

Institutions and Media Use in Democratizing Countries: The Czech-Slovak Case as a Quasi-Experiment

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Using original survey data from the early democratization period in Central and Eastern Europe, I compare the choice of media for individuals' informational demands in the context of differently evolved media environments. Using the quasi-experimental setting of the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the findings indicate that individuals who express more interest in staying informed about politics are more likely to use public rather than privatizing media. Further, in the context of the multilevel design, this media preference is consistent regardless of the differing extents of privatization between the countries. This analysis adds empirical evidence to the ongoing debate on the role of mass media and the process of political socialization in democratizing countries.

Keywords: mass media, democratization, Central and Eastern Europe, political behavior

The Institutions of Media in Democratizing Countries

Democratization in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) included the promise of liberalizing the institutions of mass media from authoritarian control. In privatizing formerly state-run media institutions, a "marketplace of ideas" was expected to emerge from a flow of information, which would in turn create a public arena for ideas of all sorts to compete for audiences as well as provide substantive counterballast to ossified state broadcasting. Many CEE media scholars, however, were less sanguine. It was also possible, they argued, that the mass media may become detriments to democratization because of the negative influence that both political and market factors might exert on their liberalization, ultimately retarding the development of mass media to provide this marketplace of ideas (Gross, 2002; Jakubowicz, 2007; Mills, 1999; Novosel, 1995; Sparks & Reading, 1998; Splicahl, 1994).

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Date submitted: 2014–11–06

¹ The original draft of this project was completed while the author was a scholar in residence at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars East European Studies Program, Washington, DC (short-term research grant). The author would like to thank Larry Gross and the anonymous referees, whose input significantly improved the quality and presentation of this article. All faults remain my own.

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At the same time, comparative media research has struggled to adequately control for both institutions and culture in cross-national research (Esser & Pfetsch, 2004).² And while several excellent studies have examined the process of institutional reform in CEE, fewer have made explicit efforts to link those institutional changes to individual-level media behaviors. Comparative media frameworks have been suggested that at least theoretically link individuals' patterns of media to media institutional settings (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); however, there have been only a few systematic attempts to empirically do so (Aalberg, van Aelst, & Curran, 2010; Loveless, 2015). Therefore, confronting both issues, this article brings some empirical evidence to bear on whether the process of privatization of the institutions of mass media can provide at least a partial explanation for variation in citizens' media choices to inform themselves about politics during the period of democratization.

Using original survey data from the early democratization period (1997) in Central and Eastern Europe, I examine which media individuals use to satisfy their information needs and compare these media choices in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Given these countries' simultaneous and shared start of media liberalization in 1989 and subsequent divergent extents of media liberalization via privatization after their separation (at the beginning of 1993), we gain a quasi-experimental look at individuals' media choices in differing media environments. The findings indicate that individuals who express more interest in staying informed about politics were more likely to use public rather than privatizing media. At the same time, in the context of this multilevel design, this media preference is consistent regardless of the differing extents of privatization between these countries.

That citizens might use public instead of private media to meet their informational needs is potentially unsurprising. Yet, as I attempt to demonstrate here, in the context of states and societies undergoing massive transformations, the concepts of both *public* and *private* as they are used in existing theories are not easily fungible for periods of democratization. Studies such as this force a confrontation with trying to characterize formerly Communist state organs as public—that is, something akin to the BBC—and recently liberated (i.e., purchased) broadcasting capacities as private media—including what effects various configurations of these public and private media may have on citizens' abilities to gather information. Thus, this article makes two contributions. First, it highlights the need to continue our examination of the role of mass media in democratizing countries in order to identify such conceptual and operational delineations and their potential impact on theory. Second, it adds much-needed empirical evidence to the debate on the abilities of mass media in democratizing countries to contribute to individual-level (democratic) political socialization and thus our thinking and eventual theorizing about media use in democratizing countries.

² Mass media are artifacts of shared experiences, social situations, identities, and attitudes—that is, cultural institutions (Blumler & Gurevitch, 2001)—and it has been of particular methodological interest of comparative political communication studies to address this context. For this inquiry, I use the word *context* as shorthand for culture *and* national level variation that may move with distinctive national character.

Mass Media at the Individual Level

Voltmer and Schmitt-Beck (2006) point out the obvious limitation that individual-level expectations about media use in non-Western media environments have been developed based on Western models of media influence. They state, "All these studies [cited in this literature] have been conducted in the context of established Western democracies, so it remains an open question whether the same pattern will appear in new democracies" (p. 234). There is, however, growing empirical evidence about individuals' media choices in democratizing countries that we can use.

Media provide individuals access to information, values, and vicarious political, economic, and social experiences beyond the often limited personal experiences of individuals. In the context of democratization, observation can serve as individuals' means to not only see, hear, and read about the changes taking place but contextualize themselves and their experiences in the "larger world" (Iyengar, 1990; McCombs & Poindexter, 1983; Robinson & Levy, 1986; Weaver, 1996). Given that deliberate media choices are made in a way that general or nonspecific media use is not (Chaffee & Kanihan, 1997), we can benefit from seeing how individuals might use media as information sources (i.e., in a meaningful and discernable way). Thus, information seeking can be a potent motivator of media choices and provide evidence of citizens' choices to engage in (or disengage from) political realities and signal further behaviors. Individuals' information seeking, as a determinant of media choices, is particularly important for citizens in countries of transition (Loveless, 2008) as the transition itself places heavier informational requirements on individuals because of the politically charged environment and incumbent level of uncertainty associated with that period (Voltmer & Schmitt-Beck 2006, p. 231).

