



THE POLITICAL INDEPENDENCE OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTERS

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Abstract

In this thesis, I demonstrate that the degree of political independence that a public service broadcaster has depends on the degree of legal protection given to it, and on the size of the market for news in that country. The latter affects broadcaster independence by creating more standardized and professionalized news, which in turn reduces politicians' incentives to intervene in the broadcaster. The former affects broadcaster independence by making it less likely that such intervention will be effective.

I demonstrate these claims in two ways. First, I conduct a large-N statistical analysis of 36 public service broadcasters (PSBs), in which I demonstrate that legal protection news market size are statistically significant predictors of PSB independence (as I operationalize it), and that other suggested explanatory factors — party system polarization and bureaucratic partisanship — have no effect.

Second, I carry out a comparative historical analysis of six European PSBs — Radiotelevisione Italiana, Radiotelevisión Española, Radio Telefís Éireann (Ireland), the British Broadcasting Corporation, Danmarks Radio, and Sveriges Radio and its associated companies (Sweden) — and substantiate the claims made in my statistical analysis. In particular, I demonstrate that where the market for news was bigger, broadcasters capitalised on pre-existing journalistic experience, adopting the house-styles of press agencies and learning from journalists' associations. Conversely, where the market was small, that experience could not be drawn on, and broadcast journalism attracted political intervention.



Jury: Gianpietro Mazzoleni (University of Milan, External Supervisor), Anker Brink Lund (Copenhagen Business School), Chris Hanretty, Alexander Trechsel (EUI, Supervisor), Adrienne Héritier (EUI).

Bio: Chris Hanretty is a doctoral student at the European University Institute and adjunct Professor at New York University's Florence campus. His doctoral research deals with the political independence of public broadcasters; his ongoing research looks at the independence of other "arms' length" institutions such as regulatory agencies, central banks, and supreme courts. His work has been published in the *British Journal of Political Science*, *Electoral Studies*, and *Comunicazione Politica*. Prior to coming to the European University Institute, he graduated from Oxford with a First-class degree in Politics, Philosophy & Economics, and worked for a year for the United Nations Human Settlement Programme.