

# Media and Transition in Latin America

**Colin Sparks**

School of Communication, Hong Kong Baptist University

## **Abstract**

This article reviews the authoritarian regimes, and the subsequent transitions to democracy, that existed in Latin America in the last third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is argued that, unlike in other cases, the political science account of such changes, usually self-described as “transitology”, does indeed fit the evidence fairly well. On the other hand, such an account demonstrably fails to illuminate very important features of the experience, notably the relative lack of change in the ownership, structure and practices of the mass media, which is very strongly marked in television. The same large companies that collaborated with, and benefited from, the authoritarian regimes, are still in a dominant position. At the same time, many of the extreme social inequalities that characterise the continent have either hardly been addressed or have actually been exacerbated. It is therefore concluded that these examples are equally well or better explained by a theory that stresses the degree of social continuity between the different political orders.

**Keywords:** Media, democracy, Latin America, Brazil, Mexico

Latin America<sup>1</sup> represents the strongest evidence for the argument that the world has been experiencing a steady progress towards democratic government, accompanied by market economics and supported by free media. These claims lie at the heart of the ‘transitological’ case developed by political scientists since the end of Iberian fascism in the 1970s. In its crudest form transitology claimed that, with the fall of European communism, humanity had overcome ‘history’ and was now confronted with a future in which democracy and capitalism would represent the unchallengeable norms by which all societies would be obliged to live (Fukuyama,

1992, 42). Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, such views may seem somewhat naive, but in a more sophisticated form, for example in the works of Larry Diamond, they continue to enjoy considerable influence and patronage (Diamond, 2008).

In previous studies, this author has been highly critical of transitological thinking, arguing that it is wrong both in its theoretical conceptions and in the empirical evidence adduced to support it (Sparks, 2008, 2009). There seems, however, to be little room for such criticism in this case. The simplest contrast between the political life of the region in the 1970s and the situation today demonstrates beyond question that there has indeed been a wave of democratization that has embraced almost every country. In the 1970s, the overwhelming majority of countries were ruled by military dictatorships of a more or less murderous stripe. Today, the norm is one of democratic government. True, there is still the decaying Stalinist hold-out in Havana, and there was recently a rightist military coup in Honduras, but these are exceptions; or at least, so one hopes. True, also, that many of these democracies have only limited claims to such a status, but the transitological tradition has always taken its inspiration from Schumpeter's minimalist definition of democracy (O'Donnell, 2000, 6–11). At the same time, market economics dominate almost everywhere – even Cuba displays more and more of the characteristic symptoms. The days of ambitious programmes of import substitution, state ownership and national plans for economic development, sponsored variously by politicians and generals of a populist or leftist inclination, are long in the past. The 'left turn' evident in the last few years has challenged economic orthodoxy, but even the most serious and extensive attempt to raise the living standards of the mass of the population, in Venezuela, is financed almost entirely by the export of a primary commodity, oil, rather than the development of industrial capacity or any other form of national development.

Many of the leading theorists of transitology have written extensively on Latin America, but in this article, I want to put to one side the general argument over the adequacy of transitology as a theoretical framework and consider rather the

nature of the democracies that have emerged in Latin America. The focus here is on the mass media, both as necessary constituents of any theory of democracy, however minimal, and also as particularly sensitive indicators of the nature of the regime changes that have taken place. Just as the political changes of the last three decades are indisputable, so too changes in important aspects of the mass media are beyond question. The political science tradition of analysis has usually been more or less silent on the role of mass media: there is seldom anything more than a simple statement affirming that free and independent media are essential to the functioning of democracy (O'Neil, 1996). As it happens, however, transitology, in one form or another, has influenced many of those who have written directly on the mass media. In some cases, indeed, there is a direct and conscious attempt to fill out the abstract assertions of the main theorists with more substantial discussions of the social realities of the mass media (Lawson, 2002). In examining both what the transitological tradition has to say about the mass media and what it tends to ignore or downplay, we can get a better, albeit indirect, sense of the strengths and weaknesses of that approach as a whole.

Any attempt to deal with such a vast geographic area – a whole continent plus a significant part of another continent – is bound to be superficial and any author who wishes to produce a work of manageable length is forced to be ruthlessly selective. A range of countries are referenced in this discussion, but the main focus here is on Brazil and Mexico. While these are by a good measure the largest of the Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking states respectively, no claim is made that they are typical or representative of the region as a whole. The reason for selecting these two examples is that they represent contrasting trajectories. While Brazil was, for two decades, a classical military dictatorship – less bloody than its neighbours in Argentina or Chile but nevertheless ruthless in its repression, indeed elimination, of oppositional groups – Mexico, by contrast, was for 70 years a civilian regime in which one party, variously named but finally and gloriously titled the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Revolucionario Institucional - PRI), monopolized power through a mixture of fraud, bribery and intimidation while maintaining the

pretence of an electoral system. The ending of dictatorial rule in the two countries is widely separated: the military regime lasted until 1985 in Brazil, but the PRI held the Mexican presidency up to 2000. Although neither the first nor the last of the countries to exit from undemocratic rule, Brazil was one of the earlier instances and Mexico one of the later ones. What they have in common, however, is that in both the transformation has been an entirely political matter: both during and after dictatorial rule these societies were unequivocally private capitalist in their economic life. This they share with the vast majority of Latin American societies – Cuba excepted – and they are thus clear tests of the value and limitations of the transition to democracy.

The article begins with a discussion of the situation in Latin America, in terms of both the general social and political structure, during the high period of military rule and its decomposition. It then discusses in more detail the trajectories of Brazil and Mexico towards democratization, in particular with reference to the place of the mass media. Finally, it surveys the resulting situation of a continent dominated by democratic governments and considers what the implications are for our understanding of the general nature of political transition.

