

The Italian Media in Comparative Context

Chris Hanretty

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Why start with the media, not television? Because television forms part of the media system, and cannot be understood separately

Why start with comparison instead of starting at the chronological beginning? Because comparing helps us to

- identify systemic differences and start asking questions about where they come from
- dispel incorrect generalizations we may have formed from experiences of our own country

and because we compare anyway without reflecting on it

Principal US-Europe differences

There are a number of substantial differences in how television is organised in Europe as compared to the United States.

- There are public service broadcasters
- They have a significant audience share
- They are required to be fair, or impartial, or objective, or some other near-synonym

By a **public service broadcaster**, I mean a television or radio broadcaster which

- is funded in large part by the state, either through direct grant or through a special tax;
- where the highest posts in the broadcaster are appointed by some branch of the government (be it executive or legislature)
- which broadcasts to the whole of the territory
- and which aims to broadcast a wide range of general-interest and niche content, and
- which displays some concern for national identity

Public service broadcasters are different from state broadcasters. This term is commonly used to describe state-owned broadcasters in non-democratic regimes.

Public service broadcasters are of great interest to politicians and political parties. This is also true in the United States. However, the tenor of European debates is more about party political competition and less about culture clashes.

Three types of media system

We can go beyond a simple United States -- Italy comparison. In particular, we can demonstrate that there exist **several types of media system**. Each type is distinguished by having certain characteristics in common.

The most successful typology of media systems belongs to **Hallin and Mancini**. They differentiate between types on the basis of three characteristics:

- degree of state involvement
- degree of journalistic professionalization
- degree of political parallelism

On the basis of these three characteristics, they identify three media system types:

- a North Atlantic/Liberal model, with low state involvement, high professionalization, and low parallelism
- a Central European/Corporatist model, with high state involvement, high professionalization, and high parallelism
- a Southern European/Polarized Pluralist model, with high state involvement, low professionalization, and high parallelism

The United States belongs to the first model; Italy to the third. The two systems are thus polar opposites (see Fig. 1).

References

Hallin and Mancini (2004). *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge University Press.

Figure 1. Individual countries and the three models

