

Editorial

# Media & Democracy: Recent Experiences from Canada and Mexico—An Introduction<sup>☆</sup>

The articles that compose this special issue of *P&S* were selected from the pieces presented at a symposium organized at the Iberoamericana University in Mexico City on “The Role of the Media in Democracy: Mexico and Canada” in February 2009.<sup>1</sup> The question that was floating was: Why to discuss these countries together? Mexico and Canada, as NAFTA partners as they are, have significantly increased the volume of their trade and investment in the last decade.<sup>2</sup> However, in spite of this growing commercial partnership relatively few works exist in Mexico that discuss the experiences of Canada and Mexico outside the frame of such partnership, which invariably includes the U.S. – and mostly end up being a comparison of each against this country.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, the aim of the symposium was to create a space to discuss public matters from Mexican and Canadian perspectives. And, in this sense, two very important elements of modern public life are communication and the media, which permit a frame for discussing the specific questions these elements pose to the development and consolidation of these apparently different democracies.

## 1. Media and democracy

Modern liberal conceptions of public life have all stressed the importance of participation, of free spaces for debate and information exchange (Dahl, 1971; Lipset, 1995; Przeworski, 1986), and of accountability and checks-and-balances mechanisms (Panagopulos, 1985) as crucial elements of a democratic polity. Here the stage is set for communication and the media. If it is to survive and consolidate democracy requires public debate, effective communication (horizontally, between individuals and groups, and vertically, between public agencies and the citizenry), critical and autonomous media, and better and timely information available for the individuals to make their best choices. Against this expectation, the temptation is to locate Canada close to the ideal in contrast to Mexico, which is situated well below the line. However, if it is true that Canadian democracy has many decades of consolidation whereas Mexican democracy is still fragile in many ways, the discussion of these cases from a media and

<sup>☆</sup> We want to thank P&S for the opportunity of publishing this special issue.

<sup>1</sup> The symposium was organized thanks to the support of the Canadian Government through its embassy in Mexico, UNESCO, and research funds from the Iberoamericana University in Mexico City.

<sup>2</sup> According to the Mexican Secretariat of Commerce “The Mexico–Canada trade recorded \$26.2 billion USD, 9.0% higher than the figure shown in the same period in 2007. This value is almost six times higher than the trade number obtained in 1993 (\$4.1 billion USD); that is an average annual growth rate of 13.3% in the NAFTA age, making of Mexico the Canada’s third trade partner. [In relation to investment] From January 1994 to December 2008, Canada’s cumulative foreign direct investment (FDI) in Mexico reached \$9.3 billion USD, becoming the second largest foreign investor in Mexico after United States. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Economy, on December 2008, 2,092 firms were registered in Mexico as having Canadian capital” (*Mexico-Canada Trade & Investment*, Secretariat of Commerce, The NAFTA Office of Mexico in Canada, March 2009, at: [http://www.economia-snci.gob.mx/sic\\_php/pages/files\\_varios/pdfs/Can\\_Dic08.pdf](http://www.economia-snci.gob.mx/sic_php/pages/files_varios/pdfs/Can_Dic08.pdf)).

<sup>3</sup> In Mexico, the National University (UNAM) has a Research Center for North America (CISAN) with a number of publications on the region, but there are still few works done in Mexico that discuss Canadian topics alone. The web page of the CISAN: <http://www.cisan.unam.mx>.

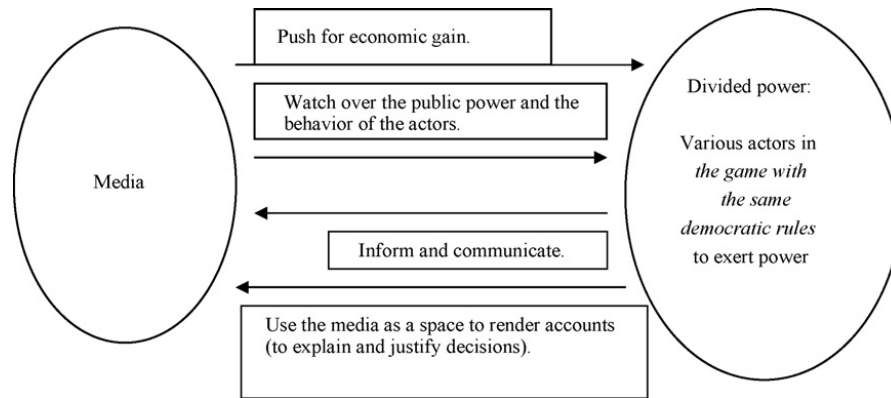


Fig. 1. Ideal relation between the media and the public power in a democracy “Media – Divided Power Relation”.

communication perspective reveals interesting angles that require some further reflection. Specifically it makes clear the kind of challenges that are faced by democracies, at different levels of consolidation. Let us elaborate a bit more on this point departing from the classic liberal conception of the relation between the media and democracy.