This analysis takes a narrow scope by examining only the between-medium choices individuals make. And, as mentioned, although this theoretical guide to analyzing individual media usage and its relationship to information in democratizing countries is limited, it does have clear theoretical foundations. Schmitt-Beck (2004) argues that "the amount of potentially influential information obtained by a voter through mass communication is a function of both the *number of media* used, and the *frequency* with which each of them is used" (p. 305, *emphasis in original*). That is, the choice of *which* media to consume and *how much* have been theorized to provide differential benefits to individuals (e.g., in the form of information or mobilization; Loveless, 2008, 2010). Frequency of media is further salient as prolonged exposure to media has more power than one-shot, specific stories for long-term attitudinal development, and even eventual behavioral change (Graber 1993; see also Schmitt-Beck, 2003; Zaller, 1992). Thus, media's long-term persuasiveness is not only through individual stories but also through cumulative impact (again, patterns of consumption are paramount). This inquiry is interested in long-term media consumption patterns because they are easier to assess from survey data and not limited to specific incidences of exposure (i.e., the recall of specific political programming or advertising).

Second, individuals' level of political information has been argued to be shaped differently by different media (Becker, Sobowale, & Casey, 1979; Brians & Wattenberg, 1996). One of the most studied media is television, including its diversity of effects: cognitive (effects on political knowledge), attitudinal (effects on political opinions), and behavioral (effects on vote decisions—among other political acts; McQuail, 1987). Most media scholars argue that television tends to politically demobilize people, keep

them at home, and uninform them (Newton, 1999). It isolates individuals from one another, discouraging social interaction and contributing to individuals' disengagement in community life (Putnam, 2000).

However, there are those who contend that television, on its own, is not a purely malicious medium. As of the implicit nature of the medium, "television is, in general: less regulated by agreed codes; more ambiguous in meaning; lacking in clear authorship (or indication of source); more open; more concrete; more universal; more information-rich" (McQuail, 1987, p. 202). Others argue that television contributes substantially to informing citizens, ultimately shaping their attitudes and activity (Volgy & Schwarz, 1980). Further clouding the water, some research suggests that television consumption has been associated with high levels of political knowledge, participation, and personal efficacy (in Britain, Norris, 2000; also Newton & Brynin, 2001). As such, television is a particularly interesting medium because of its seemingly dual nature (Halloran, 1970).³

Radio use is also examined here, although it lacks theoretical underpinnings, because radio use, despite its powerful role in the Western pretelevision media environment earlier in the 20th century, has provided few significant results in the modern era (Chaffee, Zhao, & Leshner, 1994; Weaver & Drew, 1995). However, as the findings here suggest, radio use has remained a mainstay in Central and Eastern Europe. This may be attributed to citizens' residual habits given both radio's near omnipresence in CEE households and as a function of its role in pretransition CEE as a medium of freedom (i.e., Radio Free Europe, Voice of America, Deutsche Welle, and the BBC) and may therefore persist as an influential medium. Despite this relative lacuna of theory on radio and information, we arrive at the first of three hypotheses:

H1: Individuals' information seeking is positively correlated with media use.

However, the central question of this investigation is whether the variation in media environments, in the case here, the speed and extent of privatization of the institutions of mass media, are partially responsible for media choices that individuals make in searching for political information. In the next section, I examine the distinct institutional reform paths the Czech Republic and Slovakia took (after their separation in 1993) and how this may have affected the trajectory of the liberalization of public media institutions. In doing so, I aim to inform the central question of whether institutions can shape individuals' media strategies by presenting them with varying sets of media choices.

Mass Media at the System Level: The Czech Republic and Slovakia

At the time of these countries' departure from the former Soviet Union, there was no notional or practical alternative—in either the academic or policy worlds—to "liberating" state-controlled media via privatization. In response, many of the contributions to our understanding of media institutional reform in CEE inform us on the structural, technological, and institutional changes required of moving mass media

³ This assertion, of course, rests on the undifferentiated content of television. Because this inquiry is interested in the cross-medium effect, content variations (e.g., news vs. entertainment; or for newspaper, tabloid vs. broadsheet) are for now subsumed under broad media choice.

institutions away from state financial and ideological control (Gross, 2002; Jakubowicz, 1996; O'Neil, 1998; Paletz, Jakubowicz, & Novosel, 1995; Sparks, 2000; Splichal, 1994). Below, I describe the conjoined process of media institutional reform and the different path to reform taken by the Czech Republic and Slovakia after their separation into two nation-states in 1993.

