

# The democratic potential of media participation

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# Tony Blair



# Blair & Brown

- ◆ Tony Blair, 1997-2007

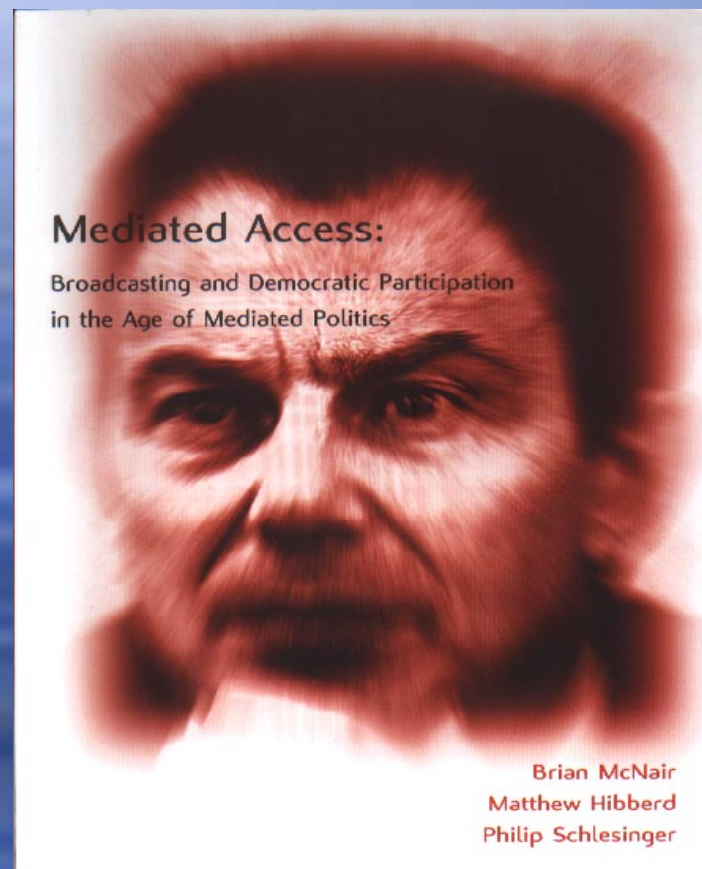


- ◆ Gordon Brown, 2007-



# Mediated Access and the crisis of democratic participation

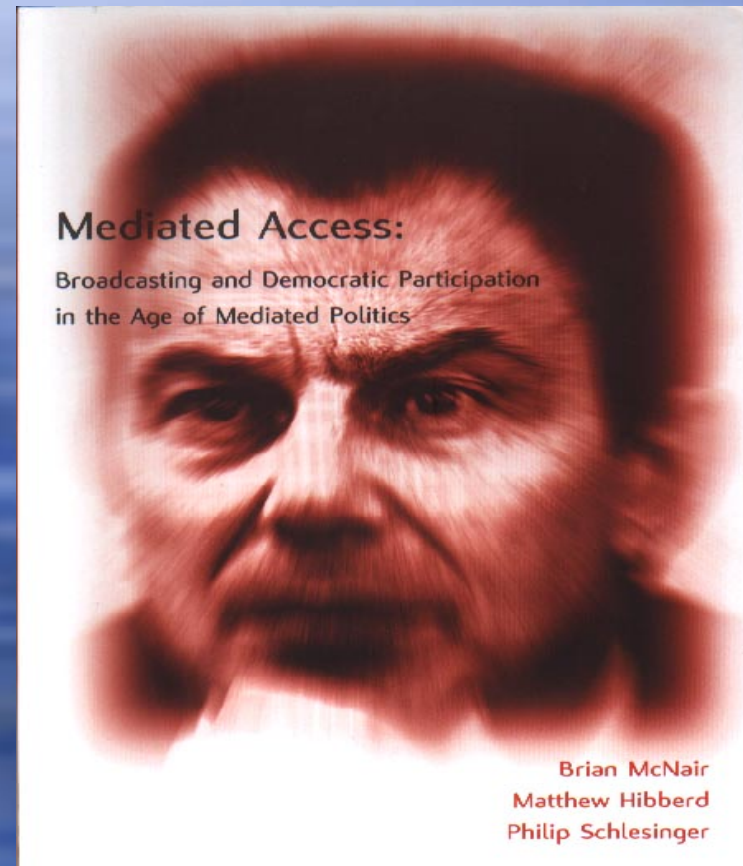
- ◆ I think politicians have their own way of talking, and the general public don't really understand half of what they are talking about because they have got all their own jargon.(focus group member)
  - ◆ I don't think they [politicians] want you to understand, and I think that's the problem.(focus group member)
  - ◆ It's always the educated people that get the voice. We need more folk like us that are wanting to get in about it and express their opinions and get answers from the politicians.(focus group member)





# Participation is popular

- ◆ “The public has recognised that [access] programmes provide them with real opportunities to engage politicians in head-to-head debate away from the protection of spin doctors and the political machinery that protects them from public scrutiny. The fact that they are the only such opportunities adds to their potency” (McNair)



# And then came Tony...

- ◆ 'What I remember most [in 1994] was Tony's assertion that the central factor in determining the outcome [of the leadership election] would be the attitude of the media. The media had to be the target of his campaign" (Charles Clarke, 'A backroom conspiracy', Guardian, March 29 2007)



# And then came Tony...

- ◆ 'This core belief in the importance of media opinion, and the success of this approach in winning the 1997 election, became a dominating factor in the way in which a large part of government has operated over the last ten years'.



# Beyond the Soundbite

- ◆ People are bored with political broadcasting. They want
- ◆ Greater diversity of style and tone, a more personalised, less formal approach to political coverage, & greater accessibility
- ◆ “The job of the BBC is to find new ways of engaging the public in democratic debate” (Tessa Jowell)





# New news, old news (ITC, BSC)

- ◆ “The type of programme which received most favourable mention was the format which allows the ordinary viewer to interrogate a politician or someone famous. Viewers also speak warmly of television programmes which hold power to account” (New news, old news)

# The Monarchy Debate

- ◆ ITV, 1997



# Ask the Prime Minister

- ◆ “Shouldn’t there be a place on TV for the prime minister of the United Kingdom to stand up in front of an audience which duplicates the population at large, and answer in a democratic form a sequence of questions about fundamental issues facing the country?” (editor, Ask the Prime Minister)



# Ask Tony Blair





# Blair on Newsnight



# Blair on Newsnight - Iraq



# The broadcasters

# Access & Interactivity



- ◆ Email
- ◆ SMS
- ◆ Blogs





# Learning from reality TV?

- ◆ Participation
- ◆ Interaction
- ◆ Exercise of choice
- ◆ Empowerment
- ◆ Engagement

# Vote for Me?

- ◆ That was what Vote For Me! was about: giving real people with real issues a voice. But more than that, Vote For Me! gave you, the people, the chance to choose a representative. A person who could honestly claim to be: 'The People's Choice'.



# The digital era

- ◆ This generation has a different understanding of media and technology. It has grown up with an in-depth understanding of genre derived from television history. And now it has distribution. This is the world of digital television, digital networks, digital everything. Power in this environment is distributed equally, in all parts of the system, acting in all directions simultaneously.
- ◆ We are not living through the death of television. We are living through the death of time and space, and the democratisation of the media. (Gary Carter, FremantleMedia)



# Creative Futures (Mark Thompson, D-G, BBC)

- ◆ The inter-active audience
  - ◆ The audience who doesn't just want to sit there but to take part, debate, create, communicate, share

