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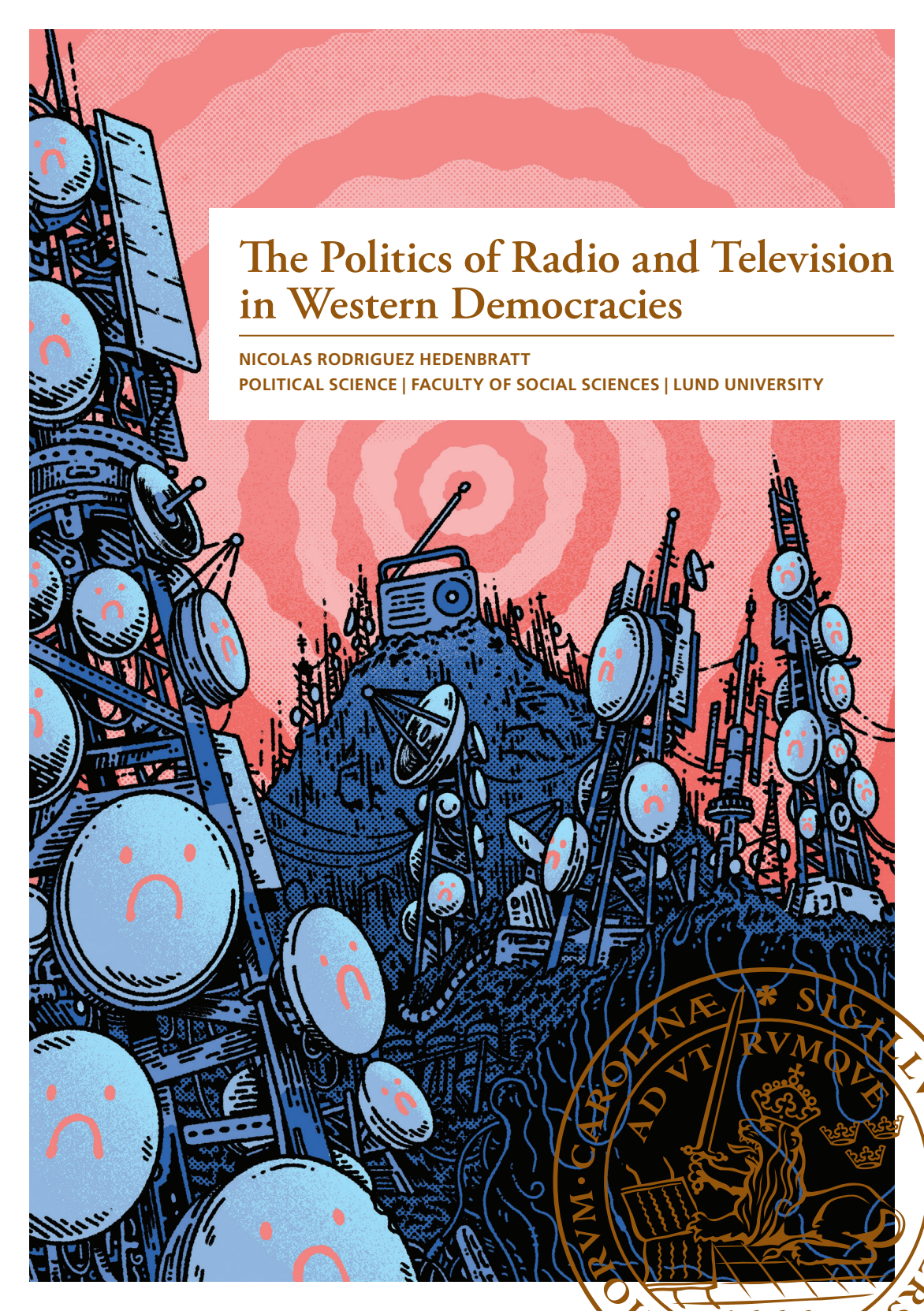
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The Politics of Radio and Television in Western Democracies

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POLITICAL SCIENCE | FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES | LUND UNIVERSITY



The Politics of Radio and Television
in Western Democracies

The Politics of Radio and Television in Western Democracies

Nicolas Rodriguez Hedenbratt



LUND
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Thesis advisors

Agustín Goenaga and Johannes Lindvall

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Abstract Using original archival evidence, this doctoral dissertation describes and explains differences in how Western democracies have governed radio and television, tracing interest group struggles over broadcasting in four countries from early radio policy to the rise of cable and satellite television in the late twentieth century. Rather than framing political conflicts over radio and television as a binary dynamic between “state” and “market,” the thesis argues that policy outcomes emerge from a <i>tripartite</i> power struggle featuring state agencies, commercial enterprises, and groups from the third sector. It also distinguishes between whether these interests are engaged in the production of program content, or the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution. To explain institutional change over time, the study identifies two types of exogenous systemic shocks — revolutionary communication technologies and international threats — that can reshape the governance of broadcasting by transforming the overarching policymaking environment and shifting the balance of power among competing interests. While such shocks can profoundly alter media systems, their impact is always mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies at the national level. Consequently, despite shared technological pressures, Western democracies maintain distinct ways of governing radio and television. Overall, the dissertation contributes to debates in communication studies, political science and comparative political economy regarding the sources of institutional stability and change in the media sector and the role of interests in shaping these dynamics.					
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The Politics of Radio and Television in Western Democracies

Nicolas Rodriguez Hedenbratt



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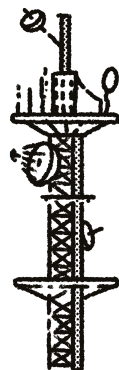
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CHAPTER 1

Explaining the Politics of Radio and Television



Following years of concerns that video-sharing platform TikTok was being exploited to advance Chinese government interests, the U.S. Congress passed a law in the spring of 2024 requiring the application's parent company to divest its operations in the country. TikTok challenged the constitutionality of the *Protecting Americans from Foreign Adversary Controlled Applications Act* (H.R. 7521), arguing the law infringed on the free speech rights of its 170 million users in the United States (Shepardson 2025). In early 2025, however, the Supreme Court unanimously rejected the petition. While recognizing TikTok as a major platform for expression and community, the Court upheld Congress's divestiture mandate, citing "well-supported national security concerns" over the company's data collection practices and ties to a foreign adversary.¹ Overall, this underscores the geopolitical stakes of new audiovisual communication technologies.

Yet this is not the first time foreign powers' use of new technology has driven the U.S. government to take decisive action to protect national interests in audiovisual media. In the wake of the First World War, there was an imminent risk that the British-controlled Marconi company would secure a monopoly on all American radio traffic with Europe, as the electronics manufacturer was on the verge of acquiring the most crucial patent for transoceanic wireless communication. When military authorities alerted Woodrow Wilson to this risk, the

¹ *TikTok Inc. v. Garland*. No. 24-656, 604 U.S. - (2025), p. 19.

President approved a solution strikingly similar to the one proposed for TikTok. The Navy quietly pressured Marconi to sell its assets to a group of domestic electronics manufacturers within the Radio Corporation of America, which quickly emerged as a global leader in the strategically vital radio industry, counterbalancing the British Empire’s longstanding dominance in international telegraphy.

The parallels between Marconi and TikTok highlight the importance of situating current debates on the political implications of digital communication technologies, foreign election interference, and disinformation on social media within a broader historical context (see Persily and Tucker 2020; Strömbäck et al. 2022). The comparison illustrates that the societal impact of audiovisual media has been a source of political contention for over a century and that states have long been deeply concerned when foreign powers exploit these technologies in ways seen as threatening national sovereignty. While previous communications research has recognized international *integration* as a major force shaping media policy in Western democracies, it has paid far less attention to how more acute forms of international competition have influenced developments in this field.

This dissertation argues that differences in the governance of radio and television across democracies in Europe and North America can be better understood by considering how policymaking dynamics vary between crises and more “normal” circumstances. Rather than framing political conflicts over broadcasting as a binary dynamic between “state” and “market,” I argue that radio and television policy is shaped by a *tripartite* power struggle featuring state agencies, commercial enterprises, and groups from the third sector. Furthermore, I make an analytical distinction between whether these interests are engaged in the production of program content, or the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution.

Drawing on historical institutionalism, I identify two types of exogenous systemic shocks — revolutionary communication technologies and international threats — that can trigger major shifts in the governance of broadcasting by altering the premises of the decision-making situation and empowering certain interests at the expense of others. While these types of shocks can profoundly alter media systems, their impact will always be mediated by preexisting power

relations and institutional legacies at the national level. This means that, despite shared homogenizing pressures from new technology and internationalization, differences in the governance of radio and television across Western democracies are likely to persist over time.

By analyzing interest group struggles over broadcasting in four countries across a century, this study demonstrates that the premises of the decision-making situation tend to shift radically whenever a country experiences a sudden intensification of international competition in telecommunications or faces heightened geopolitical pressures threatening its national autonomy. Such international shocks typically force policymakers to reassess previous policy priorities to counter the external threat, often favoring a state-led approach.