### **The Gorillas in Power**

In the longer view, military intervention in politics in Latin America is one of the leading themes of the region's history. Even those countries that could, in the 1960s, boast of a long tradition of parliamentary democracy mostly, like Chile, had a history of intermittent military interventions well into the 20th century. The more or less complete destruction even of these less than venerable civilian orders by military coups was, however, a distinctive feature of period after the Second World War. The background to this wave of coups was popular unrest, which found its origins in the extreme social inequality that marked the entire region. Poverty, racial discrimination and the arbitrary exercise of power in all its forms was endemic in the region, whether formally democratic or not (Skidmore and Smith, 2005). This

unrest had a variety of expressions and a variety of leaderships. In Argentina, for example, the Peronist movement had established itself as the main force in the labour unions, whereas elsewhere it was political parties that stood in the tradition of orthodox, pro-Moscow communism which claimed that role. Irrespective of the precise character of those leading urban workers and the rural poor, however, their activities were perceived, in both South and North America, through the lens of Cold War anti-communism (Farrell, 2006a, 204–5). The people leading these expressions of popular discontent were seen, at worst, as the conscious agents of Moscow, and at the very best as misguided dupes who would inadvertently open the way for the establishment of a totalitarian system. The military response, or rather the response of the officer corps, who were drawn from the lower ranks of the privileged classes, was thus to stage ‘middle-class coups’ in order to protect private property, religion and the family from the ravages of the reds (Nun, 1967). In what they often termed a ‘crusade’ they enjoyed ‘at least the tacit support of the upper and middle classes’ (Skidmore, 1993, 4).

The 1973 coup which overthrew the Popular Unity government in Chile, and which marked the political perspectives of this author’s generation so strongly, was a case in point. An elected leftist government, which had inadvertently ignited working-class demands for a new and more equitable social order, faced persistent opposition from the middle classes and the officer corps, aided and abetted by the US government. This struggle took place as much in the mass media as anywhere else (E. Fox, 1997, 120–5). Television, which in Chile was, unusually, owned and run by universities, became one of the key sites of struggle between supporters of the government and its opponents. Channel 9, owned by the University of Chile, was run by pro-government forces, which were opposed by the university authorities. The latter eventually set up another channel of their own and used the courts to force the leftist director and staff out of the university (Catalán, 1988, 54). Channel 6, run by the Catholic University, had a split board of directors and the Church resolved this by appointing a new channel director who moved coverage to the right (Catalán, 1988, 53).

The majority of the press, partly subsidized by the US government, was hostile to the Popular Unity government, which tried to support publications with a grassroots orientation as an alternative. The government, however, lost these battles and 'by the 1973 coup ... most newspapers, radio stations and television channels were under the control of the right-wing and Christian Democrat opposition' (Fox, 1988a, 22). The eventual overthrow of the Popular Unity government and the murder of its leader President Salvador Allende was 'the most violent military coup in twentieth-century South American history' (Skidmore and Smith, 2005, 132).

The ensuing military regimes across the continent engaged in murder, torture and arbitrary imprisonment, and they everywhere tried to ensure that the mass media portrayed their version of events without reserve. North American observers noted the universal reality of a tightly controlled media (Alisky, 1981). In Chile, for example, all the leftist papers were immediately banned and the only papers that were permitted to circulate in Santiago were the property of families who supported the military government (Buckman, 1996, 9). Censorship was endemic, dissenting journalists were often arrested and sometimes murdered, and the military retained tight control over all broadcasting outlets (Fox, 1988a, 56).

Apart from exercising tight political control over the media, the policies of the military governments varied from country to country: there was no single policy of nationalization or privatization common to all the dictatorships. The origins of broadcasting in Latin America had almost everywhere been strongly influenced by the US model, with private organizations supported by advertising revenues the dominant form (Waisbrod, 1998, 254). In a number of cases, there had been quite close links between the local broadcasters and US companies, at the levels of technology and training, and everywhere the US provided a large proportion of the entertainment programming that aired on Latin American channels (Rogoff, 1981; Wells, 1972). The influence of the US should not be overstated, however, since the immediate ownership of many radio, and later television, stations lay in the hands of the local elite, notably the political elite (Schwoch, 1993, 40–5; Sinclair, 1999, 13).

Despite occasional differences of opinion, in none of these cases did the military governments find that there was any contradiction between their desire to exercise extensive control over the symbolic landscape and the form of ownership of broadcasting. They exercised what was often rather vigorous censorship but did not seek to nationalize the stations. In some cases, however, broadcasters operated under a different, less commercial, model. As we have seen, in Chile the main television stations were owned by universities, and were supposed to follow a cultural as much as a commercial strategy. The Pinochet regime swiftly privatized these stations into the hands of close supporters (Waisbrod, 1998, 259). In Argentina, a number of radio and television channels were under the ownership of state bodies following their nationalization in 1973 by the Peronist government. In this case, the instincts of the military rulers were also to privatize the stations as quickly as possible, but this they found it difficult to complete (Galperin, 2002, 27). The heavy-handed nature of military control had led to substantial popular discontent with broadcasting and the attempted privatization was a protracted business (Fox, 1988b, 43). Although they privatized 24 radio and television stations between 1981 and 1993, these moves were contested and only finally completed after the restoration of civilian government (Zuleta-Puceiro, 1993, 59–61). Even then, the process was a protracted one since the existing commercial companies that supplied programming to the state-owned channels were hostile to any privatization that might worsen their business situation or disadvantage the political parties with whom they were allied (E. Fox, 1997, 105).

The newspaper press presented a different picture. Although the main commercial newspapers were, again, controlled by sections of the local elite, there were also oppositional, even leftist, papers as well. Again, there was extensive censorship of all the press but most leftist papers were simply closed down and many of their journalists faced arrest, torture and death. While some publishers and journalists from commercial papers also suffered persecution, notably Jacobo Timerman, who was imprisoned, tortured and exiled by the Argentinian military, there is no record of any systematic expropriation of the printed press in order to

subordinate it to the perceived information needs of the military dictatorships. Overall, these newspapers, speaking mainly to middle-class elites, were able to coexist relatively peacefully with the dictatorships even in those cases where they did not openly support them. Indeed, the titles were often used by this or that section of the military elite to conduct internal struggles against other factions in the government. Their journalists, on the other hand, frequently found the pressure of censorship and self-censorship in these newspapers so great that they participated in the widespread alternative press projects that flourished whenever direct repression made it possible.

The other distinctive factor of these military dictatorships is that none of them was directly overthrown by a popular rising: in all cases their ends were, as the transitologists demonstrated, negotiated. That is not to say there was not substantial opposition to the regimes. None of the regimes were able to sustain the level of terror reached during the first period after the Chilean coup, or the murderous Argentinean 'dirty war,' and their opponents were both courageous and inventive in finding mechanisms to exploit the opportunities for protest that emerged. In the Argentinean case, most famously, the 'Madres de Plaza de Mayo' staged public demonstrations against the disappearance of their children from April 1977 right up until 2006. There were large-scale popular mobilizations elsewhere in the region as well, with a range of issues from democratization through indigenous rights, ageing, the environment and many others. Given that the neoliberal economic policies increasingly adopted by the military regimes bore most heavily on the poorest in society, with 46 percent of the population of Latin America officially defined as living in poverty by the early 1990s, a measure of popular opposition was only to be expected (Vilas, 1997, 21). Nowhere, however, did these mobilizations bring down the military regimes: 'The military dictatorships of Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, or Chile were not overthrown by popular mobilizations or uprisings, but such mobilizations, from massive and persistent street protests to plebiscites, were important ingredients in the eventual withdrawal of the military' (Vilas, 1997, 8). The oppositional papers, videos, radio stations and other alternative media that



flourished throughout this period were an integral part of those oppositional movements (Fox, 1988c, 182). Journalists and broadcasters who were unable to resist the military censorship in their professional employment worked for these alternative outlets that provided them with a much greater degree of freedom to report and write about society.

