After Broadcast News: Media Regimes, Democracy, and the New Information Environment. By Bruce A. Williams and Michael X. Delli Carpini. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. 376p. $99.00 cloth, $32.99 paper.
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— Regina G. Lawrence, *The University of Texas at Austin*

In their book, Bruce Williams and Michael Delli Carpini endeavor to provide a new framework for analyzing and evaluating the role of media in political life in this era of 24-hour cable news and "reality" TV, the *Daily Show* and *Colbert Report,* Facebook, and Twitter and Tumblr.

This reorientation is required, the authors argue, because our dominant empirical and normative models of the media are products of a bygone era—the "Age of Broadcast News." Seen through those still-reigning models, today's media environment spells mostly doom for democracy. Traditional public affairs news delivered through authoritative media outlets is on the decline. Fewer outlets are producing "serious" news, and for shrinking audiences. The blurring of lines between information and entertainment and between fact and opinion that are the hallmarks of the new media environment, as seen through the lens of received models, seriously undermines the public's capacity for good citizenship.

In contrast, Williams and Delli Carpini argue that this broadcast news–era perspective "provide[s] an exceptionally poor starting point for any full appreciation (or criticism) of the changes currently underway in the media environment" (p. 7). A new era needs a new map of the terrain that can more effectively guide both our research questions and our normative assessments of media and democracy.

The conceptual reorientation provided in *After Broadcast News,* laid out in the book's first five chapters, includes several fundamental elements. First, the authors argue, we must understand media in terms of the regimes in which they operate: the "historically specific, relatively stable set of institutions, norms, processes, and actors that shape the expectations and practices of media products and consumers" in each era (p. 16).

The authors offer a quick walking tour of previous eras in American media history to highlight the fact that there is nothing natural or inevitable about the particular alignment of conditions that created the broadcast news era. Preceded and shaped by the Progressive era, which institutionalized the notion of journalists' professional expertise for objectively reporting the news, the era of broadcast news added mass media and limited channels, thus creating a more or less captive audience for news delivered by professionals. The decline of that era has been chronicled before, particularly in Markus Prior's *Post-Broadcast Democracy* (2007). *After Broadcast News* provides a broader grounding for understanding that every era has its own media regime and that these regimes are always evolving and contested. Seen in this light, the Age of Broadcast News was a historically specific accomplishment—or accident—and the conditions that made it possible no longer exist.

Second, the authors argue, reigning categories of the broadcast era must be critically reexamined and even set aside—the rigid differentiations between "news" and "entertainment," between "fact" and "opinion," and between professional journalists and the rest of us. Today's emerging media regime "hearkens back to earlier eras" that made no such clear-cut distinctions, adding centralized gateways like Yahoo! and Google for countless people to connect across old boundaries of neighborhood and nation. Today's regime is also characterized by the hyper-real blending of media rituals, such as popular selection of winners on TV reality shows with the simultaneous public election of an actual president, and by "multiaxial" communication flows. In this new media regime, "no one genre is automatically more or less likely to be the source of public understanding about the political and social world" (p. 113). In a later chapter, the authors offer an illustrative case study of Hollywood movies and popular novels about climate change, which arguably have shaped public understanding of that issue more profoundly than the limited, sporadic, and falsely "balanced" news coverage consumed by smaller audiences. Another chapter explores the complex information environment after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, arguing that even in times of political crisis—times during which the mainstream media regain their preeminence—studies of media content and influence must still also "include films, dramas, comedies, and late-night talk shows as well as news broadcasts; foreign as well as domestic sources; chat rooms as well as newsrooms" (p. 276).

These arguments take the authors to their central task, which is to define what counts as politically relevant information in the new media age. Rejecting past definitions resting on genre, content, or source, Williams and Delli Carpini argue instead that politically relevant information, no matter its form or source, is that which "shape[s] opportunities for understanding, deliberating, and acting on (1) the conditions of one's everyday life, (2) the life of fellow community members, and (3) the norms and structures of power that shape these relationships" (p. 122).

