This volume provides a comparative analysis of media systems in the Arab world, based on criteria informed by the historical, political, social, and economic factors influencing a country's media. Reaching beyond classical western media system typologies, *Arab Media Systems* brings together contributions from experts in the field of media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to provide valuable insights into the heterogeneity of this region's media systems. It focuses on trends in government stances towards media, media ownership models, technological innovation, and the role of transnational mobility in shaping media structure and practices.

Each chapter in the volume traces a specific country's media—from Lebanon to Morocco—and assesses its media system in terms of historical roots, political and legal frameworks, media economy and ownership patterns, technology and infrastructure, and social factors (including diversity and equality in gender, age, ethnicities, religions, and languages).

This book is a welcome contribution to the field of media studies, constituting the only edited collection in recent years to provide a comprehensive and systematic overview of Arab media systems. As such, it will be of great use to students and scholars in media, journalism and communication studies, as well as political scientists, sociologists, and anthropologists with an interest in the MENA region.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher's website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com.
Introduction

Carola Richter and Claudia Kozman

Building on extant scholarship about media systems, this chapter provides a set of criteria to examine the Arab countries, and by doing so, to allow a comparative analysis. Taking into account the various issues previous studies have had with such classifications, we designed the benchmarks of our analysis to reflect the various factors that intertwine to both draw similarities and highlight differences in the media among the Arab countries. As such, the aim of this chapter is to classify Arab media along a set of dimensions in order to better understand the overall systems that characterize media in the Arab region.

The Arab world has existed for thousands of years, but it has never received as much attention from the international community as it has during the last decade, where political unrest has resulted in changes to long-standing governing styles. At the heart of such changes were the media that played a significant role in supporting or resisting these transformations. To better understand how Arab media are situated at the intersection of politics, culture, and technology, we turn to media systems. Notwithstanding the similarities they share with one another, Arab media are not homogeneous. Therefore, to comprehend their collective power, we need first to understand their individual potential before we grasp their regional breadth.

Arab media matter globally. They matter because they reflect a range of often distinct but specific political approaches and understandings of publics and the public sphere. These approaches are potentially shaping media practices beyond the Arab world, incorporated by migrant
audiences, transnational journalists or globally investing companies. They matter because they point us to economic media models that go beyond the Western notions of “public” and “private” with strong implications for the role media can play in societies. They matter because of the ways in which digital and, in particular, social media are incorporated in both regimes’ and users’ practices, providing us with an insight into the possible effects of digital media technologies on society, economy and politics globally.

With the term “Arab media,” we refer to mass media in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region—a region that comprises more than 300 million people in over 20 states stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the borders of Iran. People living in these states are of different ethnic origins and adhere to different religions. These states are shaped by different forms of governance, ranging from hereditary monarchies to federal republics. Some are considered the richest countries in the world, whereas others are the poorest. This vast region, which was once considered the cradle of humankind, boasting some of the oldest reminders of early civilization, has witnessed various historical forces that have rendered its current political structure a product of colonial dependencies, with some states being on the brink of collapse or disintegration. Thus, the “Arab world” is by no means a homogenous entity, nor are its media. As such, any attempts at examining it require a careful analysis that centers on the historical, political, social, and economic peculiarities of the different countries making up the region. Given this need to treat the Arab world as an area of varying political and cultural structures, the primary unit of our analysis will be the nation-state. Indeed, there is a common bond of history among the countries under investigation in this book, which started with the spread of Islam in the 600s, and was amplified by a century-long incorporation of most of what is today considered the MENA region into the Ottoman Empire. There are also shared experiences of colonialism, subsequent struggles for independence and the oftentimes ongoing search for a national identity. And, separating it from all other important world regions, such as Europe, sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, or even Latin America, is a unifying language, Arabic, which creates a sense of belonging and togetherness—despite the different local dialects, the influence of
colonial languages, and the multiplicity of indigenous languages such as Kurdish or Tamazight.

A common language, a shared history, and, often, mutual political interests led to the foundation of the Arab League, comprising 22 countries, in 1945. In the following chapters, we examine 18 of them, excluding only Somalia, Mauritania, and the microstates of Djibouti and the Comoros, as they belong geographically and culturally to sub-Saharan Africa.

One major argument for specifically considering the nation-state as our unit of analysis is the historically proven pattern of the non-simultaneity of the development of Arab media, which continues even today. While as early as the nineteenth century, Cairo, Beirut, and Baghdad had already established themselves as centers of intellectual media production with a lively press landscape, today’s technologically-advanced Gulf states had no mass media at that time. Structural, economic, and political differences are also constitutive today, as can be observed, for example, in Internet connectivity, which ranges from almost 100% of the population in Kuwait to 22% in Libya (International Telecommunication Union, 2018). However, repeating the pattern from a century ago, highly mobile Arab journalists and media producers are once again driving forward intra-Arab and international exchange and media development. Whether the object of discussion is newspapers founded in Cairo in the 1800s by Syrian intellectuals from Beirut, a Tunisian-moderated talk show at the Al-Arabiya television station in the Emirates today, or a Palestinian newspaper in London financed by Qatari investors, Arab media must be understood in both their national and transnational contexts. This book aims to provide a picture of current Arab media systems, building on their past and predicting their future. To do so, it relies on new dimensions that create a framework for evaluating the media in each of the Arab countries, as they highlight the characteristics that render these media systems unique, while placing them within the larger Arab systems.

This introduction provides an overview of Arab media systems, putting forward a set of new criteria to examine media in the Arab countries and, in doing so, allowing a comparative analysis. The development of these criteria is guided by a de-westernizing approach that builds on a critical review of extant scholarship about media
systems. It thus speaks to an audience of media and communication scholars, or students who are interested in expanding their knowledge in international and comparative political communication. In addition, the emphasis the book puts on the historical and current complexities of the Arab region allows for a deeper understanding of the shared yet distinct characteristics of Arab media in their political, economic and societal contexts. As such, the book is potentially interesting to a broader audience of political scientists, media workers, and even politicians or NGOs.