For Mill (1989), freedom of the press was required in order to maintain a space where a free exchange of ideas and debates could eventually lead the individuals to find the “truth” (p. 23), to avoid the tyranny of an overwhelming dominant opinion on those who dissent from them, thus protecting individualism (pp. 8–9), and to secure “against corrupt or tyrannical government” (p. 19).<sup>4</sup> This liberal account of the media became increasingly identified with democracy – with the liberal Western capitalist democracies of the XIX and XX centuries. The mass media are conceived of as a sort of “fourth estate” within the democratic surveillance mechanisms for effective check-and-balances and accountability. In this sense, “States are dragged before the court of public opinion. In the name of the common or public interest, the press chides tyrants and malefactors who stifle or evade public opinion. The abuse of political power is exposed publicly” (Keane, 1991: 21–22). The media are essential to protect citizens’ civil and political rights and to keep transparent the political decision-making process, which otherwise would be “naturally” surrounded by secrecy.

The media are also seen as an open arena for public and rational deliberation in liberal democratic polities, through which the society and the government can maintain constant communication and through which the former exercises also an informal control over the latter. The notions behind this assumption is that the mass media are neutral and essentially reflect a potent, constant and contrasting public debate among citizens about public affairs, which is free, rational and open in principle to all citizens who want to express their ideas. This freedom of discussion benefits the public interest since it is assumed that the most significant points of view will be discussed and also that an immense amount of information will be made available for the individuals (Kelley & Donway, 1990: 89–91).

In brief, the mass media, according to the liberal tradition are conceived of as institutions that, if they are democratic, must:

- Watch over the (ab)uses of power on behalf of citizens.
- Provide the public with information to base their choices, opinions and decisions on public matters.
- Become themselves an open and free marketplace of ideas in which all citizens can participate and where there are no *a priori* granted predominant points of view, but only as a result of a permanent rational debate and the contrasting of arguments.

Fig. 1 shows the ideal type of relationship between the commercial media and the political players in a (liberal) democratic political arena.

The foundation of this model lies on the relation between the media and a system with multiple actors, where they all abide by the same rules. “Divided power” refers to a division of power that is both horizontal and vertical and has effective mechanisms of checks and balances (O’Donnell, 1998). On the subject of “the same rules of the game,” Robert

<sup>4</sup> John Stuart Mill, “On Liberty” (1859), in J.S. Mill, *On Liberty and Other Writings*, edited by Stefan Collini, Cambridge Texts in the History of Political Thought, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989. See especially his second chapter “On the liberty of thought and discussion” and his third chapter “Of individuality, as one of the elements of the well-being”.

Dahl (1971) has pointed out that there are eight basic or minimum attributes which must be present in a regime so that it can be classified under the category of “polyarchy,” which is the term he uses to designate “real democracies” (Dahl, 1971). These eight minimum attributes or procedures which must be present in a polyarchy are freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression, the right to vote, the right of political leaders to compete for support, various and alternative sources of information (with these five guarantees, citizens – considered politically equal – have the possibility to express their political preferences); the possibility for any citizen, in principle, to be elected to public office; open and free elections (these seven guarantees afford citizens the possibility to express their preferences – either individually or collectively – to their fellow citizens and to the government); and, finally, there must be institutions to ensure that the public policies are, to some degree, the reflection of electoral preferences. The systems that meet these conditions achieve an acceptable level of competence and public participation in an atmosphere in which the opposition has real possibilities to win the elections and assume power.<sup>5</sup> Thus, these minimum attributes or requirements will determine the rules of the democratic game to be followed by the political actors. In this case, the relation of the media takes place with a divided-power system in which the media not only keep an eye on the public power but also exert pressure for a gain. Politicians, for their part, are obligated to report and render accounts as they vie for power.

This liberal conception places the media within a State/Civil Society dichotomy. Media are thus inscribed in a tradition that sees all public authority as naturally oppressive to individual liberties and rights and, therefore, in order to avoid this, close surveillance over the public authorities becomes necessary. In this regard, the media are thought to be natural allies of the citizens against power abuses. At the same time, through the State/Civil Society dichotomy this liberal tradition of the media abhors from any kind of State or public restrictions and regulations that might subject their freedom of speech. As two authors stress, “a press that is licensed, franchised or regulated is subject to political pressures when it deals with issues affecting the interests of those in power” (Kelley & Donway, 1990: 97).

