

## Chapter 2

# Criticism of Politics in the Old Media and the ‘Citizenship in Rage’ (*Wutbürgertum*) in the New Media

*Post-democracy* is a fashionable term which acquired international popularity after the publication of Crouch’s bestseller (2008: 13). This variation of notions about democracy is characterised by formal institutions which seem to be working. But beneath this veneer, the “real political process” is said to be characterised by erosion of the party state, by “medialisation of politics” via old and new internet media which undermine the competence of the “political class”. This trend of “medialisation” seems to be reinforced by the growth of a new “generation living in the windows”. In Germany the success of the Party of Pirates, and recently the successful populist party AFD (Alternative for Germany), is a proof for this political change. According to the study “EU kids Online”, children start to use the internet in Germany at the age of nine and in Sweden when they are seven. The average use of internet among the age group from 12 to 19 years is 138 min a day and has already overtaken use of the TV, which accounts for only 123 min of their daily time budgets. Dangerous consequences of this development are that a third of youngsters do not follow special interests and are at risk of being exposed to extremist views, something which parents and schools struggle to prevent (Hasebrink and Lampert 2011: 4, 9).

This process of medialisation of political events will be analysed in three steps:

- The new culture of protest by the “citizenship in rage”.
- Bad guys and darlings in the media campaigns.
- New media in the internet against the established media.

### 2.1 Citizenship in Rage—A New Culture of Protest?

Media were always considered to be a “barometer of democracy”. According to some radical critics, the consequence of globalisation was close cooperation between the media, big economic enterprises and politics. “Profitability” was said

to be a substitute for the old target of “civil society” which underlies the remits of a “fourth power” (Ramonet 2005). Even the public media are increasingly valued according to economic efficiency. The “aim of high quota”—more than high quality—seems to characterise the competition between most TV channels. The debate on a “fourth power” of the media has been complemented by postmodern debate on a “fourth revolution” (Floridi 2015). It seems to be caused by a “bot” (derived from the “robot”) and stands for computer programs which work more or less automatically on tasks without needing interaction by human actors. The idea that bots are objective instruments proved to be an illusion: “Even good bots fight”. Studies by Floridi and other authors proved that even the allegedly neutral and objective bots in encyclopedic publications such as “Wikipedia” imply decent propaganda for political purposes.

Increasing self-stylisation of the political class created the hypothesis that democracy as a principle is moving towards an inability to declare itself. My counter hypothesis is that democracy seems never to be unable to announce itself. On the contrary it lives in many verbal self-declarations, especially during electoral campaigns. Sometimes political adversaries acquire strange popular names in the media, as in the German electoral campaign of 1976, when Kohl was named “Django” and his SPD-counter candidate Rau was dubbed “Jesus” because of his religious convictions (Merten 1991). *Self-staging* of politicians hides the differences between “retrospective voting” (Fiorina) and the rare concrete analysis of the future. “Medialisation of politics” is frequently discussed (cf. Pfetsch and Marcinkowski 2009: 15). The influence of the media has, however, been rather unspecific in many cases. Early on, Schulz (2004) classified four components:

- *Extension*. Technologies of media enlarge the natural limits of human communication in dimensions of time, space and expressiveness.
- *Substitution*. New media change or even extinguish the social activities of citizens.
- *Amalgamation*. Activities in the media combine with other activities, from car driving to listening to radio transmissions.

*Accommodation*. Actors adapt themselves to the rules of the media system, not just in the professionalisation of electoral campaigns. Accommodation is featured the most. It is comprised of various factors:

- Attempts to further publicity via *symbolic politics*.
- Testing the competence of political actors and institutions to mediate the policies they pursue.
- Media efforts to promote the political aims among specified social groups.
- Direct mailing to individual citizens.
- Permanent electoral campaigns via research on public opinions.
- National coordination, decentral implementation.

This multitude of issues leads to the assumption that there is no clearly definable “fourth power” which has been mentioned in the older literature. There is also hardly a one-way street between the media and the political centre. There is rather a

business *exchange of information for publicity*. In this debate we sometimes meet the exaggeration that the established print and TV-media are superfluous because some politicians communicate directly with the electors via *Facebook* or *Twitter* and no longer seem to need the established media. Experience shows that this minority of politicians is also proud when their individual manner of communication ends up in the official media and Facebook passages are mentioned in the TV news (Hickmann 2012: 33). Nevertheless this competition between modern and postmodern media seems to endorse the hypothesis that qualified journalism is in decline. The size of editions of good quality newspapers has declined by nearly a quarter, while the number of newspaper editors declined in the first decade of the new millennium at a rate of 15% (Staun 2012b: 25).