Following the introduction, the subsequent country chapters offer a more nuanced understanding of Arab media through the insights of authors who are mostly, with the exception of a few experts, natives of the countries about which they are writing. It is worth mentioning that the task of providing a comprehensive overview of the historical formation, current status quo, and future challenges faced by the media systems in a short chapter is impossible. We therefore aimed to focus on the broader picture, opting to refrain from presenting a plethora of facts and figures.

To sum up the information on individual countries, the conclusion identifies common themes gleaned from individual chapters, classifying Arab media according to a spectrum that features the specific characteristics of media in the Arab region.

Comparison of Media Systems as an Analytical Perspective

We use the term “media system”, although not everyone is content with this term (see Jakubowicz, 2010, p. 9). Dennis McQuail (2010) has defined media systems as “the actual set of mass media in a given national society” (p. 220), which points out the problem of thinking of media systems as hermetic, national “containers.” We instead follow the notion of systems advanced by Andrew Chadwick (2013), who contends that systems should be seen as being constitutive of structure-actor relationships; thus the term “system may often connote flexibility, adaptability, and evolutionary change emerging from the sum of social interaction” (p. 16). Building on these concepts and applying such a perspective, we will take a closer look at structures that shape practices
that, in turn, shape structures in both national and transnational contexts.

Scholars have contended that media systems reflect the historical trajectories of a society and the political and legal systems, economic system, and social composition of the country in which they are located. In this realm, a comparative approach to media systems appears to be a useful way to explain different patterns of media governance and performance. The past decades of comparative research have revealed that this approach has not been driven purely by scholarly motivation but has been used as a means to normatively evaluate media systems as free/unfree or developed/underdeveloped and to draw political conclusions from this typology. Beyond their political instrumentalization, these typologies can also help researchers to grasp major differences and similarities in media organization and performance quickly—but they must be established with care.

However, comparative media system analysis has predominantly focused on criteria related to the historical, political, and economic aspects, often neglecting the social aspect. One of the few authors to consider this latter aspect is John Downing (1996), who proposed analyzing media systems according to factors such as political power, economic crisis, dramatic social transitions, and small-scale media. The field of comparing media systems was first conceptualized via the publication of the *Four Theories of the Press* by Fred Siebert, Theodore Peterson, and Wilbur Schramm (1963). In this book, the authors identified four types of media system logics according to the media’s “chief purpose” (Siebert et al., 1963, p. 7): 1) an authoritarian model in which media advance and support the policies of the government and are thus strongly controlled by it; 2) a libertarian model in which media are meant to inform and entertain and can be owned by whoever has the economic means to do so; 3) a social responsibility model in which media are also meant to inform and entertain but with the purpose of discussing and solving societal conflicts; 4) a Soviet totalitarian model in which the chief purpose of the media is to propagate the ideas of the ruling party, and the media is therefore almost exclusively state-owned.

The book, which arose from the investigation Siebert and his colleagues conducted at the request of the Hutchins Commission on Freedom of the Press, was strongly driven by a Cold War impulse to
highlight Western media systems as superior to those influenced by the Soviet Union. For instance, while model 1 seems to mark the early state of a society, which can be overcome by democratic developments and eventually leads to the models 2 or 3, model 4 is seen as deviant and undesirable. Perhaps, the most potent criticism of the four theories came from media historian John Nerone (1995), who contended that the book is essentially one theory with four examples.

Regardless, this typology of what role the media ought to play in society and how they are therefore organized has shaped generations of scholars. Some have tried to add models (or theories), such as James Carey’s (1992) “ritual model”, which depends on shared understandings between sender and receiver that help to maintain society; William Hachten’s (1981) “revolutionary model”, which emphasizes the mobilizing and propaganda role of media; Dennis McQuail’s (1994) “developmental model”, in which he referred to media as a contributor to positive national development; or James Curran’s (1991) “radical democratic model”, in which he proposed that media should be free of commercial interests and belong to the people. All of these models were clearly based on contemporary perspectives, reflecting the political and economic contexts in the particular world regions with which they engaged during a particular time.

Only in 2004 did a book of a truly comparative nature, Comparing Media Systems by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini, set a new benchmark. Limiting their investigation to the 18 media systems of North America and Europe, and excluding Eastern Europe, the authors devised three types of media-politics relationships:

1) the liberal model, which is characterized by a market-driven understanding of the media, a low structural political parallelism, and little external regulation of the media, as is found in the US;

2) a democratic corporatist model, in which media are considered a public good and moderately regulated, as in Sweden;

3) a polarized pluralist model, in which political parallelism is strong and media are often seen as instruments used by either the state, political parties, or business tycoons, as we see in Greece.

This seemingly ready-to-use typology of media systems has drawn much attention and been heavily quoted in subsequent studies, but it has also been strongly criticized. One of the major criticisms against it is that
the ideal types outlined above are too general and not applicable beyond the Western hemisphere (Hallin & Mancini, 2012). Both criticisms indicate a misunderstanding of Hallin and Mancini’s intentions. The authors made it clear from the very beginning that their typology should be understood as a possible range of ideal types with many overlaps and grey zones in between, implying that none of the countries analyzed in their study fitted exactly into any single one of the types. Furthermore, the authors never intended to apply these models or types to examples outside the Western world. Thus, the polarized pluralist, which has often been labeled as some kind of “catchall category” (Voltmer, 2012, p. 225) for media systems of the Global South, would have to be reshaped or reconceptualised for use as a starting point to look beyond the Western world.

Taking into consideration the above thoughts on Hallin and Mancini’s work, and in line with demands raised in the context of the debate on de-westernizing communication studies (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014), we find it necessary to reflect on the criteria Hallin and Mancini devised to form the conceptual base of their three types and their applicability to non-Western media systems. These criteria are related to both the political and media systems and are integral to each model. With regard to the political system, Hallin and Mancini emphasized the importance of the political history of a country, i.e. whether it is a consensus or majoritarian government, and whether it operates within the context of political pluralism.