The natural space of the media – if they are intended to be and remain “free” – is the market, the free market. In any other situation the media will end up serving the interests of the State and not those of the individuals. Though in all Western countries the printed press has developed within market structures, the broadcasting – except for some exception, like the U.S. and Australia – has followed a public service model with differences in its financing, nomination of executives, responsibilities on programming, and the like. However, the public dominance in broadcasting services in Western societies started to change since the late 1970s when strong criticisms against the economic expansion of the State generated increasing pressures for privatisation and de-regulation (Hood, 1994; Tracey, 1998).<sup>6</sup> In countries where broadcasting has traditionally operated within commercial market structures, like the U.S., even some of the few basic regulatory principles, like the “fairness doctrine”, were promptly abandoned,<sup>7</sup> and in countries with public service

<sup>5</sup> Guillermo O’Donnell and Adam Przeworski, among others, have underscored how important it is for democracy – in addition to the criteria established by Dahl – the fact that the opposition stands a *real* chance to accede to power and that the defeated political force concedes defeat without destabilizing the system. See: O’Donnell (1996) and Przeworski (1991).

<sup>6</sup> Blumer (1992) also acknowledges these trends towards the market in Western European broadcasting. He says that increasingly public sector broadcasting in Europe is losing its predominance in favor of private sector provision and the dictates of the market logic. All this creates problems for, at least, seven important values that were thought to be protected through public service broadcasting: programme quality; respect for the diversity of society (in terms of its pluralism); a cultural identity in a national community; independence of programmes from commercial influences; promotion of the integrity of civic communication through comprehensive, impartial and pluralistic political communication; respect for the welfare of children; and maintenance of certain general standards in the amount of violence and sex that is presented (Blumer, 1992). In the case of Latin America, the adoption of economic liberalisation measures (many of them taken during the newly inaugurated democracies) has implied as well – of course – the selling of the large majority of previously publicly owned enterprises, which has included the privatisation of the broadcasting without even considering any other kind of media property.

<sup>7</sup> In 1987 the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), following a court ruling, decided to suspend this regulation based on its interpretation of the First Amendment free speech rights in the context of Reaganism. For many years the broadcasters complained that the “fairness doctrine” restricted their freedom of speech and damaged the quality of the information they presented since it obliged them to transmit uncontroversial matters in order to avoid losing time in presenting all opposing points of view. They underlined that they should have the right to present the information and debates freely. The FCC concluded as well that the doctrine had a vicious effect: it tended to suppress debate and tended to reinforce an uncritical support for the *status quo*, since other points of view were avoided. His interpretation of the any kind of regulation as a barrier against critical and free expression represented a 180 turn from the interpretations given in other times. For instance, during the early 1940s the FCC ruling in the Mayflower case established that “freedom of speech and radio must be broad enough to provide full and equal opportunity for the presentation to the public of all sides of public issues. . . the public interest can never be served by a dedication of any broadcast facility to the support of his own partisan ends. Radio can serve as an instrument of democracy only when devoted to the communication of information and the exchange of ideas fairly and objectively presented. A truly free radio cannot be used to advocate the causes of the licensee” (Kahn, 1984: 122, cited in Harvey, 1998: 544–545). This interpretation was reversed during the 1980s, especially through the role of Mark Fowler, the Chair of the FCC appointed by Reagan.

broadcasting, like most Western European countries and Canada, private operators have entered the game. The reasons behind privatisation, according to Keane, are based on the advantages of private management over public ownership,

Deregulation is the *idee fixe* of the market liberal case. State-organized and state-protected media, especially in the fields of broadcasting and telecommunications, are roundly condemned. They are said to be high-cost, inefficient and ridden with restrictive practices. . . [Public service broadcasting] squeezes, confines and reduces choice. The programming decisions of public service bureaucracies are not subject to continuing and detailed justification. These bureaucracies are involved in the continuous vetting of schedules and programmes, and they exercise long-term power to dissolve contracts which displease them. Public service broadcasting involves systematic and arbitrary censorship of consumer's choices. The hand of government is an unaccountable distributor of privileges and political favors (Keane, 1991: 54, 56–57).

In any case, the liberal arguments that praised the close relation between the capacity of the media to watch over power and its free market natural sphere have been extended to the broadcasting. It is considered that the sole guarantee against the oppression of the State is to watch it over, and this, in turn, will be better done if the media are free from it, and thus the only ways to secure this condition is to anchor them in the market. At the same time, it is believed that only the market can guarantee a diversity of informational sources and, if unrestricted enough, it will provide for the natural development of a “free marketplace of ideas” (Barendt, 1993).

Strong criticisms have been raised against this turn towards a complete “marketisation” of the media and communication. Late capitalism has involved during the last decades an increasing concentration of resources – technologies, capital, and so forth – in large corporations which expand their activities to the most diverse sectors of the economy (finance, industry, etc.). This pattern has not been absent from the mass media organisations. As has been shown by a relatively large amount of research, non-publishing corporations have bought, or at least have acquired major shareholdings in the printed media in the United States, Australia, Germany, France, Britain and some other Western countries (Chadwick, 1989; Bagdikian, 1990; Tunstall & Palmer, 1991).<sup>8</sup> Competition among a large variety of independent media organisations, as the liberal ideas proposed, is increasingly ceding its place to well organised corporations that create large oligopolies in which competition is limited and the market is even influenced by them (Curran & Seaton, 1988).<sup>9</sup> An outcome of the concentration of different types of media in large corporations has been the refraining of these media to cover their corporate holder's activities – and eventual irregularities (Murdock, 1990).

