Chapter 1

Democratic performance of news media
Dimensions and indicators for comparative studies

Josef Trappel & Tales Tomaz

Introduction

Throughout history, news media have made commitments that "give rise to persistent expectations" about public interest (Christians et al., 2009: 135; Nielsen, 2015). Indeed, there is vast literature about how the media can contribute to democracy by providing freedom of expression, promoting awareness of the demands of disenfranchised groups, and holding the powerful accountable.[1] However, there is also evidence of failure when the media do not live up to these expectations, reinforcing structures of the establishment and even leveraging its power. There are many reasons why they can – and more often than desired – fail. Hyper-commercialism, media concentration, and declining diversity of news, for example, have been pointed at – since long ago – as deadly threats to democracy (Baker, 2007; Curran, 2011; McChesney, 2008). Mass media understand themselves first and foremost as a business, where "accountability to shareholders and owners take precedence over professional accountability and public responsibility" (Christians et al., 2009: 226). The view that the media are primarily a business, and that the freedom of the media is the freedom to trade, is rarely challenged in the Western world. Not by chance they tend to reproduce the status quo, favouring established and powerful actors, especially economic elites.

Such failures mean that, although news media might contribute to fostering democracy's quality, this is no self-fulfilling prophecy. If they do not comply with certain normative standards, they are unlikely to play such a favourable role. Out of this perception, journalists, activists, politicians, entrepreneurs, and civil society have developed several strategies over the years to create better conditions for the news media to meet the expectations of society, including professionalisation, regulation, and monitoring.

The Media for Democracy Monitor (MDM) aims to contribute to this last aspect. Scholars have repeatedly pointed out that media monitoring should become a regular exercise in order to hold the media accountable to society

(and not only to shareholders, owners, and ultimately advertisers) and to facilitate the public debate on the performance of the media (Bertrand, 2003; Galtung, 1999; Glasser, 2009). Developed by researchers from the Euromedia Research Group in partnership with colleagues from other institutions around the world, the MDM provides a monitoring instrument to empirically assess and compare the performance of leading news media in contemporary, stable democracies by surveying their structures of production and distribution, and ownership and governance. This instrument was applied for the first time in a pilot project (d'Haenens et al., 2009; Trappel & Meier, 2011) and then in a full 2011 edition comparing ten countries (Trappel et al., 2011). After a decade of strong digitalisation, the MDM research team decided to apply it again to most of those democracies and some more, amounting to 18 countries (see the results in the country reports of this book).

The MDM is not the first media monitoring initiative, but is distinct from already existing ones. Many of the ongoing monitors watch the output of the news media, focusing on mistakes and misleading information published in their object of study. This is the case of the liberal FAIR, Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting and the conservative Accuracy in Media in the US; the Media Lens in the UK; the television programme *Media Watch* in Australia; and the Bild Blog, monitoring the broadsheet *Bild Zeitung* in Germany. But media watchers are usually run by individuals or small groups, and their sustainability depends on the time and effort these activists are able and willing to invest. Most of them also lack a theoretical foundation and scientific methodology. Their focus on specific content analysis is not shared by the MDM – we are rather interested in the changing structures of the media, which set the framework for the content and media use (Nordenstreng, 1999: 11; Pickard, 2020: 9–10).

The second kind of monitoring comprises established institutions with a specific mission statement. Often such monitoring instruments observe the media in democracies in transition and report violations of journalism rights, such as Freedom House and the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX). The MDM, instead, offers a monitoring instrument appropriate for mature democracies. The Worlds of Journalism Study, a research project headed at the University of Munich, covers changes in journalistic practices in more than a hundred countries over the years. While this monitoring can be very helpful when reflecting on the contributions of news media to local democracies, this is not their focus. The Media Pluralism Monitor, sponsored by the European University Institute, is similar to our approach in terms of its concern with democracy and its methodology, but it solely addresses European countries and has a strong focus on pluralism only. Other two valuable initiatives with strong financial and scientific support are the Journalism & Media division in the Pew Research Center and the Columbia Journalism Review,

from the School of Journalism at Columbia University; however, both of them concentrate on the US.

In this sense, the MDM has a specific ambition not covered by other existing instruments, however important they are, namely to provide an instrument for monitoring the contribution of leading news media to mature democracies all over the world. It is time, then, to explain what this instrument consists of. For this, it is crucial to clarify the conceptual assumptions about democracy that lead to the normative expectations for the media.

Roles of news media in democracy

Democratic theory offers several models of democracy, as well as different forms of classifying these models, but it is fair to notice that most accounts end up with two major groups of models: the liberal and the republican (Cunningham, 2002; Glasser, 2009; Held, 2006). Despite some divergences and criticism, it is common to use this distinction also within media and communication studies (Dahlberg & Siapera, 2007; Dahlgren, 2013; Karppinen, 2013).

The liberal model is a minimalist concept of democracy, which tends to emphasise the dynamics of representation; the role of citizens is to select representatives through voting. Because of the importance of representation, this model is often referred to as elitist (Baker, 2004: 129ff). Liberal democracy, in this tradition, can be conceptualised as an "essentially procedural mechanism designed to facilitate the expression of individual preferences" (Glasser, 2009: 94).

The republican model, on the other hand, is a maximalist position, focusing on direct participation. According to this conception, democracy comprises "a system of decision-making about public affairs in which citizens are directly involved" (Held, 2006: 4). Republican models of democracy come in many different shades, and it is difficult to give a unified account. Probably the most relevant conceptualisation of this variant is the deliberative model, a normative orientation that strives to encourage discussion and reasoned debate. In this model, democratic decision-makers should "equally [possess] the information and other resources productively to enter into deliberative forums before voting, if voting is needed at all" (Cunningham, 2015: 92–93).

Media and communication studies tend to agree that, depending on the model one chooses, there are some roles for news media in democracy. In the liberal model, the main role of the media is to identify and make public the wrongdoings of elected representatives (Baker, 2006: 114). In other words, the essential role of the press in elitist liberal democracies is that of watchdogs who alert people if something is going wrong in order to hold the powerful accountable and help people make informed choices in the next election cycle. In the

deliberation-based models of democracy, news media have not only the obligation to inform about potentially crucial issues, but also to act as a forum for the debate; the media should inspire people to participate in the public discourse, and journalism should give voice to groups that need to express themselves in public to make their cause heard (Strömbäck, 2005).

If there are profoundly different approaches to democracy and, respectively, different normative expectations regarding the role of news media, how should media monitoring proceed? The differences between these theories and their contradictions should not be overlooked. At the same time, one can also argue that these frameworks have specific aspects not necessarily excluding one another and, instead, might explain distinct moments of the relation between media and democracy. Both in times of conflict and corruption, as well as in times when such events are temporarily absent, legitimate (and even illegitimate) claims of groups, pressure groups, and lobbies are articulated. Some of these claims may be urgent and justify the immediate attention of journalism, but others may require public debate and deliberation over some time in order to mature, to explain, or even to develop their justification in public dialogue. This seems to justify the inclusion of roles from both models in a monitoring instrument. In fact, scholars have pointed out that most monitoring initiatives rely only on one model and, by doing this, are not able to cope with the complexity of democracy, especially if the goal is to assess established democracies that might display more subtle differences (Bühlmann et al., 2012).

Following this reasoning, the MDM relies on a set of journalistic roles which encompasses as many features as possible from the concurrent models. Denis McQuail's (2009) four roles of journalism – monitorial, facilitative, radical, and collaborative – correspond, to a certain extent, to all characteristics observed by the different models of democracy. The monitorial role addresses information provision by journalism to the general public: people need and require orientation, and journalistic information should be able to provide points of reference. The monitorial role refers to "all aspects of the collection, processing, and dissemination of information of all kinds about current and recent events, plus warnings about future developments" (McQuail, 2009: 125).

The facilitative role covers all aspects of the provision of a deliberative public space: Journalism should promote active citizenship by way of debate and participation: "They [the media] promote inclusiveness, pluralism, and collective purpose. According to the concept of the facilitative role, they help to develop a shared moral framework for community and society, rather than just looking after individual rights and interests" (McQuail, 2009: 126). This role is rather focused on minorities and marginalised groups and cultures than on mainstream reporting. Nonetheless, the facilitative role is particularly important in deliberative models of democracy.

The radical role "focuses on exposing abuses of power and aims to raise popular consciousness of wrongdoing, inequality, and the potential for change" (McQuail, 2009: 126). It is radical in the sense that such journalism has the potential to mobilise resistance or protest – it remembers that social order could be different.

The collaborative role refers to the collaboration between the media and the state, for example, during times of crisis or states of emergency (McQuail, 2009: 127). This role may at first sight be contradictory to the notion of freedom of the press in democratic societies, but, for example, cases such as the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 demonstrate the importance of the role of the media in communicating public health-related information.

The MDM then relates these roles to three core dimensions of mature democracies: freedom, equality, and control (Diamond & Morlino, 2004; Maniglio, 2010: 63–70). Freedom as an elementary notion in democracy refers to ensuring political, civil, and socioeconomic rights (Diamond & Morlino, 2004: 22–24), and can be understood as both negative and positive freedom. Negative freedom refers to the absence of legal or political prohibitions and – in the context of media – to the absence of censorship. In a more reductionist view, negative freedom means being free from the interference of the state. Positive freedom, in turn, refers to the freedom to act. In the context of the media, positive freedom is freedom of expression (to receive and, in particular, impart, information), freedom of opinion-building, and of the flow of diverse ideas and opinions. In other words, positive freedom is the effective capacity of individuals to have their opinions printed and circulated (Picard, 1985: 48).

Equality is another elementary principle of democracy and refers, in the first place, to the fundamental notion that all citizens are equal in and before the law, ensuring that everyone has the same rights and legal protections (Diamond & Morlino, 2004: 24–26). Equality calls for an absence of discrimination or bias in the amount and kind of access available to channels, on equivalent terms, for all alternative voices, as far as is practicable (McQuail, 1992: 71). Equality, however, does not include any kind of obligation to provide balanced reporting. Not all claims need to be treated equally by journalists, as conflicts are an intrinsic element of democratic societies. James Curran (2007: 36f) holds that the media should not pretend that the underlying notion of society is harmony: "Democratic politics is about expressing and managing real conflicts in society. […] The expression of conflict through the media is positive, and should be encouraged".