Television in Czechoslovakia and in the Czech Republic/Slovakia

First among the Central and Eastern European countries, Czechoslovakia created significant regulatory changes to guide the privatization of broadcast and print media, legislated October 30, 1991 (Sparks, 2000). The state broadcasting monopoly was almost immediately abolished, and public-service broadcasting corporations were moved away from state control (Smid, 1998). Not long after, in February 1992, an administrative board was empowered to license private media groups. However, both the Broadcasting Council and parliament increasingly came to contest the process of awarding of commercial radio and television licenses, as an issue of impartiality arose due to the accountability the administrative board to the Czechoslovak parliament.

Both public-sector television and radio functioned under broadcasting fees and received little to no federal funding since 1993. Between 1991 and 1992, the federal commission in charge of Czechoslovak television was split into two groups, Czech Television and Slovak Television. After the Velvet Divorce, Czech law consolidated public-service television into one channel and loosened the regulatory procedures that enhanced the privatization of the other, now more available, frequencies (Wilson, 1994). In June 1993, the first private television station, Premiéra TV, was broadcast in Prague. Although it was initially a local broadcast, by late 1994, it was broadcast nationally.⁴ The first national commercial television broadcast was TV NOVA in February 1994, a product of the Central European Media Enterprises (CME), which owned 96% (Ballentine, 2002).⁵

TV NOVA, in particular, deviated from Czech public television in two significant ways. First was its U.S.-style programming. Both entertainment and news programming adopted a fast-paced popular approach, which threw the state-run programs in stark relief. Second was the tremendous financial capabilities of the Western-based company, which in turn allowed rapid technological and creative changes to take place. At nearly the same time, a second national television broadcast emerged, the now-named Prima TV. Although also a private national television broadcaster, it did not present such an overt challenge to the former regime in terms of programming styles and ideological orientation.

⁴ In January 1997, Premiéra TV became Prima TV. On May 14, 1990, OK3, named Open Channel, had broadcast national satellite channels where Russian television had been. However, for all the cases discussed in this article, I discuss primarily the terrestrial (vs. satellite) broadcasters, because by the mid-1990s, terrestrial-based television broadcasts made up the solid majority of television consumption (because of the technical adjustment and extra cost of equipment), and in some cases, satellite was not available. Regardless of satellite's exclusion, the discussion remains essentially the same.

⁵ The CME is a U.S. media company, a subsidiary of the Central European Development Corporation.

By 1997, Czechoslovak regulatory reform led to not only numerous applications for private media but an influx of foreign capital. There were effectively five national television channels: the government-owned and -operated, Česka Televize consisting of CT1 and CT2; TV NOVA and Prima TV, both privately owned; and the smaller TV3, a nongovernmental Czech station. Yet, by 1997, legislative impediments to objective and free broadcast had been effectively addressed, and there were only occasional bouts of influence peddling.

Following the Velvet Divorce in 1993, the Slovak parliament was reluctant to continue legislating further independence for both broadcast and print media. The Council for Broadcasting and Retransmission, responsible for licensing private broadcast media (both television and radio), was appointed by the Slovak National Council from candidates nominated by ministers of parliament. The council also oversaw Slovak Television and Slovak Radio and appointed their directors in a clearly politicized process. Open suspicion surrounded the licensing allocation, specifically the close relationships between private broadcasters and politicians. To obtain licenses, private television and radio broadcasters have been openly neutral to the point of obsequiousness, and prior to 1998, privately owned television could not officially carry political news.

Slovakia's national television broadcasting included state-owned Slovenska Televizia (STV), with two channels, STV1 and STV2, using different broadcasting technology.⁶ The 1994 electoral victory of the Movement for Democratic Slovakia resulted in more restrictive legislation for independent, albeit still nascent, Slovak media. For example, in 1995, the television station Vasa Televizia (VTV), formerly labeled "independent," was more aligned with the incumbent Mečiar government due to an increasingly politicized application and licensing process. CME, having introduced the widely viewed and popular TV NOVA in the Czech Republic, also developed TV Markíza in Slovakia. Originally, TV Markíza was aligned with the Association of Independent Radio and Television Broadcasters and the Slovak Syndicate of Journalists in opposing a law limiting the ability of journalists to participate actively (through investigative journalism and broadcasting campaign information—particularly of the opposition) in the 1994 elections. However, by 1997, both Markíza, which has since become mostly an entertainment channel owned by the CME (49% ownership), and VTV were politically timid. Although Slovakia inherited the initial legislative freedoms from the former Czechoslovakia attempts, evidence of the enforcement of ideological congruency suggests that it not only *did not* progress but may have regressed, particularly via implicit and overt political influence.

Radio in Czechoslovakia and in the Czech Republic/Slovakia

At this time, the other broadcast media, radio, exhibited a great deal of independence—and, subsequently, more homegrown ideological petulance. This was in large part due to the relatively lower technological hurdles than were required for both television and sometimes even newspapers. Limiting radio broadcasts to local or regional distribution, broadcasters' smaller scale allowed them to often sidestep the formal, and usually prohibitive, licensing processes for national broadcasting. The legislative means of liberalizing radio broadcasting in both of these cases was often linked to television legislation.

⁶ STV1 is PAL, and STV2 is SECAM.

Therefore, in the following discussion, attention will be primarily given to aspects of radio reform that may deviate from the same trajectory as television—and from each other.