There appears, as Curry Jensen states, a subtle market censorship over the media where apparently those who own and control the large conglomerates can decide what to print and present in a market that works according to commercial criteria linked to advertising, leaving out the vocation for informing the citizens or fostering public debate (Curry Jensen, 1988). As Curran says,

Media conglomerates are not independent watchdogs serving the public interest but self-seeking, corporate mercenaries using their muscle to promote private interests. . . the free market thus compromises rather than guarantees the editorial integrity of commercial media, and impairs in particular its oversight of private corporate power (Curran, 1991: 87).

At the same time, the logic of the market makes that, though there might be a large variety of printed newspapers and broadcasters, their content tends to uniformity, leading to homogenisation in the information the media present to their audiences. A larger variety of media does not necessarily entail content diversity. Therefore, according to Keane, “the overall programme fare becomes relatively thinner, more repetitious and more predictable than would otherwise

<sup>8</sup> In the English-speaking world, though not restricted to it, one of the most notorious cases is the one of Rupert Murdoch. In Italy, the deregulation trends have benefited the magnate of the media Silvio Berlusconi, who owns three main national private TV channels, a film production company, two national newspapers, magazines, a radio network, the largest publishing company in Italy – Mondadori –, a national supermarket chain, and other investments in TV in other European countries, like Spain, France and Germany. In Mexico, *Televisa* – the largest Spanish-speaking media corporation in the world – has a virtual monopoly over the sport press and some other weekly and monthly magazines, and also owns four major TV open air channels, local TV channels, a cable TV company and a Satellite DTH system, a radio network, and shareholdings in many other countries' broadcasting and printed media, from the USA to Spain and South America.

<sup>9</sup> For instance, Bell and Meehan argue in the case of Ireland, how the erosion of public service broadcasting “is *not* issuing a market free for all”, but is rather “giving way to structures of *managed monopoly* in the ‘de-regulated’ communication sector” (Bell & Meehan, 1989: 90).

be the case. Inevitably, the ratings dominate. But ratings under-represent the opinions of ethnic and regional minorities, gay, lesbians, greens, elderly citizens, socialists and other minorities” (Keane, 1991: 77).

It is precisely these transformations of the media and communication markets that serve as the contextual reference in which this issue has collected a number of works that discuss the impacts on two democracies at different consolidation stages. How are these media engaging citizens? How are these media promoting plurality and debate? Are media markets generating more “democratic media”? How is communication used for fostering participation and rising civic consciousness?

## 2. Media and democracy in Mexico

From the mid-thirties, the government determined that industrialization would be its overriding revolutionary goal and a means through which economic progress was to be achieved. To that end, modern entrepreneurial sectors to which the regime would provide the necessary conditions for growth and development were required (Segovia, 1977). Given the predominance of the commercial model of radio broadcasting, the entrepreneurs in this sector were given support from the regime for decades in running their business on a profit (Mejía Barquera, 1989).

This relation, as many others between the regime and different organized social sectors, was characterized by corporativism.<sup>10</sup> In the case of radio broadcasting, corporativism was meant to be an exchange of benefits – both technical and economic to develop profitable businesses – in exchange for support to the regime in terms of politics.<sup>11</sup> Within this relation of exchanges, the newscasts played a very important role, as they were instrumental in promoting a positive image by supporting the regime (Guerrero, 2009). However, the demand for political support by the regime was, by no means, something that would come out of the kindness of the hearts of the radio broadcasters from general agreements, either implicit or explicit. Political support was ultimately ensured through a legislation that established clear-cut limits to the material that could be broadcast.<sup>12</sup> Hence, in return for granting favorable conditions for the development of the commercial model of the media, the regime applied a series of criteria to the laws as a way to exert control on the contents of the broadcasts, thereby securing the political support they needed.

It must be pointed out, though, that the legal provisions aimed at determining what may or may not be broadcast were never turned into effective mechanisms to keep a watch on and oversee all the contents in all the stations at all times. The State never availed itself of supervisory mechanisms of this sort. However, the mere existence of legal restraints on political contents, as well as the benefits that broadcasters received over decades (especially – but not always – the largest ones), provided sufficient motivation to align themselves with the regime.<sup>13</sup> This “loyalty”

<sup>10</sup> A good definition of corporativism is provided by Philippe C. Schmitter, who defines it as “a system of representation of interests whereby the components units are organized into a limited number of single, mandatory, non-competitive units which are hierarchically arranged and functionally differentiated, recognized, or consented to (whenever not created) by the State, given the power of a representative deliberate monopoly in its own categories in exchange for adhering to guidelines which have been imposed, suggested, or simply recognized by the State in choosing leaders and in the articulation of demands and support” (Schmitter, 1974: 86).