Control, the third elementary principle of democracy, refers to the capacity and obligation of citizens to call powerholders of all sorts to account, ultimately consecrating popular sovereignty (Diamond & Morlino, 2004: 3). While at the institutional political level elections are a powerful instrument for holding political powerholders accountable, there are no set mechanisms to

call powerholders in other social realms to account. Curran (2007: 35) argues that control should not be limited to the state and institutionalised power, as this could lead to the "neglect of other forms of power – economic, social and cultural – that can also injure or restrict". If we broaden his interpretation, this democratic principle calls for control of all institutions with power over individuals and groups. Media and journalism provide one prominent means to control powerholders by way of public deliberation. In the context of the MDM, however, there is a second meaning of democratic control: As power agents in democratic societies, the media must be called to account for their own actions as well.

Freedom, equality, and control can be translated into communication functions. The media's communication function derived from freedom is the information function; from equality follows what might be called public opinion-making, or the interest mediation function; and from control follows the function to act as a watchdog against the abuse of all types of power. Thus, the root concept of democracy translates into a democratic media mandate to serve as 1) a guardian of the flow of information; 2) a forum for public discussion of diverse, often conflicting ideas; and 3) a public watchdog against the abuse of power in all its various forms. By connecting the journalistic roles and the democratic dimensions, the MDM finds a full-fledged theoretical framework that allows the assessment of the contribution of news media to democracy (see Figure 1).

Figure 1   *Roles of news media and dimensions of democracy*
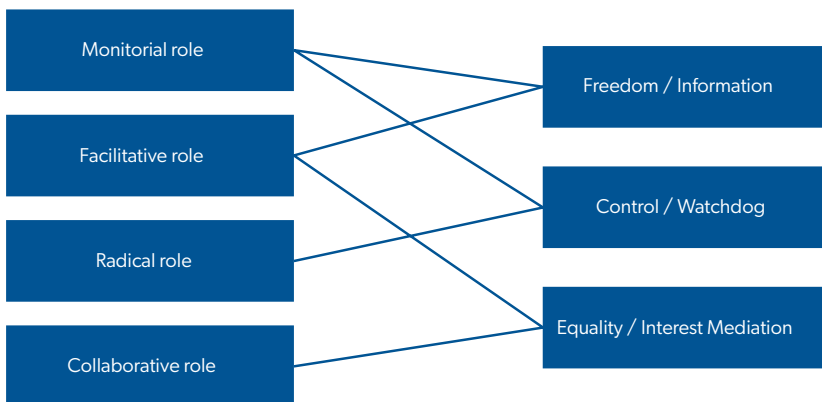
Source: Elaboration of the MDM research team based on theories of democracy and McQuail's (2009) roles of news media (for more details, see Trappel, 2011)

In the MDM, this root conceptual framework serves as a theoretical fundament for the development of empirical indicators. The original version comprised 26

indicators covering all three dimensions, *Freedom / Information (F)*, *Equality / Interest Mediation (E),* and *Control / Watchdog (C)*. For the 2021 exercise, quite a few indicators have been carefully amended and adjusted to better suit the purpose and to describe more clearly their relevance for democracy. Generally, though, the MDM keeps most of the indicators largely unchanged, allowing for diachronic comparison over this decade of heavy digitalisation in the media and communications field.

However, in various iterations among members of the research team, they identified several vacancies in the research tool. These vacancies cluster around two topics: On the one hand, gender-based challenges for democracy have been identified as insufficiently incorporated ten years ago. Therefore, two indicators were adopted: Rules and practices on internal gender equality (F8), and gender equality in media content (F9). By adding these two indicators to the research instrument, gender-related challenges to democracy are better visible and well justified with regard to the ongoing contentions within the journalistic profession and media output. On the other hand, the research team decided to allocate more attention to developments that became prominent within the last ten years – and are potentially here to stay. This concerns the recently prominent, but pertinent, issue of misinformation on digital platforms (F10), and the digitally born phenomenon of online harassment of journalists (F11). Both issues qualify as challenges to contemporary democracies and have substantially increased in importance compared with 2011. All four new indicators fall into the *Freedom / Information (F)* dimension, and they take the overall number of indicators from 26 in 2011 to 30 in 2021.

Before adopting and applying these indicators to the national media and communication realities, the research teams discussed them in various face-to-face sessions. The meaning of each indicator was scrutinised in detail and theoretically applied to the context of the countries concerned. Following the adaption of the set of indicators, the national research teams graded the performance of their country's media by assigning 0 to 3 points. Point allocation is based on the following instructions:

- 3 points: all or almost all criteria are fulfilled

- 2 points: the clear majority of criteria or the most important criteria are met

- 1 point: indicates poor fulfilment, but at least some criteria are met

- 0 points: all major criteria are not met

At first glance, it might seem this grading scheme contains arbitrary choices, but in its application, the vast majority of grades are easy to apply, as was evidenced in both the 2011 and current 2021 editions. In order to create a common

understanding of how the grades should be awarded in the 2021 exercise, the group of researchers met after data collection (in June 2020) in a hybrid, half-virtual meeting, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. This way, all members of the national research teams had a chance to follow the deliberations from their remote computers. This grading meeting turned out to be highly useful for all participants in order to clarify interpretations and increase the validity of the instrument.

In the following, we present each indicator, explain the theoretical foundations, and discuss which data should be gathered to provide evidence on the topic. Explanation and justification of original indicators are mostly unchanged in comparison with the text of the previous edition (see Trappel et al., 2011), but developments presented by recent literature are indicated and properly discussed.

Indicators

Dimension: Freedom / Information (F)

In the first dimension, indicators refer to structural conditions for receiving and imparting information. The assumption is that news media play an important role in upholding the right of freedom of expression in democratic societies. Indicators cover the reach and consumption of leading news media, the autonomy of news producers both from political and commercial interference, access to the means of production by historically marginalised groups, and conditions against abuse in online communication, such as the spread of misinformation and hate speech.

(F1) Geographic distribution of news media availability

The first indicator concerns the geographic distribution of news media. According to this feature, freedom is better guaranteed if citizens have access to the relevant news media through the whole territory and rely on them to be informed and participate in public affairs. News media should, therefore, be widely available, and regional divides should not exist. This also implies a high degree of technical reach, such as coverage of radio and television signals and broadband access, guaranteeing full supply of all types of news media. Geographic distribution as an indicator of freedom should not be underrated. It has always been a key principle of media structure, closely connected with social structure. Regions not served by leading media outlets might struggle to properly participate in national politics, as "differences of geography may also coincide with ethnic, religious or language differences within the national soci-

ety" (McQuail, 1992: 115). In fact, geographic availability of news media is a factor of media pluralism (Valcke et al., 2015). It is true that the last decade has exhibited a steady growth in broadband access. On the other hand, in the wake of the erosion of their ad-based business model, news producers are struggling to survive, and scholars point out the increase of so-called news deserts, that is, cities or even entire regions completely excluded from journalistic coverage (Abernathy, 2018; Pickard, 2020). This indicator seeks to assess these general trends and provide a more nuanced account for each country.

Indicator F1   *Geographic distribution of news media availability*

Question	Are the relevant news media available to all citizens? Is there a regional divide?
Requirement	The higher the level of distribution and availability, the more democratic freedom and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: news media are widely available all over the country 2: some parts of the country are not served by local or regional news media 1: large and important parts of the country are not served by local or regional news media 0: news media are available to the urban population only
Criteria	• coverage of all areas, nationwide access • strong radio or television signals via cable, satellite, terrestrial networks • access to online media without restrictions (extended broadband coverage) • use of multiplatform delivery systems (e.g., making radio and television available online)
Data sources	statistics; reports; etc.

(F2)   Patterns of news media use (consumption of news)

The traditional normative theory of news media has long held that well-informed citizens are a necessary condition for a healthy democracy (Berelson et al., 1954; Delli Carpini, 2000; Miller & Vaccari, 2020). This indicator relates to the reach of the primarily used news media and takes patterns of media use and consumption of news as proxies to estimate how successful news media are in the task of reaching and informing citizens. An important measure is the daily share of newspapers, television, radio, and online media use. It shows which news media reach the largest group of citizens and which media therefore have a potentially greater influence on public opinion. Comprehensive data, such as the *Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (Newman et al., 2020), indicate that interest in news continues to be very high in most stable democracies. But more granular data can help indicate whether this interest reflects similar patterns

of news consumption or there are relevant gaps, and what the implications are for each country.

Indicator F2   *Patterns of news media use (consumption of news)*

Question	How well do news media in general reach the population (different news outlets such as newspapers, television news, radio news, generic online-media, etc.)? What is the reach of the main news broadcasts?
Requirement	The more the news media are used, the more democratic freedom and the higher the potential that democracy is promoted. The whole population is distinguished from the younger population (approx. 12–25 years old)
Points	3: entire population, young and old, watches, reads, listens to, or uses news regularly 2: a considerable majority of the population is reached by news media; some gaps between young and old 1: news media reach elites, rather than the whole population; considerable gaps between young and old 0: news is of minor importance compared with entertainment, etc.
Criteria	• reach of main news broadcasts (evening news) • reach and circulation of quality newspapers • reach of radio news • reach of news-oriented online media • reach among different social segments of the population
Data sources	*Reuters Institute Digital News Report* (various years, when available); national statistics; audience research; public opinion surveys

(F3)   Diversity of news sources

News media have been regarded as the main source of exposure to dissimilar political views, a crucial feature for democratic dialogue (Mutz & Martin, 2001: 97). In the 1990s and 2000s, the popularisation of the Internet unleashed claims that networked communication would provide a more diverse information diet. However, current research shows that, despite the actual contribution of networked communication, editorial media still play the central role in raising citizens' awareness of political difference in most liberal democracies (Benkler et al., 2018; Stier et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2020) – hence the importance of media outlets themselves accounting for diversity and pluralism. Accordingly, this indicator assumes that the selection and composition of news must be executed according to professional rules and through the use of a variety of sources (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007: 135–136). By using different news sources, media organisations should be better equipped to address plurality within democratic societies; this implies a large variety of news agencies and no dominance of just one national or international agency in the newsroom.