The overall picture of the Latin American case during the years of military terror thus contains two important indications of ways in which conventional accounts of the media and democracy are mistaken, which deserve closer attention in subsequent sections. First, there is little evidence for either of the two familiar claims about relations between the state and the media. It is often said that media owned by the government will inevitably be little more than propaganda tools and that privately owned media will necessarily be independent of the government and will act as a force for democracy. In this case, extremely repressive governments with a strong desire to control the mass media, far from nationalizing media or retaining ownership of outlets already in the hands of the state, took no action to gain ownership of the private media and often actively privatized broadcasting outlets that they already owned. The other side of this coin is that the largest and most successful commercial media outlets were very far from being active opponents of the regimes: on the contrary, they were at best mild critics, sometimes willing dupes, and too often outright enthusiasts for the generals. Contrary to frequently repeated assertions to the contrary, it appears that the evidence from this period of Latin American history is that governments seeking to control the media are not primarily concerned with issues of ownership, and privately owned media are not the inevitable and indispensable allies of democracy.

Second, and closely related to this, while the conventional account of a privately owned media necessarily representing an oppositional and democratic media is clearly wrong, there is strong evidence that journalists' self-perceptions as 'professionals' very often leads them into conflict with the demands of their proprietors. While the latter were generally very willing to accommodate to the demands of the military, perhaps in order to preserve their property or maybe more

'altruistically' because they saw the generals as the sole guarantors of what they perceived to be civilization against the red menace, there was a widespread practical rejection of these demands by journalists. Certainly, some journalists accepted the restrictions placed upon them for ideological reasons, others simply tolerated the inconveniences for the sake of their jobs, some took heroic and defiant stands for which they often paid a heavy price, but very many made their own compromise of staying in employment with a collaborationist newspaper or broadcaster while moonlighting for a more radical and oppositional outlet.

## **Brazil**

A more detailed study of the trajectory of the media and society in Brazil provides a clearer picture of these overall trends. By the time of the military coup in 1964, Brazil had experienced nearly 20 years of more or less democratic government, although the franchise was extremely restricted – the large number of illiterates (and thus poor and black people) were unable to vote. Like other countries in the region, Brazil was, despite some economic development, marked by considerable inequality, which none of the governing parties were willing seriously to address (Lamounier, 1989, 125–6). The media reflected these historical realities. There was a history of censorship and government interference with the media from long before the coup (Farrell, 2006b). Newspaper readership was, and still is today, very low by both regional and international comparisons, and broadcast media are the ones which find a mass audience (Power and Roberts, 2000, 258). The media in general, and broadcasting in particular, had from the beginning been closely related to the state and the political elite, in terms of audience, orientation and ownership (Guedes-Bailey and Barbosa, 2008).

Against this background, the relationship between the media and the military conspirators is relatively straightforward to understand. The government of President Goulart found itself confronted by increasing social polarization. On the one hand there was substantial popular discontent among workers and peasants. On

the other hand, there was an increasingly militant upper and middle class, which believed that the government was in alliance with communists bent on expropriating them and creating 'another Cuba'. They were joined by large sections of the officer corps, who were alarmed by a naval mutiny, and the president's subsequent pardoning of the participants. On 30 March, the military began an assault on the government, which by 4 April had driven Goulart from the country (Skidmore, 2007, 280–320). The coup was welcomed by the leading media organizations; according to some sources their proprietors, and notably Roberto Marinho, then the owner of the newspaper and radio company Globo, had actively participated in its planning (De Lima, 1988, 123; Smith, 1997, 38–44).

Politically, the military instituted a rigorous system of censorship over the press. Writing after a decade of military rule, one well-known Brazilian author and journalist claimed that the situation was the worst in Latin America, 'with the possible exception of Chile' (Callado, 1974, 1). He went on to note, however, that the main mechanism of censorship in the press was now 'tacit' and his judgement has been supported by subsequent scholarly analysis. Although there was some direct violence against journalists, it was relatively rare and 'the Brazilian military treated the press less harshly than other groups in Brazilian society and was less coercive than other bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes in Latin America' (Smith, 1997, 182). Open censorship was rare, with very few newspapers, Smith says perhaps 10 or so, being subjected to direct intervention (*ibid.*, 82–3). The high level of conformity achieved was rather the result, first, of the extent to which the owners and editors of the major newspapers were in agreement with the aims of the military regime and, second, the extent to which they were pursuing purely economic ends (Skidmore, 1999, 171). Their political and business interests meant that there was no collective negative response by the press to the instructions issued by the regime as to the nature and content of coverage. The main factor that ensured the compliance of the press was thus its willingness to engage in self-censorship and follow the lead of the dictatorship in the subject and character of its reporting (Smith, 1997, 117–19).

This collusion at senior levels between the military and the owners and editors of the press was not shared by all of the journalists employed even by the official press (Skidmore, 1999, 172). Indeed, it was widely believed that many journalists were leftist opponents of the regime: one leading pro-military politician, José Bonifácio, is quoted as expressing the view that: ‘almost all the journalists [who cover the House of Representatives] are cryptocommunists, especially those with mustaches’ (Smith, 1997, 62). Whatever the truth of such an assertion, there were indeed many oppositional publications, including some that were highly professional critics of the regime, and many journalists submitted articles to these outlets that they were unable to publish in the papers that employed them. Such actions demonstrate that acceptance of the censorship regime was primarily determined by the politics of the owners and editors rather than because of the reluctance of journalists to risk the consequences of independent reporting (Smith, 1997, 164).