<sup>11</sup> In Mexico, media moguls have used formally organized associations from the beginning to influence government policies in their field. As a matter of fact, these entrepreneurs were the first industrial groups in organizing themselves autonomously in defense of their interests against the State. Actually, in 1922 the National Radio League – today the National Chamber for the Industry of Radio and TV – was founded. This early organization of the broadcasters as a group fully aware of its interests is worthy of mention. It is clear from the beginning that the goal is to establish, maintain, and stand up for the private commercial model as the dominant broadcasting model in Mexico. In a regime that restricted discussion of political topics on the radio, broadcasting entrepreneurs did not waste time trying to stand up for freedom of expression, but focused their efforts completely on consolidating an economic model that would bring them profits. The Chamber served as a direct channel of communication with the government in settling disputes, finalizing agreements, and pushing for preserving a *status quo* that would be favorable to the economic interests of broadcasters.

<sup>12</sup> For example, article 12 of the Law of Electrical Communications of 1926 (the first legal framework in the sector) curtails freedom of expression by expressly forbidding “the broadcast of any news or message whose contents constitute a threat to the security of the State, the peace, the public order, the good manners, the laws of the country, the propriety of the language, or which may stir scandal or assail in any way the established government, the public life, people’s dignity, or that expressly incite the perpetration of illegal acts, or obstruct justice.” So, from the very beginning, the regime wanted to make sure that the radio would not be used by an alternative political force or as a means to transmit defiant messages. In addition, the Law for All Communication Media of 1933 had a paragraph entitled “Forbidden Broadcast,” the article 77 of which censored all broadcast that might “attack the established government in any form.”

<sup>13</sup> In the written press, these mechanisms of “self-censorship” have been studied in more detail. See: Granados Chapa (1981) and Cole (1975). On the subject of radio broadcasting, a work from De Noriega and Leach (1979) is worthy of mention.



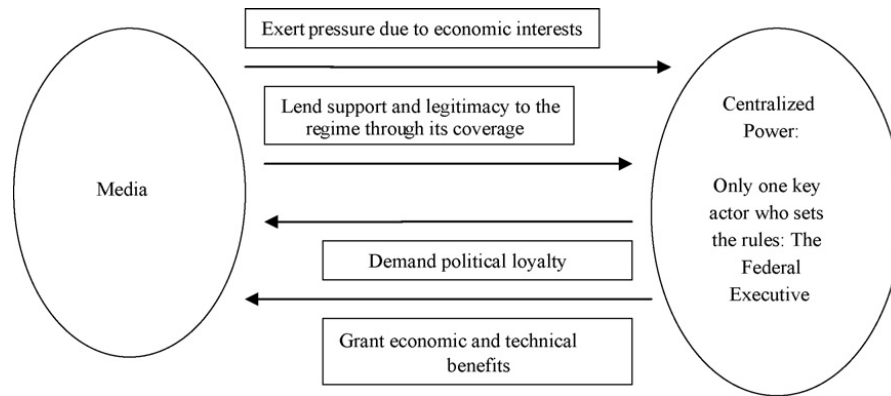


Fig. 2. Corporate Relationship between the media and the political regime in Mexico. “Relationship Media – Centralized Power”.

was further reinforced by the lack of one condition needed to broadcast more open and critical contents: a weak, ill-organized opposition as well as few institutional venues where the political participation of the opposition could be manifested (Loaeza, 1993). Thus, it was the mutual exchanges and favors within a corporate framework that defined such relationship over several decades. Fig. 2 shows the flow of this relationship between the media and a highly centralized power in Mexico, a power that was centered particularly on the presidential figure.

In theoretical terms, the foundation of this model rests on the relationship between the media and a regime that had considerable concentration and centralization of power on the Federal Executive (Carpizo, 1978) – and, therefore, of the decisions pursuant the granting of benefits.<sup>14</sup> It is about the sort of a corporate relationship where each actor knows what can be exchanged (economic gain in return for political endorsement) and where there is a relative symmetry in the allocation of benefits. This is the model that characterized the relationship between electronic media and the regime at least until the 1980s.

Both the various economic crises and the political opening gradually gave rise to conditions that led to a deeper opening in the contents, which in turn reinforced freedom of expression in the media (Guerrero, 2009). However, the old relation between the media and the political power did not become a transparent relation, even though the media gained considerable autonomy in choosing their contents. A reason for this outcome is the kind of political transition in Mexico.

