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The Mediated Public Sphere: A Model for Cross-National Research¹

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The Mediated Public Sphere: A Model for Cross-National Research

ABSTRACT

This study tests Habermas's contention that greater commercialization undermines the media's capacity to serve as a public sphere, that is, to promote rational-critical public debate involving the widest possible citizen participation. Hypotheses about commercial and state effects on news production are tested via comparison of the commercially dominated American media and the state dominated French media. In news coverage of comparable protest events, the French media are more participatory, less rational in certain aspects and equally critical. The mezzo-organizational environment of the "journalistic field" is shown to mediate external pressures, accounting more fully for cross-national differences and similarities.

The Mediated Public Sphere: A Model for Cross-National Research

The mass media are widely viewed as the central institution of the contemporary public sphere (Garnham 1993, 1995; Castells 1997; Calhoun 1988; Verstraeten 1996; Curran 1991; Hallin 1994). In recent years, concern has mounted that intensified commercialization of the American media system has undermined its capacity to act as public sphere (e.g., McManus 1994; Fallows 1996; Rosenstiel et al. 1998). This hypothesis is in line with Jürgen Habermas's own view (1992, pp. 436-39; 1996, p. 377) that increased commercialization is the primary cause of public sphere degeneration. Historically, Habermas argues, the "press itself became more manipulable to the extent that it became commercialized," beginning in earnest in the mid-1800s (1989, p. 185); the public sphere was thus transformed from a forum for rational-critical debate into a "platform for advertising" (p. 181). Even as voting and other political rights were extended to previously disenfranchised groups, expanding participation in public life, political debate in a commercialized public sphere lost its independent critical edge and became more sensationalized and trivialized, that is, less rational. Habermas's claim has been challenged on historical grounds (e.g., Ryan 1992; Schudson 1992) but surprisingly little research has examined the question cross-nationally: If commercialization undermines the democratic functioning of the public sphere, do less

commercialized media systems better facilitate widespread participation and rational-critical debate?

Just as problematically, many scholars make broad generalizations about “the workings of the public sphere” (Oliver and Myers 1999, p. 40; Oliver and Maney 2000; McCarthy, McPhail and Smith 1996; Jacobs 1996) based only on research on the American news media. Cross-national media research, advocated by many scholars (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Calhoun 1992b; Gamson et al. 1992; Schudson 1989; Blumler et al. 1992) but rarely practiced (cf. Hallin and Mancini 1984; Krauss 2000), is sorely needed. It can help us go beyond the mostly historical and normative discussions of the public sphere (Robbins 1993; Calhoun 1992a) to see more clearly the particularities of the American public sphere, as well as help identify the salient similarities and differences in the institutional structure and discursive content of other national public spheres.

The French media system offers an instructive comparison with that of the United States since it is much less commercialized and much more statist (Alexander 1981; Gerstlé et al. 1991; Chalaby 1996; Lemieux and Schmalzbauer 2000). Moreover, the French system differs from the American in the particular quality as well as the quantity of commercialization and state involvement. Of course, France does not exhaust the alternatives to the American public sphere. This study ideally should be the first of a number of comparative case studies.

As political scientists and media sociologists (Molotch and Lester 1974; Hallin 1986; Sparrow 1999) have demonstrated, media systems operate differently depending on whether the news topic involves an elite consensus, an elite conflict, or a non-elite challenge. Thus, any cross-national comparative analysis of public spheres must begin by holding constant type of

news event. This study examines how the French and American national news media covered an anti-racism, pro-immigration demonstration – the kind of event Molotch and Lester (1974) would call “routine disruption,” that is, an event staged by non-elite challengers in order to “disrupt” elites’ habitual access to media attention. The protest marches in each case were very large, were held in a central urban location and involved a conflictual message, precisely the kind of public event that Oliver and Myers (1999) predict tends to receive the most media attention.

A comparison of the French and American news coverage of the respective protest events allows us to test hypotheses about the extent to which the state-dominated French media or the commercially-dominated American media function closer to the Habermasian ideals of a rational-critical, participatory public sphere. In the conclusion, I show how the mezzo-level organizational environment of the “journalistic field” crucially mediates external commercial and state pressures, and thus provides for a more complete explanation of cross-national differences and similarities in public spheres.

Shaping the Public Sphere: Commercial and State Relations to the Media

Media research, mostly confined to a single nation-state, has offered a number of theories to explain news content, including the background and viewpoints of journalists, news organizational constraints, funding sources, state pressures, technologies, and hegemony or national culture (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980; Hallin 1986; Schudson 1989; Gamson 1988). Despite this proliferation of theories, no coherent set of hypotheses explaining how structural features of media systems affect news content has been built up or tested. In this article, I

suggest that a model for cross-national media research should include three basic variables: commercial, state and organizational field constraints.

Concepts such as hegemony and political economy tend to lump commercial and state pressures together when a growing body of research suggests the two are often in conflict with one another (Cook 1998; McManus 1994; Sparrow 1999). Moreover, commercialization is often portrayed as a unitary phenomenon when a careful reading of the literature suggests three distinct kinds of commercial pressures -- concentration of ownership, profit pressures related to type of ownership, and type of funding -- each of which may produce distinct effects on news content.

Schudson (1994) has urged scholars to “bring the state back in” to analyses of the public sphere (see also Curran and Park 2000). Again, however, theories of variations in the ways that states shape the production of news are in short supply. The most-cited literature reviews of macro-level pressures on news content, such as Gitlin (1980), Gans (1979) and Schudson (1989), do not systematically classify different types of state pressures. Gans’s only significant discussion of government pressures (pp. 260-65) focuses on particular instances of officials’ attempting to influence news coverage. Shoemaker and Reese (1991) devote just six pages to “government controls” in their book-length review of “influences on mass media content” and likewise suggest no general theories of statist influences. Kuhn (1995, p. 49) identifies four analytically distinct state roles vis-à-vis the media -- censor, regulator, enabler and primary definer. The effect of censorship is self-evident, although the “chilling effect” (Gans 1979, p. 249) probably varies depending on the force, regularity and timing (pre- or post-publication) of the censoring acts. Regulations may be relatively minor and even helpful

for the media industry, or fall just short of censorship in imposing criminal or civil penalties for certain kinds of journalistic practices. The state acts as an “enabler” when it literally enables the media to exist or thrive via indirect (technology, distribution networks) or direct financial aid (Cook 1998; Gandy 1982). Finally, because of its authoritative status in society, augmented by overt attempts at manipulation, the state acts as a “primary definer” of the issues and ideas on the media agenda (Hall et al. 1978). But Kuhn does not theorize the relations between these roles, including their various forms and combinations in actual societies, and the content of news. I draw on Kuhn’s typology to develop specific hypotheses about the effects of various kinds of state intervention on journalistic discourse.

If external constraints on journalism have not been adequately catalogued and distinguished, the effects of variations in factors internal to media systems have been scarcely theorized at all. The “organizational” tradition in media research is too micro-oriented, attributing features of the news to bureaucratic, space and time pressures (e.g., Epstein 1973; Tuchman 1978). Many of the constraints they identify are also present in the French media (Accardo 1995; Actes 2000; Lemieux 2000), yet as we will see, there are still significant differences between the Los Angeles Times and Le Monde. Internal factors do help account for cross-national differences, but primarily at the level of the mezzo-level institutional environment in which journalists and media outlets operate, rather than at the level of the organization.

Institutional and organizational scholars have posited that contemporary societies are composed of a number of competing and semi-autonomous institutional orders or “fields” (Bourdieu 1993, 1995a, 1995b, 1998; Friedland and Alford 1991; Fligstein 1991; DiMaggio

and Powell 1991; Silber 1995; Spillman 1995) and that a focus on these “intermediate-level institutions ... [helps explain] variation among capitalist countries” (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, pp. 10-11). In the most general sense, a field is a “microcosm with its own laws ... [which is to say] that what happens in it cannot be understood by looking only at external factors” (Bourdieu 1998, p. 39). Journalism is clearly a “field” in most if not all western democratic nation-states in that it has developed some limited amount of autonomy from the state and the capitalist market and that it is an arena of contestation and struggle operating according to “rules of the game” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) that are mostly “taken-for-granted” (DiMaggio and Powell 1991, pp. 27-28) by actors in the field.² In the discussion of findings, after assessing the effects of different kinds of state and commercial relations on French and American protest coverage, I show how an analysis of field structure and dynamics is necessary for a full understanding of the French and American public spheres.