With regard to the media system, they emphasized the significance of factors such as the development of the newspaper industry, the presence of political parallelism in media organizations, and the level of professionalization among journalists, as well as the role of the state in regulating the media. Thus, their models focussed strongly on history, media-politics relationships, legal aspects, and journalistic role perception, but ignored many other elements, such as technological and social aspects. Perhaps even more importantly, a rather static application of the derived criteria to the analysis of a media system misses out less explicit and non-codified practices in the realm of media policies. Waisbord and Mellado highlight that “de-westernization demands a shift in the analytical mindset” (2014, p. 364), in particular with regard to the “body of evidence” (p. 364). Still, many scholars have continued
to rely on the same limited focus on politics-media relations, such as Roger Blum (2014) who built on Hallin and Mancini’s criteria to develop a typology for the entire world. He proposed 11 dimensions that mirror these very same foci (p. 295). According to Blum, each of the dimensions, for example, media freedom or political parallelism, can unfold in three ways—liberal, middle, or regulated. As a result, six models are possible: the liberal model (represented by the US) at one end of the spectrum and the command model (represented by North Korea) at the other, with mixed models in between these two poles, such as the public service model (represented by Germany), the clientelist model (represented by Italy), the shock model (represented by Russia), and lastly, the patriot model (represented by Iran). Yet again, the applicability and adequacy of these labels—in particular in relation to non-Western countries—need to be reviewed. Examining the ubiquitous and uncritical use of the media system models brought forth by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, as well as by Hallin and Mancini, we conclude that such limiting labeling should be avoided in order to give credit to the various features of media systems beyond a static analysis of media-politics relations. In the following section, we focus on the kinds of dimensions and criteria that are particularly helpful in thoroughly analyzing Arab media systems.

Comparative Media Systems in the Arab World: The Status Quo

Until recently, there have been only a few attempts to classify Arab media systems. What exist are a number of case studies of a single Arab country, or comparisons of two states (e.g. El-Richani, 2016; Webb, 2015; Kraidy, 2012; Khamis, 2009). Often, these studies refer to one of the abovementioned classification systems and speak about the “authoritarian” or—to a lesser degree—the “polarized pluralist” character of the respective media system. Blum, for instance, analyzed three Arab states—Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon—and categorized them unsurprisingly in the command model, the patriot model, and the clientelist model, respectively. By taking into consideration the typical dimensions outlined earlier (history, media-politics relationships, and
journalistic performance), only rather general conceptualizations seem to be possible.

For a long time, the only, and probably most widely read, attempt to classify Arab media systems has been the work of William Rugh, *The Arab Press*, published as early as 1979, and updated in 2004 under the new title of *The Arab Mass Media*. According to this latest version, there are four main models by which Arab media systems may be classified. The first is the mobilization press, which represents a model stemming from the era of modernization, when republican regimes had the vision of awakening and educating their people through strongly controlled media. While in 1979 most republics were classified by Rugh as corresponding to this model, by 2004, only Syria, pre-2003 Iraq, Libya, and Sudan remained in this category. His second model is the loyalist press, whose main characteristic is its loyalty to and general support of the ruling elites, despite the fact that it consists of private media conglomerates. Rugh placed Palestine and all the countries surrounding the Persian or Arabian Gulf, with the exception of Kuwait, in this category. A third model is the diverse (print) media where media—or at least the print media sector—are characterized by a plurality of political opinions, most often indicating a strong political parallelism in the countries that are loosely (or not at all) controlled by a central government. Among the countries that Rugh believes to belong to this model are Lebanon, Kuwait, Morocco, and Yemen. The fourth model, which Rugh offered in order to reflect changes in many countries at the beginning of the 2000s, is the transitional system of (print) media. In 2004, Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia were featured as examples of this model because they had introduced privatization measures in the media sector that had started to unfold with different yet “unsettled” effects (Rugh, 2004, p. 121). Since his book was published, major political developments (e.g. the uprisings well known as the “Arab Spring”, and their aftermaths), as well as intra-regional and international military interventions (e.g. the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the NATO mission in Libya in 2011, or the war in Yemen since 2015) over the past two decades have shaken up the classifications of certain countries in terms of Rugh’s models. The mobilization press model, for instance, is slowly vanishing. On the other hand, the loyalist media model persists and needs further elaboration. With this model of the media,
Rugh has significantly contributed to Arab media system comparisons by taking into account the important category of ownership. In most previous typologies, from Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1963) to Blum (2014), only a simple distinction had been made between state-owned, public-owned, and privately-owned media. This distinction is predicated on an unspoken assessment of state-owned media as “bad” (because of government control) and privately-owned media as being “good” (because they guarantee pluralism and watchdog attitudes). While Rugh did not dig too deeply into the role of ownership, he did show, with regard to the loyalist press, that privately-owned media do not necessarily equate to independent or free media. Instead, private ownership can be used as a means to control media output even more effectively. Thus, a critical review of the specific features of the political economy of media governance and ownership in the MENA region will be very important in our analysis.

Certain other authors have made insightful contributions to further differentiate the types of media systems and the dimensions of analysis. Examining the early era of satellite television proliferation in the Arab world, Mohammad Ayish (2002) put forward a new type of classification system, distinguishing three types of patterns of government control and media purpose: 1) traditional government-controlled television; 2) reformist government-controlled television; and 3) liberal commercial television. He took a closer look at which kind of content was being processed in the media and asked whether typical “red lines” of reporting, such as political, security, and moral concerns, were being pushed by journalists in their reporting (Ayish, 2002, p. 141). Similarly, and by analyzing news content in 16 Arab countries, Noha Mellor (2005) developed her own classification criteria, mainly with regard to the content of the news and considering “the commercial purposes that these media serve, whether it is to generate as large a profit as possible or to contribute to building a new image and hence goodwill for a particular country or media outlet” (p. 73). While the purpose or philosophy of media and their functions had previously been established as categories by Siebert et al. (1963), Mellor’s introduction of content classification indeed represented a new and empirical category for analysis.