As the alternation of power in Mexico works at all levels of government, the interesting part is that Mexico is not moving towards a regime where new rules of the game are agreed on by political actors – for instance, even though new laws are passed, they are not applied to important cases – on the contrary, the old rules of the previous political game are either abided by or overlooked especially in connection with the exercise of power, such as the rule of law, accountability, and responsibility (Guerrero, 2004).<sup>15</sup> All this resulted in the emergence of various “patches of power” (unions, state governments, local governments, political parties) operating on rules which, due to its ever-changing nature, induce uncertainty and inability to either agree on reforms or to apply the law. It has been in this scenario that the transition has occurred from a power highly concentrated on the president to one where power (although political actors ascend to power propelled by democratic rules), far from being divided in terms of a democracy, is “fragmented” into different patches and levels among the actors. Fragmentation makes that the rules become uncertain. And this feature of the transition has generated the conditions for economic strong actors to organize and

<sup>14</sup> For example, article 19 of the Federal Law for Radio and Television of 1960 gave the Secretariat of Communications and Transport the power to grant radio and television concessions by using its “free judgment.” In addition, article 31, paragraph IX, granted the Secretariat of Communications and Transport the power to revoke any concession on the grounds of “any breach in complying with the requirements of the concession *not mentioned in any of the (8) sections above*” (italics by the author).

<sup>15</sup> Although there are documented cases of corruption and abuses of power and charges are brought against powerful political actors, investigations are seldom carried out. One example is the ruling of the Supreme Court of Justice on a pedophile ring in the south of the country where their liabilities were not even mentioned in spite of evidence inculcating political figures at the highest level.

negotiate favorably their own interests at the expense of the general public welfare and, ultimately of a true democratic consolidation. A case in point is broadcasting, which will be analyzed in the articles relating to the Mexican case.

### 3. Media and democracy in Canada

Canada's emergence as a polyarchy was a slow, fitful, and conflictual process. From the earliest arrivals of the French in the XVI century and the British in the XVIII century, Canada's political experience has vacillated between conformity and freedom, expressed in an ongoing dialectic between communitarianism and individualism. While the political economy and political cultures of Canada share much in common with the USA, Canada's distinctiveness is reflected in a history of the Crown, the *dirigiste* state, and habits of elite accommodation. Canada's earliest political economy was mercantilist, dependent upon Royal Charters, monopolies, and protectionism. The early Canadian state and ruling classes exercised strong control over the very creation of Canada as a white-settler colony as the population gradually moved westward. The settlement of Canada is characterized in conservative terms as a process of "defensive expansionism" (Aitken, 1959). The struggle for freedom and democracy in Canada had its notable earliest expression in the rebellions of the 1830s. The defining ideological schism was between the state and establishment, referred to as the "Family Compact" in English Canada and the "Château Clique" in French Canada, and the rising middle and working classes, known as the "Rebels" and the "Patriotes."

From the beginning, the tension between deference to authority and rebellion was expressed through the media. Establishment newspapers, known as "Gazettes," enjoyed state patronage and were the official mouthpieces of the established classes. In opposition to them, a range of pamphlets and "Free Presses" emerged from the 1830s to the 1860s, to spread the message of democracy, institutional reform, criticism of oppression, and the need for "Responsible Government," which was achieved in 1848 and 1849. Responsible government instituted the principle that governments are responsible to the people's elected representatives, who have the right to scrutinize, support, or remove the government at will. The achievement of responsible government set in place a version of Dahl's eighth principle of polyarchy and opened the way for the extension of the franchise in Canada. Most men achieved the franchise in 1885 and most women in 1918.

The struggles that originated in the XIX century found political expression both in the federal system, which was to dramatically pluralize arenas of power, and in emergence of the establishment Conservative Party and the opposition Liberal Party. Canada's emergence into nationhood through the *Constitution Act* of 1867 (known formerly as the *British North America Act*) established the complex and dynamic tensions of Canadian politics that were to set the terms of the political debate until very recently. With respect to the media and democracy, the most important of these concerned the struggles over the state and the United States (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007). The state was, and continues to be, more powerful and influential in Canada than in the United States, at least in the realm of domestic policy. This is why Canada developed a system of public broadcasting in the radio era. Established under the *Broadcasting Act* of 1932, the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation became the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) under the *Broadcasting Act* of 1936. The CBC (known in French as *Radio-Canada*) continues to play a central role in Canadian democratic life, with its mandate according to the latest *Broadcasting Act* of 1991, to "inform, enlighten, and entertain." Since its origins, the CBC has come to represent the statist and establishment side of Canadian broadcasting. Its chief rivals in the private sector, notably represented by the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), have argued strenuously against the existence of the CBC and in particular of its right to receive public funding. This is where the United States comes into the picture. Among the most powerful motivations for creating the CBC was that Canada is an enormous country, with a diverse and thinly dispersed population. Only a system of public broadcasting, it was believed, could guarantee that all Canadians would be served and that largely Canadian talent would produce and distribute programming of importance to Canadians. In other words, the creation of the CBC was an act of nation building in defiance of geography as well as the aspirations of private broadcasters. The early emergence of radio in 1920s was largely an extension of American corporations with largely American programming. Left unregulated and without a Canadian public broadcaster, Canadian governments of the 1930s believed that Canadian broadcasting would by default become essentially American, owing to the proximity and enormous scale of the America media economy.