In the following sections, I identify the differences in commercial and state relations to the news media in France and the United States, and suggest how these differences will result in more or less rational, critical and participatory public debate.

Commercial Relations

Concentration of ownership is argued to lessen competition, thus producing a narrower ideological debate (Bagdikian 1992). In France, ten companies account for 50

²See Benson (1999) for a critical review of research on French journalism using the “field” concept, notably Champagne and Marchetti (1994), Marchetti (1997), Duvall (in Actes 2000). Other than this domestic French research (cf. Kaplan 1998, Klinenberg 1999), the concept of

percent of total press commercial revenues (Kuhn 1995, pp. 35-36). Similarly, about a dozen companies now control more than half of total U.S. newspaper circulation (Bagdikian 1992). Thus, the two media systems are closely comparable in terms of concentration of ownership. However, the American and French media systems do differ in type of commercial ownership and amount and type of commercial funding.

Research on changes in the U.S. news media since the early 1980s suggests a link between increasing public stock ownership, the need to cut costs and increase readership in order to meet increased profit expectations and thus ultimately a trivialization and sensationalization of news content (Bogart 1985, 1989, pp. 202-3; Rosenstiel et al. 1998; McManus 1994). Summarizing the research, Cook (1998, pp. 112-13) argues that pressures to maximize audiences and thus profits lead to news that is “timely, terse, easily described, dramatic, colorful, and visualizable.”

Since at least the 1980s, most of the major U.S. news organizations, including The New York Times, the Washington Post and the Los Angeles Times, have been part of publicly-traded corporations. In contrast, most French media outlets were not publicly traded during the period of this case study. France’s dominant national newspaper, Le Monde, maintains financial independence via a unique employee-ownership plan (Padioleau 1985; Eveno 1996). We should thus expect the *less-profit* oriented (though by no means non-profit oriented) French news media to cover its protest march in a less trivial, less sensationalistic fashion, in short, to be more rational.

field has not been much used in media research, and its theoretical potential, particularly for cross-national research, has not been fully exploited.

Media scholars have also attributed a number of effects to financial dependence on advertising. Scholars have noted that the advertising-dependent American press offers highly positive (and little negative) coverage of business in general (Schiller 1989; Schudson 1995, p. 211) and highly critical (or sparse) coverage of labor unions or other organizations that challenge the capitalist status quo (Bennett 1983; Tasini 1990). Advertising dependence is said to lead to an ideological narrowing and depoliticization of the news in order to create a better “environment” in which to place ads (Baker 1994; Bagdikian 1992; Herman and Chomsky 1988). Researchers have also posited that advertising-dependent news media treat audiences as consumers rather than as citizens (Bennett and Entman 2001). In other words, advertising-dependent news outlets may cover a political demonstration after it has taken place, but they will not provide “mobilizing information” (Lemert 1984) before the event, such as where it will be held, how to sign up, etc., which could lead more citizens to participate.

U.S. total advertising expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product are two and a half times higher than in France (Kuhn 1995, p. 37). American television has historically relied on advertising revenues for virtually all of its revenues. American newspapers earn about 70 to 80 percent of their total income from advertising, a ratio that varies little from one newspaper to another (Bogart 1989, p. 54; Baker 1994, p. 16). French newspapers, on average, earn just 44 percent of revenues from advertising (Junqua 1995, p. 85) and often much less, with Libération for instance earning just 20 percent of its revenues from advertising in 1988 (Albert 1990). The exception is Le Figaro whose dependence on advertising parallels the American pattern. Until 1983, there was no commercial television in France and the big shift came in 1987 when the largest public channel, TF 1, was privatized. Public television, far

more prominent in France than in the United States, is not advertising free but substantially less dependent than any of the American commercial networks: In 1992, the state-owned Antenne 2 earned 42 percent of its revenues from advertising (Paracuellos 1993, p. 40). Because of the French media system's lesser dependence on advertising, we should expect it to incorporate a broader range of voices in its news coverage. We also should find that those French media outlets more like the American media, such as Le Figaro and TF 1, will produce news stories closer to the American "style."

In sum, if the literature on media commercialism is correct, the less-commercialized French media system should cover its protest event in a more participatory and rational fashion. For coverage of a political event not directly involving business or threatening business interests, we have no reason to expect that level of commercial dependence will make a media system either more or less critical.

State relations

Direct pressure on news outlets by Presidents and their staff has certainly occurred in the United States (Gans 1979; Gitlin 1980). However, outright censorship of the press and particularly of the broadcast news media has probably been a much more frequent feature of the French state than its American counterpart (Bourdon 1994; Kuhn 1995).

The French state is also a much stricter regulator of the media than the U.S. government. Neither truth nor absence of malice are defenses from criminal prosecution if journalists publish restricted government information, violate personal privacy laws, or engage in defamation (i.e. "excessive criticism" of political officials). The application of these laws has

varied according to the administration and party in power, but significantly, the threat to use this power has not diminished (Freiberg 1981; Hunter 1997, 1999; Le Gendre 1991). The French state also exerts its regulatory power over the news media via the licensing of publications and journalists (Freiberg 1981; Eisendrath 1982; Albert 1998); licensing, though largely routine, is necessary to receive tax breaks and subsidies. In the United States, state regulation of the print press has been mediated primarily via federal court interpretations of the First Amendment, with the trend since the early 1960s being a decrease in the state's capacity to inhibit journalistic investigations of government agencies or politicians' private lives (Howard 1989). Unlike in France, there is no official licensing of journalists, nor any government benefits tied to the profession of journalist (Kurian 1982). Since the mid-1980s, the U.S. Federal Communication Commission's jurisdiction over the television networks and cable systems has been progressively weakened and even dismantled (Finney 1994). Compared to American journalists, more restrictive regulations in France as well as the threat (if muted) of censorship should lead French journalists to cover politicians less "critically."

Likewise, the French state plays a more active "enabling" role vis-à-vis the media than does the U.S. state. The Paris-based newspapers La Croix (Catholic), L'Humanité (communist), Présent (far-right) and Libération (left-leaning) all at various times have met the requirements of low advertising receipts and circulation of less than 150,000 in order to receive direct subsidies in defense of "press pluralism" (de Tarlé 1980; Charon 1991, 1996). The French state also provides general subsidies to all newspapers, such as reimbursements for telephone and fax expenditures, postal shipping, etc. (Charon 1991). American journalism also has long benefited from government subsidies, including cheap postal rates, regulations

that stabilize the industry and a government public relations infrastructure that provides an “information subsidy” by facilitating the gathering of news (Cook 1998; Gandy 1982).

However, the American government has generally not provided direct subsidies or benefits to particular news organizations and the overall level of state aid to the press is clearly lower than in France. Thus, for “enabling” effects on news content, two partially contradictory hypotheses seem reasonable: first, that targeted subsidies would broaden participation and ideological diversity, and second, that a generalized dependence on subsidies would make the press less critical of government. French direct aid to newspapers such as the communist L’Humanité may indeed keep alive in the public sphere marginal political ideas, with the possibility that at least some of these ideas would occasionally filter into the mainstream media.³ However, to the extent that the commercially-weak French press as a whole has come to rely financially on the state, these subsidies could make newspapers “feel indebted to a government that has been so generous to them” and thus also serve as a “soft” control that limits criticism almost as much as the threat of criminal or financial sanctions (de Tarlé 1980, p. 146; Charon 1996, pp. 118-22).⁴

Finally, to the extent that states in both societies are able to use their authoritative status and significant communications resources to “define” the news, state definitions of

³The government radio channel France-Inter offers daily “press reviews” (revues de presse) which often included the non-mainstream media. As the host of the show commented in an interview (Silvestre 1996), “I often cited La Croix, which is a remarkably well-done small newspaper, and I often cited L’Humanité because it would be a catastrophe if L’Humanité were to one day disappear, an ecological catastrophe, in the sense of ecology of ideas”.

⁴According to Hunter (1997), when Libération editor Serge July asked socialist prime minister Pierre Mauroy in 1982 for government loans to upgrade the newspaper’s technological and

problems and values should predominate in each case. Bennett (1990) has demonstrated that the American press tends to “index” its news coverage to the views of dominant political elites. Given the French media’s greater dependence on state funding and its lesser legal freedom to investigate or criticize the government, we might expect an even greater “indexing” effect, leaving less room for marginal or non-government actors to speak and be heard via the news media.

