

where Latin American countries are with the social insurance model of social security. A final chapter, reflecting on the social insurance model and its future in the region could have rounded this particular reading of the book. This is an important book, which will find a wide readership among specialists, researchers, practitioners and students. This reviewer fully shares the author's hope that the 'book will stimulate debate, improve understanding of these reforms and, above all, contribute to better pensions and health care for the peoples of Latin America and elsewhere'.

*Brooks World Poverty Institute,
University of Manchester*

ARMANDO BARRIENTOS

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Jairo Luga-Ocando (ed.), *The Media in Latin America* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), pp. xiv + 275, £60.00, £19.99 pb.

Most recent academic work on the media in Latin America is in agreement that the onset of liberal democracies and the arrival of left-leaning governments have not on the whole heralded significant changes in media landscapes or improvements in journalistic standards. A highly concentrated pattern of private ownership has combined with the market imperative to provide more 'tabloidisation' of content, often described as 'infotainment'. Collusion between political elites and media owners (particularly over the issue of licences and the placing of advertising), or outright confrontation between the two, has not furthered the cause of pluralistic, in-depth or impartial journalism. Media regulation generally remains weak. Of course there are some important exceptions to these trends. Examples abound of 'civic journalism', particularly in the written press in Mexico, which is autonomous, diverse in its perspectives, holds powerful actors to account and informs public debates.

Jairo Lugo-Ocando's new book essentially agrees with this bleak scenario. In his useful introductory overview, he argues that on the one hand, there is often an inappropriate degree of collaboration between politicians and the media, in which journalism 'is reduced to a decorative role'. According to this model, journalism ends up giving priority to fashion, gossip and sports and is 'less willing to adopt controversial political agendas, unless they reflect dissidence amongst the ruling elites'. At the other extreme, Lugo-Ocando says the enmity between leaders and the media results in new legal frameworks being introduced that dry up resources for opposing media and restrict access to official sources.

Unfortunately, the country-specific chapters do not always explore these two trends with the same vigour. Rather, they tend to map out the specificity of each country's media landscape with details of the structures of ownership of television, radio and print media. These are useful descriptions, but at times more analysis would have been welcome. All the major countries are covered in the book with the exception of Ecuador. This is to be regretted given President Rafael Correa's fraught relation with the press. But it is to be applauded that Paraguay, Nicaragua, Cuba and Costa Rica are included, as they do not often merit examination. Even though the chapters are inevitably not uniform in treatment or style, some common themes do emerge. For example, in several countries, and particularly Chile and Argentina, media ownership has become more concentrated in recent years, not less, despite the onset of pluralist politics. Moreover, what many observers regard as the two largest and most politically powerful private sector broadcasting companies in the

Western hemisphere, Mexico's Televisa and Brazil's TV Globo, continue their dominance despite the advent of new media. As the authors of the chapters on Mexico and Brazil rightly argue, the two companies were instrumental in assuring that recent legislation governing digital channels was framed in their favour.

Unsurprisingly, the authors bemoan the trend towards the 'dumbing down' of TV content in particular, but there is plenty of content analysis to back up their assertions. In her excellent chapter on Mexico, Sallie Hughes describes the newscasts of mid-2006, which were filled with the World Cup, crime, moderate flooding and weather reports. This only changed when Israel launched its war against Hezbollah, which 'provided market-driven television with the dramatic images it thrives upon'. Susana Aldana-Amabile's chapter on Paraguay quotes studies showing the TV newscasts' overwhelming concentration on crime at the cost of covering the democratic process. Arturo Wallace notes from his own studies that in Nicaragua tabloidisation expresses itself as an 'almost complete abandonment of the political agenda in favour of news coverage almost exclusively limited to violence and crime, and rich in gory imagery'.

There is of course hardly any tradition in Latin America of public service broadcasting, in the sense of state-funded media being independent financially and editorially. This could provide some alternative to the commercial model, but the region's current left-wing governments have not generally funded such initiatives (Brazil is an exception). They have preferred instead to bolster state channels as an official arm of soft propaganda.