Another, still preliminary, attempt to classify Arab media systems has come from Mahmoud Galander (2016) in a working paper. He
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distinguished between four types: 1) the socially focused media system, 2) the modernist monarchies media system, 3) the modernist republics media system, and 4) the socially liberal media system. Using a distinction based on the form of governance (in particular monarchies vs. republics)—similar to other typologies—he introduced additional dimensions in order to avoid “the inaccurate and—sometimes faulty—interpretation of politics as the key constituent of media-government relationship in the region” (Galander, 2016, p. 3). Galander argued that the sociopolitical aspects of public decision-making and organization, such as the degree of tribalism or collectivism, along with religious fragmentation, need to be considered in the analysis of Arab media. According to him, the Gulf states, excluding Kuwait, feature in the first type—the socially focused—while modernist monarchies such as Kuwait, Morocco, and Jordan have more in common with one another and make up the second type. Sudan, Syria, and Algeria belong to the modernist republics, while Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Libya, Iraq, and Lebanon belong to the socially liberal category. While, again, the allocation of countries to a certain type can only provide a snapshot, due to ever-changing dynamics in the MENA region, Galander has made us aware of the importance of taking into consideration aspects of a country’s social composition—a factor that has been inexcusably neglected by many comparative approaches.

Others analyzing Arab media have not used typologies, but have instead either described the different developments of media systems by providing contemporary snapshots of country cases (Guaaybess, 2013), discussed a certain media genre such as television or film in a comparative perspective (Sakr, 2007; Mellor, Ayish, Dajani, & Rinnawi, 2011), or considered specific dimensions of media systems, such as the economy or audiences (Hafez, 2008; Della Ratta, Sakr, & Skovgaard-Petersen, 2015). Reasons for this hesitation to classify Arab media systems include the above described heterogeneity in so many of the key categories of comparison, the highly dynamic developments in the region, which create major ruptures and changes in opposition to the persistence of European countries, and the lack of available empirical data to permit a solid comparison of multiple categories.
Towards a Conceptual Approach to Arab Media Systems Comparison

Building on this review of extant scholarship about media systems, this section attempts to provide a set of criteria to examine media systems of Arab countries, and by doing so, to allow a comparative analysis. To achieve our goal, we carefully weighed the different approaches outlined above to ensure that the respective dimensions would help us grasp both the heterogeneity and commonalities of the media in the MENA region. This also led us to consider characteristics that might distinguish some or all countries in the region from those specified in the typologies in the West. Our investigation led us to analyze the media in each country according to the following dimensions:

1. Historical Developments

All media system classifications consider historical developments, because they have strongly shaped the patterns of current media structures, production, and consumption. However, different scholars have defined “history” differently: Siebert et al. (1963), for example, tended to relate history to a specific cultural influence that they tried to grasp by looking at certain philosophical writings of the time as reflective of a specific mentality, such as “Russian thinking” (p. 7). Blum (2014), on the other hand, considered whether the historical development of a country had been somewhat linear, or shaped strongly by ruptures. Hallin and Mancini (2004) viewed history mainly in relation to the introduction of newspapers and the size of their reception by a national readership. All Arab countries, however, have experienced strong ruptures in their historic development. Therefore, it is not the question of whether that needs to be answered here, but rather the question of how these countries have dealt with these changes. Arab countries have depended on and been strongly influenced by foreign powers; thus a closer look at the ways in which their historical development has been shaped by transnational influences will emphasize the effect of such political trajectories on these media systems. Taking these trajectories into consideration may also help to explain political decision-making
or societal conceptions of media far more thoroughly than a simple reflection on cultural mentalities, as found in Siebert et al. (1963).

Let us take, for instance, the geographical history of the region. At the beginning of the twentieth century, hardly any of the Arab countries existed in their current forms. Colonial powers (in particular France and Great Britain, but also Spain and Italy) strongly determined the MENA region’s fate up until the 1960s. Some countries, such as Algeria, only gained independence after bloody wars. In the Mashriq—that is, the eastern part of the MENA region—and also in Libya, numerous ethnically or religiously disparate populations were “thrown” into state structures, leading to political and social tensions that remain to this day. Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon are prime examples of colonial restructuring. On the positive side, the encounters and confrontations with European colonizers and the subsequent end of the centuries of Ottoman domination in the region triggered many developments in the media sector, including the importation of new technologies and formats (Skovgaard-Petersen, Harbsmeier, & Simonsen, 1997).

After World War II, the Arab region served as a playing field for the new superpowers, the Soviet Union and the US. The contest to determine their respective spheres of influence resulted in numerous conflicts and proxy wars that repeatedly set back the region’s development. Examples of this may be observed in the Arab-Israeli conflict with major wars in 1948, 1967, and 1973, and many other conflicts, including the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and the Iraq wars of 1990 and 2003. During these times, the superpowers also supported authoritarian rulers who guaranteed internal stability and showed loyalty to them, with the aim of maintaining a balance of political power during the Cold War (Turner, 2012). The main beneficiaries of such political arrangements were hereditary royal houses, as seen in Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Morocco, as well as nationalist republican regimes, which often developed a strong cult of leadership, as seen in Egypt, Libya, Syria, Algeria, Tunisia, Sudan, and Iraq.

Such historic dependence on Western actors is not the only transnational development to consider. Marwan Kraidy (2012) has also reminded us of the strong pan-Arab connections. Due to a common language, the MENA region has been, and continues to be, a hub of mobility for media producers and journalists. Media has been an
instrument of both rivalries and coalitions between Arab countries. For instance, Egypt’s Nasser targeted Saudi Arabia with his pan-Arab ideology in the 1960s via transnational radio production, which was in turn a major motivator for the Saudi regime in fostering their own infrastructure (Boyd, 1975).

A major, more recent rupture has been the Arab uprisings—often labeled as the “Arab Spring”—which started in 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain, with another wave taking place in Algeria, Sudan, Lebanon, and Iraq in 2019. In particular, young and educated people have taken to the streets and the Internet to revolt against authoritarian structures, economic hardships, and social exclusion, and to advocate for respecting the dignity of citizens and their rights in political decision-making (Howard & Hussain, 2013). While in some countries, such as Egypt and Bahrain, authoritarian rule has been restored, other countries, such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, witnessed a major disaggregation of state structures. And others still, such as Tunisia, Lebanon, Iraq, and Sudan, seem to have succeeded, at least partly, in forcing a change of their structures of government.

As a result, anyone looking into historical developments must also consider changing transnational influences and their effects on the media market and production in a given country.