Yet such crises can also create opportunities for commercial companies, particularly when state strategies depend on collaboration with private affiliates. This was the case in the 1930s when U.S. radio networks began expanding into Canada, prompting private and public broadcasters to collaborate in shielding Canadian radio from being overwhelmed by American content. Canada's experience demonstrates that sudden shifts in the broader policymaking environment can override conventional conflict dynamics in the media sector, underscoring the need for a long-term view.

While acute international threats tend to favor a state-led approach to broadcasting, systemic shocks from revolutionary communication technology can *undermine* policymakers' ability to regulate these media. This claim partly aligns with a widely debated hypothesis in comparative political communication, namely that that technological advancements are pushing national media systems to converge on a "market-oriented" model dominated by commercial outlets (see Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 1; Hallin and Mancini 2004b).

Although I agree that technological innovations generally shift power from the state to private interests, the study emphasizes that these "private" beneficiaries are not necessarily large commercial corporations. While new technologies often create market opportunities for profit-seeking firms, lower technological barriers can also enable third-sector nonprofits to flourish in niche programming.

An illustrative example is how the reduced costs of FM radio were leveraged by the French environmental movement in the 1970s

to conduct illegal broadcasts, pressuring politicians to dismantle the longstanding state monopoly. France’s experience with pirate radio highlights how new technology can undermine government control over broadcasting by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective, compelling politicians to adopt alternative strategies of intervention.

The fact that new technology tends to empower third-sector groups underscores why political conflicts over broadcasting cannot be reduced to a binary dynamic between “state” and “market.” According to the conventional view, two distinct approaches to broadcast regulation emerged following the rise of radio in the early twentieth century: the American “free market” model and the European “public service” model (see Engblom and Wormbs 2007; Pavani 2018, 15; Waller 1946, 8). However, if we examine countries’ initial decisions on radio in their original historical context, a far more complex picture emerges — both in terms of the range of governance models that were considered and the interests that shaped those choices.

For example, the “public service” monopoly that Sweden established in the 1920s combined both governmental and commercial elements. While the physical stations were operated by the state-run Telegraph Agency, programming was entrusted to a joint-stock company owned by the radio industry and the press. Those who bore the greatest loss from the 1924 monopoly decision were the popular movements that had helped pioneer broadcasting alongside local radio clubs. With the new public-commercial arrangement for radio, these third sector groups were forced to shut down their operations.

The Swedish case illustrates why a distinction needs to be made between state actors and different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector, as well as whether these interests are involved in content production or in operating the technical infrastructure for program distribution. Differentiating between these functions — and whether they are managed by state agencies, private corporations or agents from the third sector — offers a more precise understanding of the structure of national radio and television systems. Moreover, these analytical distinctions clarify how different spheres of intervention within a *single* medium interact and shape processes of institutional stability and change. To explain how these dynamics drive variations in broadcasting policy within and across countries, it is

essential to examine the interplay between interests, national institutions, and changes in the broader policymaking environment over the long term. That's what this dissertation sets out to explore.

Central Claim and Contribution

The aim of this dissertation is to gain a better understanding of the policymaking dynamics shaping the field of radio and television in Western democracies. Specifically, I ask what factors drive shifts in broadcasting policy *within* countries over time and how enduring differences *across* nations can be explained. These questions are examined through an historical-institutionalist lens, comparing policymaking on radio and television in Canada, France, Sweden and the United States across time periods and technological paradigms.

In doing so, I adopt an actor-centered approach that analytically distinguishes between state agents, commercial corporations, and groups from the third sector. Furthermore, I highlight whether these interests are involved in the production of broadcast program content, or the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution. This claim draws on previous studies in political science on multiple institutional orders and intercurrency, which suggest that separate institutional realms within a polity can evolve largely independently while still exerting significant influence on one another (Orren and Skowronek 2004).

In other words, the key conceptual argument is that a single type of medium can encompass distinct spheres of intervention that require varying regulatory approaches, and that policymaking in the broadcasting sector, specifically, cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between “public” and “private” interests.

In examining the role of interests in shaping enduring differences in broadcast regulation *across* countries, the study considers how power struggles among governments, private businesses, and third sector agents are constrained by the national policymaking environment in which these interactions play out.

I define “the national institutional environment” as past decisions and institutional arrangements which set the premises for all subsequent policymaking by reinforcing certain power asymmetries

among stakeholders. This definition leads me to trace institutional pathways and strategic interactions among actors “forward” from the foundational decisions on radio in the early twentieth century, when broadcasting first emerged as a phenomenon. This approach allows me to examine policymaking on broadcasting within its original historical context and how institutional legacies and pre-existing power dynamics conditioned subsequent choices.

I emphasize that the initial decisions that were made for radio in different nations triggered a path-dependent process, granting the interests embedded in the original regulatory frameworks a lasting advantage in resisting later reform attempts. This actor-centered analysis of the development of media policy in Western democracies thus contributes to debates in comparative communications and historical institutionalism on the origins of institutions and the role of individual political actors in creating them (see Bannerman and Haggart 2015; Pierson 1994). Furthermore, it speaks to broader debates in political economy and new institutionalism regarding the role of individual agents in sustaining institutional stability over time, as well as the extent to which actors’ interests are endogenous or exogenous to the institutional settings in which they operate (see Hall and Soskice 2001; Hall and Taylor 1996; North 1990).

To explain variation in broadcast governance *within* countries over time, the dissertation examines how long-term processes of path-dependent stability are occasionally disrupted by exogenous systemic shocks. I identify two types of critical junctures that drive institutional change in the field of radio and television: technological shocks and acute international shocks.

Technological shocks involve groundbreaking advances in communication technology, while international shocks include rising global competition in telecommunications or cases where foreign powers exploit broadcasting technologies in ways seen as threatening national sovereignty. Both types of junctures can reshape the governance of broadcasting by transforming the overarching policymaking environment and shifting the balance of power among competing interests. However, they influence the policymaking environment in varying ways and tend to empower distinct actors.

The primary effect of new communication technologies that fun-

damentally reshape the technological environment is to undermine the effectiveness of existing policy instruments, typically weakening states' ability to regulate radio and television. This compels policymakers to adopt alternative intervention strategies, often shifting away from direct government ownership of program-producing companies and distribution infrastructure toward more indirect forms of control, like subsidies or content regulations. At the same time, new technology tends to favor commercial interests, which can capitalize on emerging market opportunities in both content and carriage, as well as third-sector groups, which benefit from lower technological and economic barriers to program production.

By contrast, international shocks often marginalize third-sector groups' possibilities to engage in broadcasting, as surges in international competition in telecommunications or other acute threats to national sovereignty tend to favor centralized, state-led responses to counter external challenges. Commercial firms may benefit from such crises if state strategies require collaboration with private affiliates. Occasionally, international shocks can even trigger a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting the state, domestic private corporations, and the third sector against a common foreign adversary.

This historical institutionalist argument about the effects of exogenous systemic shocks on media systems contributes to longstanding debates in political science on the sources of institutional change. Specifically, it draws on previous work on how shifts in the broader policymaking environment can redistribute power within domestic politics and prompt politicians to prioritize entirely new goals (see Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978).

For instance, the idea that policymaking on radio and television under crisis conditions differs fundamentally from policymaking in more "normal" circumstances builds on Pepper D. Culpepper's (2010) argument that the states' responsiveness to business interests varies between periods of "quiet" politics — when policy issues are technical and attract little public attention — and "noisy" politics, when issues become politically charged and highly salient (see also Culpepper 2016). The argument also resonates with Peter A. Hall's (1993) ideas on how institutional change can be triggered by adjustments to policy instruments and, in some cases, by fundamental paradigmatic shifts

in the broader policy framework.

Finally, the study emphasizes that the impact of revolutionary technology and international shocks will never be uniform across countries, even if they occur simultaneously and under similar conditions. Political struggles over the control of radio and television during critical junctures never unfold in a vacuum. Instead, the effects of these junctures will always be mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies at the national level. This means that, although nations' media systems face similar homogenizing pressures from new technology and international integration, Western democracies maintain distinct ways of governing radio and television.

The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. The next section explores the evolution of comparative research on media systems, with particular attention to previous efforts to classify and explain variation in broadcast governance. After the literature review, I introduce the study's theoretical framework, starting with an outline of the main conceptual argument, followed by a more detailed discussion of the explanatory theory. The chapter concludes with a discussion on methods and data collection, before transitioning to the first empirical case study on the early development of radio in Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States.

Existing Comparative Research on Media Systems

This section explores how the field of comparative media research has evolved since the 1950s. The literature review is divided into three parts. The first part examines previous efforts within comparative political communication to classify media systems in different national contexts. Particular attention is given to existing classificatory models and typologies concerning the regulation of radio and television. These models do not always reflect the same dependent variable, but at the broadest level, they categorize differences in the ownership structure of radio and television systems, typically from the perspective of private versus public ownership.