Furthermore, a diversity of news sources implies the use of non-elite sources (e.g., political blogs), sensitivity to gender, age, and ethnic representation, the rejection of public relations material, and the employment of national as well as foreign correspondents. The selection or omission of relevant news sources for political or ideological reasons is considered bad performance, as it reduces the degree of diversity. Furthermore, the indicator asks whether the media cooperate and build up a content syndication and supply each other with certain news sections, such as foreign news.

Indicator F3   *Diversity of news sources*

Question	How diverse are the sources used by the leading news media?
Requirement	The more diverse the sources used by the leading news media, the better democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: large variety of sources; no dominant sources; freedom to investigate 2: restricted variety of sources, some dominant; fair amount of investigation 1: sources are uniform, but some investigation is done by journalists 0: leading news media depend on one source (e.g., national news agency); little to no own journalistic investigation
Criteria	• dominance of the national news agency • presence and relevance of other news agencies • research findings on the use of public relations material by the media • number of own national and foreign correspondents • content syndication (do leading news media supply one another with relevant news sections, such as foreign news?) • relation between elite and non-elite sources • selection (or omission) of sources on political grounds • selection (or omission) of sources to news-making that reflect societal diversity in terms of gender, age, and ethnic origin • resources for journalistic investigation
Data sources	interviews with newsroom journalists; external research findings

(F4)   Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy

This performance indicator concerns the existence of checks and balances within a newsroom that allow internal democratic practices to flourish. It assumes that newsrooms in themselves must be democratic places, providing conditions of freedom for the editorial staff (Christians et al., 2009: 92, 96). This is achieved when rules regarding internal democratic practices are in place and followed. Though national and individual factors might be even more important, a democratic organisational environment helps increase the editorial staff's sense of autonomy (Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013), which increases the likelihood that democratic freedom will be promoted. Along these lines, this indicator looks for organisational structures that guarantee the independence

of individual members of the editorial staff and whether any formal procedures (or strict rules) have been established to ensure journalists' participation in decision-making. There can be different ways of ensuring the internal freedom of the press as well as the involvement of journalists in the management of information and in important decisions at the heart of a media organisation, such as the existence of a newsroom council and internal rules of electing or appointing editors-in-chief.

Indicator F4 *Internal rules for practice of newsroom democracy*

Question	To what extent do newsroom journalists practice internal democracy?
Requirement	If effective rules regarding internal democratic practices exist, it is more likely that democratic freedom will be guaranteed, and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: democratic practices in newsrooms are implemented and respected 2: journalists have a strong say on internal decisions (e.g., by veto rights) 1: journalists are heard and participate in decision-making, but cannot decide 0: decisions in the newsroom are taken top-down and do not involve journalists
Criteria	• newsroom journalists have a formal and equal say in how to portray and frame political issues • newsroom journalists must arrive at a consensus on how to frame political issues • newsrooms have clear editorial guidelines for impartiality, with sanctions attached • existence of a newsroom council • internal rules for electing or appointing editors-in-chief, other positions, etc. • journalists choose their editor-in-chief • existence of internal rules to support and promote women journalists' careers and their access to managerial positions • existence and implementation of a system of monitoring and evaluation of the presence and participation of women in decision-making at all levels
Data sources	interviews

(F5) Company rules against *internal* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

Extending the concept of freedom in the newsroom, this performance indicator aims to assess the degree of interference by the management and other internal supervisors in editorial decisions. According to McAllister and Proffitt (2009: 331), "Owners of media operations may exert influence over content and distribution in a variety of ways […], although this may be rare in large

corporations". Empirical evidence confirms that media outlets whose editors feel pressured by owners and management devote more positive coverage and apply less scrutiny to people and companies related to their parent organisations than their competitors, showing that boards, newsrooms, and news content are intertwined (Saffer et al., 2020). In the case of publicly owned media, newsrooms displayed a long history and different degrees of editorial independence around the world (Sussman, 2012). Most European public broadcasting systems set legal limits on freedom (McQuail, 1992: 117), but even in these cases, there is a range of practices varying from government capture to power-sharing (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Reich & Hanitzsch, 2013). This indicator assumes that the newsroom must have freedom to decide independently on editorial matters. In order to secure the independence of newsrooms and journalists from the management or sales department, some internal rules are useful. A classic rule is that the newsroom and management must be clearly separated, preventing internal manipulation and influence. The sales department should also have no contact with reporting staff. But changing conditions, especially the growing employment of staff to produce paid content, defy this classical separation and put pressure on editorial freedom, which must be assessed as well (Conill, 2016).

Indicator F5 *Company rules against internal influence on newsroom/editorial staff*

Question	What is the degree of independence of the newsroom from the owners, management, and advertising sales department? Are there rules regarding this separation? Are these rules implemented?
Requirement	The more journalists decide independently on editorial matters, the more democratic freedom is exercised and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: newsroom journalists enjoy full independence on editorial decisions 2: management, sales departments, and newsrooms are separated most of the time 1: management and sales departments meet newsroom staff regularly 0: journalists must execute management decisions, including those from the advertising sales department
Criteria	• formal rules to separate newsrooms from management, including the board, in both private and public service media • Are such rules actually effective in daily practice? • representation of journalists in management • representation of journalists on the board • presence or absence of advertising sales department in newsroom meetings • Is the editor-in-chief or publisher the formal leader of newsroom work? In the case of public service media: • Does the public service remit provide for independence from the state or government? • Is the selection procedure for editors-in-chief independent from the government?
Data sources	interviews

(F6) Company rules against *external* influence on newsroom/editorial staff

Interference from external parties, such as advertisers, news sources, and organised pressure groups, are also unacceptable (Hardy, 2008: 92) – this is the topic of this indicator. Healthy financial conditions are crucial for ensuring independence from external influence; otherwise, news media are more susceptible to commercial pressure. This, in turn, reflects on content, as more commercialised media systems tend to offer less political information and more soft news, requiring citizens to put more effort towards following public affairs (Aalberg et al., 2010). Therefore, in the case of commercial media, this indicator demands investigation of large and small advertisers as well as the balance between them. The more sources of income a media company has, the more independence journalists should have to investigate. On the other hand, when financial resources originate mostly from a single third party (e.g., the government or a single large advertiser or sponsor), it is difficult to claim full independence (McQuail, 1992: 106). A similar reasoning concerns public service media: when well and independently funded, they do not need to serve the demands of the current government. Mixed funding – revenues flowing in from not only licence fees and public subsidies, but also from commercial activities, such as advertising – can also minimise dependence on political forces and foster reporting freedom. However, in this case, there is the risk that public service media might "conform to tuning-in quota" (Bardoel, 2015: 4).

Indicator F6   Company rules against external influence on newsroom/editorial staff

Question	What is the degree of interference by external parties (in particular advertisers and sponsors)? Do news media receive revenue from a multitude of sources?
Requirement	The higher the diversity of revenue streams, the more democratic freedom is exercised and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: no single large advertiser; no effective commercial influence 2: some large advertisers, but newsrooms are not affected by them 1: newsrooms depend on a few large advertisers or sponsors 0: strong dependence on large advertisers or sponsors
Criteria	In the case of mixed-financed media companies: • multitude of income streams (sales, advertising, licence fee, others) • multitude of advertisers, each having only a minor share of the total • sponsoring agreements with influence on content (such as "infomercials", etc.) In the case of media companies with single-revenue financing (e.g., some public service media): • formal rules and practice of distance between revenue source (e.g., state or government, licence fees) and news media

- Are public service media financed over a short or long period?
  Can financial provision be changed from one year to the next?
- interventions by shareholders or politicians in newsrooms

Data sources	interviews; data from leading news media

(F7)   Procedures on news selection and news processing

This performance indicator asks about routines and guidelines for news production: Is a stylebook on news selection available and being used? Do new journalists receive training in news values or selection criteria? What procedures precede publication? Democracy in the newsroom is promoted if there is regular internal debate on the selection and processing of news, because this may ensure both control and impartiality (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2007). Established procedures on news selection and processing can also be a safeguard against omission concerning structural inequalities. One example relates to gender: "The overall proportion of stories focusing on women has remained unchanged at 10% since 2000", found the *Global Media Monitoring Project 2015 report* (GMMP, 2015: 71). Formal rules on news selection guarantee a high degree of professionalism and increase the chances of gender-fair headlines and balanced representation of social diversity.

Indicator F7   *Procedures on news selection and news processing*

Question	What rules are implemented and practiced in the leading news media regarding the selection and in-house processing of news items?
Requirement	The more internal debate about news values (selection criteria) and the choice of news that occurs, the more democratic freedom is exercised and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: formal rules on how to select and process news exist and are practised day to day 2: internal debate on the selection and processing of news is practised more than once every day and is part of journalistic routines 1: internal debate is limited to the daily news conference 0: news selection and processing are done by the individual journalist based on their own preference
Criteria	• stylebook available on news selection • in-house training for new journalists on the job • defined stages for any news item before it is published, aired, or put online • critical review of news originating in "social media" as a general routine procedure in newsrooms • newsroom discussions on how reporting of (in)equality and diversity issues should be made, including the use of diversity and gender-fair headlines, pictures, and language
Data sources	interviews

(F8) Rules and practices on internal gender equality

This performance indicator is the first of the new indicators for 2021, and it concerns the principle of equality within newsrooms and the entire media organisation. It describes, in particular, the equality of pay and career opportunities for female staff. Gender inequality in media organisations is considered one of the most prevalent risks to media pluralism for democratic societies (Brogi et al., 2018: 2). Despite some progress in the last decades, in 2015, women still occupied only 27 per cent of the top management jobs in media organisations around the world, according to the aforementioned report from the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP, 2015: 45). Research indicates persistent discrimination in the assignment of tasks to women journalists and a gender pay gap and sexism from both work colleagues and news sources, even in European liberal democracies (EIGE, 2013). When women play a decisive role in media organisations, freedom and democracy are better served. Research shows that increasing the presence of women in the newsroom has a positive impact on the content, providing more diverse news sources and including women and ethnic minorities, whereas male-dominated news organisations rely mostly on official sources (GMMP, 2015: 46). This indicator seeks to assess to what extent newsrooms actively take steps toward more gender balance in their operations and internal functioning. While it takes as a departure point the proportion of women and men in staff – especially in decision-making positions – it also considers conditions of employment, benefits such as child care, and internal guidelines and policies for women's protection and career progression, in addition to existing legal frameworks.

