

**THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN THE FORMATION OF POLITICAL
CULTURE**

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Abstract: This article explores the role of media in shaping political culture by clarifying how messages, formats, and distribution logics influence civic values, trust, and participation. The study relies on theoretical synthesis, comparative analysis, and discourse-oriented reading of media texts. Scientific novelty is articulated through an integrated model linking political culture indicators to mediatisation drivers, emphasizing how agenda setting, framing, and digital feedback loops operate across institutional contexts.

Keywords: political culture; mediatisation; agenda setting; framing; public opinion; social trust; digital platforms.

The role of media in the formation of political culture can be defined as the patterned influence of information institutions and communication technologies on how citizens learn, evaluate, and routinize political meanings in everyday life. The mechanism operates through repeated exposure to narratives, the selection of salient issues, and the normalization of interpretive frames that make some actions appear reasonable and others marginal. For example, sustained coverage of public service reforms can cultivate expectations about accountability and procedural fairness, while the absence of such coverage can leave citizens reliant on interpersonal rumor. Empirically, cross-national research has long shown that television news, radio, and now platform-based feeds remain among the most frequently used sources of public affairs information, with reported reliance often exceeding half of adult audiences in many settings depending on age and access conditions.

Scientifically, this influence is best understood not as linear persuasion but as a probabilistic structuring of attention and interpretation, in which media systems interact with education, socialization, and institutional performance to generate stable orientations that scholars describe as political culture.

Political culture itself may be defined as the set of shared cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations toward political objects, including institutions, actors, rules, and collective identities. The mechanism by which media connects to these orientations rests on the translation of complex



institutional processes into symbolic forms, such as simplified causal stories, moral evaluations, and recognizable actors who personify otherwise abstract structures. For instance, a policy debate presented through conflict-oriented talk-show formats can foster a perception that politics is primarily a contest of personalities, whereas explanatory journalism that foregrounds procedures and evidence can cultivate a procedural understanding of governance. Survey-based comparative traditions often operationalize political culture through indicators such as political trust, civic duty, interest in politics, and tolerance for opposing viewpoints, with measurable variation across societies and cohorts. Scientifically, media effects research suggests that these indicators respond most strongly when media messages are consistent over time and reinforced by peer discussion, which converts private exposure into publicly shared meaning and thus stabilizes cultural patterns.

Mediatisation can be defined as the long-term process through which media logics become embedded in the operations of politics, thereby altering how political actors communicate and how citizens interpret public life. The mechanism includes professionalization of communication, strategic use of visuals and soundbites, and adaptation to platform metrics that reward novelty and emotional resonance. A clear example is the shift from program-centric party communication toward leader-centric storytelling designed to fit short video clips and headline constraints, which can modify citizens' perception of representation from policy alignment to performative credibility. Quantitatively, the growth of mobile internet and social networking has increased the volume and speed of political information flows, creating higher-frequency exposure environments in which citizens may encounter political cues multiple times a day through incidental browsing rather than intentional news seeking [3]. Scientifically, mediatisation theory highlights that media does not merely transmit politics but reconstitutes political reality by privileging visibility, immediacy, and simplification, and these features can alter political culture by changing what citizens consider normal, legitimate, and worth discussing [1].

Agenda setting may be defined as the capacity of media to shape what the public perceives as important by allocating attention and prominence to selected issues. The mechanism is driven by editorial choices, repetition, headline placement, and algorithmic ranking, which together increase cognitive accessibility of certain topics and reduce the visibility of others. For example, when unemployment, inflation, and public service delivery are consistently placed at the top of news bulletins, citizens tend to report these as the nation's most pressing problems even when their personal circumstances differ, because issue salience is socially constructed through shared informational environments. A large body of empirical work has repeatedly found moderate to strong correlations between media issue emphasis and public issue priorities, especially under conditions of low direct experience with the issue and high



message consistency across outlets [4]. Scientifically, the key contribution is that agenda setting influences political culture at the level of collective attention, shaping the repertoire of legitimate concerns that define “responsible citizenship,” and thus influencing participation patterns such as voting motivations and community engagement.

Framing can be defined as the selection and emphasis of certain aspects of reality in a communicative text so that an issue is understood through particular causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and policy preferences. The mechanism works by providing interpretive schemas, using language choices, metaphors, exemplars, and visual cues that guide how audiences connect facts into coherent narratives. For instance, corruption can be framed as a moral failure of individuals, leading to demands for punishment, or as a systemic incentive problem, leading to demands for institutional redesign; each frame cultivates different cultural expectations about how politics should work. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies often report that frames can shift attitudes, especially when audiences lack strong prior knowledge and when competing frames are not simultaneously salient, with measurable changes in opinion distributions after exposure [4]. Scientifically, framing is central to political culture formation because it converts information into meaning, and meaning into norms, thereby influencing whether citizens interpret politics through trust, cynicism, proceduralism, or identity-based evaluation [3].

Gatekeeping can be defined as the process by which media organizations and platform infrastructures filter, prioritize, and distribute information, thereby shaping the informational boundaries within which political culture develops. The mechanism includes newsroom routines, source selection, verification practices, and, increasingly, algorithmic curation based on engagement signals and personalization profiles. For example, an outlet that relies heavily on official sources may cultivate a culture of deference toward institutions, while an outlet that foregrounds investigative reporting may cultivate expectations of scrutiny and accountability as normal civic practice. Observational research on digital platforms indicates that personalization can reduce shared exposure and increase variance in what different users see, which may weaken common reference points necessary for cohesive public deliberation, while still increasing total consumption time for many users [3]. Scientifically, gatekeeping matters because political culture is not formed from “all available information” but from structured subsets that become socially visible, and the legitimacy of those subsets affects trust in both media and institutions.