2. Background: Social Composition, Languages and Geography

Contextual information on the social composition of a country, with regard to gender and age equality and ethnic, religious, and linguistic diversity, is often neglected in comparative media system analyses. This oversight downplays the importance of such information for our understanding of media and culture’s role in their production and usage. These social factors raise questions about appropriate representation in the public sphere, or question of how, through the media, they shape struggles for hegemony over discourse, and thus provide fertile ground for social conflicts. Sarah El-Richani (2016), in her analysis of the Lebanese media system, introduced “crisis” as a salient factor that has been neglected by Hallin and Mancini, and most other authors (p. 181). In the case of Lebanon, the crisis stems from a
decades-long confessional conflict that influences the media market, media governance, and media content. Hallin and Mancini (2004) indicated there might be some value to analyzing this aspect more closely when they referred to “patterns of conflict and consensus”, and discussed whether a polarized or a moderate pluralism shapes party politics (pp. 59–61). Blum (2014) similarly referred to a dimension that he called “political culture” (p. 295) and considered whether there is a polarized or a consensus-oriented political culture of negotiation. But the reduction of such complex contextual factors to a single category seems to overlook the relevance of any culture as a shared space of meaning-making.

Religion, for example, has become a main driver for conflict along distinct understandings of a cultural identity. The Arab world is often falsely generalized as “Muslim.” We say falsely because the region is also the cradle of Judaism and Christianity, with dozens of denominations, such as Orthodox or Coptic Christians, living in several countries. The word “Muslim” in itself is not unidimensional; it comprises a heterogeneity of groups stemming from the major division in Sunni and Shi’ite Muslims, which are themselves distinguished through various subdivisions. In particular, Lebanon—but also Iraq, Egypt, and Syria—has built a fragile confessional model of representation of these diverse groups in its media. Bahrain, where a Sunni minority politically dominates a Shi’ite majority, is another example of these divisions. We must also not forget the heated debates on religiously inspired Islamic groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood and their parties, indicating that there is no unified interpretation of “Islam” or “Muslim” in the region (Nawawy & Elmasry, 2018).

Ethnicity is a further significant aspect of culture. Substantial numbers of Imazighen (or Berber) people in Morocco and Algeria, as well as Tuareg in Libya, or Kurds in Iraq and Syria, do not consider themselves as being of Arab ethnicity and demand official acknowledgement of their own language and traditions (Fischer-Tahir, 2013; Pfeifer, 2015). The Kurds’ struggle for recognition is a longstanding campaign that has eventually led to autonomy for Kurds in Iraq, and is on the brink of achieving the same for Kurds in Syria as well. The secession of South Sudan from Sudan in 2011 is yet another case in point that shows the possible power of such struggles. Besides the citizens, one should also
consider the enormous foreign work force—particularly in the Gulf countries—representing different ethnicities and/or religions from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Philippines, among others. Media production, as well as media content, is influenced by this cultural diversity of languages, religions, and ethnicities.

There are other factors, such as demographics, to consider. The population in the Arab world is very young: 15–41% of the people are younger than 15 years of age, with Sudan, Yemen, Iraq, and Palestine having the highest share. These young Arabs are growing up as digital natives using mobile phones, the Internet, and digital media, which consequently throws the legitimacy of traditional media into question, especially if the youth do not feel represented in a restricted media environment (Gertel & Hexel, 2018).

Struggles about gender equality also should not be neglected—both with regard to physical and content-related representation in the media. The spectrum of female appearance in the media ranges from extremely popular Lebanese media personalities to the nonexistence of anchorwomen on Saudi national television, with the exception of one female anchor in 2019, thus reflecting different notions of paternalism (Sakr, 2007). In general, women are still a minority among journalists and media producers in the MENA region.

Finally, education, a strong indicator for class differences, needs to be considered. While the Arab world has paved its way from a largely illiterate region to acceptable rates of around 70–98% of the population being literate, there are still strata of society that cannot read and write. In Morocco, 31% of the population are still considered to be illiterate. Yemen represents the lowest rate of literacy with 66% of its population unable to read and write, a situation that is predicted will deteriorate even further due to the ongoing war there. In addition, other war-ravaged countries, such as Syria, Iraq, and Libya, will likely continue to witness the decline of general education and literacy levels (UNICEF, 2015).

These elements of a cultural and social context are constitutive of the Arab uprisings and thus intricately connected with other major factors, namely the political system, legal framework, and economy, which have strongly shaped crises in the region.
Another often neglected aspect that shapes media systems is the *geography and size of a country* as well as the size of its population. El-Richani (2016) introduced this concept as the “state size” factor (p. 180). It has implications for the media system that may be observed through each of the major dimensions we will go on to discuss. With regards to infrastructure and technology, these are of course more difficult to implement if, as in Sudan, there is a vast landmass to be covered by radio waves and Internet fiber cables, rather than a tiny island like Bahrain. As for the political economy of the media, it is important that the size of a possible target audience is known. Licensing nine national television stations for a population of under five million, as is the case in Lebanon, might jeopardize the prospect of any meaningful business model for each of the separate stations. In the case of the MENA region and the common language it shares, this often fosters a transnational pan-Arab orientation, as seen with *Al-Jazeera*, which broadcasts from the tiny emirate of Qatar (Zayani, 2005). In the European context, where many small states such as Belgium, Denmark, or Austria exist, a substantial amount of literature has been produced on the “giant neighbor” problem, in which national markets become dominated by more potent neighboring countries, as seen, for instance, in Germany’s effect on Austria or France’s impact on Belgium (Puppis, 2009). These smaller markets often develop strategies to avoid being overtaken by their “giant neighbor”, such as establishing a quota for national production or—as in the case of Denmark, with the help of state subsidies—investing strongly in niche markets such as crime series production in order to have a unique selling point (Lund & Berg, 2009). The UAE or Jordan’s media cities could be seen as embodying such strategies as a result of the diminutive size of their markets (Khalil, 2013). Finally, and with regard to the political dimension, Kraidy (2012) argued that *Al-Jazeera* and other “transnational media institutions can shape national politics in specific countries, in addition to pan-Arab politics” (p. 180). Indeed, Qatar’s *Al-Jazeera* has created conflicts with almost every Arab state due to its coverage, and it has been cited as a main reason for the ongoing Saudi-Qatari diplomatic crisis (Al-Jaber, 2018). Therefore, state size will also be considered in our analysis.
3. Political System and Legal Framework