Indicator F8   *Rules and practices on internal gender equality*

Question	To what extent do media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equality in their own operations and internal functioning?
Requirement	Institutional commitment to gender-responsive practices in media organisations in relation to working conditions, career progress, and access to decision-making positions is a sign of media companies' democratic orientation.
Points	3: employment conditions are equal between men and women 2: some inequalities remain, but the organisation has undertaken efforts to eliminate them and has already succeeded to some extent 1: inequalities exist and remain; the organisation slowly moves towards eliminating them 0: substantial differences exist with regard to payment, career and promotion, recruitment, etc., between men and women
Criteria	• equal conditions of employment and benefits for women and men, including equal pay for equal work, and equal and transparent recruitment practices

- existence of internal rules, recommendations, codes, or guidelines in media organisations to support and promote women journalists in their careers and access to managerial positions (in particular general gender equality policies, maternal and paternal leaves, and policies to support women getting their job back after maternity)
- existence of mechanisms in place to remove obstacles to equal opportunities such as a gender equality advisor or department, devoted training activities, ot the offer of childcare
- existence of female journalists' associations that monitor media's commitment to gender equality and promote good practices
- existence of national provisions or legal framework regarding gender equality in the media workplaces

Data sources	interviews; gender-related reports and studies

(F9) Gender equality in media content

This performance indicator refers to the level of gender equality in media content and the promotion of free expression and inclusion of diverse voices in reporting. There is a relevant gender gap in news content, with only 16 per cent of the portrayed subjects in politics and government news being women. Furthermore, while men are more often portrayed as government officials, politicians, or experts, women appear mostly as simply residents, parents, home-makers, students, or victims (GMMP, 2015: 9). Such entrenched inequalities contribute to replicating and reinforcing gender stereotypes. Although there is a long-standing movement to hold media accountable for gender-related failures in coverage, recent developments such as the #metoo campaign – which turned global in 2017 – seem to have finally brought awareness within media organisations all over the world of the need to correctly portray underrepresented segments of societies (Krijnen, 2020). Accordingly, we assume that democracy is better served in cases where gender sensitivity in reporting is fully respected and journalists promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the news. This indicator assesses the existence of rules and practices in media organisations to guarantee gender balance and diversity in news subjects. This way, the MDM corresponds with both objectives of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action regarding women and media, adopted at the UN's Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 (United Nations, 1995), namely to increase the participation of women in news production (F8) and promote a non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media (F9).

Indicator F9 *Gender equality in media content*

Question	To what extent do media outlets acknowledge and address challenges to gender equality in media content and promote free expression and inclusion of diverse voices?
Requirement	Gender parity and awareness across editorial content of the news and current affairs are crucial for the media to reflect the plurality of voices in society, thus fostering women's freedom to express their diverse knowledge and experiences and contributing to societal democratic development.
Points	3: gender equality in reporting is codified and fully respected in daily routines 2: such codified rules are in place, but little efforts is made to respect them 1: no codified rules are in place, but there is informal consensus to report in gender-sensitive ways, and most journalists respect this 0: there are no specific rules on gender equality in reporting in place, and each journalist decides whether or not gender equality is respected in reporting
Criteria	• commitment to selection of sources to news-making that reflect societal diversity in terms of gender, age, and ethnic origin • explicit efforts are made, and mechanisms are in place, to monitor and guarantee gender balance in news subjects (balanced numbers of women and men in the news) (e.g., monitoring and sex disaggregated analysis of news and current affairs content) • existence of internal rules, recommendations, codes, or guidelines regarding the promotion of gender equality in media content • newsroom commitment to cover gender (in)equality and diversity issues • newsroom discussions on how reporting of such issues should be made, including the use of gender-fair headlines, pictures, and language • existence of internal rules, recommendations, codes, or guidelines to produce gender-sensitive coverage of gender-based violence • existence of women's alternative media, offline and online • existence of national legal frameworks concerning gender-fair and relevant media content (e.g., media policies including gender equality goals or gender equality strategies including reference to media responsibilities)
Data sources	interviews; gender-related reports and studies

(F10) Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)

As common wisdom suggests, misperceptions have negative effects on political debate and public policy (Flynn et al., 2017: 35). There is little doubt that the Internet triggered a flood not only of information, but also of misinformation. Although misinformation did not begin with digital platforms, they have allowed it to arrive faster and reach more people than in the age of mass communication;

however, the problem is more complex. Besides structural political-economic factors that make citizens more prone to produce, reproduce, consume, and believe in misinformation, news media play an even more crucial role in either spreading it or mitigating its effects (Benkler et al., 2018; Humprecht et al., 2020). This means that, if news media are to assume their responsibility in democracy, they must fight contemporary misinformation strategies. Well-equipped news media are likely to be the most important check a society can impose on false information. Newsrooms are therefore requested to exercise particular practices to identify misinformation and avoid spreading fake news. Democracy is well served if specially trained staff are available to check doubtful news and discuss them internally before distributing it. This can be done in-house or by professional fact-checkers, with or without algorithm-based tools. The more sophisticated misinformation becomes, the more important the fact-checking mission is for leading news media.

Indicator F10   *Misinformation and digital platforms (alias social media)*

Question	How do leading news media protect and defend their content against misinformation delivered through digital platforms and social media?
Requirement	The more sophisticated the mechanisms and measures are in place to identify and prevent misinformation originating in digital platforms from being published, the better democracy is served.
Points	3: control by specially trained experts is in place, also using algorithm-based tools 2: information from doubtful platform sources must undergo specific checks 1: regular internal meetings to discuss potential misinformation 0: single journalists decide on their own when including content originating from digital platforms
Criteria	• specific rules apply and checks are implemented, additional care is taken in newsrooms if the source of news is a digital platform • algorithmic tools or other machine-based instruments are provided and in use • training on how to distinguish facts from misinformation is provided on a regular basis
Data sources	interviews with newsroom journalists

(F11) Protection of journalists against (online) harassment

Increasingly, journalists (often female) are targets of online harassment, "shit-storms", cyberstalking, attacks, and even death threats aimed at preventing them from investigative reporting (Intergovernmental Council of the IPDC, 2020). Online communication evolved into an ecosystem providing fertile conditions

for these practices (Gillespie, 2018: 56). Harassment is a violation of the freedom of expression, which is an essential human right to voice and the cornerstone of a democratic society, and so affects the quality of democratic societies and "the right of society to access a plurality of information" (Chocarro et al., 2020). As democratic freedom is constrained when journalists, especially from minority groups, are under such threats, this requires strong and determined replies. While we assume that penal legislation is in place to protect all citizens (including journalists) from harassment, this indicator seeks evidence that media organisations support their staff in cases of intimidation and abuse. We look especially for the existence of contractual protections, codes of conduct, and guidelines to address harassment against reporters, but also to the availability of technical resources, such as encryption technologies, to provide safer online communication.

Indicator F11 *Protection of journalists against (online) harassment*

Question	How do leading news media support and protect their journalists in case of harassment, particularly online?
Requirement	Democracy is better served if journalists can work free from threats and harassment. Leading news media are therefore required to establish mechanisms to support and protect their news journalists from harass-ment and threats, for instance, by providing them shelter, hiring security personnel, and enabling them to use encryption technologies.
Points	3: leading news media provide full and unlimited legal and other forms of support for their journalists in case of harassment, "shitstorms", insults, etc. 2: journalists can rely on their employers in such cases, but cost or other reasons sometimes compromise the assistance provided by news media organisations 1: leading news media normally provide assistance, but there are repeated cases where support and protection did not work out or was strictly limited 0: journalists work at their own risk in this respect, and news media do not provide any support
Criteria	• relevant provisions in work contracts • (recent) cases that demonstrate the degree to which leading news media provide support • specialised legal services at hand provided by news organisations • possibilities for journalists to use encryption technologies to prevent them from being hacked • specific provisions (code of conduct, ethical code, or guidelines) addressing instances of gender-based harassment so as to protect and support particularly women professionals targeted online
Data sources	interviews with newsroom journalists and editors-in-chief; reports in trade press; cases in recent years

Dimension: Equality / Interest Mediation (E)

The structural feature *Equality / Interest Mediation* refers to the country and its entire media system. According to this feature, equality is better guaranteed if there are large numbers of different media outlets (quantitative external diversity). Ownership structure and diversity are accordingly regarded as important elements. Moreover, news should reach the citizen by means of different formats. Finally, there is a greater chance of achieving equality if the mass media are employed by minority groups (alternative media, third sector) and if the dominant mass media report on a regular basis about minority claims.

(E1) Media ownership concentration national level

As many other economic activities, media systems are also subject to market concentration. This happens when companies increase the relative or absolute number of units they control both by growing internally (creation of new products, innovation, and accumulation) and externally (purchasing other companies). This way, media systems might display horizontal integration (few companies dominate products within the same type of business), vertical integration (the whole supply chain is operated by the same or few companies), and diagonal growth (few media firms operate across several media sectors and even beyond media and communication industries) (Mastrini & Becerra, 2008).

Claims concerning the threats of ownership concentration for the fulfilment of media's democratic role have been discussed widely among scholars from liberal and critical perspectives. For example, Doyle (2002) affirms that media concentration narrows the range of voices and can lead to over-representation of certain political opinions. Along similar lines, Baker argued that ownership concentration must be seen as contrary to the fundamental ideas of democracy: "Concentrated media ownership creates the possibility of an individual decision maker exercising enormous, unequal and hence undemocratic, largely unchecked, potentially irresponsive power" (Baker, 2007: 16).