In the initial years of transition, the Czechoslovak government authorized the transmission of foreign radio programs, including RFE⁷ and the BBC. After the Velvet Divorce, Czech law finally consolidated public-service radio into three channels but loosened the regulatory procedures that enhanced the privatization of the other, now more available, frequencies. Public-sector radio functions under broadcasting fees and has, like television, received little to no federal funding since 1993. Also like television, in 1991–1992, the federal commissions in charge of Czechoslovak radio were split into two groups, Czech Radio and Slovak Radio.

Despite little national competition, the greatest expansion of competition emerged at the local and regional levels. In March 1991, “trial radio licenses” were issued that preceded the legislation of the October media law. In that time, nearly 30 private radio stations obtained a license. The governmentally controlled national radio networks included Český Rozhlas One (also known as Český Radiozurnál), Český Rozhlas Praha, and the smaller Český Rozhlas Vltava. For Czech radio, the three broadcasts of Český Rozhlas dominated the airwaves with Radio One’s largely music and news programming and Praha’s and Vltava’s largely cultural programming. Three private national broadcasting radio stations were finally able to enter the market in the mid-1990s: Frekvence 1, Free Europe, and Radio Nova Alfa.⁸

For Slovak mass media, radio broadcasting demonstrated the most significant strides toward liberalization. Rádio Slovensko, Rádio Regina, Rádio Devín, Radio FM, Rádio Patria, Slovensky Rozhlas One, Slovensko 1, and Radio Slovakia International represented the diversity of the state’s major broadcasting programming. These strides, however, may be due to the prevalence of entertainment programming and avoidance of news on these broadcasts. The extensive number of public-service radio broadcasters was further tempered by their limited regional coverage. Private radio broadcasters included Fun Radio, Radio Twist, RMC Radio, and Radio Tatry. Of all radio, only Slovensko 1 and Rock FM were near-national radio stations; however, both Fun Radio and Radio Twist were widely broadcast. Beyond these, radio was entirely regional. Overall, there was a dominance of public radio, yet, unlike in the Czech Republic, the dispersed nature of radio in Slovakia was a function of several small regional radio broadcasters.

Despite these developments, media are still often considered second-tier reform locations, that their progress is merely a function of central institutional reform. With clear analogue to the larger framework of political/media institutions, Jakubowicz (1996) appeals to the underlying notion that the reform of media institutions toward market-based controls was primarily shaped by the distribution of licenses, content, and competition—that is, a political process of devising, legislating, and ultimately implementing new broadcasting (and licensing) laws profoundly shaped the struggle for the control of

⁷ In 1995, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty moved its eastern headquarters to Prague.

⁸ All three stations are foreign owned and operated. Free Europe was a joint project under Czech and Slovak editorial bureaus, RFE, BBC, VOA, and Deutsche Welle. Frekvence 1 was run by the French company Europe Développement. Radio Nova Alfa is a CME broadcast.

broadcasting (see Dahlgren & Sparks, 1995). Although the economic facet of media liberalization in Central and Eastern Europe was a blend of investments from private, domestic, and foreign groups (see also Coman, 2000), for these states, a large part of the process of media demonopolization was the elimination of government funding and the selling of former state agencies to private investors.

Yet, rather than the wholesale purchase of former state broadcast (and print) media, national media companies that had the needed financing to overcome the initial, and nearly always substantial, costs of privatization found themselves being underwritten by international private media groups, essentially media joint-stock companies. Those that were able to make the financial outlays necessary to fund these renovating, rejuvenating, and purchasing demands were, in general, foreign investors from Western Europe and the United States. Access to the initial investments in CEE was crucial to national media groups, particularly television broadcasters (Sparks, 2000; see also Gross, 2002). Where the legislative allowances for licensing and market liberalization had been introduced, this alliance between international and domestic media groups was not strictly financial but also allowed for the transference of technical know-how and equipment to CEE media groups (Aumente, Gross, Hiebert, Johnson, & Mills, 1999; also Armstrong & Vickers, 1996)⁹ and crucial local connections for international groups in the early years of transition.

The case of the former Czechoslovakia is one of a quasi-experimental nature. In the attempt to control for as much similarity between the Czech Republic and Slovakia as we can (a most-similar design), I exploit their historical unity—however tenuous it may have been. In the first years of media institutional reform for both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, the expanding number of political parties competing for the diminishing control of mass media and the increasing demands placed on media by their audiences as the application of liberalizing policies was as influential. However, following their separation, both the Czech Republic and Slovakia passed broadcasting legislation, and print media was often privatized through the straightforward ascension of journalists and editors (or professional organizations) to positions of control (more commonly in the Czech Republic) or private agencies (usually foreign) buying controlling shares from the state. Thus, for both radio and television, privatization was an exaggerated process as the state often yielded licenses and broadcast capacity begrudgingly—with the disbursement of technology and licensing directly correlated with broadcasters' ability to do so (Rozumilowicz, 2002). The difference is the level of manipulation, either through control of funding or appointments, that political actors (principally political parties) are able to exert over the medium.¹⁰

In other words, the liberalization of the respective media environments is a natural function or outcome of the political variation—and one, in fact, we would expect to see. Although Czechoslovakia had an early start, the Czech Republic continued to privatize its media more swiftly and completely than Slovakia following their separation in 1993. This is reflected in their Freedom House Freedom of the Press

⁹ For example, technical adjustments included rectifying the simple disparity between older and newer equipment. Western broadcasts use higher radio broadcast frequencies (88–108 MHz), and the former Comintern nations (i.e., CEE) often used much lower frequencies.

