

The Media in France

Raymond Kuhn

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group



**Also available as a printed book
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The Media in France

The Media in France presents a comprehensive overview of the history, present and future prospects of the French media and considers the successes and failures of French media policy from 1945 to the present day.

Raymond Kuhn investigates the history, politics and economics of the press, radio and television from the days of state intervention and monopoly provision to current trends towards de-regulation and pluralism. He also discusses the importance of the 'new media' of cable and satellite broadcasting. In particular he explores the changing interrelationship between media and state, as ownership and direct interference decline while the state remains a key part of the media landscape in its policy making and regulatory roles.

This up-to-date, accessible textbook is essential reading for all students of French, European and Media Studies.

Raymond Kuhn is Senior Lecturer and Head of the Department of Political Studies at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London. He is the editor of *The Politics of Broadcasting* and *Broadcasting and Politics in Western Europe*.

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London and New York

First published 1995 by Routledge 11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE
This edition published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2006.

“To purchase your own copy of this or any of Taylor & Francis
or Routledge’s collection of thousands of eBooks please go to
[http://www.ebookstore.tandf.co.uk/.](http://www.ebookstore.tandf.co.uk/)”

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada by Routledge 29 West 35th Street, New York,
NY 10001

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from
the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data Kuhn, Raymond. The media in
France/Raymond Kuhn. p. cm. Includes bibliographical references and index. 1. Mass media-
France. I. Title. P92.F8K84 1994 302.23'0944–dc20 94–9595

ISBN 0-203-19268-0 Master e-book ISBN

ISBN 0-203-32993-7 (Adobe e-Reader Format)
ISBN 0-415-01459-X (hbk) 0-415-01458-1 (pbk)

To Agnes and Roman

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Acknowledgements

I should like to thank the members of my department at Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, for their support during the writing of this book. I am also grateful to Dr Peter Morris of the University of Nottingham for his advice and friendship.

Others whom I should like to thank include: Professor Trevor Smith, my former head of department and currently Vice-Chancellor of the University of Ulster; Dr Ian Campbell, my Ph.D. supervisor at the University of Warwick; and Dr Vincent Wright of Nuffield College, Oxford.

I am grateful to those at Routledge who waited patiently for this book to come to fruition. They include Jane Armstrong, Rebecca Barden and Sue Bilton. Brigitte Lee did an excellent job as copy editor.

I should like to acknowledge the financial assistance provided by the Nuffield Foundation, the University of London Central Research Fund, the ESRC/CNRS and the British Academy, all of which provided small but invaluable sums of money to enable me to make short research trips to France to conduct interviews and obtain published material.

I owe an immense debt of gratitude to my partner, Kerstin, for her unfailing humour and encouragement.

Finally, I wish to thank both my parents for all their love and help over the years. This book is dedicated to them.

Abbreviations

AFP	Agence France-Presse
ARD	Arbeitsgemeinschaft der öffentlich-rechtlichen Rundfunkanstalten Deutschlands
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BSB	British Satellite Broadcasting
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail
CGE	Compagnie Générale d'Electricité
CGT	Confédération Générale du Travail
CLT	Compagnie Luxembourgeoise de Télédiffusion
CNCL	Commission nationale de la communication et des libertés
CNN	Cable News Network
CSA	Conseil Supérieur de l'Audiovisuel
CTPP	Commission for the transparency and pluralism of the press
DBS	Direct broadcasting by satellite
DGT	Direction Générale des Télécommunications
EDF	Electricité de France
EEC	European Economic Community
ENA	Ecole Nationale d'Administration
EU	European Union
FLN	Front de Libération Nationale
FM	Frequency modulation
FR3	France Régions 3
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
IBA	Independent Broadcasting Authority
INA	Institut National de l'Audiovisuel
ITV	Independent Television
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NRJ	Nouvelle Radio Jeune
OAS	Organisation Armée Secrète
OFI	Office français d'information
ORTF	Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française
PAL	Phase Alternate Line

