than in other media systems, because they serve and reflect parts of civil society better. Yet this online activity can be a double-edged sword: while much has been written about progressive forces pushing for more openness and dissent and protest against single-party rule (Yang 2009; 2014), the Chinese online public arena also contains a strong and visible extreme populist nationalism, as we shall see in the next chapter.

India, on the other hand, not only has a lively online public arena, as in China, but also an open one. But internet use, and also internet-based mobilization, is still mainly confined to a small, urban and younger minority. For example, one of the first incidents to gain widespread attention via social media, mainly on smartphones, was the Delhi gang rape that took place in December 2012. In response to this event, many activists and journalists went online, many on Twitter, and succeeded in drawing far more attention to the event than mainstream media would have done. However, this attention was confined to a small internet-savvy part of the population (Belair-Gagnon et al. 2014). In China, this way of drawing attention online to events such as crimes and disasters, underplayed by the government and traditional media, already has a much longer history, going back to the early to mid-2000s. India has a lively civil society, but new media are simply not used widely enough yet to make a large difference.

Nevertheless, even without widespread internet penetration, new technologies can be important for politics, and the best way to illustrate this is via the use of mobile phones in an Indian election. This was documented in detail by Doron and Jeffrey (2013, 143–64), in relation to the case of the election in 2007 of Mayawati as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh (UP), India's most populous state by far. At the time, mobile phones had just broken through to reach a sizable part of the population – 31 million of the 200 million people in UP. As Doron and Jeffrey point out, although mobile phone ownership was heavily skewed towards the middle class, it was also widespread among the Dalit (formerly known as 'untouchables') civil servants working in the government's Post Office and Communications departments. Mayawati's party, the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), was based on a Dalit political organization, and she herself came from a humble Dalit background. Dalits, 20

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per cent of UP's population, had continued to be widely disenfranchised, despite laws against this; for example, by not being allowed in certain public spaces and through intimidation by landowners (including during elections). Doron and Jeffrey also note that the 'major newspapers and television channels', controlled by Hindu elites, were 'disdainful of the BSP and often hostile to Dalit-oriented policies' (2013, 154). Yet through government policies ('reservations'), Dalits also held a certain proportion of government offices, and so could afford mobile phones, and they were a core among BSP party activists.

The BSP's election victory, and Mayawati's subsequent appointment as Chief Minister, were regarded as a major breakthrough by a disprivileged caste, gaining them power in India, and Doron and Jeffrey argue that the use of mobile phones was a necessary even if not a sufficient factor in this victory. It was achieved through the creation of an alliance with the Brahmins (10 per cent of the population), with both groups persuaded that a BSP government would benefit them. The election was won by combining a top-down and a bottom-up strategy for mobilizing voters at the level of election booths: party activists were contacted via voice and text message at organizations comprising both Dalits and Brahmins around thousands of polling stations. They were mobilized to get (especially sympathetic women) voters registered and out to vote, preparing for visits by party leaders and disseminating their text messages, and making sure that they knew the correct symbol to push on the voting machine and ballot papers (in India, where illiteracy is high, each party has a symbol – in the case of the BSP, an elephant). Doron and Jeffrey draw analogies here with the election campaign that took President Obama to power in 2008, where a similar person-to-person ground-level campaign was fought. They note that this person-to-person strategy was especially important in UP, establishing trust between Dalits and Brahmins and persuading them that the BSP represented their common interest.

Another key element was the fact that mobile phones were used to report wrongdoing and intimidation to the Election Commission, including taking pictures of irregularities. Finally, at the time, the other parties lacked such mobile phone-based mobilization. As Doron and Jeffrey note, they have subsequently remedied this, so the advantage of the BSP's innovative mobile phone use has vanished (indeed, in the 2017 state election, the nationalist BJP of Prime Minister Modi, discussed in the next chapter, won overwhelmingly in UP). Still, on this occasion, they argue that mobile phones played a crucial role, saying that it constituted a 'disruption' in Indian politics that 'bypassed mainstream media' (2013,

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163). We should note that mobile phones worked differently from other media and from the internet in this case, enabling two-way connections, with the expectation that relations between party officials and activists would be maintained. This involved one-to-one conversations rather than mass mailings, and made 'widespread frequent communication possible and involved people who would rather speak and listen than read and write' (2013, 154). In short, like the large populist rallies that characterize Indian politics, the use of this (small) technology fits well with mobilizing a part of the population using cheap and easy-to-use devices via the right modality.