Television under the Brazilian dictatorship is a well-known story. All sources agree that the well-established newspaper and radio company Globo, owned by the Marinho family, gave strong support to the military regime and that it was rewarded by being granted a privileged entrance into the burgeoning television industry in the years following the coup. Subsequently, it enjoyed considerable assistance in building its position as the dominant national network (da Silvera e Silva, 2005, 187; Lins da Silva, 2008, 30–2; Skidmore, 1999, 171; Straubhaar, 1996; Vink, 1988, 42). One recent commentator can serve as a summary of the general consensus about Globo’s owner, Roberto Marinho, and the military regime: ‘Marinho very quickly moved to work with the military and provide ideological support for and justification of the coup, branding the Goulart regime and the politicians associated with it such as future presidential candidate Lionel Brizola as communists in disguise ...’ (Wilkin, 2008, 101).

The years of the military dictatorship saw Globo emerge as overwhelmingly the dominant player in the Brazilian television industry, indeed for a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s it was effectively a monopoly. Its alliance with the

military was sufficiently close that even though it was forced to end its illegal relationship with Time-Life, and repaid the loan that had helped it establish itself in television broadcasting, it suffered no sanctions as a result of flouting the law (*ibid.*, 102).

Despite these close alliances between the press and the broadcasters on the one hand and the military on the other, it would be wrong to see them as fused into a single united grouping. For one thing, the military itself was divided between those who wished to prolong a very repressive regime and those who looked forward to eventual democratization. At the same time, the dominance of a small number of large media organizations meant that their actions were increasingly driven by commercial rather political criteria. The media were not a united group, and competed with each other to a certain extent for readers and advertisers. They could, and did, have different assessments of the situation and of what was best for themselves and for Brazil. If the media supported the generals against the civilian government in 1964, it was quite possible for them also to oppose the military in other circumstances.

The reality that there were different interests at stake within the general alliance between the military and the official media is well illustrated both by the ways in which struggles within the military spilled over into the press and by the occasions on which the media distanced itself from the policies of the generals. The clearest example of generals using the media to pursue internal conflicts was when the more 'liberal' wing of the military, led by General Geisel, aimed to move towards the gradual restoration of civilian rule, and slowly relaxed censorship between 1974 and 1978 as part of the 'political project aiming at steady but safe decompression'. From his point of view, one of the advantages of the limited freedom granted to the press was that it allowed him to isolate the more intransigent members of the officer corps (Duarte, 1987, 157-9).

Similarly, the alliance with Globo was subject to tensions on both sides. As one wing of the military moved towards a more liberal regime, the sheer dominance

of Globo, which had often been associated with the more reactionary figures in the officer corps, began to be perceived as threatening, and backing was given to the establishment of competing networks (Sinclair, 1999, 65–70). For its part, Globo remained loyal to the military almost to the end. It bitterly opposed the strike wave in the late 1970s and, at first, ignored the mass protests demanding a direct popular vote in the 1984 presidential elections. Eventually, however, Globo, driven in part by a revolt of its journalists, moved to reporting, if not supporting, the movement. It aligned itself with those in the military and its puppet Congress who wanted to continue the process of liberalization, and, together with the other media, it reported the later demonstrations very fully. Once the mass movement was defeated, however, it swung behind the campaign of Tancredo Neves, who was the (indirect) candidate for democratic change (Guimarães and Amaral, 1988, 128–31). Its reward was that ‘Tancredo then named to the Ministry of Communications a longtime Bahia governor, the indescribable Antônio Carlos Magalhães ... owner of Globo affiliates in his home state and a close friend of Globo magnate Roberto Marinho’ (Power and Roberts, 2000, 258).

Globo was not the only broadcaster to benefit from its alliance with the military and their political supporters. The award the franchises of local stations that carry networks like Globo across the country was in the hands of the presidents, who used them to reward political loyalists. According to an investigation by Marques de Melo, reported by Vink, by the end of the 1970s all of the local stations were in the hands of politicians allied with the pro-military Arena party. Even up until the last day of military rule, President Figueiredo was handing out franchises to his political allies: ‘In the last weeks of his government, the last military president, issued ninety-one broadcasting concession decrees’ (Vink, 1988, 40). The beneficiaries included existing broadcasters, politicians and close friends of the president.

It is important to note that, despite the mass mobilizations for direct elections and the high level of working-class militancy, the military dictatorship was not overthrown by mass action. The democratization of Brazil was protracted, slow

and highly controlled. The first civilian president in 20 years was elected by a Congress stuffed full of the military's political associates, and when he died soon after election he was replaced by Sarney, who had a long record of loyal support for the generals (Skidmore, 1999, 190). If Geisel had started to move towards a more liberal regime in 1974, it was not until ten years later that the first civilian became president, and he was a loyal friend of the military, elected under the constitutional arrangements that they had imposed after their seizure of power. The first genuinely democratic popular election for president was not until 1989, and then the victor was another close ally of the soldiers: 'The three presidents after 1989 – Fernando Collor de Mello, who was impeached; Itamar Franco, the vice president who succeeded him; and Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who was elected in 1994 – represented much the same interest bloc that directed the transition' (Barnhurst et al., 2006, 168). It was not until the election of Luis Ignácio Lula da Silva (Lula) in 2002 that a presidential team untainted by association with the old elite entered power.

The role played by the mass media, Globo in particular, in the new democratic order, did change somewhat, with reporting of political issues displaying less bias (Lins da Silva, 1993). More detailed analysis, however, finds that Globo had not been allied with a particular party but rather is partisan towards those candidates that represented the elite. There was no marked change in the broadcasting set up. 'In spite of the political changes, the influence of the state on the media, especially television, remained strong. All of the control mechanisms remained intact, including censorship. Even in the New Republic, censorship determines what can be broadcasted and when' (Vink, 1988, 43). One observer wrote that:

What is made clear by all these examples [from 1982 to the time of writing] is that Globo's newscasts are, at least during crucial moments, directed conscious political decisions as an instrument for intervention that seeks to

avert scenarios contrary to what the company determines as being in its own interest (or that of Brazil). (Miguel, 2000, 71–2)

This partiality is strongly in evidence in Globo's coverage of the various candidacies of Lula, the representative of the Workers' Party and a man who had made his name as a strike leader in the metal workers' union. From 1989 until his victory in 2002, he provided the main alternative pole of attraction to the elite candidates. The broadcasters, led by Globo, were predictably opposed to his candidacy. In the 1989 election, for example, Globo gave a clear preponderance of coverage to Collor, who, despite his populist rhetoric was the rightist alternative to Lula (Boas, 2005, 34; Straubhaar et al., 1993, 134). Cardoso, who had been a strong opponent of the military, and who was elected president in 1994, had as his running mate a politician who was a long-term friend of the military:

Symbolically, the inauguration of the Cardoso administration represented a reconciliation of the forces that had opposed one another during the years of repression: Cardoso's vice president, Marco Maciel, had his start in politics in the 1964 coup and had remained a staunch supporter of the military regime until its end. (Pereira, 2000, 227)

Globo continued to support Cardoso in his 1998 campaign for re-election, minimizing the problems facing the country and failing to give substantial coverage to critics and opposing politicians, including Lula (da Silvera e Silva, 2005; Miguel, 2000, 72–82).