PCF	Parti Communiste Français
PTT	Post, Telegraphy and Telephony
RAI	Radiotelevisione Italiana
RTF	Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française
RTL	Radiodiffusion-Télévision Luxembourg
SECAM	Séquentiel couleur à mémoire
Sept	Société d'édition de programmes de télévision
SFP	Société Française de Production
SLII	Service des liaisons interministérielles pour l'information
Sofirad	Société financière de radiodiffusion
TDF	Télédiffusion de France
TDF1	Télédiffusion de France 1
TDF2	Télédiffusion de France 2
TF1	Télévision Française 1
TGV	Train à grande vitesse
TVS	TV South
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States
VAT	Value added tax
VCR	Video cassette recorder

Introduction

The mass media of press, radio and television form an integral part of the political, economic and social life of contemporary France. They play a key role in the process of political communication, sometimes operating as an apparently passive conduit for the transmission of information, but more usually adopting a more pro-active stance in the selection and construction of news and the provision of comment. Not only are the media the most convenient means by which elites communicate both with each other and with the general public; they are also political actors in their own right, with the capacity to bring issues on to the news agenda and to mobilize public opinion in support of a particular point of view. In short, the French media are both the main arteries of a sophisticated system of political communication and major players within that system.

The media are also important economic actors. Growing public consumption of media product has been stimulated by an increase in its supply, particularly in the audiovisual sector. The broadcasting media expanded enormously in the 1980s as a result of government decisions to legalize private local radio and encourage the establishment of new television channels. Advertising expenditure in the media experienced impressive levels of growth during the same decade, as did levels of employment in the media and related sectors of the economy. Several French media companies have very high annual turnovers, while some also have an important stake in foreign media markets. Though still lagging behind some other industrialized countries in terms of media growth, by the 1990s France was well on the way to having a well-developed media sector of the economy.

It was also becoming a media-rich society. The extent to which the media have established themselves as important forces in French society can be gauged by a cursory examination of some statistics. In 1987 approximately 10 million daily newspapers, 69 million weekly newspapers and magazines, and 63 million monthlies were produced in France. There were 50 to 60 million radio sets in use, 27 million television sets and more than 6 million video-recorders. One of the leading writers on the French press estimates that in the late 1980s around 55 per cent of the population regularly read a daily newspaper, 72 per cent listened to the radio and 70 per cent watched television.¹ Survey evidence suggested that in the same period the average French citizen devoted about 20 minutes per day to reading a newspaper, almost two hours to watching television and between one and two hours to listening to the radio.

Yet while the growing penetration of the media into various aspects of daily existence is one of the most notable phenomena of postwar France, the qualitative impact of this trend is difficult to ascertain with any certainty. Intuitively one suspects that the media must be powerful forces in French politics and society. It seems reasonable to assume that consumption patterns, lifestyle trends and value systems have all been affected by the relentless progress towards media saturation. None the less, the power of the media in producing specific effects is hard to demonstrate unequivocally and almost always impossible to quantify. Academic studies have examined the links between media

exposure and all manner of political and social behaviour, from voting preferences to violent crime. Theories purporting to reveal the omnipotence of the media are challenged by counter-theories claiming to show the very finite limits to their power. In the end, however, the precise contribution of media usage to an explanation of attitudinal or behavioural change in postwar France remains a matter of intensely fascinating, but ultimately inconclusive, speculation. The media may indeed be powerful, but exactly how powerful is a subject of conjecture.²

The functions performed by the media in contemporary France also give rise to different and contradictory interpretations. There is no consensus on this issue, which, like the debate on media effects, is a battleground for the exposition of rival academic and ideological perspectives. For some the media are primarily ideological weapons which are manipulated for the purpose of social control. They are part of a process whereby the contradictions of power relations in society are resolved to the economic and political benefit of a power elite or ruling class. For others the media are primarily independent actors in a political system characterized by electoral competition and the diffusion of power. Press, radio and television act on behalf of the electorate, keeping them informed of elite decisions and acting as a check on the abuse of power. In this debate, any assessment of the effectiveness with which the French media perform certain functions will depend to a large extent on the nature of the observer's own value system. As McQuail argues, there is no agreed version of what functions the media perform since this 'would require an agreed version of society'.³

