

Free media is doomed?: Polis at Ditchley II

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Some more thoughts (not all mine, by any means) from this week's conference on Media and Democracy at [Ditchley Park](#).

Free media: exception or rule?

It is commonly asserted that we in the industrialised West have had something that approximates to a liberal democracy partly thanks to a free and robust media (OK, I know about Chomsky etc but stick with me for a bit). There is seen to be a mutually supportive relationship between the two.

But China shows us that you can have capitalist market growth without liberal democracy or a free press. And the credit crunch plus the Internet could well get rid of much of the news media in the West, too. It is proving very hard to establish pluralistic journalism that we would recognise in places like Africa and Russia. So here's the question.

Was the period of relatively diverse and fairly free mass news media that we have enjoyed over the last century or so in Europe and America a fluke? Was it just a co-incidence that we had that kind of journalism at a time when economic growth and the expansion of democracy was happening? Do we make a mistake, therefore, to assume there is a correlation or causality between the two and/or that it is possible everywhere?

Al Qaeda: the business model for online politics

What can we learn from the success of terrorists in using the Internet to mobilise their politics? The product is exciting, trusted, and passionately ideological. It's not particularly interactive, although it does encourage User Generated Content.

They have to use the Internet because mainstream media carries their messages and gives them profile, but it reformulates it as news. They want direct propaganda. Without the Internet they would be voiceless.

But in the end, it is down to content. Connectivity is vital, but what you say and how you say it is what matters in political campaigning. (Same with Obama, really).

[Here is my earlier report](#) on the conference at Ditchley.

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