Des Freedman, Jonathan Obar, Cheryl Martens, Robert W. McChesney (Eds.), **Strategies for Media Reform: International Perspectives**, New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2016, 360 pp., $125.00 (hardcover), $35.00 (paperback).

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Media policy researcher and activist Leslie Shade argues that media reform should be framed as "conceptualizing a vision for broader values vital for social well-being, democratic communications and the public interest" (2011, p. 147). As such, media reform movements should be characterized not simply as the pursuit of niche public policy interests pertaining to the technical and economic intricacies of media and communications industries, but instead as broad-based campaigns interwoven within wider civil rights discourses. Freedman, Obar, Martens, and McChesney take on this challenge in their edited volume, **Strategies for Media Reform: International Perspectives,** as they gather evidence of global attempts to reshape media policy to strengthen democracy and address social and economic inequalities. The edited volume is a breath of fresh air for the field of media policy, as it actually fulfills its promise of offering up "international perspectives." Far too often attempts to move media policy away from North America results in edited volumes claiming "international" status for cursory inclusions of case studies from China or South America. Freedman et al. take care to include case studies from a variety of countries across the globe and, rather than including them at the end of a Western-centric volume, weave together international experiences across a number of well-chosen themes. The resulting volume moves quickly through a broad array of successes and failures in media policy movements and provides the reader with a well-fleshed-out account of both the shared experiences and national idiosyncrasies of media reform.
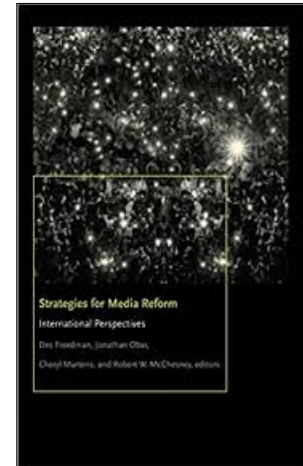
Book Structure

The book is divided into four wide-reaching sections covering multiple case studies. The editors introduce each section with a theoretically-based analysis of the section's theme and conclude with a description of the lessons learned from the included global case studies. The clear structure opens the book beyond academia to speak to a wider audience of media activists. The four sections look to embrace the "messy" nature of media policy, unpacking its varying definitions, motivations, and strategies. The opening section outlines media reform as a traditionally nebulous concept, underlining the ways in which it has traditionally been pursued and studied. The second section, "Internet Activism for Media Reform," eases readers into activist conversations through its concentration on the current dominant trend within policy research—digital strategies for reforming the Internet. Far from pandering to academic trends, the included case studies transcend their respective end goals and instead provide readers with insight into how to use digital communications platforms for broader media (and general policy) reform. The third section, "The Power of the Media Reform Movement," broadens the conversation through an exploration of the range of strategies employed by media reform movements in differing political contexts. The final section, "Media

Reform as Democratic Reform," places media reform within wider conversations of democratic governance processes and liberal reform. While this is the most overtly political section, the authors' careful choice of global cases allows them to sidestep potential accusations of ideological bias through a grounded analysis of the implications media reform holds for democratic structures across a variety of national circumstances.

Key Strengths of the Volume

The core strength of the edited volume lies in its breadth—both in geography and across communications technologies. The resulting text does not suggest a rigid framework of successful activist strategies, but instead recognizes the connection between political context and differing norms regarding the role and shape of communications technology structures. Moreover, the breadth of the volume affords it the ability to pinpoint areas of weakness in global media policy movements such as a preponderance with Internet-based media policy reform. Cross and Skinner's chapter, for example, highlights the difficulties of media democracy movements to attract financial support. The authors' Canadian case study illustrates how the growth and development of media activism has be circumscribed by an increasing focus on Internet-related issues. This is echoed by Sassaman and Tridish, whose excellent chapter on low power radio activism offers key insights into pursuing activism in an "exhausting" environment of technological change. The editors' inclusion of such case studies gives the reader an accurate portrayal of the realities of media activism in an era of digital dominance and cements the need for activists to take on, and remain committed to, activism across all media technologies.

The volume also tackles the difficulties within media policy activism that stem from its academic discourse and resulting pedagogical direction. Lentz's chapter on media policy literacy is a superb addition to the conversation, bringing to the fore an often-ignored aspect of media activism—education. Lentz's chapter explores the increasing necessity of media policy literacy as a "precondition for informed engagement in media reform struggles" (p. 24) and highlights the Consortium on Media Policy Studies (COMPASS) program as a viable avenue through which it can be cultivated. Given the ambiguity of media policy as a mobilizing paradigm the editors highlight in opening chapters, and in light of the difficulties in navigating private and governmental structures faced by the activists included in the volume, teaching media policy literacy appears ever more vital.

The combination of academic analysis and activist advice is a further strength for the edited volume. In particular, several authors draw on the notion of "critical junctures" to help explain the successes and failures of media reform campaigns. Brevini and Schlosberg provide a useful account of the Leveson inquiry as a "critical juncture" for media reform movements in the United Kingdom, as does Victor Pickard in his overview of the history of media policy reform in the United States. The blending of theory and practice affords a view of media policy reform that recognizes its internally tumultuous nature while providing a high-level view of a global march toward more democratic media systems.

In Conversation with Wider Scholarship

The breadth and sheer number of case studies included in the edited volume retains benefit, but it also can be seen as somewhat of a limitation in terms of advancing media policy theory. The volume speeds

rapidly across the globe, across political contexts, and across communications platforms, leaving little room for real reflection on how the realities of media activism can and should inform media scholarship. By comparison, Pickard and Yang's edited collection, *Media Activism in the Digital Age* (2017), perhaps serves as an example of how to better integrate lessons from activists into media activism theory, as the editing authors explicitly call for the volume to serve as a prompt to rethink theories of media policy activism. While the final section of *Strategies for Media Reform* rattles through an impressive roster of international reform movements from Egypt to Doha, the volume would have benefitted from a final chapter that sought to tie cases back to the book's overarching theoretical goals.

Furthermore, the volume falls somewhat short of its goal of articulating media reform movements as part of wider movements toward "democratic reform." As Pickard highlights in his introduction to the final section, "media reform rises and falls with other political struggles and social movements" (p. 219) and some chapters, notably Abraham-Hamanoiel's work on media democratization in Mexico, do an excellent job of placing media reform in the context of wider reform movements. However, unlike comparable edited volumes like Lloyd and Friedland's *The Communication Crisis in America, and how to Fix it* (2016), few chapters engage in how media policy reform has increasingly intersected with civil rights and feminist movements. In a volume of this scope, it is surprising to see such an absence. Nonetheless, the edited volume provides a much-needed truly global perspective to media policy and activism conversations and will serve as a vital text for future scholarship on the global battle for media policy reform.

References

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