¹⁰ For a complete discussion of the regulatory analysis, particularly the political process of creating and charging regulatory boards to oversee the privatization process, see Jakubowicz (1998/1999).

scores. Between 1990 and 1993, media were given a ranking of “free.” Between 1993 and 1997, however, although the Czech Republic maintained this ranking, Slovakia’s media freedom was downgraded to “partly free” (Freedom House, 2015).

The implication is that, for general medium differentiation, a medium with a higher level of liberalization is more likely to be considered a component of individuals’ media strategy of information seeking (see Loveless, 2008). That is, information-seeking individuals will choose among media based on each medium’s ability to present quality information. This begs the question of whether privatization is simply a proxy for differences in quality (or even content differences). Or, more simply, what, in particular, is so special about private media? The argument, embedded in the democratization literature is that liberalization, by releasing media from overt, ideological state control, is more likely to create a genuine marketplace of ideas—however noisy—and a reliable source for information seekers. Specifically, normative media theory leads us to expect that liberalized media—in the case of democratization, privatizing media—are likely to be of higher quality as information sources (Norris, 2000; however, see the discussion in Loveless, 2015). If this is the case, we can expect that information seekers consume media strategically to gain information about politics from private sources first and public sources second. Thus, given that privatizing media are expected to be “freer” and thus more informative, we should see privatizing media more highly consumed by information-seeking individuals, and we would expect to this to be more pronounced where privatization has been more extensive (i.e., the Czech Republic).¹¹

Based on this discussion, then, I present the following two hypotheses:

H2: Information seekers are more likely to use private broadcast media than public broadcast media.

H3: Information seekers are more likely to use private broadcast in the media environment that has made more progress away from state control (i.e., the Czech Republic).

Method

To investigate whether the variation in the speed and extent of privatization of the institutions of mass media are partially responsible for media choices that individuals make in searching for political information, I measure the amount of media individuals consume to stay informed on politics across public and privatizing media. The data for this part of the analysis are individual-level surveys conducted in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia in 1997 (all variables and survey information can be found in the Appendix).

To capture citizens’ media strategy of information seeking, the survey asks, “How important is it to you to *stay informed* [my emphasis] about political issues?” rather than the broader, “How interested

¹¹ It is plausible—if more of a stretch—to make the alternative argument: that private media use would be more prevalent in Slovakia, for example, as a limited but precious resource. In either case, our somewhat inductive expectation is for the evidence to bear out a difference between the different media environments.

are you in politics?" I use this question to tap behavioral implications. Individuals who express a high level of interest in being informed about politics provide a clear indication of the strategies they might pursue to inform themselves about the current state of democratic transition. The dependent variables—self-reported medium frequency usage—are additive variables from a list of broadcasting stations for television and radio (see the Appendix for full details). These highly specific response categories for individual media choices in the surveys allow me to identify respondents' specific media choices.¹² I use ordinary least squares regression analysis. Table 1 describes the dependent variables.

Table 1. Dependent Variables: Amount of Public and Private Television and Radio Use.

	Czech Republic Stations	Slovak Stations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Range
Public radio ^a	Eesky Rozhlas 1 Radio and Eesky Rozhlas 2 Praha	Radio Slovensko 1	3.97	1.75	1 to 6
Private radio	Frekvence 1 and Radio Nova Alfa	Fun Radio and Rock FM	6.30	3.48	2 to 12
Public television	ET1 and ET2	STV 1 and STV 2	8.30	2.16	2 to 10
Private television	TV NOVA and PRIMA	VTV and TV Markíza	7.20	2.49	2 to 10

^a Because there is only one public radio station for Slovakia, the combined listening to the two Czech public radio stations is halved to make the dependent variable comparable. See Appendix for full description of all variables.

I include both structural and individual attributes: age, education, income, residence. The sociopolitical predispositions include ideological orientation and personal communication. To account for the variation across media context (assuming the individual-level variables are more or less fixed across countries), I include both a country dummy variable (for Slovakia) and an interaction term with "Slovakia" on information seeking to capture two things. First, it allows for variation in the constant—that is, a statistically significant difference in the level of media use across the two countries. Second, by including an interaction term on the regression coefficient of information seeking, I test whether media consumption itself has a statistically significant differential influence on media choices based on the media contexts of the Czech Republic and Slovakia. Finally, for comparability, the models were constrained to include only respondents who were included in all models ($N = 1,469$).