The main focus of all media system typologies is the political environment behind a given system, which follows the guiding principle of Siebert et al. (1963) that media take on the “form and coloration of the social and political structure” (p. 1) in which they operate. While the social composition of a country is often overlooked as a factor in analyses of its media, political structures are always taken into consideration. The kind of governing system, the definition of media functions in society, how the media are controlled, and the kind of state intervention that regulates the media, are all important cornerstones of analyses in all typologies. However, the degrees used to measure these categories are often highly normative. The “democracy bias” often means that, hybrid regimes are seen through the lens of democratization and thus categorized as flawed, incomplete, or “transitional” democracies (Levitsky & Way, 2002), when in fact they are not transitioning anywhere, or at least not towards becoming democracies. In fact, acknowledging the broad range of political authoritarianisms and the different mechanisms of control and regulation could be more helpful than applying abstract ideas and norms of democratic governance.

In “How Far Can Media Systems Travel?”, Katrin Voltmer (2012) pointed to the fact that the dimensions used by Hallin and Mancini might suit comparisons of media systems in established democracies, but are not useful in comparisons of those outside the West (pp. 227–29). Basing our analysis on Voltmer’s argument, we contend that the question of whether there is a “high” or “low” degree of state intervention in the media system does not adequately explain what takes place in Arab media systems. Using the values designed by Hallin and Mancini for Western systems would, in almost all cases, lead to the diagnosis of a comparatively “high” degree of state intervention, or of a “not free” system (as evident in other comparative approaches used by such groups as Freedom House, Reporters Without Borders, etc.). Notwithstanding the importance of the state intervention criterion used by Hallin and Mancini, perhaps the more interesting questions are how does state intervention manifest, and how can these mechanisms be classified, as opposed simply to whether or to which degree they exist. Indeed, political scientists have diagnosed the MENA region as
a “persistence of authoritarianism” (Albrecht & Schlumberger, 2004, p. 371), indicating that different and dynamic strategies are employed by the incumbents in order to maintain the status quo. Heydemann and Reenders even speak of an “authoritarian learning” of regimes throughout the region and characterize the resulting strategies as aiming “to affect the strategic calculus of citizens, allies, and adversaries, even while constantly updating their own probabilities” (2011, p. 649).

It is therefore important to take a closer look at the objectives of state interventions with regard to the media, which precise means are used to intervene, and if and how “authoritarian learning” has shaped these processes.

For example, the idea, propagated in the 1950s and 1960s, that mass media use has a strong and direct effect on people’s will was ultimately internalized by rulers in almost all Arab countries. As a result, regime control of the media was and still is ubiquitous. Each ruler has claimed to know best what is good for the population and what information it should receive, relying on emphatic moral, religious, or security arguments. Typically, media outlets were first seen as instruments for the education and development of society, but often this instrumentalization has resulted in their being degraded to mere propaganda tools (Rugh, 1979). As a rule, information ministries that granted licenses for all types of media and made or reviewed personnel decisions served to implement this logic and the associated censorship. While state control through ministries of information has declined, other institutions have been set up to regulate the media, and these are rarely independent of state or government influence, as we can observe in the long struggle for independence in Tunisia since 2011 (Farmanfarmaian, 2014). By comparing regulation laws and procedures in 11 Arab countries, Zaid (2018) came to the conclusion that media regulations “are tools of authoritarian upgrading rather than genuine attempts to liberalize the broadcast sector and enhance pluralism and diversity” (p. 4415). Indeed, the official and internationally well-received abolition of ministries of information like those in Jordan or Qatar would, in fact, appear to be a form of window-dressing, rather than any real attempt at reform.

From a European perspective, the litmus test of precisely how independent media can be in a given country is the introduction of public service media that are intended to serve public interests, represent all
sections of society, and are governed independently of the state. Yet, while some attempts have been made to foster public service broadcasting in the MENA region, none of the “public” television channels in the Arab region fulfils these criteria (Dabbous, 2015; Guaybess, 2013).

Another objective for strong state intervention can also be detected in articulated visions of state-led development that are the result of attempts to respond to the forces of economic and technological globalization. In particular, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Oman have pushed forward ambitious plans of modernization that link welfare and stability for its populations with political control. Since this framing of state intervention resonates well with their societies, it has become a frequently used tool in the MENA region.

A further reason for strong state control is the above described crisis mode that is a constitutive element of many states in the region. This could be due to ongoing conflicts in countries such as Iraq, Libya, or Lebanon, or conflicts with other countries as seen in Yemen or Syria. Even the frequent claim by incumbent elites of being subject to terrorist threats can strongly shape the objectives and means of state intervention in the media. The plethora of cybercrime laws that were introduced in the past couple of years in most Arab countries are an indicator that securitization is a frequent strategy of state intervention in the media. Thus, we need to analyze carefully the political context, including the (legal) measures taken and the motivations behind them when analyzing media systems.

Finally, we want to note that, as we delve into an analysis of the nature of the respective political systems, we will use the term “regime”—in accordance with political science terminology—to describe a political institution as a set of rules and norms for regulating government–society interactions without imposing any specific connotation on the term.

4. Economy and Ownership Patterns

Categories relating to the economy and ownership of the media have frequently been included in media system comparisons. Sparks and Splichal (1988) even distinguished between a “commercial” and a “paternal” model of media systems, thus indicating the important role of the economic approach and respective financial sources. Blum
(2014) echoed this in his “funding of media” (p. 295) category, and also distinguished between the state and the market. Blum (2014), as well as Siebert et al. (1963), went further, differentiating between private and public ownership in their consideration of “media ownership”.

The often implicit and simplified line of argumentation is as follows: public ownership equals government influence, which equals state control and is thus considered paternalistic, whereas private ownership equals a liberal market, which equals commercial approaches and is thus considered an example of free media. However, this argument is misleading especially when it comes to the Arab countries.