The second part explores how previous communication research has sought to explain such differences. To begin, I review the dominant explanations for variation in media governance *across* nations.

Then, I discuss prevailing theories on the causes of policy changes *within* countries over time.

The third and final section summarizes the state of the field of comparative political communication. I highlight what other scholars and I consider to be the key challenges for communication research in describing the structure of national media systems and accounting for variation in media governance. From here, the chapter transitions into the theoretical section, where I argue that incorporating insights from political science and new institutionalism into the study of media systems can help address some of these challenges.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO DESCRIBE NATIONAL MEDIA SYSTEMS

The earliest scholarly efforts to classify different “media systems” date back to the early post-war period. In *The Fifth Estate*, Judith Waller (1946, 4) argued that countries’ divergent approaches to controlling broadcasting were direct outgrowths of distinct national philosophies. The primary contrast was drawn between “State-Owned Systems,” dominant in dictatorships, the “British System,” marked by indirect government control of radio, and the “American System,” based on private enterprise. According to Waller (1946, 8), the difference between these models could be discerned based on the nature of the relationship between broadcasters and the public:

In dictator-controlled countries, the objective of broadcasting is to give the people what the state wants them to have; in Great Britain, the objective seems to be to give the people what they ought to have; in America, broadcasters give the audience what it wants.

Waller’s early classification of radio systems can be contrasted with Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm’s classic framework in *Four Theories of the Press* (1956). Building on Waller’s premise that the media always take on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which they operate, Siebert et al. argued that the press tends to be subservient to the state in “authoritarian” systems, whereas it functions more as a Fourth Estate in “libertarian” or “social responsibility” systems. Questions of freedom of expression

and the relationship between the state and the media across different regime types were thus at the heart of these early classificatory frameworks.

Similar questions would continue to dominate comparative media research in subsequent decades. In a 1975 review of the field, Blumler and Gurevitch observed that most comparative work revolved around the degree of press freedom in different national contexts. Other studies took a broader approach, examining the role of communication in modernization processes and national development more generally (1975, 165). At the same time, the authors observed that the comparative political communication field was still in its infancy, evident in the lack of consensus on core theories and concepts. In the absence of competing classificatory frameworks, the media models outlined in *Four Theories of the Press* remained highly influential.

The usefulness of this framework was not seriously questioned until the collapse of the Soviet Union, whose “authoritarian” media model had served as the main counterpoint to the “libertarian” and “social responsibility” variants in Western democracies (De Smaele 1999). At this time, transformative changes were also underway in the radio and television sectors, challenging the relevance of the previously sharp distinction between commercial and state-run broadcasting systems (Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 1). Media scholars like Denis McQuail (1987) and Blumler and Gurevitch (1995, 237) criticized the prevailing classificatory frameworks for being overly ethnocentric, calling for updated models with a more coherent theoretical focus and a wider geographical outlook. In the wake of this growing criticism, the early 2000s witnessed a wave of studies in comparative political communications that sought to modify and improve the original framework of Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm.

One of the more ambitious and noteworthy attempts to reformulate and classify different “media systems” was made by Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini in *Comparing Media Systems* (2004). Drawing on the literature on varieties of capitalism, Hallin and Mancini proposed that the media in Western Europe and North America could be meaningfully compared across four key dimensions. The first concerned the degree of state intervention in the media, with the presence of public broadcasting serving as the primary indicator. The second

dimension, *political parallelism*, reflected the extent to which news media outlets align with partisan interests or maintain a more neutral stance. The third focused on the historical development of media markets. Finally, the authors examined the role of journalistic professionalism, assessing the extent to which journalists are guided by their own ethical norms and a commitment to public service.

Hallin and Mancini (2004b, Chapters V-VII) argued that these four criteria clustered together into distinct types, suggesting a three-fold classification of media systems:

- *The Liberal Model*

A defining characteristic of “Liberal” countries such as Britain, Canada, Ireland, and the United States is their reliance on market forces to govern the media. Hence the dominance of commercial outlets and a relatively limited role for the state.

- *The Democratic Corporatist Model*

The “Democratic Corporatist” model — prevalent in Austria, Germany, Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Scandinavia — is characterized by an active but relatively limited state. These nations typically exhibit stronger ties between commercial media and organized social and political interests compared to Liberal countries.

- *The Polarized Pluralist Model*

In “Polarized Pluralist” countries like France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, and Spain, the state plays a significantly stronger role in relation to commercial media, which are more party-politicized than in the Democratic Corporatist model.

By emphasizing the need for empirical inquiry and historical comparative analysis, Hallin and Mancini laid the groundwork for a more nuanced understanding of the media in different countries than the early classics, which largely interpreted variation in media governance as a reflection of underlying state ideologies or philosophies. At the same time, *Comparing Media Systems* remained anchored in the core premise of *Four Theories of the Press* — namely, that the media invariably reflects and adapts to the social and political structures in which it operates. Just as Siebert et al. contrasted authoritarian

and libertarian media models, Hallin and Mancini (2004b, 44) made a broad distinction between “dirigiste” traditions, where the state plays a major role in media ownership, funding, and regulation, and “relatively liberal systems,” which rely more on market forces and have less state intervention.

However, in a 2009 review of the the state of comparative communications research, Pippa Norris was struck by the significant differences regarding the state’s role among nations *within* each ideal type. She questioned why Britain and the United States were both classified under the “Liberal” model, given the stark contrasts in newspaper partisanship and broadcasting regulation. This led Norris to doubt whether Hallin and Mancini had truly identified the critical dimensions defining the major contrasts among contemporary media systems, calling for greater transparency in the criteria underlying their classification.

According to Norris (2009, 328), the challenges of operationalizing the dimensions in Hallin and Mancini’s framework tied into a broader issue within comparative communications research — namely, that the mass media encompasses such a wide array of disparate elements. The term “system” would seem to imply a cohesive interaction among its constituent parts. However, as pointed out by Norris, a country may have a strong public broadcasting sector and close ties between political parties and newspapers, while these phenomena are entirely unrelated in other countries. In light of this criticism, it is worth examining how existing classificatory frameworks for *individual* media types correspond to more general categorizations.

A closer look at prevailing comparative frameworks for broadcasting reveals that Britain and the United States have typically been defined in direct *opposition* to each other. According to the standard account, the two nations adopted distinct approaches to radio regulation in the 1920. These have since become the primary ideal types for broadcasting governance in democracies. In Britain, a “social responsibility” philosophy prevailed, forming the basis for the establishment of the British Broadcasting Company (later Corporation) as a license fee-funded radio service under a Royal Charter. This model influenced the adoption of public service broadcasting systems across several Western European countries. In the United States, by

contrast, a “libertarian” philosophy prevailed, leading to radio and television being governed in accordance with market principles (Engblom and Wormbs 2007, 10–12; Hadenius and Weibull 2003, 20–22).

In its ideal-typical form, the American “free market” approach assumes that the needs of the public are best met through a deregulated media market where radio and television programs are funded by advertising. The profit motive is assumed to drive private broadcasters competing in a free market to create programs with the greatest audience appeal. While a commercial system does not preclude the production of niche or educational content, the reliance on advertising has wider implications for programming and the relationship between broadcasters and their audiences.

According to Lewis and Booth (1989, 5), the pursuit of profit leads programming to primarily cater to the preferences of the broad masses. In turn, the drive to maximize audiences encourages broadcasters to engage in program syndication and network formation, as these strategies help achieve economies of scale. In such a system, there is, in other words, an inherent risk of the formation of private monopolies or oligopolies. Overall, Croteau and Hoynes (2001, 15) argue that the “market model” fundamentally treats audiences as consumers, whose primary role is to spend money on the goods and services advertised in programs. Furthermore, the media industry is assumed to function like any other industry, with media products being no different from other consumer goods.

The British “public service” model, by contrast, is based on the idea that the media have specific obligations to society and therefore should not use their freedom solely to broadcast programs that are commercially viable or have immediate audience appeal (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 13–15). In both theory and practice, there have been varying interpretations of what this social responsibility entails. The original concept of “public service” broadcasting was formulated by the BBC’s first General Manager, John Reith.

According to Reith, the concept encompassed four key elements: a non-profit objective, universal service, centralized control, and high-standard programming designed to inform, educate, and entertain the public (Briggs 1961). This definition partially overlaps with that of Jay Blumler (1992a, 7–21), who argues that public service broadcast-

ing is inherently non-commercial and entails a commitment to providing the entire population with a wide range of high-quality programs. Consequently, public broadcasters are said to address listeners and viewers as rational citizens of the nation-state they represent rather than as individual consumers (Lewis and Booth 1989, 8).