The political transition from military rule was therefore extremely protracted and the main centres of power, including the broadcasters, remained more or less untouched. Neither did the transition result in any sharp social



changes. Although there was now effectively universal suffrage in Brazil, social inequality continued to be a central feature of the life of the country, with the Gini coefficient, even in 2008, remaining one of the highest in the world. State violence against the population, and in particular its poorer sections, had been a marked feature of the military regime, although it was never as murderous as that of its Argentinean or Chilean colleagues, and opposition to these horrors has been one of the key drivers of the democratic opposition (Vilas, 1997, 4–5). After the end of the dictatorship, however, such violence, still concentrated against the poor, remains a central element of life and, according to some commentators, has even increased in the years following military rule, becoming the worst in the region (Pereira, 2000, 217; Pinheiro, 1997, 263–4; Rose, 2006). Globo, although now challenged by one or two other networks, remained the largest broadcaster, and the award of local franchises continued to be a political gift extended to friends of the current president (Power and Roberts, 2000, 258–9).

The extent to which broadcasting is the prerogative of the Brazilian political elite is remarkable. Roughly one quarter of television stations have a politician either as owner or as a relative of the owners and more than one-third of the Senate owns a radio or television station. Globo is very closely implicated in this politicization of media ownership, with: ‘at least 40 of its affiliated stations belong to regional political leaders’ (Lins da Silva, 2008, 34). This ownership is often divided amongst family members as a means of circumventing the legal provision that bans any one individual from owning more than ten TV stations. The families of senior politicians, like former presidents Sarney and Collor, own broadcasting stations, as do many others (Pinheiro, 1997, 265). On the other hand, the independent media, which had been such a prominent outlet for dissident views, tended to decline after the end of the dictatorship, for example both in video production and in the alternative press (Sarti, 1988; Skidmore, 1999, 172).

Brazil has thus gone through a genuine process of democratization, but it was one in which the pace and character of change ensured that the bulk of the old elite

retained their wealth and power. There was political change, but very strong social continuity. As one commentator put it:

The Brazilian transition to democracy was more gradual, evolutionary, and continuous than any other in Latin America. The formally democratic regime that was more or less in place by 1985 had many links, not only to its military predecessor of 1964–85, but with the populist Second Republic of 1946–64. (Pereira, 1997, 95)

Violence, corruption and human rights violations display continuities with the former military regime (Pinheiro, 1997, 267)

Nowhere is this more marked than in the continuities that are evident in the broadcasting system and press. The same companies, the same families, the same senior editors ran the media before, during and after the military dictatorship. 'Although significant changes occurred in the Brazilian media and political system over the last decades, these changes in truth helped preserve rather than alter the larger media and political system' (Amaral, 2002, 38). Even the election of a former determined opponent for two terms in government has not substantially altered the distribution of wealth and power in Brazil, or in the Brazilian media.

## **Mexico**

Mexico differs from Brazil in many fundamental respects. In the first place, it did not experience the same dynamic of civilian government, military coup and dictatorship, followed by a gradual restoration of a democratic order. On the contrary, it sustained a very long-term civilian government that was, formally at least, subject to a process of periodic election. On the other hand, the PRI elite used bribery, force and limited reforms to maintain itself in power without any real contests for several

decades before finally losing the presidential election in 2000 (Skidmore and Smith, 2005, 273–4). The transition under consideration is not, therefore, the classic one of a shift from military to civilian rule. Rather, it was a case of a shift from one kind of civilian rule, which was effectively a party dictatorship, albeit not a particularly brutal dictatorship by continental standards, to a democratic form of political rule.

Successive PRI presidents had developed a range of measures for controlling the media, most of which did not involve direct repression. The PRI preferred to incorporate its opponents wherever possible, by granting them, or at least their leaders, significant concessions, while retaining the option of penalties should they prove recalcitrant (Skidmore and Smith, 2005, 273). The mechanisms were successfully used on political organizations, peasant groups, workers' unions and the mass media. Few papers were banned: even the Communist Party was, from time to time, permitted to publish a legal newspaper, although at other times its publications were driven underground (Lawson, 2002, 25, 43–4). Similarly, there were few formal bans on interviewing or reporting oppositional figures: the broadcasters were perfectly prepared to carry out this task for themselves (Lawson, 2002, 50–1).

In the case of broadcasting, the most effective mechanism for tying channels to the PRI was through direct ownership. The early broadcasting licences, for both radio and television, were firmly in the hands of political allies of the PRI (Hughes, 2008, 132). The first television licence was awarded in 1949 by the then-president Miguel Alemán Valdés to the Azcárraga family, PRI supporters who had long been active in radio broadcasting. Their channel merged in 1955 with two others to form Telesistema Mexico (TSM) in which the Alemán family had a significant holding (Straubhaar, 2007, 68). This entity again merged in 1972 to form Televisa, which remains the dominant force in Mexican television, and is still effectively under the control of members of the Azcárraga family (Sinclair, 1999, 35–9).

The political alliance between the PRI and Televisa was always clearly and openly acknowledged. If the links between the older generation of politicians and

media owners had been cemented by family relations, the successors were open in their declarations of continuing the family traditions of fidelity. Emilio Azcárrag Jr, the son of the founder, stated 'We are the soldiers of the PRI' and that 'Televisa considers itself part of the governmental system' (Lawson, 2002, 30). One US journalist, detailing the ways in which Mexican broadcasting was closely aligned with the PRI and its consequences for reporting, wrote: 'Televisa's iron-willed owner proudly describes himself as a PRI loyalist; as a result, the evening news is dominated by fawning coverage of the daily doings of the president and his ministers' (Orme, 1993, 137). In a manner very similar to the rise of TV Globo in Brazil, Televisa in Mexico illustrates clearly Waisbrod's contention that there is no necessary conflict between even the most authoritarian state and private media companies: on the contrary, they can easily form mutually supportive alliances (Waisbrod, 1998, 259).