Venezuela is a case in point. Chávez has poured money into the state media as a means of levelling the playing field and countering the hostility of most of the private channels. This is familiar ground. But the authors of the Venezuela chapter are right to stress the historical 'symbiotic co-dependence' between the media and politicians prior to Chávez's arrival. When this was broken, it was hardly surprising that most media owners (initially at least) turned against him. The same authors discuss the formation of Telesur, the Latin American channel funded by Chávez to take on the dominance of CNN and the BBC, and to confront the Bush administration via the media. They are right to play down comparisons with Al-Jazeera as the two channels operate in two very different markets, and to stress the obstacles to what is purportedly a regional integration project when Latin America is so culturally and politically diverse. My own analysis of several Telesur news programmes suggests that they often do little more than bang the drum for Chávez and his regional allies. The channel's attempt to reach a mass audience is seriously hampered by Latin Americans' traditional mistrust of state-funded channels, in part because of their political bias. Telesur has not broken that mould.

Many chapters make the point that in most countries, newspapers are limited to a small percentage of the population, whereas television has more than 90 per cent reach. Most authors dismiss the importance of the Internet because it is restricted to the well-off. As Sallie Hughes shows for example, only four per cent of the Mexican poor have access to pay-television or the Internet. However, the exponential growth rate of internet usage in Latin America has led many observers to expect a revolution in the way consumers get information and entertainment in the near future, driven by the Net. Reliable figures suggest that at the end of 2007 there were more than 120 million users in the region, equivalent to 22 per cent of the population and a six-fold increase since 2000. The BBC's Spanish American and Brazilian Services recently took the decision to stop virtually all their radio broadcasts and shift

resources into their online services. El País too is betting on the net. One wonders how much longer books on Latin American media will not have the Internet as the starting-point for their analysis.

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism,
Oxford University

JAMES PAINTER

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Paul Freston (ed.), *Evangelical Christianity and Democracy in Latin America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xxx + 250, £24.95, pb.

With the political transformations in Latin America during the 1980s and 1990s, researchers turned their attention to the role of community-based organisations, new social movements, and non-governmental organisations in challenging authoritative politics and fostering democratic institutions. The relationship between politics and religion in the popular and scholarly imagination has been of two polar images cleaved along the liberal-conservative line. On the one hand, progressive Catholic clergy organised the poor and disenfranchised into community action and collective welfare through the introduction of base ecclesiastical communities that encouraged participation in politics. On the other hand, socially conservative Evangelical and Pentecostal churches threatened to alter community relationships through a practice of disengagement with national and local politics while focusing on individual spiritual well-being. Social scientists engaging in the study of religious pluralism in Latin America have tended to be less than sympathetic to Evangelical Protestantism's growth and presence, seeing in these churches a link to US imperialism, inauthentic cultural expression, and, perhaps offering the most consternation in light of the coalescing of democracy in the region, their avowedly apolitical stance while simultaneously espousing socially conservative values at the community level (such as prohibitions on drinking, dancing, and sexual expression).

This new collection of essays, edited by Paul Freston, complicates the association between Evangelical Christianity and conservative politics derived from too-easy comparisons with the US context of religion and politics. The case studies provided (Mexico, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Peru and Brazil) help correct this facile association by demonstrating that the neo-liberal economic and political paths these countries have travelled on through the past 20 years or so have affected the ways in which local Protestant churches engage with politics both at the electoral and community level. Each essay provides a brief historical overview of the roots of Protestantism in the country studied, which demonstrates the long history of involvement of both Historical and Evangelical Protestantism in politics. Indeed, these churches' early presence in many Latin American countries owes much to an invitation by Liberal governments wishing to decrease the influence of the Catholic clergy and hierarchy in the region.

It is in the observation of the contemporary political scene of each country, however, that the edited collection provides crucial insight into the ways in which political participation by Evangelical groups has changed over time. The essays combine a detailed analysis of Evangelical electoral politics with ethnographic study of local community action to provide a window into civic participation beyond the voting booth. The authors caution against a naïve understanding of Evangelicals as a