The distinction between “private enterprise” models and “public service” broadcasting illustrates how the dominant classificatory frameworks for radio and television are rooted in the prevailing view that the fundamental conflict in media lies between “state” and “market.” According to Croteau and Hoynes (2001, 19–20), the very rationale for government intervention in the media rests on the idea that profitability alone cannot define a healthy media industry. This assumption is illustrative of the fact that comparative research has often equated “market-oriented” media landscapes with systems dominated by commercial outlets (see Blumler 1992b, 22–23; Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 2; Jackson and Vipond 2003, 76–77; Kuhn and Perry 1999, 301–305). Building on this perspective, van Cuilenberg and McQuail (2003, 182) contend that the interaction between commercial enterprises and the state’s efforts to advance national interests lies at the very heart of communications policy.

While few would deny the centrality of the tension between profit-driven and publicly funded media, the literature on broadcasting in individual countries suggests that a broader range of interests must be considered to fully understand policy dynamics in this field. For instance, Cécile Méadel (1994, 613) argues that the central conflict in France’s interwar broadcasting landscape was not between the state and commercial enterprises but between the state and amateur radio operators. In the United States, educational institutions and labor unions were part of the loose reform movement that emerged after the Second World War to challenge the dominance of large commercial TV networks (Pickard 2011, 174–175).

These examples demonstrate that grassroots interests have been pivotal in shaping the direction of radio and television policy, raising questions about whether third sector groups have been more influential in some countries than in others. Against this backdrop, it is striking that previous comparative studies have rarely theorized the distinction between commercial and nonprofit elements within the

“private” broadcasting sector.

This is not to say that the role of the third sector has been completely neglected. Hallin and Mancini (2004b, 165) argue that media in Northern Europe have been characterized by a form of corporatism, hence the classification of countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden into the “Democratic Corporatist” model. According to the authors of *Comparing Media Systems*, the most prominent expression of this corporatism has been the significant role that “socially relevant groups” have played in the governance of public broadcasting compared to “Liberal” systems.

This perspective also permeates the prevailing classificatory frameworks for the regulation of broadcasting in democracies. For instance, the “civic” model in Humphreys’ framework is characterized by control over public broadcasting being distributed among various social and political groups (1996, 155–158). The Dutch “pillarized” system is highlighted as the purest example of such a model, marked by representation that typically extends beyond political parties to include trade unions, religious organizations, and ethnic groups (see also Waller 1946, 10). This aligns with what Kelly (1983) refers to as “politics-in-broadcasting,” which stands in contrast to formally autonomous systems (typified by the BBC) and “politics-over-broadcasting” systems, where public radio and television services are heavily instrumentalized by the governing party.

Hallin and Mancini (2004b, 32) analyze the different governance structures for broadcasting from the perspective of political parallelism — that is, the extent to which the media system reflects the political divisions of a society. They argue that the first two models in Kelly’s three-way distinction illustrate a philosophical difference in how democracies should best ensure that public broadcasting does not fall under the control of the most powerful political force. In formally autonomous systems, this issue is “solved” by attempting to keep political parties and other organized interests *out* of the process of producing radio and television. By contrast, civic/corporatist models seek to address this issue by *including* major societal groups in the process, thereby reflecting the diverse interests that constitute a democratic society.

It should be emphasized that these classificatory frameworks refer

only to different ways of organizing *public* broadcasting, with some models granting civil society groups a more prominent role than others. In other words, the models do not capture the extent to which the third sector plays a more or less significant role in the broadcasting system *as a whole*.

To my knowledge, *The Invisible Medium* (1989) by Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth is the only comparative study that explicitly recognizes third-sector broadcasting as a distinct model in its own right. Their analysis begins with the conventional distinction between the American free market system and the British public service model. These types are contrasted with a third approach, known as community radio, also referred to as listener-supported or alternative radio.

According to Lewis and Booth (1989, 4–8), the community type of broadcasting has emerged in explicit contrast to the public and commercial models, as both forms of “mainstream” broadcasting are seen as having a tendency to omit or marginalize the perspectives of certain social groups. The essence of community radio is therefore largely about empowering listeners and viewers to define themselves, determine what counts as news, and decide what is meaningful or enjoyable in their own culture. In this context, Lewis and Booth point out that “community” can refer to both geographic communities and those based on shared interests, culture, or ethnicity.

This definition closely aligns with how a report from the French Senate’s Committee for Cultural Affairs described the nature of the groups behind the pirate radio operations that mushroomed across the country in the late 1970s. The Committee observed that the rise of illegal pirate radio was a sign that two distinct communication needs had been neglected. The first involved the dissemination of information and news among those bound together by geographical proximity. The second need was more sociological in nature, centered on allowing the perspectives of minority groups to be voiced:

In any group, there naturally exists the statistical pressure of the majority, which tends, even unconsciously, to impose its averages or norms. Conversely, minorities seek to defend their identity. It can be noted that some “pirate” radios correspond to communities of thought characterized by a specific trait (whether philosophical, political,

artistic, religious, or even sexual). The hosts of these radios want to speak to those who are likeminded.²

Community broadcasting thus focuses heavily on building a sense of community with the groups it serves and directly involving listeners in the management of the stations. For this reason, stations of this type often rely heavily on volunteer work, which underscores their non-profit nature. To avoid dependency on any single source, they typically generate income through a combination of public funding, advertising, and listener subscriptions. Taken together, Lewis and Booth (1989, 8) argue that community broadcasters' relationship with the audience differs from that of commercial or public service broadcasters by aspiring to treat their listeners and viewers as subjects and participants, rather than as objects to be captured for advertisers or improved or informed.

To summarize, Lewis and Booth (1989, 9) argue that each of the three broadcasting models defines itself by its difference from at least one of the others. In its ideal-typical form, public service broadcasting is inherently non-commercial. Therefore, it is symbolically significant if such organizations rely on advertising as a source of revenue. By contrast, advertising revenue is the very foundation of commercial broadcasting, which defines itself in opposition to so-called "state broadcasting." Against this backdrop, it is equally symbolically significant if profit-seeking radio and television companies receive public subsidies or funds from license fees. Finally, Lewis and Booth (1989, 10) contend that community broadcasting has a distinct non-commercial identity that simultaneously rejects the allegedly prescriptive and paternalistic attitude of public service broadcasting. Regarding sources of funding, community broadcasting adopts an eclectic approach, as its overarching goal is to share power with its listeners on a democratic basis.

²*Senate report on the bill providing for an exception to the state monopoly on broadcasting.* 1981, 15 September. RG, Vol. 12. Archives Nationales [henceforth AN], pp. 1–2.

EXISTING EFFORTS TO EXPLAIN VARIATION IN MEDIA POLICY

The previous section illustrated how the second generation of communications scholars made significant progress in refining the original models for classifying (broadcast) media in different national contexts. Pippa Norris was not convinced that Hallin and Mancini's classification truly captured the analytical dimensions essential for identifying the major contrasts among contemporary media systems. Still, the conceptual framework in *Comparing Media Systems* provided the scholarly community with new theoretical tools for analyzing media structures across countries. Against this backdrop, the early 2000s and 2010s saw a surge of studies in comparative political communication with a stronger explanatory focus, largely centered on mapping and testing the patterns outlined by Hallin and Mancini.

When Hallin and Mancini reviewed the state of comparative media research in 2017, they argued that it painted a complex picture of both change and continuity in Western media systems. On one hand, Hallin and Mancini (2017, 162–165) saw clear signs of convergence toward the “Liberal” model. For example, they cited Umbricht and Esser's (2014) study, which found a general trend toward more objective news reporting across Western democracies from the 1960s to the 2000s. They also interpreted the findings of Brüggeman et al. (2014) — showing that the Netherlands, Belgium, and Portugal clustered with the United States and Ireland — as a sign of convergence toward greater market orientation.

At the same time, Hallin and Mancini identified several limitations in existing research on convergence, particularly the lack of longitudinal studies. They also argued that the notion of national differences among media systems disappearing *altogether* should be abandoned, citing Asle Rolland's (2008, 146–147) analysis of the Norwegian party press in the twentieth century. Rolland argues that socialist newspapers have resisted pressures toward commercialization and that prevailing analyses of convergence underestimate the state's role in maintaining its institutional power. This raises the broader question of how vested interests shape resistance to or facilitation of external pressures for institutional change in the media sector.

Dominant Explanations of Cross-Country Variation in Media Policy

In his comparative study, Peter J. Humphreys (1996, 176) highlights how interests can influence processes of convergence by pointing to the situation in several European countries in the late twentieth century, when two distinct coalitions of actors clashed over the deregulation of broadcasting. Electronics manufacturers, advertisers, and right-wing parties typically formed the “pro-market” coalition, while public broadcasters, unions, and left-wing parties generally united to defend “public service” broadcasting.

Other studies have explored specific episodes of policymaking on broadcasting within individual countries from an actor-centered perspective. A notable example is *Pressure Group: The Campaign for Commercial Television in England* by H. Hubert Wilson (1961). Wilson argues that the introduction of commercial television in the United Kingdom was not merely the result of government decisions or public demand but was significantly shaped by the organized efforts of business interests, advertisers, and other stakeholders. These pressure groups lobbied intensively to break the BBC’s monopoly and ultimately succeeded in introducing a commercial alternative, marking the beginning of the British public-private duopoly.

