Book Reviews

Michelle D. Bonner, *Tough on Crime: The Rise of Punitive Populism in Latin America*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. Figure, tables, acronyms, abbreviations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index, 220 pp.; hardcover $40, ebook.

The mass media arguably play a critical role in all modern societies by directly linking elites with the mass public. More crucially, for proponents of liberal democracy, the establishment of a pluralistic mass media and institutions that protect freedom of the press are key benchmarks in the process of democratic consolidation. Yet even in democratic settings, illiberal, antidemocratic ideas may come to dominate media narratives to the exclusion of prodemocratic ideas. What explains media actors' uncritical support for ideas that are arguably antithetical to their profession's normative role in a democracy, and what do scholars of democratic consolidation consequently need to reconsider in their conceptualization of the role of the media in those processes?

In this new contribution to the study of media and politics, Michelle D. Bonner examines how the interactions between the everyday practices of journalists, state actors, and civil society organizations contribute to the rise of illiberal populist strategies in the realm of criminal justice and security policymaking. This study, based primarily on 194 in-depth, semistructured interviews with media, state, and civil society actors in Argentina and Chile between 2006 and 2015, offers an interpretive and constructivist argument that focuses on variation in the structure of media systems to understand why the mass media promote populist, tough-on-crime rhetoric and policies in democratic contexts. These various structures, Bonner explains, shaped in recent years by neoliberal reforms, including the privatization and deregulation of the media, create performative pressures that constrain the capacity of journalists to promote pluralistic and representative expressions of public opinion. More particularly, the profit incentives inherent in neoliberal structures push media organizations to favor what Bonner calls "punitive" populist voices in their reporting on issues related to crime and violence. This constraint then leads to the homogenization of public opinion in favor of these approaches, the increased salience of punitive rhetoric and policies in government and civil society, and efforts by political leaders to align with this constructed popular discourse in their efforts to win elections. In short, media systems matter.

In the course of making this argument, Bonner compares three media systems: democratic corporatist, neoliberal, and captured neoliberal. Democratic corporatist

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systems, like those found in Northern Europe (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, the Netherlands, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland), enjoy freedom of the press even as the state regulates and subsidizes mass media to encourage diverse representation of interests and opinions. Bonner argues that these systems are traditionally less prone to the promotion of punitive discourse. Neoliberal systems, like those found in the United States, Britain, Ireland, and Canada, by contrast, see the mass media not as a social institution but as private enterprises largely independent of the state. In these systems, market forces often override democratic goals or professional standards of "balance" or "objectivity" for journalists. Cost cutting, lack of support for expensive and risky "watchdog" journalism, and the tabloidization of crime coverage to attract viewers, among other consequences of neoliberal structures, illustrate how these systems fail to account for the positive social externalities of a more democratic press. Consequently, these systems favor punitive populist discourse, which is more appealing to potential viewers.

Bonner then argues that Latin America's media systems are best described as "captured" neoliberal media systems, which combine elements of neoliberal systems with politicized media systems like those found in Southern Europe. In these systems, the profit motives of neoliberal systems combine with polarization (in favor of or in opposition to the incumbent government based on potentially clientelistic alliances nurtured by media owners) to also favor the rise of punitive populism.

Although the focus of Bonner's research is on the everyday practices of "captured" neoliberal media systems in Argentina and Chile, readers will find that this work provides a carefully reasoned conceptualization of populist practices that contributes to recent research on global populist trends. Thus, "punitive" ("penal") populism is yet another manifestation of a strategy that Bonner argues is used by all politicians, just in varying degrees. As with other episodes of populist rhetoric and practice, punitive populism is inherently divisive in its efforts to create a mythologically homogenized population ("the people") cast in irreconcilable conflict with outsiders (in this case, "criminals"). In practice, Bonner argues, this discourse often leads to calls for harsher laws and punishments and increased police powers and autonomy, perhaps even openly calling for greater police violence in interactions with "criminals" as the oversimplified solution to real or perceived criminality and insecurity.

What's more, Bonner claims, these appeals are effective in contexts shaped by neoliberal media structures because viewers are primed to accept the emotional content of populist rhetoric; after all, media outlets driven by neoliberalism's profit motive rely heavily on emotion-laden content to attract viewers and subscribers to their services. When the appeals of politicians align with this content, and when alternative, less marketable, or less aligned voices are systematically excluded from this content, as is the case with criminal justice experts and human rights advocates, punitive populism gains dominance in the marketplace of ideas.