Drawing on this theoretical framework, the MDM assumes that ownership concentration in the media may compromise the plurality of the media landscape and undermine their democratic performance. Despite some belief that the abundance provided by the Internet would make pluralism concerns outdated, more careful analysis indicates that online communication is characterised by even more concentrated market shares, overwhelmingly favouring incumbents and large conglomerates (Hardy, 2014; Hindman, 2018). Technological development is raising fixed costs and lowering marginal costs of cultural production, turning economies of scale even more profitable, a classic predictor of market concentration (Noam, 2016; Picard, 2010). As news media have become more

intertwined with electronic and digital technologies in the last decade, a high and growing degree of ownership concentration should be observed by empirical research. Indeed, previous findings already point to increasing consolidation of news media all over the world, with additional strength in highly commercialised media systems and sectors (Abernathy, 2018; Saffer et al., 2020).

This indicator addresses the issue of concentration at the national level. A national market controlled by one operator (monopoly) or two (oligopoly) can be problematic in this regard. Ideally, more than two competing news media outlets should therefore be available in each news media sector, such as newspapers, news magazines, radio, television, and online media. Data about ownership, market share, and extent of public scrutiny allows for the assessment of concentration at this level.

Indicator E1   *Media ownership concentration national level*

Question	What is the degree of ownership concentration at the national level?
Requirement	The lower the national ownership concentration, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: low concentration ratio (CR3 lower than 0.40) and more than two competitors for all news media sectors (television, radio, newspaper, generic online media) 2: moderate concentration ratio, with some market dominance by large companies; CR3 is between 0.40 and 0.70 1: competition is weak, and most media sectors are controlled by one company; CR3 is higher than 0.70 0: private monopoly at the national level
Criteria	• plurality of ownership at national level • transparency of ownership • If there is a monopoly: Is it publicly controlled? Is it state-owned? • Does one company control more than one medium (also across sectors)?
Data sources	statistics (data, calculate the market share CR3 of all media in the country; concentration ratio (CR n) is the combined market share of the n largest firms in the news media market divided by 100)

(E2)   Media ownership concentration regional (local) level

The second indicator measures the degree of ownership concentration in the market of local or regional news media. Ideally, more than two competing news media outlets should be available in each news media sector. With lower media concentration, a larger number of players have access to the news markets, and more diverse opinions are likely to emerge. But the already alluded phenomenon of increasing numbers of news deserts, when entire regions become

under-served by news media due to closures (Abernathy, 2018), predicts an even higher degree of ownership concentration at the regional level. In fact, local and regional news media are more strongly hit by the news media crisis of the last decades than national groups (Napoli et al., 2018; Nielsen, 2015). At the same time, it is important to notice that most discourses of news media crisis are often based on the developments in the US alone. Scholars in other countries challenge the idea of crisis or point out other causes (historical and political) rather than present-day and technological ones (Brüggemann et al., 2016: 534). Anyway, strong media ownership concentration at the local level is particularly difficult for local politics, as politicians have no alternative means of communicating with their electorate other than through the local monopoly media company or their social media channels. These technologically enabled alternatives can indeed help, but research indicates that the decline of local news media often translates into citizens following national news instead (Darr et al., 2018). Therefore, networked communication is no ultimate solution. Local news media should still fulfil a specific democratic role, and they are likely to better perform under a lower degree of concentration.

Indicator E2   *Media ownership concentration regional (local) level*

Question	What is the degree of ownership concentration at the regional (local) level?
Requirement	The lower the regional (local) ownership concentration, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: more than two competitors in all relevant regions for all news media sectors (newspapers, television, radio, etc.) 2: most relevant regions are addressed by more than two media companies 1: only few relevant regions are addressed by more than two media companies 0: full news control by just one private media company in all relevant regions (integrated media companies: newspaper, local television, radio, and online)
Criteria	• plurality of ownership in the regions • transparency of ownership • In the case of a monopoly: Is it publicly controlled? Is it state-owned?
Data sources	statistics (only for large regions in large countries: calculate the market share CR3 of main regions in the country, similar to indicator E1)

(E3)   Diversity of news formats

A long list of news formats through multiple types of newspapers, television, radio, and online media indicates plurality of information. Each medium has its

own specificies for the presentation of news and potentially adds to the diversity of news and information on offer. Some media, such as newspapers, tend to increase political knowledge for already educated people, while audiovisual media benefit the least educated "almost as much as the most educated" (Van Aelst et al., 2017: 17). Especially younger generations long for news formats that harness affordances provided by mobile communication (Newman et al., 2020: 57). Thus, this indicator assumes that variety of formats is a positive feature of media systems. Moreover, ownership diversity is unlikely to automatically translate into news format diversity, hence the specific importance of this indicator.

Indicator E3   *Diversity of news formats*

Question	How diverse are the formats for news presentation?
Requirement	The higher the diversity of news formats, the more plurality of information and democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: abundance of news formats in all media sectors 2: good variety of formats; some news formats dominate but are challenged by others 1: few formats are available; public attention is focused on dominant news formats 0: minimum diversity of news formats; very few formats dominate
Criteria	• degree of news formats diversity (produce a list of different formats of news, including online outlets specialised in news, 24-hour news channels, etc.) • multiple types of news media • special forms of news presentation
Data sources	reports; audience research; format research

(E4)   Minority/Alternative media

It is uncontested that media can contribute to diversity by reflecting differences in society: "Media are expected to represent the prevailing differences of culture, opinion, and social conditions of the population as a whole" (McQuail, 1992: 144). This feature belongs to democratic mediation, especially in societies marked by so many different interests and identities:

> Adequate representation of different cultural values, lifestyles, languages, and heritages in mainstream media, development of minority media, and minorities' access to media services have been repeatedly considered to contribute to a culture of tolerance, media pluralism and consequently, consolidation of democracy. (Klimkiewicz, 2015: 82)

Accordingly, all major minorities within a given society should be served by a variety of special minority or alternative media and be well represented and recognised by mainstream media based on rules or conventions. More democratic equality is likely to be established if minority groups have easy and even privileged access to the leading news media in order to argue their causes. Governance rules within media companies that entail legally binding obligations for the media in favour of positive discrimination of minorities are considered helpful tools in establishing more equality (both in public service media and in private commercial media).

Indicator E4 *Minority/Alternative media*

Question	Do minority and alternative media exist? Are all sorts of minorities served by media? Do minorities have their own media? (Qualifying as minorities are ethnic groups, disabled people, minority languages, etc.)
Requirement	The more minority and alternative media exist, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: a plenitude of minority media exist; largest minorities are served by them 2: large and mid-size minority groups are recognised by existing media and operate their own media 1: only large and powerful minorities operate their own media and are recognised by leading news media 0: no such media exist
Criteria	• quantity of minority and alternative media • Do the main or largest minorities have their own media or access to media on a regular basis? • use of languages that reflect the linguistic diversity of the media's target area • use of languages relied upon by marginalised groups • existence and relevance of weblogs of minorities or ethnic groups, etc.
Data sources	research reports; audience research

(E5)   Affordable public and private news media

According to this structural indicator, the news media should be available at a reasonable price to the whole population. In order to provide people with equal opportunities for informing themselves on a regular basis, the price of the available media must be within the financial means of the entire population. Quality news should also be affordable to the population; thus, no relevant difference exists between the price for popular or quality news. In fact, a characteristic of current media economics is price deflation caused by rising information supply (Noam, 2016: 12). Thus, technological and economic conditions predict

lowering costs for access to news media, though simultaneous trends such as ownership concentration might push in another direction. It is also important to keep in mind the argument that consumers pay much of their consumption of digital information with their personal data (Stucke, 2018). But, as there is no consensus on the validity of this argument, and even less on how to measure this payment, this indicator limits itself to conventionally measuring the cost of access to newspapers (price of subscription or copy price for paper and online), television, and radio (licence fee, pay-TV), and online media (including the cost for broadband Internet).

Indicator E5   *Affordable public and private news media*

Question	What is the price of the media in relation to average household income?
Requirement	If the price for news media is affordable, it is more likely that democratic equality will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: low price in relation to average household income 2: price excludes only few households from receiving news 1: price is an economic argument for households not to receive news 0: news media are only affordable for elites
Criteria	All in relation to average household income and to lower-income household groups (quantitative): • average price for an annual full subscription to newspapers (print and online) • annual tax or licence fees, television and radio • cover price relation of popular newspapers and quality newspapers • price of broadband access
Data sources	statistics; prices

(E6)   Content monitoring instruments

The next structural indicator refers to content monitoring instruments in the specific country and its mass media landscape. According to this feature, equality is better guaranteed if there is a large number of politically independent outlets (internal diversity) or a balance of politically aligned media organisations at the aggregate level (external diversity). Along these lines, this indicator illustrates whether a country's media system has bodies or instruments to monitor news media content. Such instruments should be independent, operate on a regular basis, and the results should be publicly available. Such systematic and structured content monitoring might be institutionalised by the media themselves, supervising bodies, university institutes, or other organisations. The existence of a permanent content monitoring institution by itself is considered to have a positive impact on journalists' behaviour and to help foster the idea of media accountability (Bertrand, 2003).

Digital technologies offer additional possibilities for automated content analysis (Boumans & Trilling, 2016; Karlsson & Sjøvaag, 2019) and (commercial) services, such as LexisNexis and others, provide content monitoring. However, democratic benefits can only be expected if such tools are used to turn quantitative analyses into theory-informed qualitative results. Simple binary metrics do not deliver adequate results with regard to democratic values.