The complexity of this issue is self-evident. Several of the analytically distinct media functions overlap in practice, while some functions appear to be performed more successfully by some media than by others. Most confusingly, some media functions seem to be in direct contradiction with others, making generalization difficult, if not impossible. What follows, therefore, is not intended to be a comprehensive checklist. Rather it is a brief overview of some of the more important functions which have been, or more accurately may have been, performed by the French media in the postwar period.⁴

First, and perhaps least controversially, the French media perform an important *information function*. They are a primary source of news for the French public, informing them of key local, national and international events. They also provide necessary background material and analysis to help their users understand and interpret the 'reality' presented to them. Press, radio and television are the three most important information sources on events taking place outside the boundaries of the household and its immediate environs. Without them, the information base of French citizens would be overwhelmingly dependent on knowledge gained through interpersonal (as opposed to mass) communication, and knowledge of a world beyond the local commune would be at best fragmentary. This information function is carried out by all the French media to some extent, though clearly it is given greater emphasis and is more successfully performed by some media outlets than by others.

Second, the French media fulfil a vital *communications function* as links for the transmission of all sorts of messages within and between different strata of society: among the social, economic and political elites; between different sections of the public; and, finally, between the elites and the public in both directions. In this last role the media carry messages from opinion formers both to the public as a whole and to specific groups in society. In this top-down communication role, the media are frequently used (or

exploited) by elites for the purpose of public persuasion (or manipulation). The advertising of consumer goods by commercial companies is an example of top-down communication. So too is the increasing use of the media by political elites for the purpose of image projection, most clearly evident during election campaigns. At the same time, the media may also serve as a means for the public to exert influence on elite opinion. Grass roots pressure groups which use the media to seek to influence policy makers would be a good example of such bottom-up communication. Some media messages involve communication in both directions. For instance, the media-friendly activities of a pressure group such as Greenpeace are designed both to influence policy makers and to raise public awareness on environmental issues.

Third, and more debatably, the French media may perform a *watchdog function*, acting on behalf of the public as an independent check on elite behaviour. This may take the form of a newspaper article highlighting bureaucratic inefficiency, a radio phone-in condemning professional impropriety or a television programme exposing political corruption. In carrying out this function, the media can help make power-holders such as politicians, bureaucrats and commercial companies accountable to the public, helping to empower the latter as voters, service-users and consumers. The media's attachment to this watchdog function is not as deeply entrenched in France as in some other liberal democracies, notably the United States, where the practice of investigative journalism is deeply rooted. None the less, some French media outlets see this function as an integral part of their civic responsibilities, even if the adverse coverage given to an issue or personality may at times look like a self-serving exercise in muckraking.⁵

Fourth, the media in France may perform an important *socialization/legitimation function*. In carrying out this role the media are normally assisted by other agencies of socialization/legitimation, including the educational system, the family, peer groups, religious institutions and voluntary associations. With the support of these other agencies, the media help shape popular attitudes, values, norms and beliefs with regard to the functioning of society in general and the operation of the political process in particular. The potential of the media in this respect makes them important political actors. For the holders of economic and political power, control of the press, radio and television may be crucial for the popular mobilization of support for political institutions and for the legitimization of power relations in society. Conversely, the media have the potential to act as a destabilizing force, sapping a regime's legitimacy and even in extreme circumstances contributing to its collapse.

Fifth, the contemporary French media perform an important *entertainment/cultural function*. Some media act as vehicles for the popular dissemination of 'high culture', a means of spreading the French cultural canon throughout society. In so doing, they may succeed in promoting a feeling of pride in the great works of French music, art, literature, theatre and cinema. At the same time, much of the mass media play a key role in reflecting and shaping popular culture. Pop music, romantic fiction and television soap operas and game shows form a large part of the stock in trade of contemporary mass media output. The precise cultural impact of the mass media may be open to debate. Yet irrespective of whether one is talking about the television dramatization of a Zola classic or radio coverage of a pop concert, there can be no doubt that without the mass media the entertainment and cultural intake of the French population would be hugely different from what it currently is.