As mentioned, online activism still reaches only a small part of the urban and educated population, mostly journalists and activists. This limited reach also applies to online politics generally, except when online media become a major platform for a much wider reach. They have recently begun to do so, but only by being amplified via traditional media, unlike in China – as we shall see. Still, what we can already see with regard to India are various forms of online or mobile phone-based media mobilization – during election campaigns, by political leaders and for issue-based social movement mobilization – that are rooted in longer-standing populist politics and civil society activism in India. Even if television and newspapers still dominate, far more so than in China due to the lack of reach of the internet or the lack of technological infrastructure, activists (and especially nationalists, as we will see in the next chapter) have a wider resonance among the population and as a movement. In both countries, then, it is important to take the wider media system and traditional media into account. However, parts of civil society gain disproportionately from new media insofar as these enable forces and information to be visible that are not represented in traditional media, and where these forces resonate among longer-term movements and ideologies 'from below'. Equally important is the way that elites use new media to shape the public agenda and mobilize the public; the Communist Party in China and the BSP's election are both examples of this.

To summarize: in the Chinese case, the regime and civil society are adapting to each other as use of the internet becomes more widespread and intensive. But there is a strain whereby the regime needs to contain dissent, and a potentially more serious strain whereby the regime's strategy of becoming an economic and high-tech superpower relies on a less constrained sphere of everyday internet use, utilizing online activity as a means of obtaining feedback, and expanding online markets that may need to go beyond borders. These tensions around how to enable Chinese citizens to participate more via digital media – but at the same

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time containing what they can do, also in relation to the world-at-large – are bound to intensify and raise questions about the regime's legitimacy. Recently, discussions of the climate of media policies in China have portrayed President Xi as adopting a tougher and more controlling stance. However, Brady has argued that he is merely perpetuating a longer-standing tradition, in operation since at least 1989, whereby periods of greater openness alternate with periods of greater control. The same applied to Xi's predecessors, Jiang and Hu. Xi, she says, 'is not trying to suppress public opinion or the "public-opinion oversight" role of the media, but rather is trying to keep it within acceptable boundaries that do not harm the party's core interests' (2016, 11).

India's smartphone use will go from 20 per cent to 80 per cent in the space of a few years (Donner 2015). Its economic development is not following the East Asian statist route and its markets are becoming more open to the world, which is a mixed blessing insofar as global internet companies dominate (unlike in China, where national companies dominate). However, India's IT sector also provides the strongest share of exports. Civil society in this case is largely unconstrained, but strong elites continue to skew Indian development towards the interests of businesses and parties. With a weak state and fragmented pluralism, a plethora of civil society groups will press against these dominant interests, and against corruption. But here, as in China, these civil society pressures include intolerant populist forces, and in India, these forces also benefit the ruling nationalist party and its leader, who can mobilize support from a wider base, bypassing traditional media.

Traditional media, newspapers and television, will continue to set the political agenda in both countries. But smartphone use has made the internet accessible to most in China, and will do so soon in India, which means that the debates will also move beyond economic development and access (Donner 2015). Online activism will increasingly influence politics, in India in a pluralist political and media environment competing for attention with traditional media but with a rapidly growing population of internet users. In China, it will be within an environment contained by an authoritarian party that will need to balance managing the pressures for greater responsiveness and maintaining stability with a deepening and extensive online sphere.

Both countries have lively politics emerging from online civil society. In China, the lid is kept on by the state, whereas in India, small burgeoning civil society forces are outweighed by elites. In both countries, major examples of online activism include protest and pressures for less corrupt and more responsive government. There are wider

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lessons here for the double-edged nature of the political implications of digital media. The internet is changing politics, but it extends inputs from civil society only within the confines of the workings of different media systems, and includes forces that demand more responsiveness from government in the direction of greater pluralism and accountability – but also, as we shall see, calls for a stronger, less tolerant state and a more exclusive nationalism. In any event, the role of online forces is a – perhaps *the* – central question for Chinese and Indian political development. That is because, unlike in established democracies, with their autonomous media systems and well-established competition for visibility among many inputs, in China and India the online realm will continue to provide the main alternative to entrenched political power and its hold over traditional media.

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