Indicator E6   *Content monitoring instruments*

Question	Is there a regular and publicly available content monitoring instrument for news media?
Requirement	If an effective monitoring instrument exists, it is more likely that democratic equality will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: continuous and published content monitoring, provided by an independent organisation 2: news media provide content monitoring themselves on a regular basis 1: content monitoring is done irregularly or occasionally by various organisations 0: no public monitoring in place at all
Criteria	• organised, permanent content monitoring • published by relevant news media on a regular basis (publicly available) • independence of the monitoring body or private company • regulatory provisions (national or organisational) include a commitment to monitor the balance between men and women subjects in news content • ad hoc mechanisms are in place to monitor the balance between men and women subjects in news and media content (monitoring and sex disaggregated analysis of news and current affairs content)
Data sources	desk research

(E7)   Code of ethics at the national level

This structural indicator seeks to determine the existence and use of an institutionalised and effective self-regulation system for the leading news media of a country. The core assumption here is that the mass media respect ethical standards when reflecting and representing the diversity of views and interests in society. Ethical norms are by no means eternal and ubiquitous. While professional skills and ethical standards are well established in democratic societies, the digital transformation calls for a profound revision of such standards and norms. Ward (2014, 2019) argues that the digital age undermines traditional principles of journalism as advocacy for contemporary democracies and calls for a redefinition of such norms and standards. Such ethical groundwork has become even more relevant at times when digital platforms increase their significance in news use and contribute to the erosion of ethical standards (Roberts,

2019). Digital intermediaries categorically reject editorial responsibility for ethical standards. In retrospect, however, Twitter's and Facebook's shutdowns of former American President Donald Trump's accounts in February 2021 might mark a turning point.

Scholars have pointed to a large variety of possible measures for implementing such standards both at the company level (internal guidelines, mission statements) and the national level (press councils, ombudspersons, etc.). Informed scholarly debates can be followed in Routledge's pertinent *Journal of Media Ethics*. Relevant for this indicator is the national level and whether codes of ethics exist and are implemented and respected by the leading news media. It checks whether the internal tools for editorial policies (such as mission statements, editorial guidelines, etc.) are implemented in line with formal rules.

Indicator E7 *Code of ethics at the national level*

Question	Does a code of ethics at the national level exist, requiring news media to provide fair, balanced, and impartial reporting? Is it known and used?
Requirement	If an effective code exists, it is more likely that democratic equality will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: code is implemented and frequently used by all leading news media 2: code exists, but not all leading news media respect it 1: code exists on paper only, and is not part of newsroom practice 0: no code or not in use
Criteria	• existence of a press complaints commission, etc. • existence of independent journalist associations, which disseminate good practice, e.g., improving skills and raising ethical standards • Are there any provisions regarding the accountability of the media to civil society?
Data sources	desk research; interviews

(E8) Level of self-regulation

Along similar lines, this indicator is geared towards self-regulation instruments within leading news organisations in each country. Such self-regulation instruments are part of media governance in a broad sense, understood as the collective rules organising media systems. It is assumed that instruments such as clear internal rules that apply to all journalists in the newsrooms help to increase quality and provide journalists with guidelines on their day-to-day routines. Such guidelines work on the condition that rules do not only exist, but are used regularly. Self-regulation instruments can be formal or informal; however, formal self-regulation rules are more transparent and possibly more helpful for journalists than a set of informal rules applied at the discretion

of editors-in-chief. One example familiar to journalists is compliance rules regarding presents and invitations by individuals or institutions. While some news sections such as travel, lifestyle, and mobility are notorious temptations to transgress the line between editorial and sponsored content (Hanusch et al., 2020), new digital para-journalism exercised massively on digital platforms has fully blurred the boundaries.

Democratic best practice obviously requires clear and formal rules in newsrooms. News organisations with a sophisticated, highly developed, and continuously updated set of internal self-regulation rules are considered to better advance the cause of democratic equality.

Indicator E8   *Level of self-regulation*

Question	Does a media self-regulation system exist at leading news media, requiring the provision of fair, balanced, and impartial reporting? Is it effective?
Requirement	The better the media's self-regulation system is, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: highly sophisticated self-regulation instruments in every relevant newsroom, and used regularly, e.g., during newsroom conferences 2: Leading news media have self-regulation instruments in place, but do not use them (only occasionally, e.g., in seminars for new staff) 1: self-regulation instruments exist, but are not notified; there is some "oral culture" in newsrooms 0: no such instruments at all
Criteria	• existence of a mission statement, code of ethics, or code of conduct referring to democratic values and containing journalistic obligations for politically balanced reporting • existence of internal rules for the right to reply • existence of formal systems for hearing complaints about alleged violations of ethical standards • Do ombudspersons have their own space in the media? Are they independent? • existence of sanctions against journalists who violate ethical standards or organised process of self-criticism • Are explicit efforts made to guarantee gender balance in the news subjects?
Data sources	interviews; document analysis

(E9)   Participation

This performance indicator examines the extent to which news media give citizens the opportunity to voice their own views and reactions to news stories they see, read, or hear. This indicator analyses how well and successfully the media encourage citizens to participate in the production of news by commenting on

news and generating content themselves. Such an approach requires that the news media be open to forms of cooperation with citizens. It can be argued, generally speaking, that the higher the number of citizens who participate, the greater the chance of representing existing opinions and interests.

Over the years, some media (sometimes public service broadcasters) developed participation formats integrating the audience (for example "open mic" formats in radio). However, simply placing spectators into the television studio, for example, for game shows or sport reporting, does not qualify as participation in this indicator. Scholarly research shows that "mainstream news organisations do not really fulfil the promises they make of citizen participation", and entirely new models may be required "rather than simply further opening of existing models" (Scott et al., 2015: 756).

While incumbent media often make use of the Internet to provide a forum for comments and criticisms on their websites, online media, as well as digital-born news formats, are well placed to organise such a forum by providing space online for user participation. In general, the Internet provides various modes of citizen participation in the public discourse with fewer gatekeepers and a redistribution of communicative power, away from established news outlets like television, radio, and newspapers. However, this form of online participation has a downside as well. Critics, such as Matthew Hindman (2009), claim that differences remain and that the computer skills necessary to participate are even more stratified than in the analogue world.

Indicator E9 *Participation*

Question	Is there an organised way for citizens to participate in the news process?
Requirement	The more citizens participate in the news process, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: newsrooms sometimes open to public; online space for citizens' voices and comments on each news item frequently used 2: newsrooms normally closed; selected news items are open for comments by citizens 1: newsrooms always closed; some space for comments online, but in online forums (e.g., Facebook), not underneath news items 0: no such possibilities
Criteria	• newsrooms open to the public (sometimes, always) • existence of rules for the right to reply or possibilities to give feedback • Can citizens actively participate by commenting on news online next to the news items, visible to all other readers? • Do leading online media offer public postings in online forums? • Do leading news media provide space for user-generated content?
Data sources	interviews; desk research

(E10) Rules and practices on internal pluralism

Along with the process of media ownership concentration (E1 & E2), the importance of internal pluralism increases. This performance indicator displays to what extent newsrooms are aware of the democratic value of internal pluralism and how leading news media operate internal pluralism. Different voices in society are well represented if the leading news media allow for a high degree of internal pluralism in the newsrooms. Denis McQuail (2010: 199) stipulates:

> Media should reflect in their structure and content the various social, economic and cultural realities of the societies (and communities) in which they operate, in a more or less proportional way. […] Media should serve as a platform for different interests and points of view in a society or community.

While in earlier stages of media development external pluralism was provided by a great number of independent news outlets (newspapers in those times) with a wide array of opinions, media concentration and the demise of the party press require higher levels of internal pluralism within leading newsrooms (Jakubowicz, 2015: 39–40). From the perspective of democratic equality, different views and opinions should be represented, irrespective of the requirement for each newsroom to follow an editorial line. Public policy intervention can help foster internal pluralism, but ideally, it should rather be part of the newsroom culture. Dire working conditions in emergent digital newsrooms such as overwork, long hours, high stress, burnout, job turnover, and low pay (Cohen, 2019: 571) create new challenges just to maintain the accomplished level and standard of internal pluralism.

Empirical evidence can be collected from close observation of the newsroom output (which is not done in this research) or by discussing with members of the newsrooms. Internal pluralism is realised when divergent voices are represented within the same newsroom, when different experts' opinions are being voiced, and when the feedback culture of the newsroom is open to all sides.

Indicator E10   *Rules and practices on internal pluralism*

Question	How do media organisations ensure different views and perspectives are being reported?
Requirement	The more different voices are reported by the media, the more democratic equality is guaranteed and the higher the potential that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: newsrooms follow known and standardised procedures to ensure internal pluralism and give voice to various groups 2: no formal rules, but newsroom meetings regularly discuss and check for pluralism 1: it is the personal responsibility of the editor-in-chief or chief-producer to check for internal pluralism 0: no such procedures; no regular control for pluralism

Criteria	- How are different positions accommodated within the newsroom? - What rules apply for presenting divergent opinions of journalists within the same newsroom? - Are there regular internal debates on different positions? - existence of and respect for internal rules or guidelines specifying that all relevant information and socially significant views must be given their appropriate weight in the coverage - Are journalists free (and expected) to also use information and views favouring the other side when a medium is allied with a particular party or ideology? - Are politicians and experts from all sides given the chance to present their case? - Is the medium's feedback feature (e.g., readers' letters) open to all sides?
Data sources	interviews

Dimension: Control / Watchdog (C)

The structural feature *Control / Watchdog* refers to the specific country and its media system and focuses on control mechanisms that exercise a watchdog role with regard to the media themselves. The extent to which media manage to hold accountable those who exercise power in society varies according to the degree to which media companies are an integral part of power structures themselves, but also the degree of journalists' freedom and independence:

> Yet, this inability to hold power to account shouldn't be seen as an unprecedented "failure" of the media to perform its democratic role when, in fact, this has long been the media's normal role under capitalism: to naturalise and legitimise existing and unequal social relations. (Fenton et al., 2020: 4)

(C1) Supervising the watchdog "control of the controllers"

The first indicator of this dimension examines the existence of instruments monitoring media performance and is based on the assumption that scrutiny from other media leads to overall better performance (Foreman, 2010: 34). However, unspecific and general media critique (such as "media are fake news") is not helpful in this respect. It is important to examine what tools different media have in order to adequately perform as watchdogs, as well as examining the extent to which the media actually deal with controversial matters, engage in public criticism, and risk antagonising either powerful interests or their own audience. Moreover, it is important to analyse the degree to which the media play an active role in their society or community.