The principle of independence of public broadcasting at arm's length from either government control or state control was established early in the life of the public broadcaster. In the election of 1935, the Conservative government introduced a series of advertisements in favor of their leader and party. They did so without acknowledging party

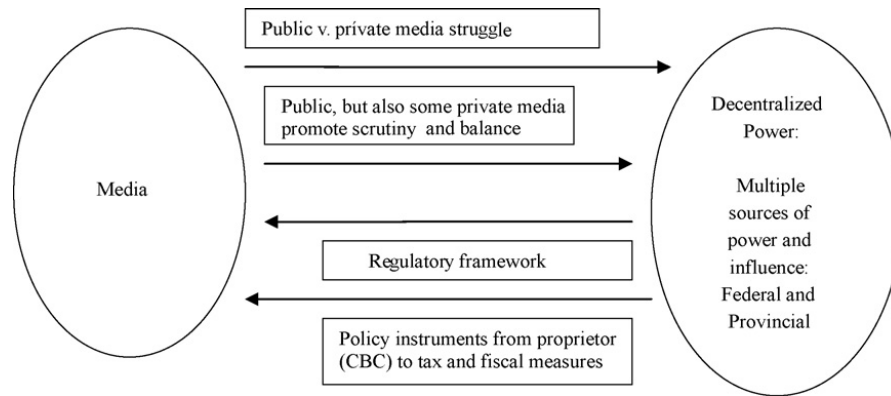


Fig. 3. Polyarchal Relationship between the media and the political regime in Canada. “Relationship Media – Decentralized Power”.

sponsorship. An angry Liberal Party opposition won the election in 1935 and proceeded to limit the powers of the government over the CBC in the *Broadcasting Act* of 1936. However, the CBC continued to play the role of both public broadcaster and regulator of private radio stations, a role it was to continue to exercise until 1958. This dual role was vigorously opposed by the CAB, who labelled the CBC “Cop and Competitor.” Partly as a consequence of the constant lobbying of the CAB, when broadcast television began in the 1950s, the CBC lost its role as regulator. The regulatory function passed to the Board of Broadcast Governors in 1958, which became the Canadian Radio–television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) in 1968. Since its creation, the CRTC has acted as the regulator of both the CBC and the private broadcasters. It issues licences to all broadcasters and can revoke them if they do not meet the standards of technology, pricing, and content set out in the detailed regulations. The early 1950s witnessed the early years of television in Canada. The government of the day, acting under pressure from the CAB, decided to fund the CBC on a one-time tax on television receivers and an annual appropriation rather than through the British model of annual licence fees per television receiver owned (Fig. 3).

This was to be a fateful decision in that it limited both total revenue for the CBC and, more importantly, removed the possibility of stable long-term funding. CBC television emerged as a poor cousin to its British counterpart and was obliged to rely upon commercial advertising revenue as well as the annual appropriation. The CBC has always struggled to sustain its role as a national broadcaster. Despite this, it has sustained a strong reputation for politically responsible journalism and for furnishing an intelligent forum for public debate. Through its mandate, the CRTC has been responsible for regulating the private broadcasters, notably during election periods, during which there are strict regulations on the reporting and coverage of parties, leaders, and candidates.

The birth of the CRTC coincided with the global crisis of capitalism associated with the end of post-War Keynesian regimes throughout the West. In Canada as elsewhere, neo-liberal policies were associated with a diminution in the role and scope of the state, de-regulation, and privatization (Blumer, 1992; Keane, 1991). While the CRTC has exerted an impact on the electronic media in Canada, its role has been exhortatory rather than directive. Only a tiny minority of licences have not been renewed and the CRTC has in recent years permitted cross-media convergences while de-regulating Canadian content requirements. In the current era of globalization, the CRTC, the CBC and other public agencies in Canada have all been weakened (Nesbitt-Larking, 2007; Taras, 1999). Similar developments have taken place in the print media. In the context of a series of horizontal and vertical media mergers, the rise of digital capitalism, and the general regime of de-regulation, the newspaper industry is in crisis and a decreasingly dependable source of news and informed opinion (Skinner, Compton, & Michael, 2005). Among the consequences of these recent developments has been the diminution of the once-familiar ideological tensions within Canada between the communitarian/statist and the individualistic/liberal ideologies. The very structures of the public sphere are being radically reconfigured as those who seek social responsibility in the media are increasingly identifying niche media, channels, and genres, and are taking the first faltering steps toward cyberjournalism and a presence in the blogosphere.

Given this overview of the Canadian context, some preliminary contrasts with the Mexico context are useful in delineating the distinctiveness of the media in Canadian campaigns. Unlike Mexico for most of the 20 century, Canada has not experienced single-party dominant authoritarian corporatism on a large scale, nor has it experienced the concentration of power and control that continues today in both the Mexican economy and the political system.



