

**BOOK
REVIEW**

***Comparing
Media Systems:***

Three Models of Media and Politics

DANIEL HALLIN AND PAOLO MANCINI

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 342 p.

REVIEWED BY **Mauro P. Porto**

As a field of inquiry, journalism studies developed from a multiplicity of theoretical and disciplinary traditions. News production processes have been explained in terms of different approaches, including economic, organizational, cultural, historical, and political perspectives (SCHUDSON, 1996; ZELIZER, 2004). To explain differences in journalistic cultures and practices, several scholars have focused on the interactions that take place between media and political systems. Since the publication of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) *Four Theories of the Press*, a growing number of comparative studies have proposed typologies to identify different models of journalism. As a result, a new field of comparative research has emerged that seeks to explain journalism in terms of the different historical, social, and political contexts in which news production practices and institutions are embedded.

Although promising, the new field of comparative research has been deeply marked by the period of the Cold War, taking the liberal or Anglo-American model as the ideal type according to which other journalistic traditions are evaluated. As a result, comparative studies of journalism have frequently been characterized by normative theories of the press that are too general and abstract, and that have not been successful in explaining concrete configurations of journalistic practices.

In this context, the new book co-authored by Daniel Hallin (University of California, San Diego) and Paolo Mancini (University of Perugia, Italy) is a very welcome contribution to this field of inquiry. *Comparing Media Systems* will certainly become a key and essential reference for any scholar interested in understanding how journalistic practices and institutions interact with political systems and how such interaction is

shaped by different social, economic, and historical contexts. The book focuses on the postindustrial democracies of Western Europe and North America and identifies important variations in the structure and role of the mass media in these regions. It has a special relevance for the field of journalism studies, since the authors emphasize the news media in their explanation of these variations.

While developing a sophisticated analysis of patterns of media and politics interaction in 18 countries of Western Europe and North America, Hallin and Mancini identify three basic models of political communication. To distinguish these models, the authors use four main dimensions, according to which media systems can be compared. First, the development of media markets, with a special focus on the development of a mass circulation press. Second, political parallelism, or the links between the media and major divisions in society, including political parties. Third, the development of journalistic professionalization. And finally, the degree and nature of state intervention in the media system.

Based on these four dimensions, the authors identify three basic models of the relationship between media and political systems. The “Polarized Pluralist Model,” found in the Mediterranean area of Southern Europe (France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain), is characterized by low levels of newspaper circulation and journalistic professionalization, as well as by high levels of political parallelism and state intervention. The “Democratic Corporatist Model” of Central and Northern Europe (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland) is characterized by high levels of the four dimensions (newspaper circulation, parallelism, professionalization, and state intervention). Finally, Hallin and Mancini identify the “Liberal Model” of the North Atlantic region (Britain, Canada, Ireland, and United States), which presents medium levels of newspaper circulation, strong professionalization, and low levels of parallelism (with the exception of Britain) and state intervention.

Hallin and Mancini discuss each model in separate detailed chapters. Contrary to much of the previous comparative research, though, the authors are careful enough to avoid simplistic frameworks and normative biases. For example, they stress that the three models are “ideal types” which are aimed at identifying patterns and not homogeneous realities. They also stress that there is variation within

each model and that media systems are not static. For example, one of the chapters discusses recent changes which indicate a process of global convergence toward the Liberal Model. But although differences between the models are diminishing in the age of globalization, media conglomeration, and secularization of politics, Hallin and Mancini argue that variations in political systems will persist and continue to shape and be shaped by the news media.

Despite its methodologically rigorous and theoretically sophisticated analysis of the three models, Hallin and Mancini's book has a few shortcomings. The authors could have provided more consistent empirical evidence to support some of their claims. For example, the book presents data from surveys conducted with newspaper readers in Polarized Pluralist and Democratic Corporatist models to prove that they are characterized by high levels of political parallelism. Thus, we learn that in Italy supporters of Berlusconi's political party (*Forza Italia*) tend to read a Berlusconi-owned newspaper (*Il Giornale*), while supporters of leftist parties (Democrats of the Left and Communist Refounding) tend to read *L'Unitá*. Although the authors argue that we do not find such level of parallelism in the print media of the United States, no similar data is presented about the readers of the main American newspapers. For example, are most *New York Times* readers sympathizers of the Democratic Party? Do Republicans prefer conservative papers? No survey data is presented.

Despite possible shortcomings, *Comparing Media Systems* is a strong piece of research that will influence generations of scholars to come. Some of them will certainly build on this book to identify other models of political communication in other regions of the world. For example, Hallin and Mancini stress the similarities between the Polarized Pluralist Model of Southern Europe and the media systems of Latin American (see also HALLIN and PAPANASSOPOULOS, 2004). But do Latin American countries share a basic model of political communication? Or can we identify, with the same level of sophistication and rigor of Hallin and Mancini, distinct models in the region? Future research on journalism should not fail to take advantage of the promising and exciting opportunities opened by this path-breaking book.

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