Formally, the model can be presented as follows:

¹² Although others have suggested that researchers compare the media use of consumers to that of nonconsumers, the number of non-media users is so low that it renders statistical comparisons between the groups uninformative (see Newton, 1999).

$$\text{Media use} = \alpha + \beta_1(\text{Informed}) + \beta_2(\text{Informed} * \text{Slovakia dummy}) + \beta_3(\text{Soc.Comm.}) + \beta_3(\text{Ideo}) + \beta_4(\text{Sex}) + \beta_5(\text{Age}) + \beta_6(\text{Educ}) + \beta_7(\text{Inc}) + \beta_8(\text{Urbanity}) + \beta_9(\text{Slovakia dummy}) + \varepsilon$$

Again, I seek to identify how individuals' use different media to satisfy informational needs in periods of transition and whether a macro-micro linkage emerges.

Empirical Results

At the outset, the findings do not suggest strong patterns of information seeking (see Table 2).

Table 2. Media Consumption Choices as a Function of Information Seeking.

	Dependent Variables							
	Public television		Private television		Public radio		Private radio	
Informed on politics	0.22*	(0.11)	-0.19	(0.11)	0.26*	(0.13)	-0.48**	(0.17)
Informed on politics × Slovakia	-0.17	(0.13)	0.11	(0.14)	-0.26	(0.15)	0.06	(0.20)
Social communication	0.02	(0.10)	0.24*	(0.11)	0.22	(0.12)	0.15	(0.16)
Ideological orientation	0.05	(0.05)	-0.03	(0.06)	0.08	(0.06)	0.17*	(0.08)
Gender (female = 1)	-0.02	(0.11)	-0.04	(0.12)	0.01	(0.14)	-0.10	(0.18)
Age	-0.00	(-0.24)	-0.025***	(-6.08)	0.016***	(7.64)	-0.064***	(-17.52)
Education	0.03	(0.04)	0.11**	(0.04)	0.06	(0.04)	0.24***	(0.06)
Income	0.08	(0.05)	0.34***	(0.06)	0.04	(0.06)	0.61***	(0.08)
Urbanity	-0.05	(0.12)	1.08***	(0.13)	-0.05	(0.14)	-0.11	(0.19)
Slovakia country dummy variable	0.33	(0.37)	-1.25***	(0.39)	-1.35**	(0.44)	0.17	(0.58)
Constant	7.30***	(0.36)	6.49***	(0.39)	4.33***	(0.43)	6.27***	(0.57)
Adjusted R ²	0.008		0.1435		0.1813		0.1168	
N	1,469		1,469		1,469		1,469	

t statistics in parentheses; * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

The only ideological process is that individuals who express higher democratic values listen to more private radio. Indicative of selectivity, individuals with more education prefer private media. This finding is supported by the similar effect of income. Both variables may combine to suggest some process of self-selection, but they also may reflect the consumption of private broadcasts as a function of not only social norms but technology available at home (i.e., availability or prestige components to their use).

Whereas younger viewers and listeners prefer private television and private radio, public radio is a mainstay of older listeners—and perhaps it is appealing to see an explanation in the form of a generational difference. We might argue simply that older viewers and listeners prefer the former state-controlled media in its comforting form and that the youth are quicker to adopt the newer, more Western, media. Yet, while age is a statistically significant negative predictor for both private television ($p < 0.001$) and radio ($p < 0.001$) and a statistically significant positive predictor for public radio ($p < 0.001$), informed on politics is statistically significant for both public and private radio and public television. That is, controlling for age, staying informed is a substantive predictor. In terms of substantive power, for public television, being informed is the most significant variable, according to a comparison of standardized betas (not presented). For both public and private radio, being informed is second only to age in its predictive power.

For both public television and public radio, there are statistically significant and positive returns on individuals' patterns of information seeking (supporting H1), but private television and private radio fare less well. Private television is not sought out by political information seekers in either country, and private radio is actively not consumed for information (no support for H2).

Central to this investigation, what of the expected micro-macro difference in media environments (H3)? The expectation is that the liberalization of media via the privatization of former state-dominated media institutions would provide wider access to information, and this would be evident in two ways. First, we would see a preference for private over public media, and, second, we would expect this preference to be stronger in an environment where privatization had been more extensive (in the case here, the Czech Republic). There is no evidence for such a preference for private media. In the aggregate, while Slovaks appear to consume the same amount of private radio, they listen a great deal more to public radio (1.35 points higher on a scale from 1 to 6, $p < 0.01$). At the same time, while the Slovaks show no difference in the level of public television use, they watch less private television (1.25 points lower on a scale from 2 to 10, $p < 0.001$).

Regarding the expectation of a stronger relationship where privatization was more extensive (in the Czech Republic, i.e., Hypothesis 3), the interaction effect is not significant in any of the models and thus there is no support for differing media choices in media environments of greater privatization. Regardless of differences in the speed and extent of privatization between the two countries, there is little difference in the informational affinity for public broadcasting services (and the neutral or negative informational orientation to privatizing media). This is further interesting, because Slovaks accord privatizing media a higher level of objectivity than do Czechs.¹³ Yet recall that both Czech and Slovak public broadcasting were largely financially independent of the federal governments but less subject to market demands, as Gross (2002) describes. Specifically for radio, the Czech case was arguably affected

¹³ Participants were asked how much they agree with the statement: "Private/independent media will always be more objective than state media" (1 = *strongly disagree*; 2 = *disagree*; 3 = *neither* [and *don't know*]; 4 = *agree*; 5 = *strongly agree*). (Czech: $n = 1,003$; $M = 3.20$; $SE = 0.037$; Slovakia: $n = 1,118$; $M = 3.37$; $SE = 0.035$); and statistically different ($t = -3.2949$, $p < 0.001$).

by the late entry of national private radio, and Slovakia was clearly limited by a lack of national broadcasting ability, limiting coherence in any message.