Finally—and here the problems of generalization become overwhelming—some of the media may perform a *nation-building function*, while others (or the same media at different times) emphasize a feeling of difference and may encourage social and political divisions. Some media outlets (such as national television) and some media content (such as coverage of a presidential address or of a French football victory) tend to unite the nation in a collective ritualistic celebration. While the media's performance of this nation-building function is a frequent feature of developing societies, it can also be found in postwar France. Centralized state control of television by the Gaullists in the 1960s, for instance, was intended to reinforce the legitimacy of the one and indivisible (Fifth) Republic as the embodiment of the national will, just as the prefectural system of 150 years previously had been used to bind the nation under the control of the Napoleonic Empire. Conversely, some media outlets (such as the provincial press) and some media content (such as coverage of regional folk festivals or separatist political movements) may contribute to a feeling of difference within the nation or even, in extreme circumstances, subvert the claims of nationhood altogether.

In any case, whatever functions are attributed to the French media, none of them is performed in a vacuum. Rather, they are carried out within a variety of specific contexts or bounded environments. The particular configuration of the French media system at any point in time is itself a crucial variable in this respect. Important elements of the media system which may influence the capacity of the press, radio and television to carry out their functions (however defined) include, *inter alia*: the level of media penetration and consumption in society; the balance between private and public ownership and control of the media; the sources and levels of media finance; the relative market weighting of local, regional and national media; the supply of and demand for quality and popular media content; the extent to which the media are regulated; public levels of confidence in media practitioners and media content; and the degree of political and commercial independence of the media.

The French media interact in a highly complex, varied and dynamic system. A popular provincial daily, a privately owned pop music radio station and a public service television channel have different resources, gear their product for different audiences, work to different professional norms and operate within different regulatory environments. Consider some of the main elements of contrast within the French media system. Whereas *Le Figaro* can trace its origins back to the mid-nineteenth century, the NRJ radio network came into existence only in the 1980s. Some media, such as the TF1 television channel, serve a nationwide audience; others, such as the many provincial daily newspapers, cater for a local or regional readership. While the France 2 television channel is subject to a host of public service norms, the pay-television channel, Canal Plus, is very lightly regulated. The former state monopoly broadcasting organization, the ORTF, was run by a director general who was appointed by the government, with the result that its news coverage was politically suspect; conversely, the satirical newspaper *Le Canard enchaîné* prides itself on its political independence and publishes scathing critiques of alleged abuses of power by government ministers and other politicians. The weekly news magazine *L'Express* receives over half its income from advertising; in contrast, Radio France is funded principally through licence revenue, while some cable channels are financed mainly from viewer subscription. These and other differences

between the various media players affect not just the content, but also the style, presentation and form of media product—as well as its cost to the consumer.

The structure and operation of the media system in France are themselves influenced directly and indirectly by a whole series of variables. While many of these are interrelated in practice, they can be distinguished for analytic purposes. *Geographical, demographic and linguistic factors* comprise one set of variables. Even though France is by no means self-sufficient in media product, it is still a large enough and sufficiently well populated country with its own national language to support a highly developed indigenous media system. Compare the French situation with that of Canada, which is a huge but thinly populated country whose mainly Anglophone inhabitants live for the most part alongside a common border with the United States. As a result, many Canadians rely heavily on American media product, especially television programming. In Europe, small countries such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Ireland are major users of non-domestic television product both in the form of programme imports on their national stations and direct audience usage of foreign channels via terrestrial transmission, cable and satellite. Even in an era of growing internationalization of media technology, capital and product, France possesses a media system with solid national roots.

Technological factors make up a second set of variables which have influenced the evolution of the French media system. New methods of production and distribution in the late nineteenth century ushered in an era of expansion in the press, while the introduction of new printing technology in the 1970s and 1980s had important consequences for the economics and employment practices of the publishing industry as a whole. More efficient use of the FM waveband facilitated the explosion of private local radio stations in the early 1980s. The huge potential of fibre optic technology and switched star networks for the provision of a wide range of interactive services persuaded the French state to invest in an ambitious national cable project at the beginning of the same decade. Simultaneously, the state also provided public resources for the construction and launch of a direct broadcasting satellite, TDF1, to ensure that France would not be left out of what was hoped would be a lucrative hi-tech market for satellite hardware.