This can be contrasted with Karl-Hugo Wirén’s (1986) study on the role of interests in *preventing* the introduction of commercial television in Sweden. Wirén describes how groups advocating for advertising-funded broadcasting had significant momentum in the 1950s compared to the interwar period, when the license-funded radio monopoly was introduced. However, in the end, a commercial model for television was rejected, largely because the alliance of interests advocating for the preservation of the status quo — including the Social Democrats, newspaper publishers, and the public broadcaster Radiotjänst — was so strong.

More recently, a number of studies have explored how interest group struggles have shaped media policies from a comparative-historical perspective. For instance, Seth Ashley (2014, 134) argues that the varying power dynamics between commercial and state agents were central to why government ownership of broadcasting was rejected in the United States after the First World War but embraced in Britain (see also Leblebici et al. 1991). Similarly, Heidi Tworek’s (2015, 485)

paper on interwar broadcasting in Britain, Germany, and the United States highlights the crucial role government authorities played in determining the extent to which commercial companies could operate radio stations. Hence, what unites these actor-centered studies on broadcasting within and across nations is their framing of the main conflict of interest as a binary struggle between “state” and “market.”

While acknowledging the importance of analyzing the relationship between political and economic interests, Hallin and Mancini argued as early as 2004 that civil society’s role also deserved attention in understanding the evolution of media policies. However, they pointed to a lack of systematic comparative studies on how power dynamics among a broader range of societal interests have shaped national media systems. Hallin and Mancini’s (2004b, 8) observation remains relevant to this day. To my knowledge, no comparative study has yet examined how interactions among state actors, commercial interests, and third-sector groups have influenced the long-term development of radio and television across Western democracies. Instead, most analyses have attributed enduring country differences in media regulation to entrenched structural features of nations’ political systems.

From the first part of the literature review, we recall that Hallin and Mancini (2004b, 44) made a broad distinction between “dirigiste” traditions, where the state plays a major role in media ownership, funding, and regulation, and “relatively liberal systems,” which rely more on market forces and have less state intervention. Similarly, Pavani (2018, 11–12) attributes the historical differences in how Europe and the United States have governed their broadcast media to varying state traditions and conceptions of public management. Pavani’s perspective aligns with that of Humphreys (1996, 177), who argues that cross-national differences in radio and TV policy have persisted despite technological and economic pressures toward convergence due to nations’ deep-seated political and regulatory traditions (see also Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 310; Kleinstaub 1993, 324; Syvertsen et al. 2014, 2).

While this study agrees that entrenched institutional constraints at the national level are key to explaining enduring differences in broadcasting regulation, I argue that existing comparative scholarship has not sufficiently specified which policy legacies matter in the

media sector. Moreover, previous studies have only partially theorized how deep-seated institutional arrangements at the “meso” level interact with interest group dynamics at the “micro” level and how this interaction shapes policy variation. As a result, the literature offers few empirically testable theories on the relationship between state traditions and media outcomes, reflecting Norris’ (2009, 328) broader critique of comparative communications research for its lack of well-defined theoretical frameworks and concepts.

In summary, I argue that comparative communications research faces two key limitations in explaining enduring variation in media policy *across* countries. First, the vast majority of actor-centered studies have framed the primary conflict in media as a binary dynamic between “state” and “market,” overlooking the role of third-sector groups. Second, existing scholarship has insufficiently theorized how national institutional arrangements mediate interest group struggles over broadcasting in ways that shape policy variation. These limitations also extend to how previous communications research has sought to explain shifts in media policy *within* countries over time.

Prevailing Explanations of Within-Country Variation in Media Policy

The dominant theory of change in existing scholarship posits that national media landscapes are converging in a market-oriented direction, driven by the combined pressures of technological advancements and broader structural shifts in the economic and political landscape that can be subsumed under the concept of “internationalization.”

Among the first to advance this perspective were Dyson and Humphreys (1988, 1–2), who highlighted how changes in broadcasting technology and economics were creating unprecedented opportunities for European commercial media outlets to enter a sector long dominated by public broadcasting. Similarly, Nicholas Garnham (1990, 117) argued that the trend toward deregulating broadcasting and telecommunications in Western Europe since the 1980s was driven by underlying economic trends and the efforts of transnational companies to expand the market for information goods and services as a new growth sector. These transformations were expected to bring greater uniformity in how countries structured their media sectors (see also Thompson 1995; Tomlinson 1991).

Beyond economic and technological pressures, the push for European integration was also seen as a key force in harmonizing media regulation across nations. The European Union actively sought to create a common broadcasting market through the Television Without Frontiers Directive of 1989. According to Hallin and Mancini (2004a, 26–28), this and other elements of European law were eroding national differences in communication policies and weakening the boundaries that had long defined media as national institutions. They argued that these transformations could be interpreted as a form of “Americanization,” as national media systems appeared to be converging toward the commercial model that first emerged in the United States (see also Butler and Ranney 1992; Negrine and Papathanasopoulos 1996; Swanson and Mancini 1996).

To summarize, the general consensus within comparative communications scholarship is that national media systems worldwide became increasingly market-oriented in the late twentieth century. This “marketization” has been widely equated with a growing dominance of commercial outlets at the expense of public broadcasting, reflecting how communications research remains anchored in the prevailing view that media policy is shaped by a binary conflict between profit-driven private businesses and states seeking to safeguard the “public interest.” Furthermore, there is broad agreement that these transformations were driven by forces *external* to nations’ domestic political systems, most notably the rise of new communication technologies and broader trends toward international integration.

An exception is the paper by Leblebici et al. (1991, 333), which explores endogenous mechanisms of change in U.S. broadcast governance between 1920 and 1960. The authors argue that institutional change depends on the analogies policymakers use to make sense of new phenomena and the practices adopted by relevant organizations to solve coordination problems. This is one of the few studies that explicitly theorize how policy change in the media sector is influenced by the interaction between interests and institutions. However, Leblebici et al.’s analysis is confined to a single national context and does not account for how shifts in the overarching policymaking environment shape power relations among actors within domestic politics.

To my knowledge, the only comparative study that explicitly the-

orizes how exogenous forces shape institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level is Mark Thatcher's (2004) analysis of telecommunications policy in Western Europe in the late twentieth century. He shows that powerful interest coalitions, not least within state telecommunications bureaucracies, sustained national media institutions in Britain, France, Germany, and Italy until the late 1980s, when transnational technological and economic shifts began to erode these rigidities, driving reform and convergence. By the late 1990s, all four countries had privatized, liberalized, and delegated authority to independent regulators. Thatcher (2004, 773–775) concludes that international forces, when strong and combined, can bypass domestic institutional constraints in telecommunications by reshaping incumbent actors' strategies, enabling new entrants into institutional debates, and eroding coalitions opposing reform.

I argue that Thatcher's main contribution lies in theorizing the ways in which transnational integration and new communication technologies can disrupt entrenched path dependencies in telecommunications, namely by overturning power dynamics among stakeholders (see also Stehmann 1995, 43; Thatcher 1999, 47; Ungerer and Costello 1988, 35). However, he does not specify the *extent* of convergence across nations. Therefore, I argue that the jury is still out on the magnitude of these exogenous forces' impact on national media systems and how interests, institutions, and shifts in the broader policymaking environment interact to shape variation across nations.

The need for further inquiry is also evident in light of more recent debates on convergence, which continue to grapple with how online media technologies have shaped national media institutions and interest group dynamics. Strömbäck et al. (2022, 50–51) note that the rise and expanding reach of digital and mobile media have fueled an explosion of content, driving a broader shift from a low-choice to a high-choice information environment. However, scholars remain divided on the extent to which the rise of digital media in the early 2000s has weakened national media institutions and how it has shifted power among different actors.

One perspective suggests that this transformation signals the decline of media systems as distinctly “national” institutions. For instance, Frank Esser (2013, 113) argues that the proliferation of pri-

vate digital outlets has weakened national governments' ability to shape the media by undermining one of the traditional justifications for public service broadcasting — namely, its role in complementing content areas where the market falls short. According to Arriaza Ibarra, Nowak, and Kuhn (2015, 4–5), public service broadcasters therefore face a thorny dilemma: if they merely emulate commercial providers, they risk losing their distinctive role. However, if they differentiate themselves too much and their audience share declines, they risk losing both public and political support. A similar view is advanced by Paolo Mancini (2020), who likens the digital revolution to a critical juncture that appears to undermine the role of national public media.

At the same time, Mancini (2020, 5751–5755) observes that competition has intensified not only between public and commercial outlets but also *within* the private media sector, as digital advancements have significantly lowered entry barriers to the public sphere. According to Strömbäck et al. (2022, 51–52), this shift has empowered a wide range of “strategic actors,” who can now communicate with the public more independently, in addition to ordinary citizens, who have greater control than ever over the information they consume (see also Strömbäck 2013). Consequently, established media corporations now face competition from an expanding array of alternative digital outlets, whose messages reach the public sphere regardless of legacy media's actions (see also Nielsen and Fletcher 2020; Vos 2015, 16).