In sum, to the extent that the degree and quality of state intervention shapes news content, the less state-dominated American news media should cover government and politics more critically. It is difficult to predict a priori whether state intervention increases or reduces participation. If enabling subsidies are effective, the French news media could be more participatory (reinforcing the effect from lesser commercialization). However, if a stronger indexing effect in the French case shuts out non-governmental voices, the American media could be comparatively more participatory. State involvement with the press, per se, should not make a media system either more or less rational.

Table 1 summarizes external relations (which may be enabling as well as constraining, as we have seen) to the French and American mediated public spheres and their predicted effect on producing relatively more or less participatory, rational and critical discourse about politics.

Table 1
Commercial and State Relations: Effects on French and U.S. Mediated Debate

	Participatory +	Rational +	Critical +
Commercial Relations	France	France	--

printing facilities, the prime minister let it be known that he expected *Libération*’s “sympathy for the government” in return.

State Relations	United States / France	--	United States
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Protest in the French and American Public Spheres

Cases and Sample

In order to test the foregoing hypotheses about state and commercial effects on the journalistic production of political discourse, this study examines the journalistic coverage of structurally comparable events in France and the United States. For France, I examine a protest against racism and the anti-immigration National Front (Front national) political party held in 1992 and for the United States, I analyze stories about a pro-immigration/anti-Proposition 187 march held in 1994.

On January 25, 1992, an estimated 60 to 70 French unions, political parties and anti-racism associations organized a protest through the streets of Paris, drawing between 50,000 and 100,000 demonstrators. The protest sponsors and participants opposed not only the National Front, but a broader anti-immigration trend among even mainstream politicians reflected in a number of incendiary statements over the previous year (e.g., socialist prime minister Edith Cresson's call for more "charter [airplanes]" to deport immigrants, and president François Mitterrand's off-hand remark that France had surpassed its "limit of tolerance" toward immigrants). The anti-racist coalition also called for dramatic changes in immigration policy, such as greater access to political asylum and additional protections against discrimination in lodging, employment and social benefits for immigrants. At the same time,

however, the party in power -- the Socialist party -- was undergoing a severe leadership crisis and a drop in its opinion poll ratings with local elections soon in sight. In an effort to deflect attention from its own troubles, the Socialist party announced that it would join the demonstration and sought at the same time to reframe the march's primary purpose as opposition to the extreme right rather than advocacy for immigrant rights.

The October 16, 1994 demonstration against California's Proposition 187 was organized by some 80 civil rights, ethnic advocacy, religious and labor organizations. An estimated 70,000 people marched across Los Angeles from the Eastside to City Hall for a rally. With the stated goal of reducing illegal immigration into California, Proposition 187 expressly prohibited illegal immigrants from receiving government services available to U.S. citizens, such as education and non-emergency health care. Since opinion polls showed a strong majority of California voters supporting the initiative, opponents were divided in their strategy. The largest anti-Prop. 187 umbrella organization, Taxpayers Against 187, took a position similar to that of the leading state Democratic politicians: that illegal immigration indeed was a problem but that Proposition 187 offered a far too draconian solution. Latino rights associations, in particular, disagreed with this strategy and sought to reframe the problem as one of "racism" rather than "illegal immigration." They and other civil rights groups were the chief organizers of the march. During the demonstration, a significant minority of the marchers carried with them Mexican flags. Protestors and speakers directed much of their ire against Republican Governor Pete Wilson, who had made Proposition 187 a centerpiece of his re-election campaign.

These brief vignettes show that while the particular circumstances of the French and American protests were different, in broad structural terms they were quite similar. In France as in California, an extremist “anti-immigration” right fought to reframe the public debate about immigration policy, the mainstream parties adopted many of the basic tenets of this extreme right, and within the “pro-immigration” camp, there was a split between idealists who sought to reframe the issue entirely (in California, as an issue of “race,” in France, as an issue of “social justice”) versus pragmatists who sought to win immediate victory against the anti-immigration right without questioning the anti-immigration activists’ basic framing of the problem. In addition, the number of sponsoring organizations and actual marchers was almost identical in the two cases.

These two events offer a natural controlled comparison, providing about as much assurance as is possible for a single case study that differences will be due to features of the media systems rather than to aspects of the events themselves. While Los Angeles is a regional capital and Paris is a national capital, a comparison of immigration-related events occurring in these two cities is appropriate not only because U.S. immigration news has mostly originated in southern California but because the American political system and news media are much less centralized than in France. That is, the “typical” U.S. media event is more likely to occur outside of the national political capital than is the case for France.

In order to compare journalistic coverage in the two cases, I assembled the corpus of all articles appearing two weeks before or after the event, for totals of 66 French news stories and commentaries (55 newspaper and 11 broadcast news) and 16 U.S. news stories and commentaries (12 newspaper and four broadcast news). For the French case, I analyze

stories in Le Monde, Le Figaro, Libération, the private TF 1 evening news broadcasts and the state-owned Antenne 2 (now “France 2”) evening news broadcasts, drawing on a comprehensive search of microfiche records for the newspapers and of the computerized data base at the French National Television Archives (INA-Bibliothèque Nationale) for the television news broadcast stories. For the United States, the corpus of texts includes all stories in the Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, the Orange County Register, USA Today⁵ and the three major national commercial network (ABC, CBS, NBC) evening news broadcasts, using full texts of newspaper articles provided by the Nexis data base and story summaries of broadcast news stories provided by the Vanderbilt University National Television Archives. While these media outlets do not represent the entire spectrum of news media for either France or the United States, they do offer a reasonably accurate list of the media outlets whose news and views are widely circulated and known within each national public sphere.⁶ Because of the greater number of articles in each of the French media outlets (with the exception of Antenne 2), I offer quantitative analysis of stories for each French media outlet compared with an aggregate total for all U.S. media. The individual versus aggregate comparison is also justified because the French media outlets vary systematically in their level of commercialization (with percentage of advertising revenues increasing steadily from

⁵The Washington Post and the Wall Street Journal are the only other American newspapers commonly referred to as national which are not included in the corpus of this study. But the Post is not widely circulated outside of the nation’s capitol and the Journal, while nationally circulated, is a specialized business newspaper. In any case, neither the Post nor the Journal covered the Los Angeles immigration protest march. The Orange County Register is a regional rather than a national newspaper. I included its stories not only because the Proposition 187 movement originated in Orange County, but also because the U.S. national media system is highly fragmented and regional newspapers like the Orange County Register are how most Americans receive their news (along with local television, not included in this study).

Libération through Le Figaro), whereas American newspapers rely to the same high degree on advertising revenues.

In the following sections, I compare French and American news coverage of their respective protest events in relation to the Habermasian ideals of a public sphere that facilitates widespread participation and debate that is rational and critical. Due to the lack of full transcripts, television news stories are not included in the quantitative comparisons except for total citations. Both television and newspaper stories are analyzed qualitatively. Indicators of participation, rationality and criticism in media accounts are meant not only to establish the similarities and differences in French and American mediated public debate, but to serve as a model for other cross-national comparisons of public spheres.

Who Participates in Mediated Debate?

Journalists facilitate public participation in political debate first, by naming, and thus publicly legitimating persons and organizations as public actors. To capture this function, I coded all news stories for citations, that is, social actors mentioned, but not necessarily quoted, as having taken a position. Journalists also literally give voice to social actors when they quote them directly and allow them to speak in their own words. As an indicator of the relative power of this “voice,” I thus also code for quotation words. Individual sources, in terms of raw citations and total quotation words, are then categorized according to institutional and ideological affiliation.

⁶See Page (1996) for a similar methodology and justification.

Source institutional categories include: State (executive, legislative, bureaucracy, judiciary, police), Political Parties, Civil Society (associations, labor unions, academic/expert, media and religious), Unaffiliated persons (ordinary persons, immigrants, survey aggregates), and Other (foreign or international organizations, historical figures).⁷ Ideological categories are: Far left (economic left actors, ranging from trade unions to the communist party and far leftist sects), Center left (mainstream left political parties and “cultural left” humanitarian groups), Neutral (bureaucrats, academics or organizationally-unaffiliated individuals), Center right (mainstream right political parties), and Far right (nativist, neo-fascist). Of course, certain U.S. institutions have no French equivalent and vice-versa. Likewise, the meaning of "left" and "right" is not precisely equivalent in the two cases. These categories attempt to roughly capture diversity of media sources relative to those that are institutionally or “culturally available” (Beckett 1996) within each nation-state.

The media may also facilitate and encourage participation in the public sphere, particularly in the case of a demonstration, by providing advance notice not only of the time and location of the event but also of its institutional sponsors and avowed purpose. To operationalize this “mobilizing” role, I compare when the first stories appeared, the content of those stories, and the extent to which social actors are politicized or de-politicized.