Third, the French media system has been affected by *economic factors*. The economic condition of the media sector is linked to the general performance of the economy as a whole, with the latter having a notable impact on the supply of, and demand for, media services. In a period of economic downturn, for instance, the state and commercial companies are less likely to invest in new media hard- and software, media advertising budgets decline and consumers have less money to spend on media entertainment. For example, the budgetary problems faced by the French government in the mid-1980s led to a cutback in the state-sponsored cable programme announced with such a flourish only a few years earlier.

More particularly, the economic situation of the media sector has obvious implications for the output—and even survival—of different media players. The collapse of the commercial television channel, La 5, in 1992 was the result of the company's inability in a highly competitive audiovisual market to generate an audience of the requisite size or socio-economic composition to attract sufficient advertising and thus make itself financially viable. Various schemes to launch a mass circulation national daily newspaper in France have foundered in the face of negative financial projections. In the 1980s some

private local radio stations went under because of their inability to raise sufficient advertising revenue, while others recognized 'economic reality' and became part of *de facto* nationwide networks. The budgetary constraints within which the public sector television channels Antenne 2 and FR3 had to operate in the late 1980s had deleterious consequences for the companies' programming, audience ratings and staff morale. Indeed, the costs of television production had massive consequences for programme output across the whole of the French broadcasting system as certain programme genres (for example, home-produced fiction and drama) declined, while others (such as variety shows and feature films) increased.

The *changing nature of French society* is a fourth factor which has influenced the configuration of the media system and the output of the various media players. For example, the demand by a new generation of women for equal rights has been sympathetically reflected in the content of many women's magazines. New publications (such as *Cosmopolitan*) aimed at the target group of young, independent women have come on to the market to join well-known titles such as *Marie-Claire*. Other new weeklies and monthlies have been published to cater for contemporary lifestyles: magazines for computer junkies, car buffs and hi-fi freaks now compete with those covering more traditional leisure pursuits, including the venerable *Le chasseur français*, established in 1885.

In a consumer society which places a high premium on leisure activities, a lot of media product is designed for entertainment purposes as consumers seek to distract themselves from the more mundane aspects of their existence. The impact of the entertainment imperative has not just been reflected in the expansion of those media sectors specifically geared for this purpose (such as pay-television and music radio stations). It can also be seen in public service media outlets and in programme genres such as news, where the need to entertain the audience has become an important constraint on the behaviour of media practitioners.

One social group which is now better catered for than ever before by the entertainment-oriented media is French youth, a development which reflects their economic importance as consumers. The expansion in the audiovisual media has allowed radio stations and television channels to target the 15–34 age group. Many local radio networks transmit music designed to appeal predominantly to this section of society, while the short-lived television channel, TV6, successfully attracted young viewers with its output of pop music and video-clips.

Geographical and linguistic factors, technological developments, economic conditions and changing social patterns have all played a part in shaping the structures and operations of the French media. The single most important set of variables, however, is to be found in the realm of French politics. Both the historical evolution and contemporary development of the French media have been indelibly marked by the influence of *political factors*. Four features of French politics are particularly worthy of note in this regard.

The first of these is the chronic regime instability from which France has suffered since the 1789 Revolution.⁶ The constitutional issue has rarely been far off the top of the political agenda in post-revolutionary France. In the absence of agreement among French political elites on the basic groundrules of the constitution, French politics has frequently presented a tragi-comic spectacle of high ideological rhetoric combined with low-level

political accommodation and bargaining, especially in cases of resource allocation by the state.

In such a political environment the media have often been able to act to stimulate popular discontent with the regime on behalf of a disaffected social group or political party and to present politics as an essentially amoral and cynical 'pork barrel' activity. It is highly likely that as well as contributing directly on occasions to regime collapse, the media have often played a part in undermining the legitimacy of the political system through their critical coverage.⁷ After the Fifth Republic was established in 1958, it is understandable that the implantation and consolidation of the regime was a constant source of concern for de Gaulle and his supporters. Not surprisingly they used their control of television to try to mobilize popular support for Gaullist institutions in the face of opposition from the Communists (over the new constitution in 1958), from the extreme Right (over decolonization from Algeria in the early 1960s) and from the post-war political elites (over the 1962 constitutional amendment to elect the President by direct universal suffrage).

