Maria Soledad Segura and Silvio Waisbord, **Media Movements: Civil Society and Media Policy Reform in Latin America**, London, UK: Zed Books, 2016, 224 pp., $29.95 (paperback), $95.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
Jessica Roberts
Boise State University, USA

In **Media Movements: Civil Society and Media Policy Reform in Latin America**, Segura and Waisbord examine the contribution of citizens' movements to media policy in Latin America during a particularly active period of reform at the beginning of the 21st century. The focus is on media movements that the authors approach as social movements: "networks of citizens and associations that aim to achieve social transformations through collective actions such as advocacy, education, and protest" (p. 3). Social movements are influenced by several internal and external factors, and this book provides some examples of how movements have successfully reflected the will of the citizens and prompted the enactment of policy reforms.
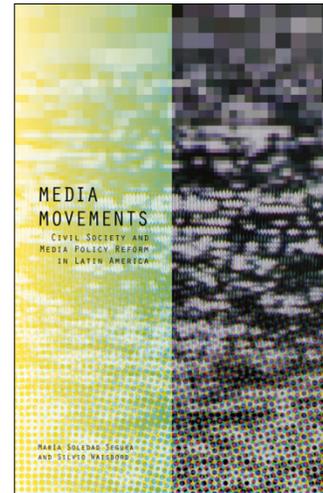
To examine the contribution of media movements, the authors first establish the characteristics of what they call the "limited pluralism" of media systems in Latin America, and the relationship to media governance in the region. In the following chapters, they describe the strategies and resulting policy reforms of media movements in the region, emphasizing cases in Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Ecuador. Finally, they provide an analysis of the success and failure of media movements, and the political opportunities that remain, as well as the role that transnational activism can play in media movements. The authors situate their study in the complex examination of participatory politics and the effect of new media technologies on the participation of citizens in democracies, an area of continued research and examination.

This book is intended for academics interested in the functioning of social movements within particular political and social contexts and for those interested in Latin American media and policy. Overall, it offers an instructive comparison to media systems and media activism in the United States and other democratic countries, where the role of citizen engagement in policy-making is idealized, but often not wholly realized. Scholars of social movements looking for an overview of the relationship between legal, economic, and political contexts and media movements may find it informative. As a study of a brief historical period of media reform, it would serve media policy scholars and historians well. The analysis of media movements and their effectiveness in representing citizens' interests and achieving them may also be useful to activists and coalition leaders. Especially the third chapter, which focuses on the strategies of citizen-led movements, may provide lessons for activists.

Context

The impetus for this book is the regional trend of citizen-initiated reforms that began in the mid-1990s and were enacted mainly from 2000 to 2015. The adoption of media policy reforms were, in part, a reflection of changing technology and communication practices and a response to an active media movement motivated to pursue policy reform. The book is published at a time of heightened interest in the role of citizens in social movements and the effect of increased participation by citizens through social media and other new communication technology in democratic decision-making. However, its narrow focus and examination of a specific time period and geographic region does not allow it to offer conclusive assessments of the increase in participatory media and its effect on political engagement—nor is that its goal.

Critique

The book is neither overly optimistic nor critical, but takes a clear-eyed look at the political context within which recent media activism and resulting media policy reform has taken place in Latin American states. The authors ground their arguments in a progressive interpretation of philosophical liberalism, which is broadly accepted by many proponents of free expression in democratic systems, and the presumed benefits of a citizen-driven approach to policy-making. Unlike some literature that enthusiastically promotes participation for its own sake, this book notes the functional benefits of participation, specifically, that "citizen participation might broaden the debate about issues and perspectives and contribute to passing legislation that favors public interests" (p. 6). The authors describe methodically the ways media movements strengthen their positions and promote media policy reforms. While it is difficult to identify the exact causes of a policy change, the authors point to resulting reforms that overlapped with the goals of social movements working for those reforms and to places where the activism of media movements shifted a policy.

The book offers a broad perspective on a region that is quite diverse, focusing on the shared characteristics and drawing general conclusions where possible. It shifts frequently from a macro to a micro view, managing a balance between specificity and generality. Often an argument is supported by a brief summary of examples from various Latin American countries, although no case is discussed in depth, and occasionally the examples read like lists of organizations and coalitions that exist in each country. These lists of example cases, with no details or context, are not helpful for the reader of this text, but could lead an interested researcher to find specific cases for further examination. What results is a helpful overview of characteristics common to media systems and governance in the region, mostly putting aside particular national contexts and differences. The authors acknowledge that differences in economics, political stability (cycles of democratic and authoritarian rule, often marked by political violence), population size, and media development and market share create distinct situations in each country in the region, but they attempt to discuss commonalities and general characteristics in a way that allows analysis. The authors select cases from Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, and Ecuador for more detailed exploration, but do not provide a rationale for choosing these four.

An important question in social movements is whether they are led from the top or the bottom—whether an existing advocacy organization or political group, for example, takes an issue and rallies support for it, or a common interest of citizens drives them to organize and advocate for policy change. This text mainly addresses the formation of coalitions, the strategies employed, and the results of their work. The authors pick up the story at the point where the issues and the interested organizations have been identified. There is little discussion of the process by which citizens would become aware of issues and then motivated to take action to pursue reform related to those issues. The authors discuss citizen education and engagement, but there is an assumption that these movements already exist in some form, and that they will have access to citizens who are sufficiently educated and motivated to get involved, when of course this is not a presumptive condition in most states.

Alternatives

Compared with texts such as Downing's (2011) *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media*, which provides a series of case studies of social movements from different countries utilizing different communication media, this text offers a narrow area of geographical focus, but provides a more in-depth examination of the various factors at play in shifting media policy. While the cases examined in Downing's text are more specific and provide details about the use of a particular medium, they are short and so narrowly focused that they may not offer an opportunity for broader comparison. *Media Movements*, on the other hand, takes a wider view that allows for general conclusions about the functions of citizens, coalitions, government policies, state actors, and other factors affecting media movements and their goals. Others, such as Snow, Soule, and Kriesi's (2004) *The Blackwell Companion to Social Movements*, lack the specific regional focus to provide the political context that makes this examination so effective. The analysis in *Media Movements* takes many of the issues and theories raised in these other texts and applies them to a specific case.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the authors present a hopeful view of the reality and potential for citizens to effect political change. Media movements are one way to communicate the will of the citizenry to the policy-makers, and this book demonstrates how they can be successful in a particular context. The authors conclude that media movements have "catapulted to the center of media policy-making the notion that media systems and public communication should maximize opportunities for public expression and ensure the right to communication of all citizens" (p. 181). The nature of this fight for policy that maximizes public expression is self-reinforcing, in that increased protection for and creation of opportunities for citizen communication will potentially enable increased engagement by citizens in policy-making in other areas. *Media Movements* provides an analysis and roadmap for how this can be done successfully, demonstrating the importance of civil society in policy-making, while acknowledging the role that state actors continue to play in media democracy.

References

Downing, J. D. H. (2011). *Encyclopedia of social movement media*. Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications.

Snow, D. A., Soule, S. A., & Kriesi, H. (2004). *The Blackwell companion to social movements*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.