The relationship between the media and the political scene since 1949 has changed considerably. Several ideal types have been constructed such as:

- Autonomy.
- Interdependence.
- Symbiosis (semi-authoritarian local interdependence, especially in smaller cities which have only one newspaper). The wave of populism in the new century seems to favour this kind of symbiosis.
- Parties losing their own media, even in such a historical case as the “Vorwärts” of the German Social Democratic Party, which was even a model for the international movement in other countries. This was a reason why a new edition was sponsored for a certain time.
- Governments and parties installed their own systems of information and thereby increased the interdependence of politics and media.
- The so-called “politainment” has increased in a species of privatisation aimed at a popular “boulevard democracy”.

Many contributors to the feuilleton section proposed “slowing down the rhythm of life”. But the contrary happened: an *acceleration of life* dominated even in the political sphere. A kind of reduced “journalism of mere statements” also influenced the media and the time of research in political processes was getting shorter, also in order to reduce the costs for the newspapers. In his German bestseller *Please no news* (*Am besten nichts Neues* 2010: 61), Schimmeck regretted that the decline in the originality of media contributions was caused by a decline in the time spent on research. Weischenberg (1997) stated that even print journalists adapted themselves to the demand for reports on prominent people in many debates on TV broadcasts. Increasingly the national system has been treated in a deteriorating way. In his book “Show of the day” (*Die Tagesschau*) van Rossum (2007) found that TV no longer serves as a provider of information and explanations of the world, but rather as a setter of agendas with language regulations for political topics. The Spanish media specialist Ramonet (2005) has already shocked the public with the hypothesis that the media have abandoned their civil duty and cooperated with big enterprises and politicians. This development seems to depend on the cycles of economic development: in times of boom the control functions have been better used by the media

than in times of economic slow-down (Schiffer 2011: 29). This debate has led to the construction of types within a “Gaga-Galaxy” (Schimmeck 2010: 86f):

- The *ego-department* of sentimental individualists.
- The *we-department*, hobnobbing with political elites.
- The majority of journalists focused on citizens, called “they journalism”.

Politicians and journalists increasingly cooperate in such processes. They create a public machine of revolt and further the omission of parties. Even scientists are affected by this kind of populism, when one political scientist is declared the most intelligent scholar in the field (Schimmeck 2010: 110)—a judgement which hardly coincides with the opinions of his colleagues in the field, as demonstrated by citation indices. In Germany a certain direct connection between the elitemedia and politicians is given by the official “broadcasting councils” (*Rundfunkräte*). According to a decision by the Federal Constitutional Court, public radio stations should be independent and at a distance from the state. In reality, politicians determine the chief positions of the radio stations and the Government installs its own media controls (Seils 2010: 179). Media perform, however, as an early warning system for politicians. In spite of the close cooperation between politicians and the media, this relationship is hardly free from conflicts because of differences of media presentations in both spheres:

- Media increasingly prefer irony and hooliganism.
- Politicians take this medial style of representation as a kind of negative attitude towards the politicians concerned.

Strong politicians, such as the former federal chancellor Helmut Schmidt, therefore criticised in a self-created neologism the *Indiskretins* and the arrogance of the media. When he left the political sphere he himself became a weekly media commentator and sometimes argued worse than the formerly criticised journalists. Sometimes “myths of persecution” were created by politicians, and the media have been compared to the power of repression wielded by security services in Communist states (Wieselmann 2011: 12). The collectivism of a “journalism of gangs” was frequently criticised. When important politicians lost their elections, such as Kohl in 1976 and Schröder in 2006, the media were frequently held responsible for the result. In some cases this led to partial de-democratisation by streamlining the media, not only in Russia and Turkey but also in EU-member states, such as Hungary and recently even Italy.

The initiatives of interaction between media and politics are distributed in an unequal way. *Initiatives by governments* centre on:

- Financing electoral campaigns.
- Travelling to the governments of other countries. Only very strong media try to finance their trips when they accompany politicians.
- Pressconferences by governments and opposition parties.
- Daily informal contact with media representatives.

*Initiatives of the media* prevail in:

- Movements for critical journalism.
- Investigative journalism in cases of scandals.

Media and politics develop different preferences in such conflicts:

- Media prefer clear alternatives in terms of government and opposition.
- Politicians, on the other hand, mostly face a multi-party-system and try to negotiate.