Second, the French political landscape has traditionally been scarred by a number of deep and troublesome criss-crossing faultlines. These have both destabilized regimes and exacerbated executive instability by making it difficult for the government to build cohesive, enduring parliamentary coalitions to support executive policy decisions. In addition to disagreement over the constitutional question, these divisions have centred on issues such as the role of the Church in political life and in particular its institutional relationship with the state; the incorporation of working-class representatives from both organized labour and political parties into a decision-making process dominated by an objective alliance of peasant—bourgeois interests; and the thorny and for a long time apparently intractable problem of decolonization, especially from Algeria.⁸ In general the press system has reflected and perhaps even exacerbated the fissures of this divided society, with newspapers taking up the cudgels on behalf of one tendency or another.⁹

Reflecting this societal disunity, the French party system has traditionally covered a wide ideological spectrum of opinion organized in an assortment of clubs, movements and parties, many of which have had only a short and tempestuous lifespan.¹⁰ It is not the existence of a multi-party system in itself which has been crucial in influencing political behaviour, however impressive the sheer number of political parties has frequently been. What has been more significant historically is the large ideological spectrum covered by the different parties. This has resulted in the party system frequently being characterized by a high degree of polarized pluralism, including the presence of anti-system parties.¹¹ Even during the Fifth Republic, which has witnessed a reduction in the degree of ideological polarization in the party system, inter-party rivalries have been intense.¹² Faced with such a complex party system, state broadcasting during the post-war period has tended to articulate the views of the political party or coalition in power, rather than try to present a balanced and impartial account of political debate. Governments feared giving access to their opponents because there was no agreement on the rules of the political game which would set accepted boundaries to party conflict. The postwar British concept of a consensual middle ground cutting across the two-party division and underpinning a public service approach by broadcasters to political coverage has been an alien one in French party politics.

Third, in contrast to this pluralism in the party system, the state has been organized on highly centralized lines. Originating in the pre-revolutionary period of the *ancien régime* and reinforced during the Napoleonic empire, the centralized Jacobin state largely confined itself to the minimalist functions of territorial defence and economic protectionism until the collapse of the Third Republic. The Second World War changed this, producing a postwar state which, whatever the political complexion of its governing parties, intervened massively in the management of the economy, the provision of welfare and the dissemination of culture. Even the liberalization and privatization programmes of the conservative and Socialist governments in the second half of the 1980s failed to undermine the primary role of the state in many facets of French economic, social and cultural life. State subsidies to the press and centralized state monopoly control of broadcasting were only two aspects of the wide-ranging role of the French state in the postwar media.

Finally, during the Fifth Republic a powerful presidency, usually supported by a stable and durable majority in Parliament, has been established at the apex of the policy-making process. While de Gaulle concentrated mainly on foreign and defence matters, his successors at the Elysée have extended the presidential domain to include domestic policy. The President of the Fifth Republic has generally been able to impose his will on the various legislative initiatives in the media field. For example, the decision in 1974 to abolish the ORTF was made by President Giscard d'Estaing, while the initiative to set up two commercial television channels in the mid-1980s came from President Mitterrand. Sometimes the President has been willing to delegate power to one of his ministers. During de Gaulle's presidency, for instance, the Minister of Information drafted the 1964 broadcasting statute. He also ensured that television news was pro-Gaullist in content and tone through a combination of partisan political appointments and close supervision of editorial decisions. However, since the early 1970s the guiding hand has generally emanated from the Elysée.¹³

The point to stress here is not just that the French media have evolved against the backdrop of these political factors. It is rather that the development of the press, radio and television has been strongly conditioned by them. The key political actor in this context, and one whose role must be central to any analysis of the media in France, is the state. The multiple linkages between the state and the media since the Liberation include the following:¹⁴