Table 2: Ideological Range of Social Actors Cited in French and U.S. Media Accounts (Proportions)

Category/News outlet	Libération N=195	Le Monde N=173	Le Figaro N=134	TF 1 N=34	U.S. Total N=120
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⁷My institutional categories draw on Gans (1980), Hallin and Mancini (1984), Hallin (1994), Porto and Cordero (1998) and van Dijk (1991).

Far Left	.12	.20	.22	.03	.03
Center Left	.69	.67	.63	.79	.54
ALL LEFT	.81	.87	.85	.82	.58
NEUTRAL	.12	.07	.05	.06	.22
ALL RIGHT	.08	.06	.10	.12	.21
Center Right	.07	.04	.06	.09	.17
Far Right	.01	.02	.04	.03	.04

Ideologically, the French media system represents a broader spectrum of voices than the U.S. media. As Table 2 shows, citations of far left actors made up from 12 to 22 percent among the three leading French newspapers, versus just 3 percent for the U.S. media as a whole. In their respective coverage of protest events that in both cases were sponsored by the left and far left, both the French and American media leaned left but the French media much more so, with 81 to 87 percent of all social actors mentioned being left of center, versus 58 percent in the American media. While part of this difference was linked to the American media mentioning right-leaning actors more often (21 percent versus from 6 to 12 percent in the French media), it is also linked to the greater prevalence of neutral actors in American media accounts. Neither the French nor the American media often mentioned the far right, ranging from one to 4 percent in the French media, and totaling 4 percent in the U.S. media.

Table 3: Ideological Range of Social Actors Quoted (Total Quotation Words) in French and U.S. Media Articles (Proportions)

Category/News outlet	Libération N=3279	Le Monde N=1523	Le Figaro N=2463	U.S. Total N=1147
Far Left	.06	.02	.02	.00
Center Left	.45	.69	.56	.39
ALL LEFT	.50	.71	.58	.39
NEUTRAL	.41	.09	.01	.18
ALL RIGHT	.08	.20	.41	.43
Center Right	.05	.08	.39	.32
Far Right	.03	.12	.02	.11

When we look at the amount of quotation words rather than citations, there is some convergence toward the center right in both cases. But none of the French national newspapers emulates exactly the American pattern. Libération out-does the American press in giving voice to neutral actors, but for the remainder of its quote words the French newspaper leans much further left than the American press. Le Figaro gives proportionately more quote words to center-right sources than the American press, but in contrast to the American pattern does not quote neutral sources.

Table 4: Institutional Range of Social Actors Cited in French and U.S. Media Articles (Proportions)

Category/News outlet	Libération N=195	Le Monde N=173	Le Figaro N=134	TF 1 N=34	U.S. Total N=120
STATE AND PARTIES	.45	.43	.52	.32	.27
STATE (without Parties)	.17	.17	.16	.06	.25
Executive	.11	.10	.09	.06	.10
Legislative	.05	.06	.05	.00	.08
Bureaucracy	.01	.00	.01	.00	.01
Judiciary	.00	.00	.00	.00	.03
Police/Military	.00	.01	.01	.00	.03
PARTIES	.28	.26	.36	.26	.02
CIVIL SOCIETY	.43	.50	.44	.53	.46
Associations	.34	.35	.28	.44	.31
Trade Unions	.05	.08	.12	.00	.03
Academic/expert	.01	.00	.00	.03	.08
Media	.01	.02	.01	.03	.00
Religious	.01	.05	.02	.03	.03
BUSINESS	.01	.00	.00	.00	.02
UNAFFILIATED	.12	.07	.03	.15	.24
Ordinary persons (non-immigrants)	.08	.05	.02	.12	.16
Immigrants	.05	.02	.01	.03	.03

Polls (results)	.00	.00	.00	.00	.05
OTHER	.00	.00	.01	.00	.02
Foreign or international organizations	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01
Historical figures	.00	.00	.00	.00	.01

A slightly different picture emerges when we analyze social actors by institutional affiliation. U.S. media accounts favor state officials, elected and non-elected, more than French media accounts. But if the French press thus seems less statist, strictly speaking, it is clearly more politicized. While political parties are virtually invisible in the U.S. press, they constitute from one-fourth to more than one-third of social actors cited in the French press. When state and political party categories are combined, the French media system gives greater voice to political officials as a whole than the American media: from 32 percent to 52 percent for the French media, versus 27 percent for the U.S. media.

But if the French press does seem more closely institutionally “indexed” to the political establishment, it is not therefore less representative of civil society. Civil society actors make up from 43 to 53 percent of citations for French media organizations versus 46 percent for the American media as a whole. In both the French and the American media, associations make up around one-third of total sources cited and quoted.⁸ Trade unions appear more often in the French press – from five to 12 percent in the three national dailies – versus 3 percent in the U.S. media. Conversely and somewhat surprisingly, academics are cited far more often in the American press, appearing in 8 percent of stories versus less than 1 percent on average in the

⁸For institutional categories, only citation proportions are discussed. The same pattern of differences was evident for quotation words, with the exception that the French as well as the

French press. Businesses are virtually invisible in both the French and American media. And institutionally unaffiliated individuals make up 24 percent of U.S. citations versus 3 percent in Le Figaro, 7 percent in Le Monde, 12 percent in Libération and 15 percent in TF 1. It is important to note however that these are simply proportions. The French press covered the Paris manifestation far more intensively than the American press covered the L.A. demonstration and rally. While the French national media outlets gave slightly less attention, proportionally, to civil society sources, they gave in raw terms a larger amount of attention and space to a far greater number of parties, associations and unions than did the American press.

An important part of facilitating participation is not only citing and quoting a range of social actors, but in legitimating the very idea of organized political action. When we consider this aspect, the high percentage of citations of unaffiliated individuals in the American press appears anti-political rather than simply apolitical. The U.S. media depoliticized U.S. protestors by depriving them of any identifying affiliation. Even activist leaders were portrayed as free agents, freed of any link to a specific constituency or organizational base, as in these lead paragraphs of a Los Angeles Times article (18 October 1994, p. B1):

A day after the largest demonstration in recent Los Angeles history, enthusiastic organizers and participants exuded optimism Monday about a new political activism that would energize an increasingly diverse Latino community. “This is the beginning of a new era of civil rights struggle – headed by Latino immigrants,” said Fabian Nunez, a Pomona-based activist and one of the march coordinators. But to proponents of Proposition 187, the hotly debated immigration measure on the November ballot, the march was an outrageous display of Mexican nationalism that bolsters the case for reducing immigration. “Any time they’re flying Mexican flags, it helps us,” concluded Alan C. Nelson, Proposition 187 co-author (author’s italics).

American press virtually silenced trade unions (only Libération gave trade unions even one

As noted, between 60 and 80 organizations were involved in organizing the protests in both countries. Only a handful of these organizations were specifically named in any of the American news stories. At one extreme were the wire service stories in The New York Times (17 October 1994, p. B8) and the Orange County Register (17 October 1994, p. A1) which noted simply that “about 80 groups, among them labor unions and religious and human rights organizations, were represented,” or the USA Today article by its own correspondents which portrayed the march as a “spontaneous” gathering of 70,000 people with no mention at all of organizational involvement (17 October 1994, p. 3A). But even the extensive Los Angeles Times article the day after the march (17 October 1994, p. A1) named only four specific organizations among the 80 involved: the Mexican-American Legal Defense Fund, Taxpayers Against [Proposition] 187, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the umbrella group which organized the march, the National Coordinating Committee for Citizen and Civic Participation.

In contrast, French articles tended to identify in detail the range of organizations involved. For instance, a pre-march story in Le Figaro (21 January 1992, p. 6) mentioned 30 associations and political parties by name, ranging from the "League of Human Rights" to the Greens, the French communist party, and further left, the Communist Revolutionary League. Post-march stories in Le Monde (28 January 1992, p. 12) and Libération (27 January 1992,

percent of its quotation words).

pp. 2-4)⁹ listed, respectively, 37 and 23 distinct associations, trade unions and political parties supporting the march.

Moreover, the French national press (if not television) provided “mobilizing” information about the march where the American media did not. With the exception of a tiny notice in the Los Angeles Times the day before the protest (15 October, 1994, p. B-2), which primarily served to notify drivers which streets would be closed, the American media failed to alert readers in advance about the anti-Proposition 187 march. In contrast, the French media began substantive coverage of the march several weeks before it was held. Although the right-leaning Le Figaro presumably did not share the ideals of most of the demonstrators, its story two weeks before the march (9 January 1992, p. 6) gave detailed information about the associations involved and their reasons for protesting.