This difference occasioned the complaint that the media are scarcely able to accept the complexity of debates and proposals in parliamentary debates. Journalists have little sympathy for the fact that politicians often vehemently criticise each other during parliamentary debates yet nevertheless try to meet afterwards in a parliamentary restaurant in obvious friendship. Some critics doubt that media can analyse the complexity of important decisions correctly:

- In complex and federal systems politics is interrelated with several levels of decision-making. What has been dubbed the “dictatorship of 1.3 min” for an interview in the TV or in a radio broadcast can hardly cover the complexity of decision-making.
- The consequences of important laws cannot be foreseen by most journalists. A notable case was the “law of emissions” of 1974, when even well trained lobbyists did not anticipate the consequences which showed up in the process of implementation afterwards.
- Routine policies can be important but are boring for journalists and turn into the field of activities by lobbyists.
- Innovative policies promoted by new social movements are likely to advance as “darlings of the media” though their content can hardly exceed “symbolic politics”.

An additional problem lies in the importance of a third actor, the scientists. But they mostly offer highly *abstract deductions in the tradition of systems’ theories* whereas the media prefer a *history of events*, though historians can only offer proper insights after some time and distance have elapsed since the decision.

## 2.2 “Darlings” and “Bad Boys” in the Media Campaigns

The subjective side of media policies had an increasing influence on the public position of political elites. “Darlings” among the politicians seem to be actors who can talk in an unconventional and free way, such as Heiner Geissler or Norbert Blüm, two former federal ministers in the Cabinet of the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl.

Politicians, however, cannot rely on a permanent position as “media darlings”. After a while some German darlings lost favour with the media, such as Lothar Späth, a former Prime Minister in the state of Baden-Württemberg, after a minor scandal, and Möllemann and Westerwelle, two former federal ministers of the liberal party (FDP). Its party chairman, Guido Westerwelle, had tried to get into the centre of public attention with his “Guido-mobile”, but was soon classified by the media as an “incompetent” leader.

The Federal Defence Minister, Karl-Theodor zu Guttenberg, who was always considered competent at leadership had to step down when a scandal about copying large parts of his dissertation from other works was made public. Today he avoids his country and lives in the USA. Some of his radical political measures, such as the abolition of a general duty to serve in the armed forces (*Allgemeine Wehrpflicht*) remained untouched by his successors. Some writers, however, classified his self-staging as the “the top of work by empty politics” (Lepsius and Meyer-Kalkus 2011). The case of zu Guttenberg did not leave a clear line in the political elite. Federal Chancellor Merkel excused herself in the first phase of the discussion. “I did not want to install a mere assistant”. A good policy would have been to nominate a Minister of Defence with a more serious disposition, such as de Maizière. But the needed reform of the cabinet did not take place.

Media play an important role not only in conflicts between government and opposition but also in the competition between candidates within leading parties. The chairman of the Social Democratic Party (SPD), Sigmar Gabriel, for instance, declared himself during the party congress in December 2011 to be the “master of procedure” and classified the media movements of his competitor Steinbrück as a kind of “Steinbrück festival” which he declared to be over (Sattar 2011: 3).

The influence of the media has recently become most visible in current affairs talk shows on the most important television channels. In no other European country are there five talkshows devoted to current affairs. They are mostly respected even by intellectuals and not ridiculed like entertainment shows such as the *Germany looks for the Super Star*. The image of Frank Plasberg’s show *When Politics Meets Reality* is typical of TV programmes which do not present themselves as typical shows (Clemens 2011: 148f). Even intellectuals sometimes overlook the fact that on TV it is not “reality” that is represented but the “visual construction of reality”. Reality would be represented by facts—but they have the image of being boring. Influential TV presenters, like Anne Will and Maybrit Illner, frequently stop reports on reality by saying: “We don’t want to go into the details”. Their colleague, TV presenter Günter Jauch was initially an exception to this rule, but in the long run he was unable to maintain his liberal principle. Political talkshows are often personalised and full of staging. The selection of the debating panel shows that the initiators look for people that provoke and mix up the scene, such as Heiner Geissler and Norbert Blüm in politics, or the historian Arnulf Baring and the constitutional lawyer Hans Herbert von Arnim among the scholars who are frequently invited. Objective analysts of political processes are less in demand.

In one of the big crises of the Federal Republic the power of the media became obvious. When Federal President Christian Wulff was attacked, a “great coalition”

of the media was formed between the popular daily *Bild*, and the high-brow weekly, *Der Spiegel*.—two publications which were normally polls apart. Media critics immediately spoke of “self-equalisation of the media”. The “yoke of the online media” was criticised for creating a kind of military “cadence march” which succeeded in toppling a Federal President. The presidential office supported his honorary remuneration of 200,000 Euros per annum—even though it was opposed by most citizens in the country—asserting that Wulff resigned because of political reasons. Wulff’s search for a personal advantage did have political aspects, but citizens had different very ideas about the nature of those “political reasons”.