Within a wider context, both the European Commission and the Council of Europe have recommended measures by member states to increase transparency

of media ownership as a minimum requirement in democratic societies. Ownership structures can influence editorial policies and should be brought to the awareness of the public and of regulatory bodies (see Council of Europe, 2018). In a research project following up on these recommendations on pluralism and ownership, Fengler and colleagues (2014) scrutinised self-regulation and media accountability in some 14 countries and concluded that professional observers of the media such as independent media councils are much better placed to control the controllers than self-regulatory bodies. This indicator, therefore, asks about the existence and functioning of any such bodies. Researchers are requested to report about the level of media critique within the media, and by external observers, such as bloggers and academics.

Indicator C1   *Supervising the watchdog "control of the controllers"*

Question	Are there any institutionalised mechanisms to control the performance and role of the news media?
Requirement	If effective institutionalised mechanisms for scrutinising the performance of the leading news media exist, it is more likely that democratic control will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: permanent debate on the role of the media as watchdogs, which engages a wider public; media themselves are a topic for critical journalistic coverage 2: media performance is often publicly discussed in the media, in online forums, or both; some forms of journalistic coverage of the media 1: media performance is occasionally discussed, but mostly by representatives of unsatisfied vested interests 0: no public debate about media performance
Criteria	• independent observers: news monitor, media blogs, professional journalistic journals, etc. • openness to external evaluation • existence of relevant media bloggers • media journals reporting on media coverage • newspaper space, television, and radio programmes on news coverage and the media
Data sources	observation, desk research

(C2)   Independence of the news media from powerholders

This structural indicator refers to independence of the news media from the government and big business. In *The Media Manifesto*, Fenton and colleagues (2020: 103) identify clientelism as a major threat to pluralism, and thus to democracy, "creating an ever more impoverished public sphere". The more the media are independent of powerholders such as large businesses or the state, and the more this independence is guaranteed by formal rules or even

laws, the better the media can fulfil their function as watchdogs, and the better democracy is served. In this regard, media ownership matters, as material and structural factors "dramatically impact a media system's openness and diversity" (Pickard, 2020: 105). The decade 2010–2020 has witnessed quite a few diagonal ownership concentration instances, originating in the booming Internet economy: Jeff Bezos (Amazon) took over the *Washington Post* in 2013; Marc Benioff (Salesforce) took over *Time Magazine* in 2018; Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay, launched his own media company First Look Media, with its online flagship *The Intercept*, in 2014; and in China, Jack Ma's Alibaba took control of Hong Kong's South China *Morning Post* in 2015. Such media business conglomerates potentially limit the editorial independence of the news media if commercial or other business interests are affected by their coverage (Saffer et al., 2020).

Therefore, this structural indicator examines the influence of political parties, business interests, and other social groups on the news media. Are financial investors, representatives of the government, or churches present on the board of the leading news media? Do non-media companies own news media? The normative assumption is that media should first feel obliged to the citizens, and not to powerholders.

Indicator C2   *Independence of the news media from powerholders*

Question	How strong is the independence of the news media from various power-holders and how is it ensured?
Requirement	News media's watchdog function requires a high degree of independence. More independence means more control of those in power, thus enhancing democracy.
Points	3: no formal or ownership-related influence from powerholders on leading news media 2: powerful organisations have no say in leading news media, but are present as owners in minor news media 1: powerful organisations or individuals own or control important shares of leading news media 0: strong formal or ownership-related influence of powerholders on leading news media
Criteria	• Are there shield laws in place to protect journalists, and are they effective? • How important is party affiliation among leading news media? • Are powerful business interests present on the boards of leading news media? • Are non-media companies such as financial investors, political parties, churches, etc. among news media owners? • Is such diagonal ownership concentration made transparent?
Data sources	legal provisions; public service remit; corporate information (investors' relations); complementary interviews

(C3)   Transparency of data on leading news media

Transparency is essential for democracy; thus, this indicator refers to citizens' possibilities to inform themselves about the ownership and (conflict of) interest of leading news media. Ownership transparency increased in relevance and public attention over the first two decades of the century. In 2018, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)1 on media pluralism and transparency of media ownership. In the preamble, they point out that "transparency of media ownership can help to make media pluralism effective by bringing ownership structures behind the media – which can influence editorial policies – to the awareness of the public and regulatory authorities" (Council of Europe, 2018). Indeed, ownership transparency must be considered an indispensable – but certainly not sufficient – prerequisite for media independence.

   This indicator asks if information on ownership and vested interests is published frequently and easily accessible. Does an imprint, as a minimum requirement, exist, and is it obligatory to make the ownership of a news medium transparent? Who provides information on leading mass media: journalists' unions, government or regulatory authorities, universities, or research institutes? And to what extent is this information available? Potential sources for this information are company intelligences as well as public reports on the media for relevant information (ownership, key business figures, corporate social responsibility data, etc.).

Indicator C3   *Transparency of data on leading news media*

Question	How accessible is detailed information on leading news media for the citizens?
Requirement	Transparency is essential for democracy. The more easily citizens can inform themselves about the leading news media, the better the news media are placed to perform their watchdog function.
Points	3: information on leading news media is published frequently and is easily accessible online or from other sources 2: such information is published once every year, but available online 1: such information is in principle available on request, but not available online 0: information on leading news media is not available or only available to experts
Criteria	• publication of ownership information in every edition or imprint (impressum) • information on ownership, key business figures, CSR information, etc. • information on leading news media is provided by outside sources such as government, universities, unions, etc. • easily accessible and comprehensive information on leading news media is available online

- annual reports by news media include detailed and relevant information
- data provided by regulatory authorities

Data sources	own research; annual reports; company information; government reports

(C4)   Journalism professionalism

This performance indicator addresses shared norms and standards of journalistic work and ethos. Professionalism (Anderson, 2012) can be regarded as one main form of journalistic accountability, and it is considered "useful to examine journalistic performance and change" (Waisbord, 2013: 4). Professionalism is different from occupation and reaches beyond mere descriptions of what journalism does; rather, it aspires to include the "ethical dimension of journalism in democracy" (Waisbord, 2013: 7).

In this respect, there are enormous challenges. Recent literature points out that the traditional understanding of journalistic professionalism is eroding because of changes in technology as well as organisational structures. Deuze and Witschge (2018: 170–171) identify reconfigurations toward post-industrial and entrepreneurial arrangements, encompassing trends like job-hopping and precarity instead of job certainty and economic sustainability, atelier-style offices instead of newsrooms, and "agile development sequences" with "fast-paced projects with short design cycles". It is clear that these developments confront professional values of the media's watchdog function, such as trustworthiness, fairness, and objectivity, hence the importance of empirically assessing how professionalism is established in leading news media and to what extent it still relates to the watchdog model.

On the one hand, this indicator covers questions of journalistic ethics: Do journalists and society discuss media rules and ethics on a frequent basis? Is there any journalistic training on these matters? On the other hand, watchdog professionalism requires freedom from pressure in terms of space, time, and format. Empirically, newsroom journalists, as well as journalists' unions, should be asked for the status of journalistic professionalism in their day-to-day practice.

Indicator C4   *Journalism professionalism*

Question	How well developed is journalism professionalism?
Requirement	Strong professional ethos and sufficient journalistic resources are pre-requisites for the exercise of the watchdog function. Strong professionalism is therefore beneficial for the watchdog function of the media.
Points	3: high professional ethos and sufficient resources across all leading news media

	2: while professional ethos prevails, professionalism is sometimes compromised by lack of resources
	1: limited journalistic resources do not allow for high professional ethos
	0: no or low professional ethos; very limited journalistic resources
Criteria	• workload of journalists and time for investigative research
	• multimedia requirements of journalists; overload of journalistic capacities
	• self-organisation of journalists, discussing own rules and ethics; frequency of such meetings
	• solidarity in case of conflict
	• public debate provoked by journalists about ethical behaviour
	• statements of professional rules established by journalists
	• regular or irregular further education training for journalists on professional ethics
	• Are gender inequalities explicitly considered in professional development (gender-unequal life-work balance, horizontal segregation regarding assigned topics, leaky pipelines towards access to managerial positions)?
Data sources	own research; interviews with journalists' unions

(C5) Journalists' job security

This structural indicator is based on the assumption that the better journalists are protected against dismissal due to their reporting, the better they can exercise their watchdog role. Journalism research found that perceptions of job quality and job security are positive predictors for journalists' job satisfaction: "If employees are not satisfied in their jobs and fear being laid off, reduced work quantity and quality is inevitable" (Reinardy, 2012: 55). But this obvious and not surprising relation between job satisfaction and job security is more important than the individual welfare of journalists – job security is a prerequisite for investigative reporting. Journalists who fear their employer does not fully support their investigations may avoid unpredictable outcomes and personal risks. Job security for journalists is therefore more than just an incentive to work better, but it is an essential condition for bold watchdog journalism.

The decade of digitisation has decreased rather than increased journalists' job security. Online media tend to employ less journalistic staff than incumbent media companies, relying more on freelance contributors. Self-sustained digital-born media are still rare in many countries, and labour contracts are often weaker than in traditional press or television companies. On the juridical level, therefore, this indicator asks for legal provisions to save journalists from writing against their conviction (*clause de conscience*) as well as from being dismissed if their conviction is expressed in the commentary. On the level of the labour market, this indicator examines the share of freelancers and permanent staff in the newsrooms, as only long-term and secure contracts promote free and autonomous reporting.