Gitlin (1980) has noted how the American press often covers protests as (potential) crime stories, not as political events but rather as (potential) disruptions of public order. This “public order” theme in fact dominated the first five paragraphs of USA Today’s story on the march (17 October 1994, p. 3A), quoted below in their entirety:

A peaceful march of a few thousand protestors spontaneously swelled to an estimated crowd of 70,000 people Sunday opposing California’s controversial “Save Our State” measure, a ballot proposal that would cut off most public services to illegal immigrants. The day-long march in mainly Hispanic East Los Angeles consisted mostly of Hispanic demonstrators chanting slogans and waving signs as they proceeded peacefully to City Hall. Police equipped with riot gear stood by and a number of streets were cordoned off from traffic, but authorities said there were no signs of trouble. “For such a large crowd, it was incredibly quiet,” said Officer Arthur Holmes, a spokesman for the Los Angeles Police Department. The protest was large even for Los Angeles, said officer Sandra Costella, a police spokeswoman. She did not know

⁹These stories appeared on the same day. Libération is a morning newspaper and Le Monde gives its edition, which appears in the afternoon, the following day’s date.

whether more demonstrations would follow in the final three weeks before the Nov. 8 election. (Author's italics)

Other than for estimates of crowd size in Le Monde (28 January 1992, p. 12) and Le Figaro (27 January 1992, p. 5), no police officers were cited, let alone directly quoted, in any of the French news coverage of the equally peaceful Paris march. Le Monde's institutionally- and politically-oriented lead paragraph contrasts sharply to that of USA Today's:

The demonstration against racism and the government's anti-immigration policies brought together 50,000 people, according to police sources, and 100,000, according to the collective of five associations organizing the march. The Federation of Associations in Solidarity with Immigrant Workers (FASTI), The League of Human Rights (LDH), The Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples (MRAP), SOS-Racisme and the International League against Racism and anti-Semitism (LICRA) were in the front row of the march, along with a group of refugees whose asylum requests had been turned down. The four leading associations, as well as the French Communist Party, the Greens, the Communist Revolutionary League and labor unions including the CGT, the CFDT, the FEN and the UNEF-ID, constituted a "unitary permanent collective" calling for a week of action at the beginning of April and a mobilization "for equality and fraternity" on May 1. The Socialist Party, criticized by a majority of the participants, gathered its activists at the Place de la Bastille, but did not join in the march.

If it seems unfair to compare the relatively populist USA Today with the elite Le Monde, the lead paragraphs of post-march stories in the Los Angeles Times and Le Figaro exhibited the same pattern of differences. Le Figaro, not surprisingly given its right-leaning political orientation, emphasized the divisions within the left and the Socialist Party's embarrassment, but still put the emphasis on the political message and organizations (27 January 1992, p. 5). The Los Angeles Times (17 October 1994, p. A-1), while not emphasizing as much as USA Today the theme of law and order, also portrayed the march as

a mass of individuals swept up in the emotion of the moment rather than the expression of organized political sentiment.

How Rational is Mediated Debate?

Habermas argues that public political debate is rational to the extent that arguments based on reasons, rather than “statuses or traditions,” dominate the debate (Calhoun 1992b, pp. 1-3). To that definition, one could add that public debate is more rational the less it employs over-simplifications (Bourdieu 1998) or emotional metaphors or images (Jackall and Hirota 2000). In this study, I primarily operationalize media rationality procedurally, that is, in reference to the selection of sources and the narrative parameters within which both journalists and non-journalists are accorded public voice. However, I also offer some analysis of the substantive rationality of claims, that is, the extent to which arguments are backed up with logical and empirical evidence rather than tradition, “common-sense” or emotional slogans.

I thus suggest first, *ceteris paribus*, that a media system acts with greater rationality when it selects a higher proportion of its sources from among those social actors whose professional identity is linked to rational argument and scientific evidence, that is, academics. In his discussion of television journalism, Bourdieu emphasizes the connection between “thought and time” (1998, p. 28) and argues that “fast-thinking” is inimical to rational (and critical) thought. Since this case study is primarily based on written texts, I simply posit in like fashion the connection between thought and space. I thus propose, secondly, that a media

system that provides more space for direct quotations from academics, as well as other sources, is more procedurally rational. Third, it is not simply space as in number of words that counts, but the larger “narrative format” within which those words appear. Narrative formats such as the interview and the commentary/essay provide a more conducive forum to develop and sustain an argument than the standard news story. Thus, I propose, thirdly, that a media system that includes a wider variety of narrative formats is more rational.

In terms of mere numerical presence of academics in its protest coverage, the American news media was more rational than the French media. As noted, academics made up 8 percent of sources cited in the American media versus just one percent in the French media. But when we look closer at what the American experts said, it would be difficult to conclude that they contributed significantly to rational public debate. Experts seem to be used to provide “cover” for journalists' own analysis since by the conventions of American journalism, reporters are not allowed to state their views directly. As one Los Angeles Times reporter puts it, “it’s not for me to frame the story, that’s for the experts.”¹⁰ Thus, we see repeatedly a narrative style that combines an unattributed (or vaguely attributed) statement followed by an echoing quotation (rarely more than one sentence) from an “expert.” For instance, a Los Angeles Times story (18 October 1994, p. B-1) included this loosely attributed statement, “If the march and other organization activities motivate more [people] to become citizens and participate, Latino activists agree, it will surely be judged a success in the long term,” followed by a quote from Harry Pachon, president of the Tomas Rivera Center: “If people see the link between this demonstration and the electoral process, then the march

will have a great benefit." In similar fashion, the story concludes (concerning the waving of Mexican flags) with the comment "from a practical standpoint, independent observers said that the march could bolster support among those angered by what many will view as an expression of Mexican nationalism," followed by a closing echo from "political analyst" Sherry Bebitch Jeffe, "In the cold reality of politics, the pictures that went out on the front pages and on television may have well energized proponents of the proposition."

In contrast, when experts do appear in the French media, they provide historical or policy expertise that journalists or politicians cannot provide, rather than the opinion the journalist would like to say but feels he or she cannot legitimately express. Libération (27 January 1992, p. 5), for example, published a transcript of an interview with an historian and a political scientist, co-authors of a recently published history of the French socialist party, who are thus able to provide some needed context to accusations that the Socialist party is cynically using the immigration issue to win re-election.

Table 5: Quotations in French and U.S. Media Articles

Average Quotation Length	Libération	Le Monde	Le Figaro	U.S. Total
Excluding Interviews	21.8	25.0	19.8	24.9
All Quotes (including Interviews)	28.5	25.0	50.3	24.9
Proportion of All Quotes longer than 50 words	.10	.15	.14	.09
Proportion of All Quotes less than 10 words	.38	.41	.39	.15

¹⁰Author interview with a *Los Angeles Times* reporter, March 20, 1998.

Likewise, the “space” test of media rationality provides mixed results. On average, French quotes were slightly longer than American quotes: 31 versus 25 words on average per source per article.¹¹ However, the difference is due in large part to the frequent French practice of publishing interview transcripts, which inflates the overall average. When interviews are excluded from the sample, American quotes are on average slightly longer than French quotes, 25 versus 22 words per source. French quotes varied in length more widely than American quotes (even when not taking into account the French interviews). From 10 to 15 percent of French quotes were longer than 50 words, versus 9 percent of American quotes; at the other end of the spectrum, 39 percent of French quotes were less than 10 words versus just 15 percent of American quotes. This greater prevalence of short quotes in the French press could be interpreted as less rational. However, a high percentage of these short quotes were verbatim observations of the banners carried by protest marchers, and in this sense, contributed to the goal of participatory debate. Whether or not American quotes were more rational, they were clearly more “rationalized”, standardized and formulaic.

Table 6: Narrative Formats in the French and U.S. Media (Proportions)

Narrative Format	Libération N=19	Le Monde N=16	Le Figaro N=20	U.S. Newspaper Total N=12
Event News	.63	.69	.60	.67
Feature/Background	.16	.19	.10	.08

¹¹A single quotation is operationalized as all directly quoted words attributed to a particular social actor in a single article.