As Wulff’s potential follower, the protestant clergyman Joachim Gauck became a darling of the media at the same time that Wulff gained his reputation as the “bad boy” of the year. Wulff was not very honest or skilful at handling his crisis, and this was sufficient reason for his fall from grace, since Germany has never accepted the kind of “mafia behaviour” shown by Berlusconi in Italy. Joachim Gauck, as a former dissident in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), was venerated as a “Federal priest” who created “critical solidarity” even among non-religious citizens. His role in the GDR and his “non-marriage” with his lady, who joined him in public, was criticised. But not once was the career of church-orientated former GDR citizens, such as Angela Merkel and Joachim Gauck, seriously criticised by the Christian Social Union (CSU) or the Catholic wing of the CDU. Frequently the media claim to support “public opinion” as a counter publicity of the political system (Staun 2012a: 29). But they tend to overlook the fact that the “people’s opinion” is an intellectual construct since the population hardly ever has a unified opinion, and especially no constructive opinion. Only occasionally does the large majority of the population join in a negative attitude against dictators they want to get rid of, as in the cases of Mubarak, or against democratic statesmen who failed in some of their democratic activities. The new slogan claims “transparency”. This new fashion has sometimes become an ideology which did not create a freer society because it universalised a climate of suspicion that referred to dying dictatorships (Han 2012a: 41). The concept of transparency is colourless and does not support a political concept, but rather the equalisation of opinions. This happens in two directions:

- The rather conventional direction of *populist campaigns* by new or old parties.
- The direction of *new forms of anarchism*, such as the “occupy movement”, which pretended to operate without leaders and verbally admitted only to “creators of new impulses” (Ebbinghaus 2012: 22).

These new movements develop in organisations as a mixture of new movements and old parties, and undermine traditional representative democracy. They further a kind of new “democracy of moods”, which threatens to lose itself in mere subjectivity and in global slogans such as “down with”. Thus the personalisation of politics is increasing and sometimes leads to unexpected coalitions in the media such as *Bild* and *Der Spiegel*. This development, on the other hand, quickly leads to exhaustion in the media. In the debate on the question whether Federal President Wulff should renounce his office, the necessary investigation was substituted by a

campaign against him (Brobst 2012: 1). In certain campaigns the views of the “people” were far more varied than those of the media, which entered into a kind of invented legal judgement and tried to implement it even though this was hardly their job (Niggemeier 2012: 140, 142).

Public opinion was increasingly exhausted and the citizens often showed astonishing tolerance during these permanent campaigns. In a survey by the first German TV channel (ARD) in January 2012 57% of the interviewed citizens had the impression that the media wanted to “kill” the Federal President as an office holder. A new task of the media is to reconcile citizens with democracy even if no clear ethical leader emerged. There were a several irregularities in various legislatures, such as:

- Clientelist policies for certain groups such as the reduced value added tax for hotels,
- Westerwelle’s attack against the “late Roman decadence in Germany”,
- Unclear recruitment of travel groups in the Foreign Office,
- And conflicts between two parties such as the liberal Free Democratic Party (FDP) and the conservative Bavarian Christian Social Union (CSU), leading to allegations such as “wild boar” and “a group of cucumbers”.

Democracy moved closer to the media because the parties increasingly discovered *online-campaigning*. TV and radio broadcasts were still used, but the internet became increasingly important for electoral campaigns. Studies found interesting details about political citizens:

- 8% of the citizens in Germany receive their information from TV and radio broadcasts.
- 77% from newspapers and magazines.
- 37% via the internet (Knuth 2010: 361).
- 58% of young men look for news in the internet, which offers the parties a good instrument for steering public opinion.

But the online electoral campaigns are still only complementary to the traditional instruments of electoral campaigns (Zielmann and Röttger 2009: 84). The success in opinion-building is still not quantified, but internet campaigns offer the advantage that the candidates look modern and are orientated towards the future (Reinke 2010: 86f).

The internet has considerably changed decision-making within parties. But it is not yet quite clear whether this development has supported membership and created a stronger position for it (Marshall 2001: 46). The new media have not yet developed the same level of importance in all political systems. New technologies are mostly needed in weak party states, such as the American presidential system or the semi-presidential system in Russia. The traditional method of self-evaluation is not necessarily less successful, as was shown in Russia. President Putin directed the media and showed himself hunting half-naked with a tattoo of a cross, so that both old-fashioned and modern citizens would be impressed. President Medvedev, on the other hand, tried to impress the citizens by tweeting. The new media change



cultural policy and politics tries to respond to it. Even the traditional law of authorship has increasingly been attacked. The “download kids” who, according to the existing law, use the media illegally, are persecuted by lawyers, who try to dissuade them. One consequence is that the new monopolists, like Apple or Amazon, earn a lot of money and dominate the market (Probst and Trotier 2012: 54). Politics therefore will have to find new rules for copyright law.