Do these findings suggest that the liberalization process went too far or too fast? Gross (2002) notes that, in the early years of transition in Central and Eastern Europe, foreign media (invested in alliances with national media groups) found that to generate revenue they had to acquiesce to domestic demands for politically charged presentations. They had to, in Gross' words, "be political" (p. 36). Commercial broadcasts offered a mix of politically biased news and ideologically neutral entertainment, with strong favor toward the more popular and revenue-raising latter (see O'Neil, 1998; Sparks & Reading, 1998). That is, the intervention of international companies exhibited more of a gold mine motive than a marketplace of ideas motive.

If this was the case, the process of liberalization via privatization may have rendered a largely impotent private mass media—in terms of democratic socialization—while creating opportunities for public broadcast media to reform in a less chaotic manner. That is, the process of liberalizing former state media may have, to some degree, insulated public-service broadcasting, providing impetus for the simultaneous professionalization and upgrading of the former state media broadcast system. The state, in its role as the distributor of licenses, granting of ownership, and broadcasting rights, and its vigor in abiding by the legal statutes of liability, criminal prosecution, and access, may have been an unwitting contributor to democratization.¹⁴ Although we cannot answer that question here, the process of privatization—whether a function of political or market constraints—seems to have resulted in the confounding of media as an important political contributor to the process of democratic political socialization.

Discussion

The results here suggest not only that information seeking is important in distinguishing media choices but that public television and radio demonstrate positive correlations with this information-seeking media behavior. Although the extent of privatizations does not appear to condition this behavior, this finding remains relevant to the study of media, because these information-seeking media strategies provide evidence about individuals' media choices during democratization as well as underscore the role of mass media as a potential component of the process of political socialization in democratizing countries.

It is important to note that, despite the setting of democratization, the evidence here corresponds to existing work that demonstrates that public-service broadcasting can serve as an effective source of information (Aalberg et al., 2010; Curran, Iyengar, Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009; Curran et al., 2014; Fraile & Iyengar, 2014). However, as demonstrated in the review here of institutional reform in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia, it is difficult to imagine an easy conceptual match between the previously Communist, state-run media institution amid a highly political process of being dismantled and Western, democratic public broadcasting institutions (e.g., the BBC). As well, the uneven process of media liberalization via privatization (i.e., obtaining licenses, updating broadcasting or printing technology,

¹⁴ Whereas public broadcasting is by definition a state appendage, editorial freedom and funding are—at least by law—conducted impartially.

training and hiring staff, inter alia) in which recently Communist media institutions are actively dismantled seems to bear little resemblance to the private media of politically and economically stable advanced industrial democracies.¹⁵ Thus, these potentially substantial incongruities between the *public* and *private* (or *privatizing*) media in democratizing countries and the *public* and *private* media of established democracies ultimately suggest caution in drawing conclusions based on existing theories.

It is because of these conceptual incongruities that inquiries such as this one are important. The proliferation, pluralization, and liberalization of mass media in democratizing countries are in a position to make a significant contribution to individuals' learning of new social and political orientations by providing a means to understand the changes and new social and political realities. In lieu of direct experience, mass media provide a mediated experience of the new political reality, one that is more widely accessible and readily available than infrequent interaction between individuals and their new political institutions. Thus, in theory, the emergence of a free media could contribute to the process of democratization, specifically individual-level democratic political socialization. Yet, as described here, there is at best inconsistent empirical evidence for continuing to hold this position without more systemic and wider analysis. Do the findings here warrant a worry that the liberalization of mass media may have perverted the process of democratization? That is unlikely, as the inconsistent roles of mass media in democratization seen here—and elsewhere (see Jebiril, Štětka, & Loveless, 2013)—are more likely akin to their complex political role in established democracies. How exactly they are akin or unalike, however, remains unknown and requires further investigation.

Unfortunately, the design and data of this analysis limit our ability to offer further implications. It cannot be demonstrated whether this is a Czech/Slovak phenomenon, a post-Communist phenomenon, or a democratization phenomenon. And this is important to know. Empirical evidence such as that provided by this small study is aimed at expanding the existing work about media effects in democratizing countries about which we know so little (Bennett, 1998; Jebiril et al., 2013). And it does provide empirical evidence on individuals' media choices that have direct implications for thinking and eventual theorizing about media use in democratizing countries. For example, the positive role of radio found here is not only under-theorized in the literature as a potentially significant source for information seekers but suggestive of the specific theoretical character of the role of mass media in the process of democratization. Therefore, work such as this should be of interest to democratization scholars aiming to determine which facets of the dynamic environment are most likely to husband political democracy, market economics, and congruent political values and attitudes. And, as such, democratization offers the opportunity to skip the "replication of well-established findings" (Stevenson, 2004, p. 370) and begin integrating regionally specific findings within a larger framework of political communications.