Although there is broad scholarly consensus that the transition from a low-choice to a high-choice information environment has undermined the gatekeeping functions of both public and commercial legacy media, far from everyone is convinced that these institutions have lost their relevance altogether. Mancini (2020) argues that despite the rapid and dramatic rise of digital media, legacy media still play a central role in shaping public debate. Flew and Waisbord (2015, 620) echo this view, contending that nation-states remain key players in media governance and that domestic actors continue to shape the core dynamics of media policy. According to Thorson (2015), the key difference from earlier periods is that legacy media are no longer the *sole* curators of information reaching the public. Instead, journalistic curation now competes with social media feeds,

personalized recommendations, and algorithm-driven rankings, all influencing what information people see and engage with (see also Strömbäck et al. 2022, 51–52).

In recent years, researchers have emphasized that this shift in the balance of power between traditional media companies and new digital intermediaries needs to be reflected in the classificatory frameworks and theoretical models used to study the development of media systems (Chadwick 2013; Mattoni and Ceccobelli 2018). Liu, Liu, and Jensen (2020) note that comparative studies on the effects of digital technologies remain scarce and that few empirical typologies are available (see also Flensburg and Lai 2020). A notable exception is a study by Peruško (2015), which examines smartphone and broadband internet penetration across 22 countries. However, it does not incorporate standard media system variables. By contrast, Humprecht et al.'s (2022) typology of media systems in the digital age builds on Hallin and Mancini's framework, expanding it with new indicators for digitalization, including online news consumption and media freedom across 30 countries.

These studies have made important contributions to updating existing comparative frameworks so that they better reflect a new media landscape shaped by digital communication. At the same time, it seems to me that many of the fundamental conceptual challenges Pippa Norris identified in her 2009 critique of comparative communications research remain unresolved. For instance, the dimensions in Humprecht et al.'s (2022) typology operate at widely different levels of abstraction and are based on indicators spanning various types of media, including print, online, and broadcast media. In other words, there still seems to be no consensus on how a media system should be defined or which basic units of analysis should be compared. This raises questions about whether the most recent comparative frameworks for interpreting the media ecology of the 2020s truly capture the analytical dimensions essential for identifying the major contrasts among contemporary media systems.

SUMMING UP THE STATE OF THE FIELD

This literature review has shown how successive generations of scholars have contributed to classifying and explaining differences in how the media operate in various national contexts. Among the pioneers were Waller (1946) and Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm (1956), who asserted that the media are shaped by the social and political structures within which they operate. Building on this premise, a second wave of research in the early 2000s placed greater emphasis on empirical comparisons across nations, often incorporating a historical perspective (see Ashley 2014; Brüggeman et al. 2014; Thatcher 2004). The key contribution to this literature was *Comparing Media Systems* (2004) by Hallin and Mancini, who introduced a framework identifying key analytical dimensions of media systems and categorizing Western democracies into distinct types based on factors such as journalistic independence, the historical development of media markets, and the balance between public and private media.

However, a limitation of the dominant classificatory frameworks is that they conceal significant sources of variation *within* nations. This can be attributed to the fact that the prevailing country-types are rather static; thus they do not reflect how nations' media systems have evolved over time. This relates to certain challenges that existing comparative research encounters in explaining the dynamics of institutional change.

The prevailing theory of change within previous research suggests that technological innovations and "internationalization" are pushing national media landscapes to converge in a "market-oriented" direction (see, for instance, Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 1–2; Thompson 1995; Tomlinson 1991). However, the limited number of studies relying on over-time data means that these claims of cross-national convergence have been difficult to substantiate empirically (Hallin and Mancini 2017, 162–165). Moreover, previous comparative studies have only to a limited extent theorized how these types of structural changes at the macro-level are mediated by institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level (but see Thatcher 2004).

The second limitation extends to how existing comparative communications research has attempted to explain enduring differences in media policy *across* countries. The general consensus is that sig-

nificant differences persist in how nations regulate the media despite external pressures toward convergence. These differences have commonly been attributed to entrenched structural features of nations' political systems. The prevailing idea is that countries have developed distinct political and cultural traditions that shape their approaches to media governance as new technologies emerge (see, for instance, Humphreys 1996, 177; Kleinstaub 1993, 324; Pavani 2018, 11–12; Syvertsen et al. 2014, 1–2).

However, I argue that existing comparative scholarship has not sufficiently specified which policy legacies matter in the media sector. Moreover, previous studies have only partially theorized how deep-seated institutional arrangements at the “meso” level interact with interest group dynamics at the micro level and how this interaction shapes policy variation. As a result, the literature offers few empirically testable theories on the relationship between state traditions and media outcomes.

Additionally, the vast majority of actor-centered studies have framed the primary conflict in media as a binary struggle between state and market, overlooking the role of third-sector groups. This despite calls from some scholars to consider how power dynamics among a broader range of societal interests have shaped the press, radio, and television sectors across national contexts (see, for instance, Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 8; Kelly 1983; Lewis and Booth 1989).

The fact that a “media system” encompasses so many different sectors has, in turn, raised questions about whether it is even possible to reliably map and explain national differences across such diverse phenomena. As pointed out by Pippa Norris (2009, 328), the media encompasses everything from newspapers to radio and nowadays also digital platforms, but these elements do not necessarily interact in a cohesive manner. The challenges of defining what a media system *is* are closely linked to Norris's broader critique of the state of comparative political communication research in 2009: the lack of well-defined theoretical frameworks and concepts. This was deemed a key reason why there was still no consensus on which analytical dimensions are essential for identifying the major contrasts among contemporary media systems — and, by extension, which basic units should be compared.

This fundamental issue has hardly been mitigated by the growing prominence of internet-based media in recent decades, raising questions about whether the prevailing comparative frameworks from the early 2000s remain useful for interpreting today’s increasingly digitalized media landscape (see Humprecht et al. 2022, 145; Mancini 2020, 5765; Waisbord 2019).

Theorizing Variation in Broadcast Governance

The limitations of existing typologies in *describing* a new digital media ecology are closely intertwined with the challenges comparative communication scholars face in explaining the interplay between institutional stability and change over time. As discussed in the literature review, previous research has emphasized the role of national cultural and political traditions in shaping enduring differences in media policy across countries. However, beyond broad distinctions such as between “dirigiste” and “relatively liberal” traditions (Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 44), previous studies have under-specified which types of policy legacies are relevant in the media sector and what variation in outcomes they are expected to generate.

Furthermore, comparative communication scholars have emphasized the role of internationalization and technological innovations in driving institutional change in the media sector, specifically toward cross-national convergence on a “market-oriented” model. Yet, they have only to a limited extent specified how such broad macro-environmental shifts are mediated by institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level. Overall, this raises questions about how comparative media research can refine its classificatory frameworks and theoretical models to better describe and explain policy outcomes in an increasingly complex media ecosystem shaped by continuous technological advancements (see Chadwick 2013; Humprecht et al. 2022, 146; Mattoni and Ceccobelli 2018).

In charting a path forward for comparative media research, several scholars have argued that the field could benefit from greater engagement with political science and comparative political economy (see, for instance, Humphreys 2012, 23; Humprecht et al. 2022, 145). In particular, they have emphasized the potential of incorporating

insights from historical institutionalism, given its focus on identifying the mechanisms driving stability and change through analyses of interactions between institutions and interests over long periods. According to Bannerman and Haggart (2015, 2), this approach offers key advantages for communication scholars, who often examine the formal and informal regimes governing text production.

As noted in the literature review, the second wave of comparative media research in the early 2000s already brought a heightened sensitivity to historical analysis. However, as Bannerman and Haggart (2015, 1) point out, communication studies have typically engaged with neo-institutionalist approaches in an implicit manner, with a strong emphasis on sociological institutionalism (but see Ashley 2014; de Percy and Batainah 2021; Thatcher 2004). Consequently, the theoretical and methodological toolbox of historical institutionalism has yet to be fully exploited by comparative communication scholars.

THE ARGUMENT IN ESSENCE

Drawing on new institutionalism, this study outlines a conceptual framework aimed at capturing within- and cross-country differences in broadcast governance that existing classifications largely fail to address, along with a theory to explain this variation. I propose an actor-centered approach that highlights the role of strategic interactions among political agents in shaping the development of radio and television policy in Western Democracies. Furthermore, I argue that insights from historical institutionalism on how such interactions are mediated by the broader policymaking environment can deepen our understanding of the dynamics of institutional change in the media sector, as well as the factors underpinning enduring variation in broadcasting regulation across Europe and North America.

As noted in the literature review, a key conceptual challenge lies in the fact that “the media” encompass such a broad array of outlets that, while sharing certain characteristics, do not necessarily interact in a cohesive manner. Against this backdrop, I argue that the development of media in Western democracies should be analyzed separately for different types of media; otherwise, the complexity becomes unmanageable. Furthermore, I propose extending Orren and Skowronek’s concept of multiple orders one step further by consid-

ering that even a *single* medium can consist of distinct spheres of intervention.