As a result, a critical examination of the political economy of the media is indispensable. Many Arab countries can be considered rent-seeking economies (Nour, 2016), that is, economies based on revenues not generated by the production of goods or services. For example, finances might come from the sale of raw materials, such as crude oil (as in all Gulf countries, Algeria, Iraq, Sudan, and Libya), from state-owned stable sources of income (such as the Suez Canal in Egypt), or from non-state-owned resources (for instance as remittances of migration), as is the case in Morocco, as well as Palestine, Lebanon, Algeria, and other countries. Rent-seeking economies are therefore heavily dependent on only a few sources of income, and their economies usually have a very low degree of diversification. This affects their media systems because the limited domestic revenue sources and the resulting distribution of wealth could dictate who is powerful enough to own media. Moreover, the degree of dependence on such income has an impact on the level of taxation (and indeed whether or not taxes are being imposed on the population at all), which can ultimately result in popular demands for representation in the media. So far, many regimes have rejected demands for representation with the claim that without taxes, (media and political) representation does not need to be guaranteed (Anderson, 1987).

In all MENA countries, the state elites have secured their stakes in the relevant economic sectors. Anyone who wants to profit from this status quo must be loyal to the ruling elites (Roll, 2013). As a result, in most of these countries, patronage networks have frequently emerged, focusing on the ruling elites, who consolidate their position of influence through their control of political institutions and the economy. In this
context, the media are of particular importance, both as economic enterprises and political instruments (Richter & Gräf, 2015). For example, during the 1990s and 2000s, and mostly due to political or economic legitimization crises, several Arab regimes such as Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt introduced “liberalization measures” in the media market (Guaaybess, 2013). In the Gulf, particularly in Saudi Arabia and the UAE, investment in media was seen as a strategy to diversify a rent-based economy. In all these cases, the alleged privatization of media has rarely been more than a transfer of ownership to the regime’s close associates from among the business elite. “Private” thus should not be misunderstood as “independent.” Instead, and in accordance with the dictum “divide and rule,” a limited amount of the “privatized” media’s critical reporting is accepted, as long as it does not attack the cornerstones of the regime’s rule. Other means of securing loyalty from “private” media have already been described in detail by Rugh (1979), in his chapter on the “loyalist press.” These include guaranteed government advertisements and subsidies, or threatened withdrawals of newspaper copies. Commercially successful financing models for independent press, radio, or television media, on the other hand, are rare in the Arab world.

In this context, the often-used category of “political parallelism” is given a new twist. Hallin and Mancini (2004) and Blum (2014) made it one of their four key categories. The concept of political parallelism was first proposed by Seymour-Ure (1974) as “party-press parallelism,” which he argues is characterized by close associations between political parties and media, thus entailing a culture of journalism that openly promotes political parties and their positions. Hallin and Mancini (2004) developed this concept further, adapting it to the realities of the early twenty-first century in the Western hemisphere and disconnecting it from the party-as-organization notion. They argued that, in countries with high political parallelism, “media are still differentiated politically, [although] they more often are associated not with particular parties, but with general political tendencies” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004, p. 28). However, De Albuquerque (2012) criticized the term “political parallelism” as an arbitrary coinage. He emphasized that, in order to distinguish between simply politically engaged media or media advocacy and “real” political parallelism, one must identify
whether there are clear or unclear relationships between actors in the media and the political system (De Albuquerque, 2012, p. 93). Taking this suggestion seriously, we can see that the political involvement of media owners is a major driver of political parallelism. Thus, ownership patterns, in addition to the funding of media outlets by political actors, are the essential aspects that must be investigated in order to ascertain the nature and degree of political parallelism.

In most Arab countries, political actors are commonly involved in the media business, and vice versa. In addition, Kraidy (2012) has pointed to the fact that there are transnational structures of political parallelism and media instrumentalization (pp. 194–95). He discussed the case of Saudi investment in the Lebanese market, which had clear political interests behind it. It is also obvious that political actors from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar finance media in war-torn Libya, in order to play out their rivalries and secure zones of influence (Wollenberg & Richter, 2020).

Yet there are also other models of ownership and funding beyond these dominant state-funded or loyalist models. Local or community media have long been marginalized, but have recently gained ground in manifold ways, as evidenced by small local radio stations in Jordan, Tunisia, and Libya, or by hyper-local online, or even print, media in Iraq, Palestine, and Egypt (Sakr, 2016). The potential for decentralized and less costly production via the Internet has been a major driver for new forms of media production situated on the border between journalism and activism. Often, these media can be categorised as “alternative media” (Atton, 2001), i.e. media that are not only organized differently, but also aim to disseminate content differently from the mainstream media. Nonetheless, the financial sustainability of these models is always in question.

5. Technology and Infrastructure

None of the well-known media system typologies focuses on the role of infrastructure and technology. In fact, one of the major criticisms Hallin and Mancini faced was their neglect of the Internet as a technological and transnational factor (Norris, 2009). Although they acknowledged the role of technology as a “force [or] limit of homogenization” (p.
in their original book in 2004, they did not see it as a particular factor to be considered separately, but rather as inherent in social practices that shape the market, the professionalization of journalists, or political parallelism. Indeed, technology should not be treated in such a way as to foster a technological deterministic viewpoint. However, it is to be considered as both a specific outcome of and influence on social practices, or, as Andrew Chadwick (2013) described it, a driver of hybridity. This “notion of a hybrid system,” he argued, “draws attention to change and flux, the passing of an older set of cultural and institutional norms, and the gradual emergence of new norms” (Chadwick, 2013, p. 10). The notion of convergence of media should also be considered in this discussion. Convergence refers to both the changes of media technologies themselves and the implications for how we create, consume and distribute media within these converging technologies. The questions of how, when, and why new technologies have been included in a media system, and with what effect, are thus important factors in the analysis of media systems.

With regard to the spread of technologies, a strong culture of oral communication in the MENA region, which persists due to continued widespread illiteracy in some regions, might explain the spectacular success of radio and, later, television (Armbrust, 1996; Fahmy, 2011). Print media such as newspapers have been consumed by the educated elite since their inception, and thus have a limited readership. In contrast to broadcasting, they have usually been less strongly regulated by the state. Internet-based media now provide a hybridization of oral, visual, and written elements.