Conclusion

Media structures and political institutions co-evolve (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Mass media are thus inextricably linked to the historical development of party systems, and for the countries of CEE and

¹⁵ There also are profoundly different media consumption experiences with, orientations to, and cultures of mass media that distinguish East European audience members from their Western counterparts.

countries of other democratizing regions, this includes the development of entire political systems. This is salient to our discussion, as Hallin and Mancini further argue that both the dissimilarities and commonalities among institutional structures create comparatively differentiated media environments and thus variation in potential individual-level media effects.

This is an important concern for the development of new media structures. It was generally expected that privatization would lead to a more vibrant marketplace of ideas and ostensibly toward media environments familiar to Western citizens (and academics). Theoretically, this was fully embraced as all forms of the “free press theory,” which aligns a free and *plural* press with a free and rational society (Bartels, 1993; McQuail, 1987; Mutz & Martin, 2001; Norris, 2000; Schmitt-Beck, 1998; Swanson & Mancini, 1996). In the pre-1989 period, this notion was supported in practice by the missions of the BBC World Service, Radio Liberty, Deutsche Welle, and Voice of America as radio broadcasts specifically designed and implemented as alternatives to state-run (i.e., noncompetitive) radio by expanding the number of “voices” in the marketplace (Tusa, 1999). Thus, without notional or practical alternatives in either the academic or policy worlds, liberating state-controlled media in Eastern Europe via privatization was the only means to allow media to attempt to provide its role (however inexpertly at first). Yet, at the same time, what has been the effect of privatization on the process of political socialization in Central and Eastern Europe? While this essential question cannot be fully answered here; it has not been satisfactorily answered elsewhere either.

This investigation has, however, confronted the shortage of empirical evidence necessary for a full evaluation of the role of mass media in democratizing countries in a manner that accounts for both individual and macro-level variation. In asking whether the variation in media and the speed and extent of privatization of the institutions of mass media are at least partially responsible for media choices that individuals make in searching for political information, the evidence here suggests that citizens in both the Czech Republic and Slovakia were more likely to use public media than privatizing media to satisfy their informational needs about politics—regardless of the extent of media liberalization via privatization.

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Appendix

The mass public surveys were produced by InterMedia (<http://www.intermedia.org/>). In the Czech Republic, the surveys were conducted by AISA (now TNS AISA) in face-to-face interviews. The fieldwork was conducted between May 12 and June 24, 1997, and it produced a raw sample size of 1,003 completed surveys. In Slovakia, AISA also conducted face-to-face interviews between May 2 and June 2, 1997, producing a raw sample size of 1,118 completed surveys. The central topic of these surveys was originally to provide measures of audience attention to foreign media broadcasts. However, the surveys provide information on not only domestic media choices but the necessary sociopolitical predispositions and social and economic location indicators.

Dependent Variables

In Czech Republic: public radio: Eesky Rozhlas 1 Radio <ee1cum> and Eesky Rozhlas 2 Praha <ee2cum>; private radio: Frekvence 1 <frekcu> and Radio Nova Alfa <novacu>; public television: ET1 <et1cum> and ET2 <et2cum>; private television: TV NOVA <tvnvcu> and PRIMA <pricum>.¹⁶

In Slovakia: public radio: Radio Slovensko 1 <slo1cu>; private radio: Fun Radio <funcum> and Rock Radio <rockcu>; public television: STV 1 <stv1cu> and STV 2 <stv2cu>; private television: V TV <vtvcum> and TV Markíza <markcu>.

Public and private radio: Response codes include 1 (*never heard*), 2 (*ever heard*), 3 (*in past 12 months*), 4 (*in past 3 months*), 5 (*regular listener*), and 6 (*daily listener*).

¹⁶ Given that the surveys were originally designed to capture individuals’ international and domestic media use, there are alternative measures of media consumption patterns for many—but not all—of the radio and television stations included here. The findings, inasmuch as they can be reproduced with the reduced number of broadcasts, are similar.

Public and private television: Response codes include 1 (*not in past 12 months*), 2 (*in past 12 months*), 3 (*in past 3 months*), 4 (*regular viewer*), and 5 (*most days viewer*).

Independent Variables

Informed on politics <infpol>: How important is it to you to stay informed about political issues; would you say it is: very important, somewhat important, not very important, not at all important, or don't know? (Reverse coded.)

Gender <sex>: dummy variable coded; 1 = *female*.

Education <educ>: level of education on seven-point scale.

Age <age>: raw age (18+)

Urbanity <urbrur>: 0 = *rural*; 1 = *urban*.

Social communication <talkpol>: When you get together with your friends, would you say that you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally, never? (Reverse coded.)

Income <incgrp>: Income quartiles based on monthly household income, ranging from *low*, to *medium-low* to *medium-high* to *high*.

Ideological orientation: Additive index of the two questions How interested are you in a democratic society? <indemsoc> and How interested are you in a market economy? <inmktec>.

Response categories include *very important*, *somewhat important*, *not very important*, and *not at all important*. (Reverse coded.)