News Analysis	.05	.13	.00	.00
Interview	.05	.00	.20	.00
Commentary-Journalist	.11	.00	.10	.08
Commentary-Politician	.00	.00	.00	.00
Commentary-Academic	.00	.00	.00	.00
Commentary-Activist	.00	.00	.00	.17

A generally accepted way of classifying news formats begins with the basic “event news” report, distinguished from articles that add progressive amounts and degrees of interpretation and opinion: the feature or background story, the news analysis, the commentary or editorial, etc. (Bruck 1989; Cottle 1995). Commentaries may also be written by journalists or non-journalists including politicians, activists, academics and other experts. About two-thirds of both the French and American print press articles were “event news” stories. The French press, on average, included more commentaries, all by journalists. Of the U.S. press outlets, only the Los Angeles Times offered commentaries as well as event news articles, including one journalist commentary and two commentaries by activists. In their protest coverage, the French press offered more “background” stories providing contextual information about the actors and issues involved in the protest: 8 out of 55 stories, or 15 percent, versus just 1 out of 12, or 8 percent, in the U.S. press.

The French press also included two news formats that had no equivalent in the American media. Though an American “invention” (Schudson 1994b) that was originally exported to France (Chalaby 1996), interviews published in their entirety have now become a French news convention. In addition to the aforementioned Libération interview of two academics, Le Figaro featured four interviews among its 20 stories on the march, including not only RPR (right) party leaders Alain Juppé and Patrick Devedjian but march organizers

Harlem Désir, president of SOS-Racisme, and J.M. Cambadelis, a socialist député. In this particular sample, Le Monde had no interviews, but it normally publishes several interviews with political and cultural figures per week (Lemieux 2000). In contrast to the average event news article quotation of 22 words, interviewees had from 358 words (Cambadelis) to 519 words (one of the two academics interviewed by Libération) to develop and back up their arguments. A second French difference lies in the regular use of “reactions” articles, usually titled simply “Reactions”, in which leaders of political parties, associations and occasionally intellectuals are quoted at length. A reactions article in Le Monde (28 January 1992, p. 12) quoted center right party leaders Charles Millon (57 words) and Alain Juppé (44 words), Prime Minister Edith Cresson (44 words) and far right party leader Jean-Marie Le Pen (97 words). Le Figaro’s reactions article of the same day (27 January 1992, p. 5) ranged slightly further, giving voice to SOS-Racisme leader Harlem Désir, socialist government ministers Bernard Tapie and Jean-Louis Bianco, as well as prime minister Cresson and party leaders Juppé, Le Pen and Dominique Perben.

This broader variety of narrative formats in the French press is linked to the “plural” or “ensemble” way of organizing news in French newspapers. In American journalistic practice, each news event is usually presented as a complete package in the form of a single and often lengthy news story. Of course, with a major, breaking news story such as the Clinton scandal, an American newspaper may devote several stories on multiple pages to satisfy perceived reader interest. But in the French press, in part because of Libération’s daily événement formula in which a single event or trend occupies the cover and the first inside four to five pages, an ensemble approach has been institutionalized in the French journalistic field and also

extends to many routine news events. Thus, for example, on the morning of the Paris demonstration, Libération's événement coverage featured eight articles: five "event news" articles (including articles on a related protest "tour de France" by a group of banlieue youths and its arrival in Paris, on a former French soccer star threatened with deportation and on the Socialist party newspaper's hysterical anti-Le Pen coverage); two feature/background articles (on the conflict between the Socialist party and SOS-Racisme, and on a young leftist couple's difficulties holding on to their anti-racist beliefs living next to an immigrant family with 17 children); and an editorial about the need for new policies that address the social problems underlying the anti-immigration backlash. Over the course of several weeks, many American newspapers might cover a topic from as many or more angles, but the multi-perspectival approach in a single day's edition offers the advantage of seeing the world whole in all its complexity rather than as a succession of complementary fragments.

If Libération's "event of the day" formula makes room for complexity of ideas and analysis in public debate, it also creates the misleading impression that social reality is one major crisis after another. Libé's emphasis on dramatic photographs and extra-large, bold page-one headlines brings the logic of television visuality into the heart of the national press (in turn influencing French television, among whose journalists Libération is reportedly the most frequently read newspaper). In this sense, the heavy coverage of the Paris anti-racist march could be portrayed not as comprehensive, but as excessive, helping to create rather than simply report a crisis for the Government and the Socialist Party. But as Hallin (1994, p. 9) reminds us, passion and "procedural" reason are not necessarily opposed. It is important to distinguish between sensationalism that is a- or anti-political (Freiberg 1981), as in the

celebrity-driven scandal coverage of tabloids such as the New York Post or the (London) Mirror, and a sensationalism that is politically-driven and motivated. A certain amount of political sensationalism is probably necessary to make people care enough to get involved and to engage in reasoned debate. Nevertheless, in creating a dramatic aura around politics and political struggle, the French media is arguably less rational than the American media.

How Critical is Mediated Debate?

The critical function of the press is in some ways closely related to that of rationality. Ideas expressed in short soundbites tend to be not only highly simplified but also politically conformist, “received ideas” that can be digested so easily precisely because they are conventional (Bourdieu 1998, pp. 28-29). Likewise, scholars have posited that the event news format is more “ideologically constrained” than more topical formats like the in-depth background article (Altheide 1987; see also Bruck 1989 and Cottle 1995). But some lengthier formats that are more procedurally rational, such as the interview, are not necessarily more critical since many interviews are with powerful political figures who represent dominant viewpoints. Moreover, at least as practiced in France, the interview form leaves less room for the journalist to be critical, since interviewees reserve and often exercise the right to edit transcripts before they are published.¹²

For analytical purposes, however, I clearly distinguish the media’s critical function from that of rationality, as the presence in media texts of critical statements directed toward powerful political or economic actors. Thus, I coded articles according to (1) the presence or

absence of any critical commentary, (2) the originator of the criticism (the journalist or the sources whom the journalist quotes or paraphrases), and (3) the form which this criticism took. The major forms of criticism are classified as (1) administrative, (2) ideological, (3) factual, (4) personal and (5) strategic. By administrative criticism, I mean investigation and criticism of government corruption or incompetence, essentially the so-called “watchdog” role (Sparrow 1999). Ideological criticism weighs the logical or normative content of proposed ideas or policies. Factual criticism attempts to “set the record straight,” (ideally) offering evidence to assess the truth-value of claims. Personal criticism focuses on the behavior, public or private, of politicians or other public officials. And by strategic criticism, I refer to horse-race type commentary on political performance, including coalition-building, behind-the-scenes lobbying, image-making and rhetorical campaigns, etc. (Hallin 1992; Adatto 1993).

**Table 7: Criticism in the French and American Media
Journalist Criticism: Proportion of Stories Containing Critical Phrases**

	Libération N=18	Le Monde L=16	Le Figaro N=16	U.S. Total N=10
Strategy	.61	.25	.31	.20
Administrative	.00	.06	.19	.00
Ideological	.11	.06	.13	.10
Personal	.00	.00	.00	.00
Factual	.06	.06	.06	.20
TOTAL with any criticism	.67	.25	.38	.40

Non-Journalist Criticism: Proportion of Stories Containing Critical Phrases

	Libération N=19	Le Monde N=16	Le Figaro N=20	U.S. Total N=12
Strategy	.47	.38	.45	.33
Administrative	.32	.13	.20	.00
Ideological	.74	.63	.60	.83
Personal	.00	.06	.05	.17
Factual	.00	.00	.00	.17

¹²Author interview with a Le Monde editor, Oct. 1998. See also Lemieux (2000, pp. 146-47).

TOTAL with any criticism	1.00	.81	.85	.83
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Because of greater state intervention, we expect the French media to be less critical of government or other powerful political actors than the American media. This case study suggests that this is not necessarily so. Four of the 10 American newspaper articles written by journalists included criticisms from the journalistic authorial voice. This was about identical to the proportion of articles containing journalistic criticism in Le Figaro (38 percent) and far less than the proportion in Libération (67 percent). Both French and American journalists were more likely to convey others' criticisms than to offer their own criticisms, and more than four-fifths of the articles in the French as well as the U.S. media contained critical comments, mostly ideological, from politicians, activists and other non-journalists.

Personal criticism of political officials by journalists was absent in both the French and the American press. Because of legal restrictions, we expected the French media to restrain in particular from administrative critique of government performance. There were in fact administrative critiques, but they were generalized complaints in editorials (Le Figaro, 22 and 27 January 1992, p. 1,) and commentaries (Le Monde, 28 January 1992, p. 12) rather than specific charges backed up with evidence of incompetence or malfeasance. For this particular news event, the less legally constrained American press did not use its freedom to engage in administrative criticism.