A further, and extremely important, similarity with Brazil should be noted in this context, however. The fact that Televisa was very closely allied with the PRI did not mean that it experienced no conflicts with the state. On the contrary, it came into being as a response to an initiative by the state to establish its own broadcasting system. If the Brazilian regime, with the advantages of military discipline, was itself divided into different factions, the same was even more true of the civilian rule of the PRI: just because a country is a dictatorship does not mean that the rulers all speak with one voice. In the Mexican case, the PRI had, at least, a 'left' and a 'right' faction and Televisa was historically allied with the 'right' faction (Lawson, 2002, 29). The very foundation of the unified company was a response to consequences of the factional struggles inside the PRI. Mexico entered a major crisis in 1968, when government troops shot down large numbers of protesting students in Tlatelolco Square in Mexico City. Many accounts mark this as the start of the general decline of the PRI domination, and certainly the 'leftist' Echeverria government considered that it needed to respond to a major social crisis (Bruhn, 1997). One of its responses was attempt to exert more direct control over broadcasting, and it moved to establish its own television network (E. Fox, 1997, 42). The merger between the

existing private broadcasters that led to the birth of Televisa can be understood as a response to the threat to market domination potentially posed by the new competitor (Kaplan, 1988, 70–2).

A later and slightly different example of the ways in which the PRI elite was divided in its attempts to appropriate the spoils was the foundation of what became the main rival to Televisa. As part of the more general privatization of state assets that marked the ‘neoliberal’ response to the economic crises that increasingly plagued Mexico from the 1980s onwards, the Salinas government sold off two government-owned channels to a private corporation, Grupo Elektra (Sinclair, 2002, 128–30). Although the controller of this corporation, which set up TV Azteca, the first major rival to Televisa, was also called Salinas, he was in fact completely unrelated to the then president, so this was not an obvious example of direct corruption. It later emerged, however, that the president’s brother was in fact a secret investor in the successful company (Darling, 2008, 50; Fromson, 1996, 126–7).

The situation in the press was rather different, in that there have always been many newspapers, spanning a broad political spectrum, but, until the emergence of tabloid papers in the 1990s, these had a very small and mostly elite audience. As in Brazil, television is by far the most important medium among the mass of the population (Hughes, 2008, 133–7). The low circulations and consequent financial difficulties had the consequence of making the newspaper press particularly dependent upon the state for various forms of direct and indirect subsidies. The owners of many newspapers were, and are, closely aligned with this or that section of the PRI, either nationally or in the provinces, and this facilitated access to government advertising, some of which masqueraded as news copy (Benavides, 2000). Other financial aid included reduced tax burdens, cut-price newsprint, soft loans and many other forms of support. As a result, according to one writer: ‘even in the 1990s, only about a dozen of Mexico’s 250-odd newspapers could have survived without direct or indirect government assistance’ (Lawson, 2002, 32). These subsidies had a positive effect of sustaining pro-government (or

pro-governmental faction) titles, and the negative effect posed by the threat of their possible withdraw also acted as a powerful disincentive to criticism.

The incorporation of the owners of most newspapers into the PRI system was paralleled by the acceptance, willing or reluctant, of the existing order on the part of many journalists. Again, financial reasons were important: journalists often found it tempting to supplement their low pay with bribes, direct or indirect, from influential political and business figures (Fromson, 1996, 135). Negative factors limiting the independent spirit of journalists included both the career risks involved, since sacking of critical journalists was quite a frequent occurrence in both press and broadcasting, and there was the real danger of politically motivated murder initiated by government officials (Lawson, 2002, 45–6).

While media owners, both in the press and broadcasting, mostly collaborated, or at least coexisted, with the dictatorial government, just as in Brazil, there is less evidence in Mexico of resistance by journalists in the form of moonlighting for independent publications. This is difficult to explain in terms of repression, since the Mexican government was less brutal than the Brazilian generals. Unlike them, however, the PRI enjoyed a degree of legitimacy as the heirs of a genuine revolution and the bearers of an enduring form of government that satisfied the aspirations of at least some social groups. As a consequence, the system also commanded a degree of support among journalists. As one writer puts it: ‘most reporters considered themselves part of a valid system, rather than autonomous outsiders, and so affirmatively endorsed the political status quo, sought to legitimize it, and attacked its detractors’ (Hughes, 2006, 51–2).

This apparently stable and well-organized system began to break down with the loss of legitimacy entailed in the 1968 massacre, but it proved capable of sustaining itself for another 30 years, albeit with gradual change and adaptation. One of the reasons for the relative success of the PRI had been that it had delivered some elements of economic development, but by the 1980s this had stalled and the regime was obliged in 1982 to devalue, renege on its debts and accept strict IMF

conditions as part of a rescue plan. Among other conditions, a steady process of privatization was imposed, which included the above-mentioned selling-off of government channels to form TV Azteca and the ending of the government monopoly on news print importation (Darling, 2008, 50–1). One consequence of this programme, however, was to reduce the amount of direct government patronage in terms of advertising revenues: a state-owned industry can be obliged to advertise wherever the state wishes, while a private industry, even one owned by a government crony, is obliged to consider the market implications of such decisions (Hughes, 2003, 101). These changes, and other fiscally driven reforms instituted by Salinas necessarily reduced the ability of the government to bribe the press (Lawson, 2002, 76–7). It also meant that economic success came to depend upon political connections less and less – in other words, being in good standing with the PRI was no longer an almost indispensable condition for a businessman. The effect of these changes was thus to widen the gaps that had always been present between factions in the PRI, some of whom looked outside of the traditional patronage structures to solidify their base of support (J. Fox, 1997, 398). It also gave greater room for manoeuvre to those who, for one reason or another (for example, the PRI tradition of anti-clericalism) had remained outside of its embrace. Similarly, the development of much closer ties with the USA, and the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1994 opened Mexico to much more direct influence, particularly in the media. Some owners, and many journalists, began to enjoy direct experience of the US and Canadian media and were influenced by the assertive claims to independence and professionalism that are such a marked feature of that system (Hughes, 2006, 114; Lawson, 2002, 87).

The overall effect of these developments was to weaken the hold of the PRI over the society as a whole and the mass media in particular. Although it continued to win elections right up to 2000, it depended more and more on apparent fraud, for example in Salinas's 1988 election victory over Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, which delegitimised its victories. Cardenas was not only a former stalwart of the PRI who had been expelled and forced to form his own party but he could also claim to be the

inheritor of the traditions of the movement as the son of the man who as president had perfected the PRI's hold on power in the 1930s. The combination of social, political and economic changes generated pressures on the established control mechanisms that the PRI had deployed over decades. It struggled to adapt to these changes, sometimes changing the nature of its relationship to different sections of society and sometimes being forced to relax its grip more or less completely.