Bonner's subsequent analysis of the semistructured interviews with journalists, state actors, and civil society representatives in Argentina and Chile ranges through topics including journalistic practices with a focus on source selection, the rise of public relations as a core function in police forces, state security bureaucracies, civil

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society organizations, the development of crime-centered reality television and its role in framing a police force's image in popular discourse, and the concepts of frame alignment and discursive opportunities for civil society (historically more available for antipopulist organizations in Argentina than in Chile, given each country's respective media system development). As part of this discussion, Bonner's analysis eschews and criticizes "objective" measures of crime and violence, such as crime statistics, public polls and surveys, and measures of police violence, seeing these not as representative metrics of criminality and insecurity but as tools used and manipulated by key actors to legitimize the punitive populist perspective. Indeed, Bonner's argument comes into focus when it becomes clear that punitive populism emerges as the dominant narrative in different contexts independent of these metrics. Here Bonner leverages the most-different-case comparison between Argentina (late neoliberal adopter) and Chile (early neoliberal adopter) to identify neoliberalization of the media as the explanatory factor behind the rise of punitive populist rhetoric and policy. Taken together with the evidence provided, the argument is persuasive and insightful.

That said, the conclusions Bonner offers ask the reader to consider "the need for media systems that support and encourage more diverse journalistic sources, more heterogeneous depictions of public opinion, more watchdog journalism, and regulations on the use of PR [public relations] as well as on criminal justice reality shows and certain news formats" (154). Unfortunately, Bonner offers no practical alternative to the neoliberal approach other than to point to the Northern European democratic corporatist media system. Concerningly, it remains unclear how a corporatist model would function once layered on top of existing institutions in the Latin American context, particularly given the region's complicated history with corporatist politics.

Moreover, although Bonner attempts to balance structuralist theory with agency-based perspectives, the role of the public is largely conceptualized as the passive and naïve recipient of the homogenizing discourse provided by opinion leaders in society. This is perhaps rich ground to pursue further research, building on Bonner's contribution in combination with theories of public opinion formation. After all, if one accepts that variation is likely to occur in the public's level of trust of and receptivity to the discourse constructed by the mass media, perhaps it would be possible to identify other mechanisms for the rise of populism among those who are less trusting of the media.

Still, Bonner's study provides a refreshing and nuanced argument about the politics of media and political communications. While other observers have gravitated toward analyzing the role of social media in politics, Bonner cleverly sidesteps the lure of these still-developing tools of communication, noting that traditional media continue to play an important role in shaping public discourse, given their relatively captive, if somewhat diminished, audience and their as yet unimpeded agenda-setting power (82).

What's more, the comparative approach employed in this work highlights how neoliberal ideas can shape core institutions of democratic societies in ways that may

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not necessarily promote democracy. Thus, Bonner reminds readers that one need not refer to authoritarian norms, international pressures, or social instability, important though these may be, to comprehend the rise and fall of democracy in contemporary Latin America; the mutually reinforcing actions of domestic actors pursuing their own self-interested ends may also produce illiberal outcomes when not constrained either by an empowered public or by a capable democratic state. If Bonner's analysis is generalizable, one of the quintessentially democratic institutions, the press, may well undermine Latin American democracy and the public commitment to uphold human rights. Media systems matter indeed.

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Jessica A. J. Rich, *State-Sponsored Activism: Bureaucrats and Social Movements in Democratic Brazil*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Figures, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index, 240 pp.; hardcover $105, ebook $84.

Jessica Rich's book is a premonitory tale about how state actors and social movements deal with a pandemic. Written before the current dystopian times of COVID-19, Rich's volume is an outstanding analysis of the HIV/AIDS pandemic and how it was efficaciously tackled in Brazil.

The book's argument is that the successful story of the AIDS movement in Brazil is a result of the alliance between federal bureaucrats and a collection of NGOs and advocacy groups. This was possible because of the contradictory effect the dual transition to political democracy and neoliberal economy produced in undercutting traditional corporatism. Democratization led to the renovation of the bureaucracy with the inclusion of a generation of state officials with a progressive and democratic perspective, the redesign of the state institutions around the principles of participatory democracy, and the emergence of a new "social question" that responded to claims that transcended labor-based grievances. Neoliberalism, in parallel, cut resources to labor-based actors but increased them for NGO-style actors, while it promoted outsourcing of social policies to NGOs to reduce the state apparatus.

In this context, federal bureaucrats expanded a grassroots movement to confront the negative effects of outsourcing and decentralization as part of state reforms that would have left AIDS programs under the sphere of conservative subnational governments. Thus, the main motivation for bureaucrats to support grassroots groups was the need to bypass internal state resistance to AIDS policies to provide an efficient health response to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In this sense, Rich goes well beyond the narrow co-optation arguments of some social movement literature, which confuse incorporating social actors into the state apparatus with abandoning the ambition of promoting social change. The book makes a strong case for the need to surpass the outsider-insider argument in social movement–state dynamics and

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