The American coverage included more journalistic factual criticisms, but these were mostly journalists' assessments of strategic claims made by sources. In the Los Angeles

Times, (unnamed) march participants were said to compare their movement to that of the Chicano rights movement of the 1960s and 1970s. The journalistic voice (later confirmed with an academic quote) quickly countered: “Yet the Chicano movement was far different – and in some ways less complex – than current plans to marshal the vast Latino immigrant population that has arrived since the 1980s” (18 October 1994, p. B1). The one case in which the French press did offer a factual critique involved detailed cross-examination of claims by the French Interior Minister about the number of refugees “regularized” by the government, with the conclusion that he was stretching the truth at best (Le Monde, 28 January 1992, p. 12 and Le Figaro, 27 January 1992, p. 5).

Two of the findings in particular go against our expectations of French-American differences. The cynical, strategic frame in political reporting has been hailed as a uniquely American disease. Yet French journalists were just as likely, and in the case of Libération, much more likely to criticize politicians in “strategic” terms. Conversely, the supposedly more politicized French journalists were not more likely than American journalists to criticize the government in ideological terms, nor even to include ideological criticism from others in their stories.

But what is clear from the data is that criticism abounds in the French press. It is perhaps not surprising that Le Figaro’s coverage was highly critical, emphasizing the right’s play-on-words criticism of the manifestation (demonstration) as a “manip” (short for manipulation).¹³ In Le Figaro’s published interviews with right party leaders, the headlines

¹³“A l’émission ‘Objections’; Toubon dénonce la ‘manif manip’; Il estime que la manifestation ‘antiraciste’ d’aujourd’hui fait partie du jeu socialiste,” Le Figaro, 25-26 January 1992, p. 5.

stressed the right's accusation that the anti-Le Pen march was really a socialist ploy to promote Le Pen and thus take away votes from the center right, as in "Patrick Devedjian: "The PS and FN are in it together!" (25-26 January 1992, p. 4). However, equally scathing criticisms of the socialist government were also voiced in the left-leaning Libération. The day after the march, the Libération cover story (27 January 1992, p. 1) was headlined: "Anti-racist protesters interrogate the government; the Socialist party's anti-Le Pen march a flop".

In a sense, these criticisms were not surprising given the socialist party's last-minute, heavy-handed attempts to co-opt the march for its own purposes. In so doing, the governing party became fair game for criticism not only from opposing parties but erstwhile allies and sympathetic press. Similar sharp criticisms of the Republican governor were voiced in the U.S. press coverage of the anti-Prop. 187 demonstration. But the tone of the headlines and the less personalized writing style in American newspapers distanced journalists from the criticisms in the stories. U.S. headlines clearly attributed the criticisms, as in "Protestors condemn Wilson for backing initiative that they say promotes 'racism, scapegoating'" (Los Angeles Times, 17 October 1994, p. A1; Author's italics) and "Prop. 187 takes hits, but backers still confident ... Proponents of the controversial measure are upbeat ..." (Orange County Register, 20 October 1994, p. A14). Contrast those timid headlines to Libération's terse "Socialists, the descent into hell" (PS, la descente aux enfers, 28 January 1992, p. 6).

The degree of critical coverage among French media outlets did vary. The left-centrist Le Monde offered only muted criticism, and its headlines smoothed over the intra-left conflicts highlighted by Libération and Le Figaro, with headlines such as "Going beyond a demonstration in favor of immigrants; A campaign develops against the National Front" and

“The anti-racist demonstration in Paris; A gathering for the defense of refugees and immigrants” (25 January 1992, pp. 1 and 7). The state-owned Antenne 2 television channel featured the fewest news stories on the march – just three -- of any major national media outlet. But to be fair, Le Monde’s article the day after the demonstration also included detailed and vivid criticisms of the government, especially from association activists (28 January 1992, p. 12). And Antenne 2’s stories featured highly critical quotes of the government, including a statement by anti-racist activist Harlem Désir equating a socialist immigration proposal with one previously favored by Le Pen (25 January 1992, 8 p.m. newscast).

Discussion: Mediated Debate and Journalistic Fields

In sum, this study complicates Habermas’s contention that greater commercialization correlates with a lower quality of public discourse. Indeed, the less commercialized French media system was more participatory: it gave voice to a wider institutional and ideological range of views and did more to encourage political involvement. But lesser commercialization did not make the French media system dramatically more rational. It was more procedurally rational in its use of narrative formats, but about the same as the American press in its quotation practices, and arguably less rational in its dramatization of political conflict. Critical coverage, which I linked to level of state intervention (addressing an issue not systematically discussed by Habermas or other media scholars), was not less frequent nor intense in the more state-dominated French media as hypothesized.

In order to fully explain this pattern of differences and similarities, we now need to consider the context in which external pressures act on journalists, that is, via the mezzo-level

organizational environment or “journalistic field. Fields may have any number of properties which shape their discursive production, but I focus here on two elements: first, the generally accepted “rules of the game” within the field and secondly, the field’s macro-“structural ecology”.

A field’s rules of the game or “conceptions of control” (Fligstein 1991) are established when the field is founded, and once “routinized” tend to persist over time. As Fligstein and McAdam (1995, pp. 22-23) explain, fields “are born of the concerted efforts of collective actors to fashion a stable consensus regarding rules of conduct and membership criteria that routinize action in pursuit of collective interests. If the initial consensus should prove effective in creating an arena advantageous to those who fashioned it, then it is likely to prove highly resistant to internal challenge...”. These rules, involving both overt beliefs and habitual practices, are linked to the dominant national culture but not reducible to it.¹⁴

Historically, journalistic professionalism in France has been defined not as a detachment or distance from political or ideological allegiances, but in fact as the right to hold and defend a set of ideas (Albert 1990, p. 41). This ideal goes back at least as far as Article 11 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen which states: "The free communication of thoughts and opinions is one of the rights most precious to men. Every citizen may thus speak, write, publish freely, except to be accountable for this liberty in those

¹⁴Schudson (1980), in dismissing an organizational “bureaucratic” explanation for differences between an American newspaper and *Le Monde*, points to “cultural” reasons: “The difference between the French news product and the American news product is no less broad than that between French and American social science...” What I want to stress here is that cross-national differences in fields – journalistic, academic, political, etc. – need to be explained, in the first instance, in reference to the specific cultural rules and practices of those fields rather than

cases determined by law." This political/literary journalistic tradition developed over two centuries of heavy-handed state censorship and the political and intellectual dominance of Paris literary culture, absorbing along the way certain aspects of the "Anglo-American model" (Palmer 1983; Ferenczi 1993; Chalaby 1996). The French tradition, significantly, defines itself in part against the "American model," via a less strict separation of "news" and "opinion" (Padioleau 1983) and a lesser concern with "sourcing" every fact or opinion included in a story (Ruellan 1993, p. 202). Most French national newspapers continue to have distinct political orientations.¹⁵ The political/literary ideal is also evident in the high prestige accorded Le Monde, a newspaper which is noteworthy not so much for its "scoops" as for its thoughtful analyses and moral reflections on events (Padioleau 1985; Champagne 1991). In contrast, the American informational, "objective" press tradition owes a great deal to the Progressive political movement of the early twentieth century, in particular its reformist desire to uncover government corruption, its skepticism toward traditional party politics, and its faith in objective technical solutions to complex policy problems (Schudson 1978; Gans 1979). The ongoing influence of this American journalistic ideal of fact-oriented, investigative journalism is evident in the prestige still accorded these genres by the annual Pulitzer prizes.

Schudson uses the term "structural ecology" to describe all the potential institutions and actors of the public sphere (1994a, p. 539), and lists such characteristics as size of the

of the much broader (and thus less powerfully explanatory) national set of "cultural repertoires" (Lamont and Thévenot 2000).

¹⁵In 1988, Franz-Olivier Giesbert left the left-wing Le Nouvel Observateur, where he had been editor, to assume the editorship of the right-wing Le Figaro. Giesbert justified his move as part of a "depoliticization" and "Americanization" of the French press (International Herald-Tribune, 24-25 September 1988). But the French reporters and editors with whom I spoke in 1997 and 1998

polity, distribution of wealth and the extent to which “political authority and intellectual leadership” are centralized in a capital city. Related to this last characteristic, I want to suggest that an important ecological aspect of the “mediated” public sphere is the type and intensity of competition among organizations within the journalistic field, related to the degree of centralization versus fragmentation of the field.