To place this in a political context, it is important to ask how and why the different regimes did, or did not, upgrade their media technologies. Most likely, they were seeking a balance between connection to technological modernity, which was important for their own legitimacy, and the closest possible control of new media discourses. Modernization ideology and the interest of spreading education through technology, on the one hand, stood in opposition to the fear of threats to national unity or challenges to moral values, on the other hand. These factors have undeniably influenced the support of technological advancement in the media sector (Abdulla, 2007).
The first major advancement in this realm was made during the 1980s. The 22 states of the Arab League decided to invest in their own satellite system called ArabSat (the first satellite was launched in 1985). The costs for this project, which at the time totaled around USD 500 million, were distributed proportionately among the different countries according to their financial power: Saudi Arabia therefore paid 36.6%, Kuwait 14.5%; Libya 11.2%; Qatar 9.8%; the United Arab Emirates 4.6%; Jordan 4.0%; Lebanon 3.8%; Bahrain 2.4%; Syria 2.0%; Iraq 1.9%; Algeria 1.7%; Yemen 1.6%; Egypt 1.5%; Oman 1.2%; Tunisia 0.7%; Morocco 0.6%; Mauritania, Sudan, Palestine and Somalia 0.2% each; and Djibouti 0.1% of the costs (ArabSat, 2019). Although ArabSat carried most of the Arab national television channels, it was dominated by huge media consortia, such as MBC, ART, Orbit, and Rotana, which were backed by Saudi investors. Egypt invested in its own system, NileSat (launched in 1998), as did the UAE with YahSat (launched in 2011). Qatar, with its Al-Jazeera consortium, also started its own system, Es'hailSat (launched in 2014), so as to become independent from its rival Saudi Arabia.

Mobile telephony has been another technology that has leapfrogged the poor landline infrastructure in almost all of the Arab world since the beginning of the 2000s. As a rule, statistics show that, by 2010, at least half of the Arab population had their own mobile phone—albeit with strong asymmetries in distribution: the Gulf states were again early and strong adopters, while Yemen, Syria, and Palestine came in at a much lower level. Mobile phone use is closely connected to the upgrading of the Internet infrastructure, since the Internet is overwhelmingly accessed through mobile devices (Salem, 2017). Those countries in which the Internet had been propagated as a symbol of modernity and education had a particularly rapid growth in the number of users. Besides the Gulf states, during the 2000s the regimes in Egypt, Morocco, and Tunisia, despite their fear of the Internet as a hub for oppositional political activism, enlarged their DSL infrastructures and enormously expanded access for a large part of the population, with campaigns promoting “A computer for every household.”

However, at that point, the race had only just begun, and given the manifold effects of Internet communication on all areas of life (even beyond the decidedly political ones), social change seemed unstoppable. The networking of formerly marginalized political groups
(Kopty, 2018), the challenge to religious and political authorities (Faris, 2013), new communication spaces for gender discourse (Al-Rawi, 2014; Antonakis, 2018), and resurgent connections between population groups and their relatives in the diaspora (Khamis, 2017) all owe their existence to the public spaces created by the new media technologies and must consequently be considered in a media system analysis. In particular, the convergence of media use and production across platforms can stimulate extremely dynamic political and social practices in relation to media. On the other hand, the dominance of a few giant (Western) technology companies in this convergent media environment may also create “algorithmic harms,” as Zeynep Tufekci (2015, p. 207) has put it, meaning that there might be a lack of visibility of certain strata of society and an information asymmetry due to a digital divide and a kind of algorithmic gatekeeping. In addition to taking these companies into consideration, one must take into account the ownership and control of such an infrastructure in the countries analyzed. The proprietorship of Internet service providers and telecommunications companies in many cases already resembles the cronyistic ownership structures described in the section on political parallelism—with major regime-loyal businessmen, such as Egypt’s Naguib Sawiris, being at the forefront (Sakr, 2015). This raises the question of what this means for the shape of the respective media systems.

Other dimensions that have often been discussed—such as the self-perception or professionalization of journalists and the role of audiences—will not feature as separate categories in our analysis. We do not consider them unimportant, but in not defining them as separate categories, we acknowledge that, in a digitally shaped media system, the role of journalists can no longer be distinguished so clearly from that of audiences (Chadwick, 2013). Furthermore, the question of who can talk in the media, and the role that he or she is able to play, is in our country cases not a matter of professionalization, but rather one of social composition, legal framework, economic realities, and technological possibilities of the system. As such, we incorporate the discussion of the roles of journalists into these separate categories.
Book Structure

In the following chapters, we provide insights into the different media systems in the MENA region. The book is structured according to geographic groupings of countries, starting in the east with the Levante or Mashriq region, which comprises Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, and Iraq, and followed by the Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, which consists of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, and Yemen. We then continue with Egypt and Sudan, and end with the west of the MENA region, the Maghreb, which includes Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. This regional grouping specifically highlights the relationships between neighboring countries that often share a common (colonial) experience, as in the case of the Levante and the Maghreb. Some also face similar challenges, such as the incorporation of ethnic minorities, or the response to the post-oil boom era.

To allow for a systematic comparison of the different media systems, each country chapter follows the dimensions outlined above through an analysis of the specific characteristics of each media system within its political, social, cultural and economic contexts. Adhering to these criteria does not overshadow the uniqueness of each media system, but is rather an approach that examines the specific features and developments of a particular media system, while allowing for comparative analyses across the countries. Finally, the conclusion highlights major themes that can be identified from the in-depth studies provided in the country chapters.

References


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\(^1\) World Bank, "Population, total". \(https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/sp.pop.totl\)
\(^3\) World Bank, "Population ages 0-14 (% of total population). \(https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.0114.AZ\)
\(^5\) International Telecommunication Union, "Percentage of Individuals using the Internet". \(www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx\)
\(^6\) Definition: "This is the proportion of individuals who used the Internet from any location in the last three months.\(^d\)"
\(^7\) International Telecommunication Union, "Mobile-cellular subscriptions". \(www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx\)
\(^9\) UNICEF, "Literacy rate (2009-2013)".

Table 1 Data on each country included in the study.