In broadcasting, the creation of TV Azteca, although clearly influenced by the family considerations of the president, led to a new competition for audiences that resulted in a more aggressive news styles both on Azteca and on Televisa itself as it attempted to maintain its dominant position (Darling, 2008, 52). Much of this news was 'tabloid' in character, although there were also important changes to the type and amount of political coverage as well, which included more adversarial attitudes towards officials on the part of journalists (Hallin, 2000). The television news was no longer dominated by uncritical coverage of the latest trivial doings of the president. Although such coverage certainly remained, it was now forced to cede at least part of the bulletin to more entertaining kinds of comment that would attract a larger audience in a competitive market.

The changes in the printed press were, however, more rapid and extensive. A number of existing titles were transformed and were joined by some new papers. What emerged was a new model for Mexican journalism which bore many marks of the influence of North American journalism. The new papers were more commercially oriented than the older titles and therefore needed to provide material that attracted readers rather than pleased their political paymasters. In pursuit of this objective, they broadened the range of journalism to include lifestyle journalism and other audience-oriented material. Initially, and perhaps not coincidentally, they also tended to be located in the north of the country. They were at the same time much more politically independent than the existing press and, to the extent that they were aligned, tended to side with the Party of National Action (PAN, from the Spanish name Partido Acción Nacional, which is the heir to the Catholic resistance to PRI anti-clericalism) rather than the PRI (Lawson, 2002, 61–



92). The press which began to emerge in the declining years of the PRI monopoly of power thus came to reflect a greater diversity of viewpoints than had been possible in earlier years.

Whether this weakening of control over the media was the cause of the gradual erosion of the PRI's power or a consequence is a question we do not need to address here. Whatever the causality, we can observe that, by the 2000 presidential election, which was won by PAN candidate Vicente Fox, there was also a much greater diversity of information and commentary available in the Mexican media. Although it had been punctuated by crises – the massacre of 1968, the economic catastrophe of 1982, the disputed election of 1988, the Zapatista rising in Chiapas and the devaluation of peso in 1994 – none of these had been sufficiently pronounced as to produce a sharp disjuncture in political life. Fox, the eventual victor, was certainly from outside the PRI apparatus, but was nevertheless a representative of an important section of the broader Mexican elite. Indeed, as one major commentator puts it, the members of this broader grouping 'were crucial actors in transforming Mexico politically and economically' (Ai Camp, 2002, 255–6). In fact, the new distribution of power represented a shift away from the corporatist structures of intertwined political and economic power that had evolved during the years of attempted self-development towards a much more obviously business-oriented grouping: 'the most dramatic changes from Zedillo's to Fox's cabinet are that nearly half of Fox's collaborators are the product of private schools, and two thirds are businessmen contrasted to none under Zedillo, a radical shift from six years earlier' (Ai Camp, 2007, 131). Mexico remained a highly unequal society with large numbers of people living in extreme poverty and wealth and power concentrated in very few hands.

The election of Fox inspired some commentators to anticipate radical changes, particularly in the mass media (Rockwell, 2002). In the event, there have been no such dramas. The ownership of television assets remains concentrated in very few hands: in 2002 Televisa had more than 70 percent of the audience and, together with Azteca, controlled 97 percent, making this the most concentrated of

markets in Latin America (Lawson and Hughes, 2005, 175). The result is, predictably, that news has become much more tabloid in form and content as a consequence of oligopolistic competition of a kind familiar elsewhere in the world. While there is less obvious support of the government of the day, there is seldom any substantial criticism of the wider power structure, particularly businesses, and although Azteca leans towards the PAN, Televisa continues its close relationship with the PRI (Hughes and Lawson, 2005, 14). So, too, with the printed press. The 'civic journalism' that began to develop in the last years of the PRI domination has experienced a decline and here, too, one can observe deference towards corporate interests. The hotly contested elections of 2006, where the 'leftist' candidate of the party founded by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática), came very close to defeating (some would say actually did defeat) PAN was marked by the emergence of highly partisan reporting and commentary (Hughes, 2003, 145–7).

Overall, Mexico has moved from the effective 'soft' dictatorship of the PRI that found many ways to dominate the media landscape to a much more plural political and media system that 'can fairly be labelled a democracy, if democracy is narrowly defined as a competitive political system, in which two or more parties compete in an open and fair electoral process' (Ai Camp, 2007, 10). Despite the obvious differences in their starting points, Mexico and Brazil display many features in common, particularly with regard to their mass media. Both have moved towards systems in which the political elite no longer exerts direct control over the content and direction of the mass. There is much less censorship and much more room for criticisms of the political elite. At the same time, the ownership and control of the media, particularly the crucial mass medium of television, remains in more or less the same hands as it always has been, and continues to enjoy comfortable relations with the power elite.

## **Conclusions**

Both the general trajectory of Latin American societies and the specific examples we have examined offer confirmation of the general thesis advanced by the transitologists. These were indeed societies that evolved, through a process of negotiation and compromise, from dictatorship to democracy. The key actors were different sections of the national elites, although outside forces did play some role both in the establishment and continuation of the dictatorships and in their eventual ending. While there were certainly large scale popular political protests, for example the 1984 mass demonstrations for direct elections in Brazil and the 1994 Chiapas rising in Mexico, none were substantial enough to force the elite into significant concessions, let alone challenge its power. In media terms, these processes entailed the removal of direct censorship and the loosening of forms of indirect censorship, although they did not always make the job of journalist any more secure or physically safer. Although very far from representing the range of opinions available in society, and certainly not impartial in their coverage of politics, the media were now much more open to at least the major forces in society. Ownership, particularly of the dominant medium of television, remained highly concentrated and firmly in the hands of the same companies that had profited under the dictatorships. There were some new entrants into the media scene, religious broadcasters in Brazil for example, and commercial newspapers mostly associated with PAN in Mexico, but these entries represented at most a limited renewal and redefinition of the elite. The forms of oppositional media, for example the alternative media in Brazil and the civic journalists in Mexico, tended to decline after the establishment of democracy. The new media of the democratic age, notably large numbers of community radio stations, often on the borders of legality, do indeed address a plebeian audience, but the mobilizations that it enables are mostly local ones (Hughes and Lawson, 2005, 14–15). The internet does indeed provide an alternative platform for dissident groups, as it most notably did in Chiapas (Knudson, 1998). This medium, however, remains relatively restricted in terms of its audience's size and social composition: by 2009 only 32 percent of the population were classified as 'Internet users,' and these were disproportionately male (World Internet Project, 2010). This source is not apparently interested in things like social class, which one might have thought

would be important in developing countries if not in the USA, so we cannot say to what extent peasants participate in this activity.