- 1 **The ownership of radio stations and television channels.** Up until 1982 the state had a monopoly in the ownership of the broadcasting media. This state monopoly was entrusted to a single broadcasting corporation until 1974 and then to separate radio and television companies. In addition, through its participation in the holding company Sofirad, the state indirectly owned a share in several peripheral radio stations such as Europe 1, while through its stake in Havas it had a controlling interest in Radiodiffusion-Télévision Luxembourg. Private ownership of the broadcasting media was introduced only during the 1980s.
- 2 **The formulation of media policy.** Through its policy-making role and specifically by means of legislation the state determines the rules by which the media operate. Since the Liberation there have been several major statutes on broadcasting (1964, 1972, 1974, 1982, 1986 and 1989) and three important pieces of legislation on the press (1944, 1984 and 1986), plus a plethora of supplementary decrees, ordinances and

policy documents. During the postwar period these state-sponsored measures have ranged from macro-initiatives which have radically altered the configuration of the media system (such as the establishment of commercial television channels) to micro-measures targeted at specific aspects of media performance (such as programming obligations for television, the allocation of political broadcasts during election campaigns and rules covering the provision of a minimum broadcast service during industrial action by broadcasting personnel). The state has also introduced measures designed to prevent concentration of ownership in the media, has passed a privacy law covering press activities and in the 1980s established three consecutive regulatory authorities to supervise the functioning of the broadcasting system.

- 3 **Control of media finance.** The state gives financial subsidies to the press. Through its control of the banking sector it has also been able to play an influential role in the reorganization of press groups and the restructuring of the newspaper industry.¹⁵ Up until recently the state held a controlling interest in France's largest advertising agency, Havas, and was a major purchaser of advertising in the media. The state sets the level of the licence fee for public sector radio and television. It was the state which allowed the introduction of advertising on television in 1968 and set statutory limits on its contribution to broadcasting turnover. Finally, in the 1950s and 1960s the state played a highly interventionist role in the spending decisions of the state broadcasting organization.
- 4 **The power of appointment to key decision-making posts.** For most of the postwar period the state appointed the director general of the state broadcasting corporation and controlled (or at least influenced) other key managerial and editorial appointments. During the 1980s and early 1990s the state controlled the majority of appointments to the broadcasting regulatory authorities. In addition, the state has consistently enjoyed close links with the media through a system of interlocking personnel.¹⁶
- 5 **The capacity to influence the news agenda through the primary definition of issues, media manipulation and censorship.** The French state has sought to define the media agenda and influence the content of political information in the press, on radio and on television. For a time it controlled the principal news agency in France, Agence France-Presse. It has utilized an impressive array of weapons to try to ensure that media coverage of its activities is favourable and supportive. These have ranged from the primary definition of issues by means of press releases and ministerial statements to outright censorship and seizure of publications. Such intervention has been particularly crucial (though not always successful) at politically sensitive periods such as the 1968 'events', the Rainbow Warrior scandal and the French military involvement in the Gulf War.
- 6 **The use of the media to further other state policy goals.** The state has used its powerful position in the media sector to assist the implementation of its objectives in other policy fields. For instance, in the 1980s the state made decisions about investment in the new media of cable and satellite to ensure that their technological development would be in accord with the goals of French industrial policy. In the 1960s the state used its monopoly control of broadcasting to influence television programme output so that it conformed with the general thrust of state cultural policy.

In the light of the key role played by the postwar state in the French media, it is tempting to paint a picture of state omnicompetence and even omnipotence in this area. However, an account of the French media system in terms of state domination of the press, radio and television, exercised through a combination of direct and indirect, overt and covert controls, needs to be severely qualified. A simple state power thesis is too static and monolithic, failing to account both for change in the relationship between the state and the media over time and for conflict within the state apparatus.

Far from being static, the links between the state and the media are dynamic and subject to constant change. For example, the links between the state and television are very different in the 1990s from what they were in the 1960s. Though still a key player in the media system, the state does not have the field to itself. Non-state actors are now active on the media scene, constraining the exercise of state power. The ownership of newspapers, much of local radio and a large share of the television market is in private hands. In terms of ownership the past decade has witnessed a marked decrease in the role of the state, following the abandonment of the broadcasting monopoly in 1982. Not only has private local radio been legalized and commercial television channels established, but a major television channel (TF1) was removed from the public sector and privatized in 1987. Commercial companies have also taken a major stake in the cable industry as network operators. Under the original 1982 cable plan the state also devolved some powers of control to local authorities. This was a decentralizing initiative without precedent in the audiovisual field, which for so long had been marked by a strong attachment to the centralist Jacobin tradition.

