

Jan Zielonka (ed.), *Media and politics in new democracies: Europe in a comparative perspective*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2015, xiv + 322 pp.; ISBN: 9780198747536, \$90.00 (hbk)

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Comparative political communication is experiencing a radiant moment since the publication of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. After the book was published, numerous studies were developed, applying the authors' approach to different countries and regions. Not by chance, one of the main objects in the field is the series of nations that changed autocratic rule to democracy in the last decades of the 20th century. After the end of the Cold War, various communist regimes and military or one-party dictatorships turned to democracy in Europe, Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

Media and Politics in New Democracies: Europe in a Comparative Perspective lies within this context. Edited by Jan Zielonka, the book is a major output of the Media and Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe (MDCEE) interdisciplinary research project, launched in October 2009 by the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, with the Department of Media and Communications at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The research project, finished in 2013, aimed to investigate the relationship between democracy and the media in Central and Eastern Europe, after the fall of communism in the region. The collection reunites 24 specialists and presents 18 works, plus the Introduction by the editor and the Conclusions by Terhi Rantanen, Professor of Global Media and Communications at the LSE, and Nikola Belakova, PhD Researcher.

The book first discusses theoretical models to analyze media and democracy, including the notions of volatility and hybridization, the democratic debate and its normative approach, and Karl Polanyi's theory of capitalism. After that, it presents three more empirical parts concerning "actors," "forces," and "challenges." Maybe due to the great number of contributors, the chapters are mostly short and sometimes lack empirical evidence or more complex interpretations. Because of that, the book must be seen within the broader research project, along with other materials made available by the MDCEE through its website (<http://mde.politics.ox.ac.uk/index.php>).

After the three empirical sections, the other two parts of the collection—"Benchmarks" and "Regional Experiences"—raise important matters, such as which structural challenges Central and Eastern European countries may face ahead and how the analysis of post-communist European nations' media and democracy can contribute to the understanding of other different contexts, even though the diagnosis presented in the former are sometimes too abstract to be applied to any nation, and the analysis in the latter too reductionist to deal, as it does in the book, with three large regions—Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa—in only three chapters. In addition to that, *Media and Politics in New Democracies* make very few considerations on the effects of the Internet and the new media in the analyzed contexts, something yet to be studied by further research projects on media and democracy in the region.

The book's main approach, however, focusing on the quality of the media as a function of the quality of democracy, brings a very important contribution to the field. Not much by establishing a causal relationship, but showing media and democracy as interdependent processes, which mutually constitute themselves *in* and *through* communication. As it is written in the Introduction, "Regional experiences discussed in this book show that the media and democracy condition each other" (p. 19).

Another important contribution is the "normative relativism" embraced by the authors. The need for comparative studies of not taking the context of some (Western) countries as references for others to follow was already widely discussed. The fact that Hallin and Mancini (2004) analyzed only Western European and North American countries and the sense that, in *Comparing Media Systems*, the "Mediterranean model" of Southern Europe was seen as inferior to the liberal and the corporatist models of England, the United States, and the North European nations automatically raised questions concerning the same models as adequate frameworks for understanding different contexts. After all, as we know now, different democracies have different democratic deficits. Democratic life is an unfinished process guided by certain parameters as "popular sovereignty," "freedom," "public debate," and so on. Comparative political communication, as any comparative study, has nowadays the imperative and simultaneous challenge of respecting cultural, historical, social, and institutional particularities and finding correspondence among them, in different parts of the world.

Reference

- Hallin DC and Mancini P (2004) *Comparing Media Systems: Three Models of Media and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.