Refreshingly, Williams and Delli Carpini avoid two traps that could undermine their own analysis. First, in contrast to those who romanticize new media technologies, these authors do not assume that today's multiaxial communication will remain as free and open as it seems at the moment. They caution that "this Wild West version of contemporary information flows" will almost certainly give way to "a new media regime, with new institutions and norms, as well as new 'winners' and 'losers'" (p. 78). And the fall of journalistic gatekeepers does not mean the end of gatekeeping, as search algorithms and their authors

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become the new tenders of information gates. Ultimately, they warn, the extent to which the emerging media regime will enhance or limit democratic discourse is unclear.

Second, the authors avoid crude relativism. To say that all forms of media may contain politically relevant information is not to say that all information is politically relevant, nor that all political information is democratically helpful. Notably, they contend that politically *relevant* information can either enhance or inhibit the public's understanding of politics. (In fact, they suggest that conventional political news, with its focus on the inside game of politics and devotion to a narrow understanding of "objectivity," has arguably undermined the public's democratic capabilities.)

After Broadcast News is both exhilarating and, at times, a bit frustrating. A few key components of the argument beg for more development, including the authors' reading of the Realist movement that, they argue, profoundly shaped the American media regime of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. That the Realist movement is not more completely rendered here is unfortunate, because recalling the Realist influence is one of this book's main contributions to our received understandings of media history. The Realist impulse to apprehend reality through a variety of genres, as much as a postmodernist embrace of hyperreality and multiaxiality, animates the book. The authors, it seems, wish to create a realism for the postmodern age, in which, as in the original Realist era, "the public assume[s] that the new media capture reality in ways that other sorts of representation could not" (p. 34).

The book is also less than satisfying when dealing with the vexing problems of misinformation in contemporary politics. In the final chapter, the authors offer some thoughtful standards against which to measure the democratic performance of media, including *transparency* (about the persons and interests that lie behind media messages), *pluralism* (of media outlets, content, and perspectives), and *verisimilitude,* which they define as a media product's ability to offer "the likelihood or probability of truth" (p. 303). They pointedly reject the broadcast era's faith in facts; indeed, a central argument of the book is that "determinations of what constitutes all but the most basic facts, what constitutes opinion, and for whom this is the case are almost always inherently contestable" (p. 297). In essence, instead of preserving a privileged place for facts, Williams and Delli Carpini contend that facts have rarely been as self-evident as the broadcast era model of journalism believed. But replacing facts with "verisimilitude" will undoubtedly leave some readers dissatisfied, for the book does not fully grapple with the implications of a marketplace of ideas in which half-truths and distortions become the most popular commodities.

For readers attached to traditional notions of media social responsibility or to received models of media influence such as top-down agenda setting, this book may be jarring. "The challenge in shaping this new regime," the authors argue for example, "is not to determine how to re-create the authoritative political-information hierarchy of the past—for better or worse, that battle has already been lost" (p. 133). For others who have already embraced the relaxed boundaries between news and entertainment and the hyper-real nature of contemporary media and politics, the book may feel less like a revelation and more like a long-overdue exhortation to everyone else to catch up. No matter which camp you belong to, this should be required reading. Personally, I am grateful for the reorientation.

COMPARATIVE POLITICS

The Soldier and the Changing State: Building Democratic Armies in Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. By Zoltan Barany. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012. 472p. $75.00 cloth, $29.95 paper.
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In case any of us needed reminding, the events of the Arab Spring have highlighted once again the crucial role that coercive state agencies in general, and the military in particular, often play in regime transitions. Those seeking a clear and well-grounded overview of the role of the military in periods of major political change and of the way in which the army is subjected to democratic civilian control after such episodes will find a valuable guide in Zoltan Barany's new book.

The Soldier and the Changing State is an extraordinary book in both senses of that word, simultaneously remarkable and rare. Most notably, the book is built around 27 country case studies that span the globe—it really does encompass Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas, as the subtitle promises. Barany traveled to all of those continents to conduct interviews, although not surprisingly in a book of this scope, the major source for the case studies is the existing secondary literature. The case studies are grouped by three different "contexts": after war, after regime change, and after state transformation. Each of these contexts is further subdivided into types, or what the author calls "settings": Postwar contexts can be found after both external and internal war, post–regime change contexts can be either postpraetorian or postsocialist, and state transformation can be either after colonialism or after (re)unification. Further, some of his settings use multiple chapters to cover different regions, and so there are three chapters

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