A comparative perspective defines media systems as patterned configurations of ownership, regulation, professional norms, and audience practices that condition how political communication operates. The mechanism linking media systems to political culture lies in how different system types incentivize journalistic autonomy, pluralism, public service orientation, and the



separation between information and promotion. For example, environments with strong public service broadcasting traditions often emphasize informational programming and civic education, which can support cultures of institutional trust and participation, whereas highly polarized commercialized environments may reward conflict, leading to more adversarial orientations. Comparative scholarship has documented that system-level differences correlate with variations in news quality, political knowledge, and citizen trust, though the direction and strength of these relations depend on broader institutional performance and historical legacies [1]. Scientifically, this implies that political culture should be analyzed as an emergent property of interacting institutions rather than as an attribute of individuals alone, and that media reforms may have cultural consequences only when aligned with education and governance quality.

In transitional and reforming contexts, political culture can be defined as particularly sensitive to informational credibility because institutional routines and expectations are still consolidating. The mechanism here centers on uncertainty reduction: when citizens lack stable reference points, they rely more heavily on trusted communicators and repeated narratives to evaluate institutions and predict outcomes. For example, explanatory coverage of legal reforms that clarifies procedures, rights, and responsibilities can foster a culture of law-oriented participation, while ambiguous or sensational coverage can promote rumor-based evaluation and heightened skepticism. Empirical indicators such as trust in institutions, perceived efficacy, and willingness to participate in consultative processes often fluctuate more in such contexts, reflecting the importance of credible information channels and consistent civic education [5]. Scientifically, the implication is that media's cultural role is amplified when institutions are new or changing, because media becomes a primary arena where meanings of citizenship and legitimacy are negotiated and stabilized over time.

Digital platforms can be defined as socio-technical infrastructures that mediate public communication through user-generated content, algorithmic ranking, and networked diffusion. The mechanism includes feedback loops in which engagement metrics guide what is amplified, while social endorsement signals such as likes and shares serve as heuristics for credibility and popularity, sometimes independent of accuracy. For instance, short-form videos that personalize policy issues through individual stories can increase emotional engagement and perceived relevance, yet may reduce attention to structural explanations, thereby influencing whether political culture becomes more person-centered than institution-centered. Quantitatively, global trends show sustained growth in social media as a news pathway, particularly among younger cohorts, alongside declining reliance on print, which shifts the temporal rhythm of political learning from periodic to continuous exposure [3].



Scientifically, this environment requires political culture research to integrate psychological mechanisms of attention and emotion with communication structures, because the same informational content can produce different cultural effects depending on platform affordances and network dynamics.

Media literacy may be defined as the capacity to access, evaluate, and use media messages critically, including understanding sourcing, bias, verification, and persuasive techniques. The mechanism by which media literacy influences political culture lies in moderating susceptibility to manipulation and enabling reflective engagement rather than reactive consumption. For example, citizens trained to distinguish news from commentary and to cross-check claims are more likely to form stable, evidence-sensitive opinions, which supports a culture of reasoned deliberation and measured trust. Educational interventions and assessment studies typically show that media literacy training can improve recognition of unreliable content and increase verification behaviors, though effects vary by baseline education and the complexity of the information environment [6]. Scientifically, media literacy functions as a cultural immune system: it does not remove disagreement, but it supports norms of justification and accountability in public discourse, which are core components of a resilient political culture.

From a methodological standpoint, political culture formation through media can be defined as a multi-level phenomenon linking micro-level cognition, meso-level institutions, and macro-level system structures. The mechanism for studying it rigorously therefore combines discourse analysis of media texts, audience research on reception and interpretation, and comparative institutional analysis of media governance and professional norms. For instance, a discourse study may identify dominant frames in coverage of governance reforms, an audience survey may test how those frames correlate with trust and efficacy, and an institutional review may explain why certain frames persist due to ownership or regulatory incentives. Quantitatively, triangulation strengthens validity by allowing scholars to compare patterns across datasets, such as aligning content frequencies with survey indicators, while acknowledging that correlation does not by itself establish causality in complex social systems [4]. Scientifically, this integrated design aligns with contemporary communication scholarship by treating media effects as conditional and context-bound, thus avoiding simplistic determinism and enabling more precise claims about when and how media contributes to political culture [1].

The analytical synthesis of this thesis supports the conclusion that media contributes to political culture primarily by structuring attention, providing interpretive frames, and institutionalizing communicative norms that define what citizens perceive as legitimate politics. These effects are strongest when media messages are consistent, credible, and embedded in everyday routines, and they are weakened when informational environments fragment into



personalized streams without shared reference points. Digital platforms intensify speed and volume of exposure and introduce engagement-driven amplification, which can either broaden participation or reduce deliberative quality depending on literacy and institutional safeguards. A balanced approach emphasizes that media is neither a sole cause of civic orientations nor a neutral channel, but a constitutive arena where political meanings are produced, contested, and stabilized. Practical implications follow for strengthening professional standards, transparency, and media literacy so that political culture evolves toward evidence-sensitive participation and durable social trust.

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