Focusing specifically on radio and television, I analytically distinguish between (1) the production of program content and (2) the operation of the technical infrastructure required for distributing programs. Additionally, I emphasize the importance of identifying whether the groups involved in these activities are public authorities, commercial corporations, or third sector agents. In other words, the key conceptual argument is that a single type of medium can encompass distinct spheres of intervention that require varying regulatory approaches, and that policymaking in the broadcasting sector, specifically, cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between “public” and “private” interests.

To better *explain* how interests have influenced enduring differences in broadcast regulation across countries, I argue that comparative media research can benefit from historical institutionalism’s insights into how political struggles are constrained by the broader policymaking environment in which these interactions play out (see Gourevitch 1978; Katznelson and Weingast 2005). As discussed in the literature review, no comparative study has yet examined how interactions among state actors, commercial interests, and third-sector groups have shaped the long-term development of radio and television across Western democracies. Instead, most analyses have attributed enduring country differences in media regulation to entrenched structural features of nations’ political systems. Yet their effects on policy outcomes and interest group dynamics remain under-theorized.

Drawing on Ikenberry (1988, 222), I argue that “the national institutional environment” can be defined as the power asymmetries among the state, private business, and the third sector that are embedded in countries’ policy frameworks for radio and television. Since interest group struggles are always shaped by pre-existing power relations and institutional outcomes rooted in deeper historical contexts, this perspective leads me to trace different nations’ institutional pathways back to the foundational decisions on broadcasting in the early twentieth century (see Pierson 2004, 135).

As scholars within historical institutionalism have pointed out, processes of institutional creation typically involve a clash of power

among actors with deep stakes in which new policies that are adopted (Hall and Taylor 1996, 954). Against this backdrop, I direct attention to how the power relations among groups from the state, private business, and the third sector that already existed in each nation shaped the institutions that were created for broadcasting.

In line with Thelen and Steinmo (1992, 14), I emphasize that these initial decisions triggered a path-dependent process, providing the interests embedded in the original regulatory frameworks a lasting advantage in protecting their positions against later reform attempts. This actor-centered analysis of media policy thus contributes to debates in comparative media studies and historical institutionalism about the origins of institutions and the extent to which actors' interests are endogenous or exogenous to the institutional setting in which they operate (see Pierson 1994; Hall and Taylor 1996).

Historical institutionalism's nuanced understanding of "the environment" can also offer deeper insights into the sources of institutional change in the media sector. As noted in the literature review, previous research has identified international integration and new technology as major drivers of change, but it has only to a limited extent theorized how such macro-level forces are mediated by institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level.

I argue that countries' path-dependent broadcasting trajectories face a considerably heightened risk of being disrupted whenever they are exposed to an external systemic shock (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341). I identify two types of critical junctures: technology-driven shocks and international shocks. The former are innovations that fundamentally alter the technological landscape and whose primary effect is to render the policy instruments previously used to regulate radio and television ineffective. International shocks, by contrast, comprise external threats to national autonomy, sudden intensifications of international competition, or heightened geopolitical pressures. Unlike technological innovations, these shocks do not directly undermine the effectiveness of existing policy tools in addressing new policy developments. Rather, their primary impact lies in changing how policymakers prioritize between different goals and which policy instruments they are willing to use to achieve them.

Besides altering how policymakers perceive the decision-making

situation and changing the effectiveness of the policy tools at their disposal, critical junctures can also reshape the power dynamics among different stakeholders in the broadcasting economy. The main theoretical expectation concerning technological innovations is that they will empower private interests at the expense of the state. Commercial companies benefit the most, particularly in carriage but also in content production, as they can capitalize on expanded market opportunities. The third sector primarily gains opportunities in content creation, as lower technological barriers enable grassroots and nonprofit actors to thrive in programming niches.

International shocks, by contrast, often marginalize third-sector groups in favor of centralized, state-led efforts to address perceived threats. Commercial firms may benefit from such crises if state strategies require collaboration with private affiliates. Occasionally, external threats to countries' national autonomy can propel a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting the state, the corporate sector, and civil society against a common foreign adversary.

The argument that policymaking on radio and television under such crisis conditions differs fundamentally from policymaking in more "normal" circumstances builds on Pepper D. Culpepper's analysis of how states' responsiveness to business interests varies between periods of "quiet" politics — when policy issues are technical and attract little public attention — and "noisy" politics, when issues become politically charged and highly salient (see also Culpepper 2016).

The study embraces a "dual" conception of institutional development, examining the interplay between episodes of path-dependent institutional stability and critical junctures that occasionally disrupt these processes (see Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 341). The argument thus aligns with the second image reversed literature, which suggests that shifts in the broader policymaking environment can redistribute power within domestic politics and prompt politicians to prioritize entirely new goals (see, for instance Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978). Specifically, it resonates with Peter A. Hall's ideas on how institutional change can be triggered by adjustments to policy instruments and, in some cases, by fundamental paradigmatic shifts in the broader policy framework.

Finally, the study emphasizes that the impact of revolutionary

technology and international shocks will never be uniform across countries, even if they occur simultaneously and under similar conditions. Political struggles over the control of broadcasting during critical junctures never unfold in a vacuum. Instead, the effects of these junctures will always be mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies at the national level (Ikenberry 1988, 222). This means that, although nations' media systems face similar homogenizing pressures from new technology and international integration, differences in radio and television governance across Western democracies will endure. Hence the importance of tracing interest group struggles over broadcasting in Europe and North America "forward," from the foundational decisions on radio in the early 1900s to the present day (Møller 2021).

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: DESCRIBING NATIONAL BROADCASTING SYSTEMS

As noted in the literature review, a key challenge when it comes to describing media systems is that "the media" encompass such a broad array of outlets that, while sharing certain characteristics, do not necessarily interact in a cohesive manner (see Norris 2009, 328). This diversity has complicated the establishment of scholarly consensus on even the basic units of comparison, raising questions about whether it is possible to systematically compare media systems across countries in a reliable way.

I believe that some of these conceptual challenges can be addressed by incorporating ideas from Orren and Skowronek's (2004, 17) framework for analyzing American political development. Orren and Skowronek emphasize that a single polity is made up of multiple institutional realms that can evolve largely independently while still exerting significant influence on one another through so-called intercurrency (see also Kingdon 1984).

I propose extending Orren and Skowronek's concept of multiple orders one step further by considering that even a *single* policy realm can consist of distinct spheres of intervention that require varied regulatory approaches. With this in mind, I argue that the development of Western media systems should be analyzed separately for different types of media; otherwise, the complexity becomes unmanageable.

Focusing on radio and television, I analytically distinguish between the production of broadcast program content and the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution. Additionally, I stress importance of identifying whether the groups involved in these activities are public authorities, commercial corporations, or third sector agents. Hence, the key conceptual argument is that broadcasting encompasses distinct spheres of intervention that require different regulatory approaches and that policy dynamics in this sector cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between “public” and “private” interests.

Separating “Distribution” from “Program Production”

The distinction between “carriage” and “content” has featured in previous historical research on broadcasting in individual nations. For instance, Heidi Tworek (2015, 471) notes that in Britain, the BBC initially built and operated radio transmitters while simultaneously managing programming. In Weimar Germany, by contrast, the Postal Ministry built and operated the distribution network, whereas the programs were supplied by private radio companies. A review of government inquiries into radio and TV in different countries further reveals that policymakers have actively regarded the production and distribution of programs as distinct spheres of intervention. Consider, for instance, the following statement by the Canadian Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts in 1966:

Much of the controversy about public control of broadcasting seems to arise from a failure to distinguish clearly between two quite separate elements — the physical structure of the system and the actual programs broadcast.³

Given the centrality of the distinction between “content” and “carriage” in the eyes of both policymakers and broadcasting historians, it is surprising how little attention this perspective has received within comparative media research. Among the existing classificatory frameworks for broadcasting, to my knowledge, only Waller’s from 1946

³*Eleventh report by the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Films and Assistance to the Arts*. 1966, 23 November. RG 134539, Vol. 287. LAC, p. 7.

mentions the difference between technical operations and program production (pp. 9–10).

The analytical distinction is important is because the two spheres of intervention are intertwined. It matters little how much high-quality program content is produced in a country if there is no infrastructure to deliver it to an audience. Conversely, a high-bandwidth distribution network holds little value if there is a shortage of content to fill the available channel space.

Moreover, since program creation and distribution require distinct competencies, maintaining a well-functioning radio and television system often depends on alliances between interest groups from distinct societal spheres, whose composition may vary across nations, technological paradigms or time periods. Given this interplay, I fully agree with technology historian Nina Wormbs (1997, 9) on the necessity of studying the regulation of content and carriage in tandem — both to more accurately describe the structure of national broadcasting systems and to better understand the role of interests in shaping policy dynamics in this field.