Recently more reflective representatives of the media, such as the editors of the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit*, have started to become self-critical, (Bürger et al. 2011: 16–22). Journalists often show empathy and understanding during discussions, but in written articles they may demonstrate a more cynical approach.

Given these developments, dangers for journalists emerge in a kind of overestimation of their own importance when circulation increases. Once opinions are published they cannot easily be ignored: corrections are limited to corrections of names and facts, but not to changes in possible wrong judgements by the authors. Published opinions can enter into a hard version in the media, as the affairs of Thilo Sarrazin or the poem on Israel by Günter Grass have shown (Mangold 2012: 50).

The development of a new “dual landscape of the media” has had some impact on political institutions:

- The professionalisation of electoral campaigns and the growing importance of media experts have contributed to downgrade the importance of simple party members. They are only important as “ambassadors of their party” in a special social milieu. Their financial contributions can guarantee only about half of the costs of the organisation. Spin doctors, experts of electoral campaigns and of angling topics in the USA, mostly rely on the cooperation and skill of the candidates. However, in Europe they remain attached to the parties, in spite of a certain degree of independence (Falter 2002: 424).
- The medialisation of political competition has increased the financial needs of the parties. The need to combine the best of both worlds has also resulted in Germany in the worst of all solutions: high government subsidies were combined with tax privileges which Anglo-Saxon countries, in their less etatistic tradition, have always enjoyed. Despite this combination there was a growing financial crisis among the parties in Germany. To reduce costs during electoral campaigns, the parties used indirect marketing via “product placement”, targeted topic and event management, such as conferences, participation in talkshows and state visits (Falter 2002: 425).
- Commercialised relations with the media have reduced the efforts of parties to produce their own media. “Outsourcing” appeared to be cheaper but in the long run it has become more expensive because the labour could no longer be supplied by party members and was increasingly less volunteered. The party membership was less inclined than previously to play an active role in campaigns.

### 2.3 New Media in Networks Versus Established Media

Politicians frequently complain about tough judgements in the media. In the meantime journalists are severely challenged by bloggers of the new media in the same way that they have occasionally treated political actors. Nicolas Carr called Twitter “the telegraph of narcissists”. The language tends to be aphoristic and direct, orientated towards “action”. The advantage lies in direct promotion and personal contact. Tweeting creates a human image, and involves—so to speak—more “glasnost” in semi-authoritarian regimes. But there are several drawbacks to this use of the media:

- Overly direct statements can lead to *diplomatic difficulties*. Medvedev is presumed to have said that “Angela Merkel prefers Hamburgers to Barak Obama”, a statement which did not improve Russian-German relations.
- There is a risk that political actors will *lose authority* through insufficient distance from official statements. The users are in danger of over-exposure, which does not improve the treatment of important news and can lead to a kind of “democratic censorship” (Ramonet 2005). A new “economy of attention” seems to be important, but it remains unclear who should steer it.
- Users are seduced by the hope that the application of these new media will be without *financial costs*. They overlook, however, that the costs are frequently financed by data on the users of these new media (Schiffer 2011: 30f).

The internet has frequently proved too influential, as in the scandal on zu Guttenberg:

- The internet collected material about a fraud committed by zu Guttenberg. His thesis adviser, Peter Häberle at the University of Bayreuth, was shocked: “We are not trained for the discovery of falsifications via the internet”.

But the internet proved to be multifunctional. It was also used for the defence of zu Guttenberg and collected half a million votes in favour of returning the politician to office. New in this case was the fact that zu Guttenberg created an alliance with the “boulevard press” to an extent which was never reached even by such a famous demagogue as Franz Josef Strauss, the former chairman of the Christian Social Union and a former prime minister of the Free State of Bavaria.

