



DEMOCRACY AND MEDIA IN EUROPE

A Discursive-Material Approach

Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer



Democracy and Media in Europe: A Discursive-Material Approach is a theoretical reflection on the intersection of democracy and media through a constructionist lens.

This focus allows us to understand current political struggles over democracy, and over media's democratic roles, with the latter ranging from the traditional support for an informed citizenry and the watchdog role, to the organization of agonistic debate and generating fair and dignified representations of society and its many (sub)groups, to the facilitation of maximalist participation in institutionalized politics and media. Moreover, the book's reconciliation of democratic theory and media theory brings out a detailed theoretical analysis of the core characteristics of the assemblages of democracy and media, their conditions of possibility and the threats to both democracy and media's democratic roles.

This short book provides in-depth reflections on the different positions that can be taken when it comes to the performance of democracy as it intersects with the multitude of media in the 21st century. As such, the volume will be of interest to scholars of media and communication and related fields in the social sciences.

<https://bit.ly/DemoMediaEurope>

Nico Carpentier is Extraordinary Professor at Charles University (Prague, Czech Republic) and Visiting Professor at Tallinn University (Estonia) and at Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (Suzhou, China). He was Vice-President of the European Communication Research and Education Association (2008–2012) and President of the International Association for Media and Communication Research (2020–2024). His theoretical focus is on discourse theory, his research is situated in the relationship between communication, politics and culture, especially in social domains as war and conflict, ideology, participation and democracy. His latest monographs are *The Discursive-Material Knot* (2017) and *Iconoclastic Controversies* (2021). His last exhibition was *The Mirror of Conflict* photography exhibition, in October 2023 at the Energy Museum, Istanbul in Türkiye, and in October 2024 at the Hollar Gallery, Prague, in the Czech Republic.

Jeffrey Wimmer is Professor of Communication Science with an emphasis on media reality at the University of Augsburg, Germany. From 2008 to 2014, he was chairing the 'Communication and Democracy' section of the European Communication Research and Education Association, and from 2009 to 2015, the 'Sociology of Media Communication' section of the German Association of Communication Science. His research and teaching focuses on the sociology of media communication, public sphere and participation, mediatization and media change, digital games and virtual worlds. Recent edited book publications include *(Mis-)Understanding Political Participation* (2018, Routledge) and *The Forgotten Subject* (2023).

Introduction

Part I: Democracy 1. Core Components of Democracy 2. Struggles over Democracy
3. Conditions of Possibility of Democracy 4. Threats to Democracy 5. A First Visual Summary

Part II: Media and Democracy 6. Core Components of Media 7. The Roles of (European) Media in Democracy 8. Struggles over Media's Democratic Roles 9. Conditions of Possibility for Media's Democratic Roles 10. Threats to Media's Democratic Roles 11. A Second Visual Summary

A brief conclusion

“Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer have written a hopeful book that offers a map of the often confusing landscape of current democracy and media. Everything you want to know about the state of 21st-century democracy and media is here. The book’s learned, yet clear and concise, voice shows how theory can help us tackle the great challenges of our times and build democratic societies that do not succumb to declarations of decay and pessimism.”

> **Anu Kantola**, *Professor of Media and Communication Studies, University of Helsinki*

“This book is groundbreaking in many ways. It is the first comprehensive investigation in a long time on what is arguably today’s most important socio-political issue – in Europe and elsewhere: Without media that respects democratic standards there is no modern democracy; without democracy there is no politics that respects fundamental human rights. Consequently, the book combines approaches from communication and media studies and political science. But, moreover, it interlinks the material(ist) and the discursive component of media and democracy in a way that the struggles over what is expected from both are revealed. Highly recommended.”

> **Josef Seethaler**, *Research Group Leader “Media, Politics and Democracy”, Austrian Academy of Sciences*

“This groundbreaking book by Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer provides a powerful and innovative response to a pressing issue of our time: the thorny relationship between democratic politics and the media in Europe. In so doing, the book elaborates a distinctive discursive-material approach, neatly reconciling themes in discourse theory and new materialism, which foregrounds the primacy of politics in our understanding of the contemporary forms and articulations of democracy and the media. Delineating and representing the complex intersections between different democratic and media assemblages, the book sets the agenda for future explorations and interventions in this critical field of study and practice.”

> **David Howarth**, *Professor in the Department of Government and Co-Director of the Centre for Ideology and Discourse Analysis, University of Essex, UK*

“Democracy is the ultimate essentially contested concept and at the same time a never to be ultimately fulfilled or realised promise. This excellent and very necessary book not only makes this apparent in an understandable as well as sophisticated manner but also discusses the consequences of this for the role of media and communication within the competing articulations of democracy.”

> **Bart Cammaerts**, *Professor of Politics and Communication, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK*

“The topic of media and democracy is currently highly relevant because democracy and media are developing apart. With this in mind, the authors of this book systematically describe possible and existing problems of democracies in connection with the media, and then just as thoroughly examine the question of where the media can develop and how they can be kept on a democratic course. This is why this book is important for theorists, empirical researchers and practitioners, as well as anyone else who works or wants to work in the fields concerned.”

> **Friedrich Krotz**, *Professor of Communication and Media Sciences, University of Bremen, Germany*

“Heterogeneity and turbulence characterize democracy in Europe; the convoluted media landscape is in constant evolution. Both domains are contingent, shaped by changing contexts, as are the relations between them. Analyzing such moving targets can be a bewildering task. This important volume by Nico Carpentier and Jeffrey Wimmer equips the reader with an elegant analytic framework to grapple with these challenges. From a discursive-materialist perspective the authors provide a very lucid toolkit, one to make use of, to work with. For many it will become a close companion.”

> **Peter Dahlgren**, *Professor emeritus, Lund University, Sweden. His latest book is Media Engagement (Routledge, 2023, with Annette Hill)*