Advertising as a source of revenue has also increased in importance with the commercialization and privatization of radio and television. Control of the licence fee remains a powerful tool for the state *vis-à-vis* public sector radio and television, but it is no longer a weapon which can be brandished over the whole of the broadcasting media. The state's power of appointment has also been eclipsed both by the growth of private sector media and the establishment of regulatory authorities in the audiovisual field. While sometimes the regulatory authorities have acted as transmission belts for decisions taken by the state authorities and at other times have been simply ignored, they have still to some extent curtailed the power of the state to appoint political sympathizers to key decision-making posts in public sector broadcasting. Finally, the growth in the media in the 1980s, especially in radio and television, has of itself weakened the capacity of the state to exert control over content. As the number of information sources has expanded, it has become both more difficult and less rewarding for the authorities to control the output of any single source.

As for the coherence of the state apparatus, the French state is internally divided and riddled with conflict. Sometimes this assumes a party political form, as in the period of Right-Left *cohabitation* between 1986 and 1988 or the Giscardian-Gaullist conflict of the late 1970s. More frequently, conflict manifests itself as a struggle between ministries or administrative agencies, as in the internecine strife over new media policy in the 1980s between the state transmission company, TDF, and the telecommunications wing of the PTT ministry, the DGT.

As an alternative to the state power thesis, it might be argued that the defining characteristic of the relationship between the state and the French media has not been unwavering state dominance, but rather the withdrawal of the state from an initial

monopoly position, followed by economic and political liberalization of the media as ownership and control are taken over by private interests. From this perspective the history of the French press and broadcasting reveals an early period of state domination, followed by a marked relaxation of state intervention and control once the medium has reached maturity, as happened with the press in the late nineteenth century and broadcasting in the 1980s.¹⁷ However, the argument that the history of the French media is one of inexorable liberalization from state control is not wholly persuasive either. For example, this model is particularly inapplicable to the case of radio. Though radio was officially a state monopoly during the inter-war years, in practice the existence of several private stations was tolerated. State control of radio was not effectively established until the advent of the collaborationist Vichy regime. Moreover, with regard to the press, state intervention in the immediate postwar period brought an end to an era in which newspapers had been remarkably free from government controls.

The liberalization thesis appears to be more relevant if the analysis is confined to the period since 1945. In the immediate postwar years the state became heavily involved in the media, as owner, regulator, financial controller, source of patronage, primary definer of issues and censor. In contrast, during the 1980s the state transferred its ownership of much of the audiovisual media into the private sector, while its role as censor had also declined in significance. However, two caveats are important in this context. First, even when applied only to the period since 1945, the liberalization thesis needs to be qualified. While the role of the state may have lessened on some dimensions, it clearly has not on others. The state may have less of an ownership stake in the media, but it remains a powerful regulator and primary definer. It is important, therefore, to distinguish between different forms and degrees of state intervention and control. Second, inasmuch as economic and political liberalization have taken place, it cannot be taken for granted that this process will continue or that it is irreversible. Different political circumstances, such as a regime crisis, could well result in a return to a more interventionist role for the state.

The book aims to provide the reader with an overview of the structures and functioning of the French media system, particularly emphasizing key aspects of the complex interrelationship between the media and the state. Its central focus is on the period since the Liberation, though in the chapters on the press and radio historical material from the period before 1944 is also included. The book is principally organized by media sector (press, radio, television and the new media), with the four chapters on television being divided chronologically. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the press, highlighting the history and economics of the daily newspaper sector. Chapter 2 examines two key features of the politics of the press: its linkages with the state and with political parties. Chapter 3 looks at the development of radio from its origins at the end of the First World War to the emergence of private local radio networks in the late 1980s. The next four chapters focus on television, tracing its evolution from the end of the Second World War up to the early 1990s. Chapter 4 examines television during the de Gaulle presidency; chapter 5 covers the Pompidou and Giscard d'Estaing presidencies; chapter 6 concentrates on the period of the first Socialist government (1981–86); and chapter 7 deals with the period since 1986. Chapter 8 looks at the new media of cable and satellite. In the Conclusion some common threads of the analysis are drawn together and key issues on the media policy agenda in the 1990s are examined.