The established media frequently felt entitled to serve as critics of politics and its actors. Often the *new political class* with its oligarchic tendencies was denounced. But soon, however, it was discovered that the same tendencies were also developing within the media. Editorial bodies often appeared to be rather homogeneous and hermetic in their composition. Women, journalists with a migration background and East German writers were underrepresented. Nevertheless quota regulations were hardly accepted. Newspapers were said not to exist for the ‘incarnation of justice’, but they had to be “good” and successful (di Lorenzo 2012: 1). The German writer Kurt Tucholsky once said in the 1930s (?): “Problems are not solved by mankind but they rather are avoided”. One recent form of “avoiding problems”

seems to be that many citizens escape into the new media. When the power of the media was exaggerated dramatically, the new “raging bourgeoisie” supported new forms of populist politics and media. The “generation social media” developed into a kind of collective notion for media offerings such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *YouTube*. Politically most relevant were not the blogs about personal life and private exchanges on *Facebook*, but rather:

- new forms of *cybermobbing* which might challenge politics.
  - *online surveys* initiated by politicians.
  - *shitstorm*—proposed as the anglicism of the year in Germany—which included masses of offending and threatening E-mails.
  - *Trolle* became a new strategy of anonymous and pseudo-anonymous users who try to provoke citizens as well as politicians.
- Hardly any politician dared to defend Sarrazin and when German President Joachim Gauck cautiously mentioned that the hypotheses of this writer should be discussed, he was strenuously attacked. A large majority of the citizens favoured Sarrazin’s hypotheses and they expressed their support via “shitstorms”. When the female sociologist Naika Foroutan attacked Sarrazin during a TV discussion with Maybritt Illner, her enemies uploaded names and telephone numbers on “Google”. Foroutan was attacked every day. Even threats against her life occurred and her daily life became barely tolerable (Soares 2012: 3). Even political actors have used the “politics of threat”, but without verbal offenses.

Ansgar Hevling of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU), a rather unknown backbencher, succeeded in getting more public attention through an appeal of 90 lines to the internet community than from seventeen parliamentary speeches (Rosenfeld 2012: 3). Most *shitstorm* statements are offensive and discriminatory. However, sometimes they do have a positive effect on key executives in big corporations. The political establishment has increasingly been unable to cope with these new forms of criticism (Brauck 2012: 90).

*Whistleblowers* can develop into a positive form of modern net-pirates when they denounce political mismanagement, corruption or violation of human rights, as, for instance, the revelation platform *WikiLeaks* (Netzdeutsch für Anfänger 2012: 4) did.

Reinhardt (2012: 10), a member of the Berlin State Parliament and a speaker on the domestic politics of the parliamentary group of the populist “Pirates”, praised the softway as a chance to reduce lobbyism to its original function: informing the public and completing the normal process of building opinion within the parties.

In some cases the first experiences with the new media were not positive. The Bavarian Prime Minister Seehofer organised in 2012 a Facebook party. However, it was a flop. The organisers had hoped that 2500 guests would participate. But only 160 representatives of the media, 200 party members and a few “internet friends” tried to participate.

The new media should not be overrated in their importance for the parties. According to a study of St. Gallen (more details needed) only 34% of the German Federal deputies never used social media, and only 56% did so very rarely (Hein and Weddeling 2012: 109). Only a few politicians, such as Dirk Niebel, a former minister of development cooperation of the German liberal party (FDP), were eager to communicate with their electorate via the internet.

The power of the new media is growing, but it threatens to establish new veto groups that are more difficult to control than the old interest groups. Another former liberal German federal minister, Sabine Leutheusser-Schnarrenberger, recently proposed to the German Federal Parliament, The Bundestag, an “Acta law”.<sup>1</sup> But after only two days of public demonstrations to stop this *Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement* (ACTA) project, the minister changed her mind and recognised the need for additional discussions. In the meantime this project was stopped at European level by the European Parliament.

The Pirates’ Party emerged in parallel to the spread of smartphones and the merger between computers and mobile phones. Sigmund Freud once called mankind the “god of artificial limbs” (*Prothesen-Gott*) who, with tools and machines, developed a species which was omnipresent across the world. The smart phone was considered to be the incarnation of this kind of “god of artificial limbs” (Tuma 2012: 65). This “Quasi-Party”—as we might call the Pirates in comparison with traditional parties—became a kind of a temporary success model for the new movements which boasted of promoting the “the principle of transparency”. According to this kind of movement, the state was reduced to the role of offering services.

Marina Weisband, a former spokeswoman of the Pirates who left the party in 2015, declared: “If the FDP is the original, we are the updated model” (Hank 2012: 38). However, the new party group, which very quickly entered several parliaments of the German states (Länder), became a victim of its “halfway liberalism”. It suffered from the problem that its obligation to provide transparency was difficult to harmonise with the right to privacy for individual citizens.

Some critics, such as the philosopher Han (2012b: 11), were afraid of a general culture of suspicion and spectacle close to a pornographic society which transforms society into a “society of nakedness and immorality”. Some serious artists were anticipating that the “gratuity world of the internet” and a half-hearted copyright law might push large parts of culture into difficulties which can no longer be financed (Greve 2012: 54).