The French journalistic field is highly centralized. During the 1990s, TF 1 alone reached 45 percent of households with its evening broadcast, followed by Antenne 2 with about 20 percent (Bourdon 1994, p. 356). The major national newspapers (as well as newsmagazines and radio, not considered in this study) are all headquartered in Paris with the majority of their readers living in Paris and immediate environs. Le Monde and Libération in particular compete directly to attract virtually the same ideological and demographic slice of readers (Eveno 1995, p. 354). Political, professional and economic competition are all closely intertwined in an intensely competitive French national journalistic field. In the United States, the major national newspapers, particularly the Washington Post, the Los Angeles Times and The New York Times are aware of each other, and compete as a “matter of professional pride” but this competition has “little to do with business.”¹⁶ In contrast, in a highly concentrated field, strategies of distinction become all important. Media outlets are only able to emerge, survive and thrive to the extent that they can distinguish themselves from what is already on offer. Thus, the behavior of a journalistic actor in this environment is due not only to

continued to see Giesbert’s move as highly unusual and indicative of Giesbert’s lack of political principles rather than of a high degree of professionalism.

¹⁶Author interview with managing editor of the Los Angeles Times, March 1998.

level of commercialization or proximity to the state or political parties, but to the actor's dynamic relation to others operating inside the field.

Let us now return to our findings and see how taking into account these aspects of journalistic fields extends the explanatory power of our commercial/state comparative model. Although the less commercialized French media field as a whole does more to facilitate participation, this difference cannot be fully explained by lesser commercialization. If level of commercialization alone is key, those French media outlets which are more commercialized – chiefly Le Figaro and TF 1 – should fall closer to the American pattern. They do not. Le Figaro scarcely cites at all the kind of neutral technical experts or ordinary citizens that are the mainstay of American news stories. In fact, in establishing some distance toward organized politics, the least-commercialized French newspaper, Libération, comes closest to the American press style.

One might argue that the greater prevalence of left-leaning sources in the French press coverage is due to the existence of a left government in power in 1992, whereas in the United States in 1994 there was a Republican governor in California. Yet the French right in 1992 was also clearly on the rise politically, virtually on the cusp of power. Given that the protest events in both cases were organized by the left and involved intra-left squabbles, what is puzzling is not why the French press did not cover the right, but why the American press gave the right such prominence. It is not greater commercialization that led the American press to lean further rightward in its coverage of a left-organized march, but the professional tradition of “balance” combined with the convention of “sourcing” all statements of opinion. Heavy reliance on official government sources (Sigal 1973; Gans 1979; Pedelty 1995) thus leads the

American news media to “index” their coverage of politics to the range of views expressed by mainstream government elites, in this case, even those not directly involved in the event being covered.

If the American media tended to index coverage to political elites – executive branch and elected officials – the French media also gave a privileged voice to party officials. But if the French media were simply indexing coverage to the power elite, as with the American media, they would not have allowed left-leaning actors to so overwhelmingly dominate the news. Precisely because the French media were not bound by the same conventions of (imposed) balance and sourcing, they could allow the protest to speak with its own voice. In sum, the American media imposed a relatively uniform ideological balance on the left-generated anti-187 march as well as a generalized de-ideologization of quotes regardless of the source. French news media outlets, despite their partisan colorings, were more politically “transparent.” This case study shows that the media indexing of elite political opinion can vary cross-nationally not only due to differences in political systems, but due to media practices themselves.

Lesser commercialization in the case of the French media also did not clearly result in more rational journalistic discourse than that of the American media. More procedurally rational narrative forms such as the feature/background article, the interview and the commentary were more frequent in the French media, but quotation practices were about the same. Moreover, in their use of dramatic, emotion-laden headlines and prose and in the intensity of the coverage over several days, the French media could also be portrayed as less substantively rational. Commercial effects theories alone cannot explain these findings. And,

again, Le Figaro, which approaches a level of advertising dependence comparable to that of American newspapers, tended to be more like its French competitors in its use of narrative formats, quotations and politically-dramatized style. Le Figaro was forced to act and react in the first instance to its immediate environment; its particular commercial and professional formula takes shape in relation to the space of possibilities in the French journalistic field.

As for the dramatized French coverage of the march, the centralization and intense competition among Paris newspapers relying on daily street sales for most of their revenues clearly played a crucial role. Yet the particular form this competition took was shaped by historically contingent developments. From the mid-1960s until the early 1980s, Le Monde was the unquestioned dominant national newspaper in France, combining left-leaning political engagement with high professional standards. When François Mitterrand came to power in 1981, Le Monde's close association with the socialist party led to a decline in both its professional credibility and its readership. Libération, a small, far-left journal founded by Jean-Paul Sartre in 1973, was able to establish itself after 1981 as a national newspaper in part because of the chance occurrence of Le Monde's decline. To take advantage of this opportunity, Libération distinguished itself from Le Monde politically, but to an even greater extent, stylistically (Bonnafeous 1991, p. 79). As its editor openly proclaimed, Libération's goal was to capture the "emotion of the news" (Perrier 1994, p. 201). Two decades later, the Libération formula has become institutionalized, leading even Le Monde to feature a single three column headline story "above the fold" each day. During the 1990s, as Libération, Le Monde and Le Figaro have all moved closer to the political center, the three newspapers (along with TF 1 and France 2) have tended to compete even more directly over the same

major political stories, amplifying the dramatic potential of every political debate or crisis that emerges (Marchetti 1997; Actes 2000).

Finally, despite greater state dependency and regulation, the French media was just as if not more critical of government as the American media. One surprising finding was that the “strategic” criticism was even more common in the French press than in the American press. American media scholars have tended to assume that this cynical mode is unique to U.S. journalism (e.g., Patterson 1994), either because of its historical roots in the anti-political progressive movement or because of the particular circumstances of the decline in public confidence in U.S. institutions after Vietnam and Watergate. In fact, strategic criticism may be even more common in more state-dominated media fields precisely because journalistic organizations in those fields have a greater need to demonstrate to their readers their political independence. In the case of Libération, its highly critical approach, and the focus on strategy, is consistent with the image of the newspaper since it first gained readership at Le Monde’s expense by emphasizing its greater distance vis-à-vis the socialist party and its more “informational” and less overtly ideological approach (Perrier 1994; Eveno 1995). In order to assess whether the overall focus on strategy over ideology indicates a lessening of the power of the “political/literary” model, we would need more data on French press content during the 1960s and 1970s. It may be that strategic criticism has been just as much a part of the French as the American press traditions, with the main difference being that strategic criticism continues to focus on party strategies in France rather than political consultants and free agent political candidates as in the United States. These findings could also be due to the particular

character of this French protest event, involving an intra-party feud more than a right-left divide.

In sum, I have sought to redress Habermas's inattention to "national or other cultural specificity" (Calhoun 1992b, p. 34) in his theory of the public sphere, by highlighting how cross-national differences in media systems serve to facilitate or hinder participatory, rational and critical public political debate. Habermas and many other scholars attribute many of the ills of contemporary mass media to commercialization. This study has shown the inadequacy of that simplistic formulation. The less-commercialized French media's coverage included a number of features conducive to participatory, rational-critical public debate, in particular the reporting of mobilizing information and unique narrative formats such as the interview transcript and the reactions story. But these features stem less from level of commercialization than from the historical formation and structural ecology of the French journalistic field. Conversely, if the less commercialized French media system did not behave exactly as Habermas's theory would suggest, it may be due to the way that journalistic competition is structured. Though less commercialized, the French national journalistic field is more centralized and economically competitive than the American journalistic field (at least for the leading national newspapers). This feature of the French journalistic field may help explain both its greater dramatization of political debate, despite lesser commercialization, and its surprisingly high level of critical content, despite greater state intervention.

My aim has been to extend and make more explicit existing hypotheses about how journalistic structural features influence discursive content, while developing a number of new indicators of media content to test these hypotheses. This study has shown the importance of

analytically separating state and commercial constraints and the additional utility of taking into consideration the mezzo-level “organizational field” context through which external pressures are mediated. Further research is needed to test and refine the model outlined here for a range of public sphere institutional configurations, event categories and issues (see., e.g., Gamson 2001).

This study's focus on the democratic, emancipatory properties of media systems themselves also offers an alternative to the classic (and tired) media studies approach that idealizes atomized audience reception as the site of semantic resistance to powerful media industries (see, e.g. Verstraeten 1996, Dahlgren 1995). While media-audience relations may vary across societies, with some audiences being more critical and interpretive than others, this study shows that features of journalistic fields and their relations to the state and the market clearly do vary and with important consequences for the production of the raw material of political discourse made available to citizens.

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