Indicator C5 *Journalists' job security*

Question	What provisions are in place to provide maximum job security for journalists?
Requirement	The more securely journalists can do their research and reporting work, the better they can exercise their watchdog function, and the better for democracy.
Points	3: high degree of legal or professional security; journalists rarely lose their jobs 2: once employed, journalists normally remain employed for a long time, but such jobs are thinning out 1: news media change their journalistic staff frequently; employment for a longer period of time is not the rule 0: no or low job security; precarious journalistic jobs are the rule
Criteria	• legal provisions to save journalists from writing against their personal conviction (clause de conscience) • professional rules protecting journalists from dismissal because of personal convictions • labour contracts with long periods of notice (in case of dismissal) • employment duration of journalistic jobs • proportion of freelancers and permanent staff • systematic use of short-term contracting • efforts to support women and promote gender equality in relation to part-time and non-permanent contract positions • existence and implementation of prevention, complaints, and redress systems with regard to sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace
Data sources	own research; legislation; interviews with journalists' unions

(C6)   Practice of access to information

This structural indicator refers to journalists' possibilities to gain access to public information. Actually, in many countries, this right to information does not privilege journalists over other citizens but is laid down in general legislation. Since 2011, the Canadian Centre for Law and Democracy (n.d.) is conducting an indicator-based survey on the right to information worldwide. Its 61 indicators include the recognition of a fundamental right of access to information by the legal framework (indicator 1), the right of everyone to file requests for information (indicator 4), that requests are free (indicator 24), and many more. Although the right to public information is considered universal, access for journalists is paramount. As stated earlier, taking the role of watchdog, journalists must be free from restrictions when they are researching government or state activities. Otherwise, the media cannot provide efficient and profound control and criticism. This indicator questions whether there is any media law providing unrestricted access to public information and how it is implemented.

Indicator C6 *Practice of access to information*

Question	How accessible is public information to journalists?
Requirement	In order to exercise the watchdog function, journalists need unrestricted access to public information.
Points	3: no barriers for journalists; unrestricted access to public information 2: public information is accessible by law, but not in reality; journalists must spend time and effort to gain access 1: public information is not generally available, but single journalists manage to bypass restrictions and access public information 0: high barriers for journalists; government information is generally not publicly available
Criteria	• Does media law allow for access to public information? • Do journalists enjoy privileges in accessing public information? • Are there reports about problems for journalists seeking public information? • Are there relevant restrictions against journalists accessing public information? • differences between promises and practices
Data sources	own research; interviews with journalists and journalists' unions

(C7) The watchdog and the news media's mission statement

This performance indicator examines the extent to which the news media perform their mission as journalistic watchdogs. The view of the media as watchdogs against the abuse of power and corruption has long been a steady component of the journalistic self-image and of Western democratic political theory (Nielsen, 2015). This indicator intends to reveal the extent to which the watchdog function is perceived. The indicator assumes that a strong mission statement in favour of investigative journalism facilitates the day-to-day work of journalists to exercise control. Managerial meta-studies on mission statements concede, however, that the effectiveness of mission statements as a communication tool is underexplored and the results of mission statements on performance are inconclusive (Alegre et al., 2018). Although effects of mission statements in general should not be overrated, watchdog mission statements in particular help journalists' orientation in their routines and display the news media's investigative identity to external stakeholders.

Indicator C7 *The watchdog and the news media's mission statement*

Question	Does the mission statement of the media company or the newsroom contain provisions for playing an active role as watchdog, for investigative journalism, or for other forms of power control? Does the mission statement have any relevance in practice?
Requirement	If a mission statement concerning watchdog journalism exists, it is more likely that democratic control will be exercised and thus democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: all leading news media refer to the watchdog role and exercise it 2: investigative and watchdog journalism is part of the self-conception of leading news media, but journalists rarely have resources to exercise it 1: investigative and watchdog journalism is laid down in mission statements, but is lip-service rather than reality in day-to-day practice 0: investigative and watchdog journalism is neither required, nor exercised
Criteria	• existence of mission statement referring to active investigative journalism and containing duties to act as a trustee on behalf of the public • level of importance of watchdog journalism for the media organisation • examples for accountable journalistic watchdog role
Data sources	desk research (mission statements); interviews

(C8)   Professional training

This next performance indicator provides information on whether journalists are given the chance and opportunity to take part in professional training courses: the news media can only perform their watchdog duty if they have qualified staff resources. Since the turn of the century, continuous training regarding (big) data analysis, digital research methods, and collaborative online tools for investigative journalism has become state of the art for committed journalists. However, as the need to update skills and crafts about digital journalistic opportunities is becoming pertinent, further education is inevitable. In parallel, journalism schools and other institutions offering further education for journalists are also called to improve and update their teaching methods and education models, "based on benefits digitalisation has to offer in an era of increased public awareness and interaction" (Maniou et al., 2020: 35). This indicator provides information about whether such contemporary trainings are available and used.

Indicator C8 *Professional training*

Question	What importance do leading news media attribute to journalism training?
Requirement	If effective professional training on watchdog and investigative journalism is provided, it is more likely that democratic control will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: continuous knowledge training for journalists in news media available 2: training opportunities are provided, but are rarely used 1: training opportunities are not regularly provided, but those who wish to participate find ways and means to do so 0: continuous journalistic training is not provided and not exercised
Criteria	• continuous training; obligation for continuous training • not only skills but knowledge training • opportunities to learn and practice (big) data analysis for journalists • participation in training networks on digital research and investigation methods • enough resources (time and money) for each journalist • Are women professionals supported and encouraged to participate in training on digital and investigation methods? • availability, accessibility, and promotion of training on leadership for women
Data sources	interviews

(C9)   Watchdog function and financial resources

A vital condition for exercising the watchdog role is that sufficient financial resources and time are available to journalists in the newsrooms. The more money there is at the disposal of newsrooms, the more reporters that can be employed, and the more funding there is to be invested in investigative journalism (Hamilton, 2016); thus, this indicator refers to the financial resources, regarding time and budgets, of newsrooms for performing their watchdog function. Limited resources have often been cited as a potential cause of constraint on the independence of journalism. Resources for their own investigations reduce the dependency on agency material. Additionally, news media perform better if they can make use of journalists who are trained specialists on given topics. Newsroom realities, however, suffer from budget cuts and less resources. This development is inherently linked to a much wider transformation of media economics and the frequent crises affecting the media. One element of Curran's "triple crisis" of the media is the economic decline of journalism:

> The migration of advertising to sites like Facebook, Google and Craigslist […] has led to a total decrease in the size of the journalism workforce employed in many countries, and to smaller editorial budgets. This has resulted in less investigative reporting, more reliance on public relations, and more office-bound, derivative journalism. (Curran, 2019: 192)

In this indicator, the size of the loss in resources for investigative reporting, or their defence by leading news organisations, is estimated.

Indicator C9   *Watchdog function and financial resources*

Question	Are there specific and sufficient financial resources for exercising investigative journalism or other forms of power control?
Requirement	If sufficient resources for the scrutiny of government and business are available, it is more likely that democratic control will be guaranteed and thus that democracy will be promoted.
Points	3: leading news media give highest priority to well-funded investigative journalism 2: journalistic investigation has priority, but the number of investigations is clearly limited by financial means 1: investigative journalism happens, but it is the exception rather than the rule 0: leading news media cannot afford their own investigations and rely on agency material or other sources instead
Criteria	• composition of news output (news agency material, own investigation) • funds, time, and money for investigative journalism • ad hoc provisions by the news media for in-depth investigation • foreign correspondents
Data sources	interviews; output observation

Final remarks

No monitoring instrument is perfect – the MDM also has its limitations. Concerning our theoretical framework, one can object that it relies mostly on the so-called high modern normativity of news media and journalism, and this narrative cannot stand anymore in face of current developments. Throughout the twentieth century, the foundations of values such as objectivity and impartiality, core elements of that narrative, have been strongly shaken. Moreover, technological change, globalisation of cultural industries, sluggish economic development, and increasing public distrust challenge the media's distinctive position in society. Taken at face value, such tendencies cast doubt on the legitimacy of lofty expectations; however, they do not invalidate such a project. Rather, by empirically assessing news media's actual fulfilment of that normativity, the MDM sheds light on its possibilities and limitations in the digital age. Whether or not one accepts the traditional narrative, our exercise gives journalists, activists, academicians, and policy-makers firmer ground to discuss what news media can really do for democracies, and under what circumstances.

Another limitation of this exercise is the lack of focus on digital platforms. Maybe Facebook, Twitter, or even Google News are leading players in the news

ecosystem, at least in the Western world, and a monitoring instrument born in 2021 could develop indicators to address their performance as well. But the MDM arose in 2009, when claims about the possible impact of networked communication in former American President Barack Obama's election were just starting to gain momentum. Radically changing the instrument to accommodate organisations with so many different characteristics would likely render any longitudinal comparison useless. Additionally, research confirms over and over again that, despite their amplifying role, platforms still play only a secondary role, even in digitally advanced media systems such as the American one (Benkler et al., 2018, 2020), whose core continues to be occupied by traditional, editorial mass media.

A methodological issue concerns the tension between qualitative findings and quantitative assessment. Scoring each indicator for each country as we do might give the impression that one can simply take the final numbers and find out which media systems are performing better; however, the MDM considers itself as a qualitative exercise. The richness of this project lies rather in the keen insights of experienced researchers combining data from very different sources. Furthermore, aspects represented by each indicator have different weight and implications depending on cultural, economic, and political conditions of each country. Our research team has made the best effort to come as close as possible to comparative scores, but at the end of the day, only a qualitative approach to these data can do justice to the conclusions.

Finally, it is important to highlight that the country reports in this book, which apply this instrument, present detailed findings for each individual democracy. They allow comparison when one reads the same performance indicator in several countries; however, explicit cross-country comparisons fall outside of the scope of this material. This purpose will be fulfilled by a forthcoming volume, *Success and Failure in News Media Performance: Comparative Analysis in The Media for Democracy Monitor 2021*, edited by Josef Trappel and Tales Tomaz, which engages in cross-country and longitudinal comparisons in selected topics brought out by this first research stage.

Therefore, despite some limitations, we firmly believe that the instrument developed by the MDM, with its dimensions and indicators, continues to deliver a robust and adequate framework for assessing the performance of leading news media in contemporary democracies.

Note

1. A more extensive discussion on contemporary literature on these issues is planned for a forthcoming volume as part of the Media for Democracy 2021 edition, *Success and Failure in News Media Performance: Comparative Analysis in The Media for Democracy Monitor 2021*, edited by Josef Trappel and Tales Tomaz. This volume will be published by Nordicom (Open Access and accessible from the publisher's website, www.nordicom.gu.se, and Euromedia Groups's MDM web page, www.euromediagroup.org/mdm).

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