The web designer Neumann (2012: 24) argued against the anxieties of some authors that illegal stock exchanges which create their business by spreading copied contents would not be proved by the pirates. They also wanted to approve the circulation of contents solely for private purposes and education projects. When the

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<sup>1</sup>ACTA refers to an Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement; see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Counterfeiting\\_Trade\\_Agreement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anti-Counterfeiting_Trade_Agreement).

experts in the German Federal parliament exposed competing positions concerning copyright law, astonishing similarities between the papers of the Social Democrats and the Pirates could be seen (Küchemann 2012: 25).

It is likely that most theses of the Pirates will be accepted by the established parties, similar to the acceptance of ecological demands in the debate with the Green Party after 1980. There are already prognoses that a “leftist liberal mixture” will develop with the Pirates, even though they prefer to describe themselves as “social liberal” (Wagner 2012: 10). According to an initial chairman of the Pirate Party, Bernd Schlömer (2012: 33), their liberalism is *ordo-liberal*. Not maximation of winning positions but harmonisation, fairness and justice are the aims of this new party, which tries to place itself outside the traditional scheme of left and right stances. The Pirates proposed a basic income and thus tended to reinforce the drawbacks of the social situation created by the so-called “Hartz IV” law<sup>2</sup> of the former Social Democratic Chancellor Schröder (Herack 2012: 27). The dangers of this new undogmatic party wielding too strong an influence however, were rather low. The then chairman of the Pirates’, Schlömer (2012: 7), admitted that a Party with 31,000 members—which adopts a decision based on 440 votes in favour and 390 in opposition is not yet close to an authentic “basic democracy”.

In 2016 the Oxford Dictionaries chose the concept of “post-truth” as the international notion of the year. This word makes it clear that public opinion is no longer characterised by objective facts, but rather by an appeal to sentiment and personal opinions. The drawbacks of the *digital revolt of communication* cannot be ignored even in moral fields: time and again new advocates of truth show up and sometimes they lead to a kind of “mob”. New victims are always found. The political relevance of issues is replaced by fashionable interesting topics. New forms of uncertainty lead to ever new forms of suspicion (Pörksen and Detel 2012a: 141). Thus the alleged transparency actually results in new forms of uncertainty which lack transparency. The cycles of acceptance and critique are increasingly hectic. The Pirates proposed their programme and straight away the first offences against *plagiarism* were launched by some media.

In the new media there are not always successes to be stated, with the exception of certain dictatorships, when the Chinese Communists for a while lost control over the internet in their country (Köckritz 2012: 6). The good news: censorship in these regimes does not function any more. In the name of freedom of opinion, the new media defend themselves against any state regulation. In some defective democracies in Eastern Europe and in the successor states of the Soviet Union the media constitute some new hopes, as long as the old media feel under government control (Transformation Index 2012: 60f).

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<sup>2</sup>On the so-called Hartz law; see: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartz\\_concept](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hartz_concept). The *Hartz concept* refers to recommendations submitted by a commission on reforms of the German labour market (2002) that was headed by, Peter Hartz, then Volkswagen’s personnel director. The reforms were incorporated in the *Agenda 2010* of the German federal government composed by the Social Democratic Party and the Greens.

They pretend to fight for transparency, but contribute to the opposite. In the cases of parties and interest groups the dialogue partners are known. But there are increasingly new ad hoc-groups—in America called “politics without parties”—which are volatile and hard to identify (Wefing 2012: 3). The old media, on the other hand, are highly ritualised. Their relationship to politics is frequently articulated in press conferences, talk shows and semisecret meetings. The new media has strengthened the “unclearness” which Habermas found in some postdemocracies. Other critics, such as Münkler (2012: 100f), has already seen in the new media a contribution to the end of parliamentary democracy. Deliberation seems to be a permanent event and decisions become more difficult in the stage of “liquid Democracy” with weakening parliamentary and executive institutions.