Canada's political culture has generated a parliamentary tradition of moderate political parties of the centre right and centre left, with minor touches of socialism and right-wing populism. While the Liberal and Conservative parties have enjoyed periods of dominance, each has been regularly voted out of office and neither attained the institutional tenacity of the Mexican PRI in the 20 century. While ownership of television companies in Canada is oligopolistic, there are vibrant and independent public television corporations at both the provincial and the federal level. Moreover, Canada has greater diversity than the ultra-concentrated degree of ownership in Mexico, where *Televisa* and *TV Azteca* between them control 92% of market share (Hughes, 2008: 138). While there is some demonstrable relationship between the ideology of media owners and media content in Canada, it is relatively muted and the government normally remains neutral. In contrast, as we have seen and as Lawson notes "...collusion between media barons, the government, and conservative political leaders" in Mexico (Lawson, 2008: 370).

#### 4. The contributions to this issue

The articles collected in this issue reveal precisely how are these questions posed and debated in Canada and Mexico, making clear the specific challenges that democracy faces at different stages of consolidation. For instance, it is discussed how in a postindustrial democracy, as Canada, the media and communication are part of the debate of complex issues related to participation, effective governmental communication, and civic engagement in multicultural settings. Whereas at the same time it shows how Mexico, some steps behind in its democratic consolidation, is still fighting for creating effective institutional and legal frameworks for fostering competitive media markets and a setting in which electoral campaign communication may properly channel balanced information.

This special issue starts with the article of Howlett, Craft and Zibrik on government communication and its impact on public policy. The authors discuss how the lack of an effective taxonomy of government communication has made difficult the proper evaluation of its impact. Thus, they propose to conceive government communication activities as "information-based policy tools" in order to have a frame of comparison useful for national and cross-national studies. The relevance of their proposal is to outline the participatory nature of government communication and the quandaries it implies for a multicultural and diverse society as the Canadian one.

It follows the contribution of Guerrero, who proposes a model to understand the relation between the media and politics in Mexico after the transition, which transformed from a relation dominated by a centralized political power into another dominated, this time, by strong broadcasting networks over a fragmented political landscape. And then moves to discuss, additionally to the considerations offered by actual literature, the possibility of State capture by strong and organized economic actors under different conditions, those of political fragmentation. The challenging implications for democracy become evident.

The third article is Brenda O'Neil's discussion of a very relevant topic in actual modern democracies: How does mediated information affect attitudes and engagement in the civic/political spheres? The question is an important one, not only because of changing media forms but also because of the important role of the media in providing political information. The work offers a quantitative approach (based on the 2003 General Social Survey) to assess and compare variation in the effects of various media forms on civic engagement in Canada in order to provide a means of developing comparative claims regarding individual media effects.

Then it follows Nesbitt-Larking's critical assessment of Canadian perspectives on the role of the media in electoral behaviour, notably on the roles media play in setting or responding to the agenda in the heat of election campaigns. The work is divided in four sections. In the first one, the author highlights important Canadian methodological and empirical contributions to behaviouralism. The second section, devoted to Culture, Ideology, and Discourse, illustrates general patterns of contrast between the Canadian and American political cultures through an exploration of the comparative role of negative and attack advertisements in election campaigns. The third section of the chapter illustrates how facets of the Political Economy of Canada exert an impact on media/campaign interactions. Finally, the last section of the chapter undertakes the task of situating media/campaign interactions within the Legal-Institutional regulatory context of the Canadian state. The author stresses here the unacknowledged conditions and the unanticipated outcomes of the regulatory apparatus and its possible consequences for Canadian democracy.

The article of Rodríguez on electoral reform in Mexico departs from assessing the growing conditions of political competitiveness and high political uncertainty, which, says the author, have strained relations between the players

involved. The electoral governance of increasingly inclusive regulations which facilitated the development of a moderate multiparty democracy seems not to guarantee the legitimacy and quality of the electoral process. The article analyzes the electoral reform of 2008 with an emphasis on the media aspect and its effect on the behaviour of the different players involved: the parties, the dual structure of the media, the arbiter, and the audiences–voters.

These articles conform an attempt to bring together Mexico and Canada outside the traditional NAFTA frame and (a first attempt) from the media and communication perspective. They do not correspond to a comparative analysis, but to a joint debate on a specific topic. Though these countries are very different in many ways, the discussion of how similar topics develop in each of them may reveal interesting reflections on their public lives and their paths to democratic consolidation. It may pose questions on assumption taken for granted about democracy in Canada, at a time when it may also show some more positive signs of democratic consolidation in Mexico than initially expected. This does not mean that Mexico and Canada are living their democracies along the same path or continuum, but bringing these countries into the discussion together helps to identify the specific issues that democracy raise at different levels of consolidation and development. Further research and discussion are required.

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