While the Latin American experience does indeed fit rather well with the claims of the transitological perspective, it also provides clear evidence of the limitations of this approach:

**1)** *The limits of purely political democracy.* The transitological tradition has always been quite clear that it was concerned exclusively with political matters. These transitions have been 'purely political' and have had singularly little impact upon the overall distribution of wealth and power. The social and economic arrangements that facilitated dictatorship have survived into the democratic era. While Schumpeter himself was sensitive to the social realities within which any democracy operated, the political science adaptation of his approach without the existence of the conditions he specified in the Latin American context produces 'a mockery of the democratic regime' (Nun, 2003, 22). The overwhelming body of evidence from Latin America is that social inequality grew alongside the transition to democracy (Ai Camp, 2007, 5; Vilas, 1997, 23–5). The result has been a democracy that delivers little or nothing for the mass of the population except for periodic elections (Vilas, 1997, 8). In most cases, for example in Central America, the state machine over which successive dictatorial and democratic regimes ruled remained dominated by the same social forces and represents a major obstacle to the kinds of social changes that might alter this situation (Rockwell and Janus, 2003, 217).

**2)** *The demobilization of popular opposition.* One of the main motivations for support for the military regimes, and for dictatorship more generally, was that the upper and middle classes feared a 'communist' takeover and the subsequent destruction of their extremely privileged positions. One of the 'achievements' of the dictatorships was to weaken or destroy the classical oppositional movements that might have led such social movements. The result was that, apart from sporadic and localized protests, the only groups able to formulate overall strategies were 'the wealth holders of real estate, of businesses, and of liquid assets' and the technocrats

whose policies have 'have normally benefitted the status quo, meaning the wealth holders' (Skidmore and Smith, 2005, 442).

**3)** *Internal divisions are a characteristic of the ruling group.* While it is a commonplace to recognize that one of the characteristics of a democratic political order is that it provides for the public articulation of differences between elite groups, the absence of democracy does not imply that such differences vanish. The evidence from Brazil and Mexico demonstrates that, during the dictatorial period of both countries, there were powerful differences in strategy among those who held power. The transition to democracy has not removed the clash of interests but it has made the manner in which it is resolved very different.

These more general features are obviously in the analysis of the mass media conducted above. The general continuity of the media elite, both proprietors and senior employees, is one aspect of the general elite continuity. The continuing powerlessness of journalists in the face of their employers, not to mention their exposure to violence motivated by their professional activities in a number of countries, is characteristic of the relative impotence of subordinate groups. The limited, but real, willingness to represent different points of view is an indication of the continuing divisions with the elite. There are, however, several media-specific features of this general process that require comment:

**1)** *Pluralism is intra-elite pluralism.* Just as politics is dominated by sections of the elite, so too are the debates in the media, and the extent to which the media are prepared to act independently of the political elite is relatively limited. The media in the democratic era have certainly been much more prepared to investigate scandals and corruption, which was difficult if not impossible in the mainstream press under the dictatorships. Corruption, which has been rife in most if not all Latin American countries, has provided an obvious target for exposure. While newspapers have a relatively strong record in this regard, television tends to be less committed to 'watchdog' journalism since, as we have seen, access to broadcasting remains a highly political question. The targets of these journalistic exposures tend to be elite political scandals rather than the egregious social and economic problems of the

region. One explanation for this is that the marketized press is concerned to attract middle-class readers who will be attractive to advertisers, and this audience is not interested in the problems facing the lower orders (Waisbrod, 2000, 96). Perhaps more important, however, is that the exposure of elite wrongdoing usually depends on the leaking of information that was previously confidential, and the source for this kind of material is overwhelmingly from within the political elite itself. Providing material for investigative journalism is thus an aspect of intra-elite disputes (Waisbrod, 2000, 97–115).

**2)** *Media ownership is not the decisive question.* There seems to be no necessary relationship between particular political forms and media independence. The post-1989 version of transitology places great emphasis upon the twin processes of democratization and marketization, and this model has been applied to Mexico, with some success, by Lawson (2002) and, to a lesser extent, Hughes (2006). These writers make out a strong case for the ways in which market-oriented journalism in some sections of the press played an important role in broadening the range of political debate. A more inclusive account, however, would be forced to question whether these two processes are inevitably linked in such a way. As was noted above, the dictatorships found little need to interfere with the ownership patterns of the media, and to the extent they did they tended to transfer public and state broadcasters into private hands. The mechanisms for control of the mass media worked relatively independently of ownership and proved as effective, and eventually as ineffective, in both sectors. Second, as both Hughes and Lawson note, the longer-term impact of commercialization has been to shift journalistic effort away from 'Fourth Estate' functions towards the more commercially attractive forms of entertainment journalism (Hughes, 2006, 145, 2008, 210; Lawson and Hughes, 2005, 186).

**3)** *Political power and economic power are not in opposition.* The assumption underlying much of the transitological literature is that political power acts as a restriction on economic power. The evidence from the media in Latin America, and in particular the evidence relating to television, is much more Foucauldian. Political power has certainly been exercised over the broadcasting field, but its effect has

been to produce powerful oligopolies rather than to restrict their growth. We might call this relationship between political and economic power 'political capitalism', in that there is a mutual dependency between the wielders of these distinct kinds of social power. Political power provides the legal basis for the activity, and economic power provides the legitimizing ideology. These relationships hold under both dictatorial and democratic forms of government, although in the democratic form there is, perhaps, more equal bargaining between the two elites. This equal bargaining helps to explain why it is that political alignment remains so central to media practices in the democratic era: media owners are allied with different factions of the elite, and they try to use their outlets to improve and protect the position of the media allies.

Overall, the transitological approach provides an adequate account of the processes involved in the Latin American case. It also, however, illustrates the limiting conditions under which this kind of transition can take place successfully. The facts presented here also fit very well with the alternative approach of elite continuity advocated by the current author as an explanation of transitions, some to democracy and some not, in other cases.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> I use the term 'Latin America' in its obvious linguistic sense to denote those countries officially speaking Spanish and Portuguese, in North, Central and South America, and in the Caribbean. I should make it clear that I do not claim to be an expert on these countries or their media system, being unable usefully to speak either Spanish or Portuguese. This inability to engage with the primary sources is an unfortunate obstacle to many comparative researchers and I am acutely conscious of the limitations that it imposes upon my analysis.

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