## 2.4 Conclusions

The new media became a fashionable topic in 2010. But the literature sometimes exaggerated the power of the new social networks on the internet, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. The latter are of decisive importance only in countries where the old media are controlled by the state, such as most Islamic countries—recently including Turkey—and Russia. There are, however, some authors, such as Buchstein (1996: 603ff), who contradict the “optimists” of the new media and see disadvantages in this development, such as an increasing loss of participants in the libertarian groups which were said to make the media landscape much more open and decentralised than the traditional setting. It is suspected that *Mediapolis* will pass beyond the “democratic rubicon”. This danger is even seen in the possibility which *Cyberiologues* praised as a chance of democratisation, as for instance the “push-bottom votes”. It is correctly argued that the new networks do not create a new form of publicity. Only in local democracies and their planning in provincial areas are positive sides of this kind of voting behaviour recognised. Otherwise, it would be necessary to opt for a kind of “democratic censorship” if uncontrollable and aggressive votes of the *Wutbürger*, the “enraged citizens”, are channelled. Thus republican ideals—such as “common goods” and “common interest”—might not survive. But as soon as the dangers of the new media become too strong, counter-movements tend to appear, such as the initiative for a *European Charter of Basic Laws*. Article 27 in this document not only aims to protect data, but also makes proposals for the use of “big data”, artificial intelligence, “Robotik” and the steering of social behaviour (*Die Zeit*, No 50. 1 Dec. 2016: 5).

The power of the media is generally overrated due to some spectacular highly personalised events. The routine work of the media which predominates is mostly reactive and rarely innovative. Even *agenda-setting* is rarely achieved by the new media, but rather by new social movements behind them. Rare successes in innovation are mostly not working continuously. Intellectual fashions are quickly

becoming generalised, such as the ecological demands of new social movements. Sometimes established organisations have been successfully criticised, as was shown by the debates about new liquid fuel, such as “E 10”, which affected the Christian Democrats more than the Green Party in Germany. “Editors of photography are the victors of history”. The price, however, is costly: they often repeat the same photographs. They want to create something worth remembering, but in fact get lost in banalities (Kurbjuweit 2011: 41). Digital instruments encourage new forms of discussion and participation. The new speed of communication has so far facilitated an unprecedented speed in the spread of information. But the media are unable to determine the contents and the concrete events in a way which can be calculated in advance (Pörksen and Detel 2012b: 15). But the tendency towards the “*boulevardisation*” of comparatively minor events in competition with supraregional media threatens to damage the image of the old media. These are also under pressure from the provincialisation of the local media, which has to contend with the competition from local advertisements (Biallas 2012: 32).

The increasing orientation towards entertainment—especially in private TV stations—furtheres what Populists and Pirates pretended to fight: politics is downgraded to “politics as merchandise” (Jun 2004: 46, 412). The new media are an insufficient substitute for discussions between party members and the old media. In this fragmentation of the media landscape, the media is losing the power of integration to the same extent that traditional political parties are ridiculed for being “old-fashioned”.

A postmodern relation of disturbance between the media and politics seems to be a duplication of disturbances between the citizens and the elites. Journalists liked to support the fire and invented a “*counter republic*”. In the light of empirical findings such notions however prove to be an exaggeration. They can be recognized as the outcome of an unsafe commitment of the old media, created by the new media. The old media call this process a “shit storm”—working as a school of new barbarism which tries to ruin what democracy needs most: a moderate culture of debate which facilitates compromises (Kurbjuweit 2012: 25). Survey studies of Dieter Rucht—WZB Berlin and the “Institute for research on democracy” in Göttingen—corrected many of the exaggerations of the horror scenarios in the media. Only the bias of the age was correct. Old citizens were hardly involved Rarely Christian Democrats—contrary to the members of the Green Party—were among the citizens opposing everything. As an explication it was offered that older citizens in their youth collected some experience in protesting and looked more critical on the controversies of conflict in the old age. Demonstrations of older citizens were not quite unusual and their educational level was high enough to prevent light-minded generalizations. The new protesting citizens—in contrast to the generation of 68—does not oppose the existing democratic system. The media—in contrast to former times, such as the debates on Hartz IV—report more favorably and sometimes support the issue. Scientific surveys show that the citizens expect less from the political system than in former times and the individualization of participation reduces the pressure on the “political class”.



The success of the new media has been identified with globalization and was seen in a rather negative way as losing the notion of a whole system and a loss of representation (Leggewie and Maar 1998: 19f; v. Alemann and Marschall 2002: 37). A “Structural change of public life” was created in a more technological form than Habermas had predicted, though the patterns of conflicts between distributive and redistributive politics were less clearly decided than Habermas anticipated (Busch 2012: 14). Since David Easton’s analysis of systems we know that the critique on details of politics is getting tougher, but nevertheless this does not mean a critique of the democratic systems as a whole. The tensions between democratic ideals and realities became fertile, so that democracy remained not in formalism: on the one hand the demands of the citizens grew considerably, on the other hand of offerings of the systems media as well as politicians are ready to accept the change with some delays. Both trends tend to develop a transformation of democracy which makes the loose talk on “post-democracy” superfluous and rather tends to new forms of Neo-democracy.

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