I use the terms “carriage” and “program distribution” interchangeably to refer to hardware elements such as terrestrial broadcast towers, cable networks, and direct broadcast satellites, all of which are used to *transmit* radio and television programs to an audience. The main dependent variable related to carriage captures which groups own and operate a country’s broadcasting distribution infrastructure at a given point in time

In programming, too, the primary dependent variable reflects ownership and operation — that is: which groups own content-producing companies or are directly involved in creating radio and TV programs. However, in this area, the dependent variable is more multifaceted than in the case of carriage. This is because governments can use policy instruments other than direct ownership of radio and television facilities to influence the nature of the programs reaching the citizenry. For example, they may provide subsidies to encourage certain groups to engage in broadcasting, or enforce general regulations that directly or indirectly determine the type of content private media companies are allowed to air (Brüggeman et al. 2014, 1041; Fukuyama and Grotto 2020, 200).

This argument aligns with the broader theoretical idea that new technology can render existing policy tools ineffective, compelling decision-makers to adopt alternative methods of intervention. Overall, the study's definition of the governance of programming aligns more closely with what Wormbs (1997, 9) refers to as the "soft" components of a broadcasting system, encompassing organizational structures, financial frameworks, and general regulations.

Unpacking the "Private" Broadcasting Sector

In examining how policy issues related to "content" and "carriage" have been resolved in different national contexts and time periods, the study adopts an actor-centered approach that stresses the need to analytically distinguish between diverse interests within the "private" broadcasting sector. This approach stems from a rationalist view of institutional development that draws attention to the role of strategic interaction among actors in determining political outcomes (see Hall and Soskice 2001; North 1990; Williamson 1975).

The basic premise is that groups and individuals have distinct interests that they seek to advance in competition with other influential actors (see Hall and Taylor 1996). Equilibrium outcomes related to the production and distribution of radio and television programs are thus assumed to depend on which strategic actors are most successful in advancing their agendas during critical episodes of policymaking (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 17).

As noted in the literature review, comparative communications scholars have routinely characterized the fundamental conflict in media policy as one between "state" and "market" (see Blumler 1992b, 22–23; Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 2; Jackson and Vipond 2003, 76–77; Kuhn and Perry 1999, 301–305). Without denying the centrality of the tension between profit-driven and publicly funded broadcast media, this study argues that a third category of actors — the third sector — must also be considered to fully understand the interest group dynamics shaping radio and television policy.

Some existing classificatory frameworks have acknowledged the role of "socially relevant groups" in the governance of broadcasting (see Humphreys 1996; Kelly 1983). However, these frameworks focus

solely on different ways of organizing *public* broadcasting, with some models granting civil society groups a more prominent role than others. In other words, the models do not capture the extent to which the third sector plays a more or less significant role in the broadcasting system *as a whole*.

To my knowledge, *The Invisible Medium* (1989) by Peter M. Lewis and Jerry Booth is the only comparative study that explicitly recognizes third sector-driven broadcasting as a distinct model in its own right. As we saw in the literature review, the starting point for Lewis and Booth's analysis is the conventional distinction between the American "free market" system and the British "public service" model. These types are contrasted with a third model called "community radio," also known as listener-supported, free, or alternative radio (1989, 4–5).

This tripartite division between public, commercial, and community broadcasting closely aligns with this study's approach to classifying radio and television systems. Like Lewis and Booth, I associate each model with a distinct source of funding and a specific type of relationship with the audience. One difference lies in the conceptualization of the dependent variable, which adds the analytical distinction between the production and distribution of content. Furthermore, the analysis expands beyond radio to encompass all forms of broadcasting, as well as satellite and cable television. The key distinction from Lewis and Booth's framework lies in the use of the tripartite model, not only as a tool to *describe* variation in radio and television policy within and across nations, but also as part of an actor-centered theory to *explain* these differences.

EXPLANATORY THEORY: AN ACTOR-CENTERED ARGUMENT OF VARIATION IN BROADCAST GOVERNANCE

A Tripartite Actor Conceptualization

In the following, we explore which actors from the state, private sector, and third sector have a stake in the governance of the production and distribution of broadcast programs. In line with rational choice theory, I assume that radio and television policy, as a basic premise,

is causally shaped by the actions of political agents that seek to advance their interests in competition with other influential actors (see Hall and Soskice 2001; North 1990; Williamson 1975).

Congruent with this rationalist view on institutional development, this subsection elaborates on how the three types of stakeholders' interests and policy preferences differ regarding the regulation of "content" and "carriage." It should be emphasized that the tripartite actor conceptualization represents ideal types. In other words, I outline the actors' *presumed* interests and policy preferences in broadcasting, while their actual interests, preferences, and actions are examined in the empirical case studies.

State Actors

The main classes of stakeholders included in the category of *state actors* are elected officials, government bureaucrats, and managers of public broadcasting companies.⁴

One might question whether it is reasonable to define common interests across such disparate agents. Political parties, for instance, adhere to fundamentally different ideologies: some favor market competition in the media sector, while others advocate for a stronger role for the state. Similarly, officials in different branches of the state bureaucracy often pursue competing objectives. Still, all these state agents share a fundamental interest in governing. This makes them active players in a political game alongside other societal interests seeking to steer radio and TV policy in a particular direction.

Having established this fundamental premise, I distinguish analytically between elected officials and government bureaucrats. The rationale behind this distinction is that politicians tend to take a more hands-off approach in complex and technical policy areas — at least as long as the issues remain low in public salience (Culpepper 2010). If that is the case, policymaking is often delegated to officials or experts with specialized knowledge (Heclo 1974, 318)

As outlined in the preceding section, policymaking in broadcasting unfolds in two distinct spheres of intervention, each demanding a

⁴Although public broadcasters are not typically classified as formal state agencies, I consider them "public" actors because their primary funding usually comes from license fees and/or government budgets rather than commercial advertising.

different set of expertise. Program production relies on artistic and journalistic skills, which are widespread across society but, among state actors, are primarily concentrated among employees of public broadcasting companies (Humphreys 1996, 176). By contrast, managing the infrastructure for program distribution requires technical expertise in telecommunications, typically concentrated within state telecommunications agencies and other government bodies responsible for civic infrastructure (see Thatcher 2004, 759).

I assume that the primary concern of senior executives at public broadcasters is to safeguard their role in programming. Even though it is not precluded that public broadcasters may also manage the infrastructure required for program distribution, state telecommunications agencies remain the primary public stakeholders in this area. I presume that senior civil servants within state telecommunications agencies share a similar motivation with the managers of public broadcasters, namely to secure and maintain as much responsibility as possible within their area of expertise.

Thus, a central element of my conceptualization of the main public stakeholders in “content” and “carriage” is that they should be seen as *vested* interests. By this, I mean that the primary concern of public broadcasters and state telecommunication agencies is to safeguard their position within their respective domains, rather than actively shaping broader policy goals regarding the social role of radio and television.

By contrast, I expect *elected* officials to have a much greater interest in defining the underlying normative goals of broadcasting. The premise is that mass media play a unique role in democracy by informing, educating, and connecting people across geographic and social boundaries. According to Croteau and Hoynes (2001, 27–28), policymakers in democracies have long regarded radio and television as carrying a particularly great responsibility to uphold public interest objectives due to their reach and persuasive power — a pattern that holds true across Western nations with widely divergent regulatory traditions (Holtz-Bacha 2015, 31; McQuail 1992). At the same time, the “public interest” in broadcasting has been defined in widely divergent ways. Director and Botein (1994, 232) argue that politicians have invoked the term so broadly in media policy debates that

it has lost its substance (see also Heller 1978; Napoli 2001, 1-10).

Against this backdrop, I assume that elected officials will pursue broadcasting policies they claim to promote the public interest but that, in practice, reflect whatever policy preference they happen to hold at the time — whether for ideological or other reasons. To specify what those “other reasons” might entail, I analytically distinguish between whether policymaking on radio and television unfolds under extraordinary conditions or more “normal” circumstances. This aligns with the study’s theory that shifts in the overarching policy environment can lead politicians to reconsider their usual policy goals and preferences.

Under normal conditions, I expect politicians to focus on setting broad policy frameworks for broadcasting while avoiding direct intervention in programming. As pointed out by Fukuyama and Grotto (2020, 199), media regulation remains a sensitive and controversial issue in all liberal democracies. Moreover, managing a broadcasting system — both in terms of program production and distribution — requires specialized expertise. Hence, in line with Culpepper (2010)’s (2010) theory that politicians tend to delegate policymaking to experts when issues are complex, technical, and low in public salience, I expect elected officials to adopt a relatively hands-off approach to governing broadcast media when circumstances are normal.

In times of crisis, by contrast, I expect politicians to take a far more active role *vis-à-vis* industry groups and technical experts. Specifically, I argue that elected officials’ interest in broadcasting intensifies whenever a country faces an international threat perceived to endanger its national sovereignty. Such external shocks radically transform the policymaking environment, prompting politicians to reassess their previous policy preferences — typically in a more control-oriented direction as part of efforts to counter the foreign threat.

In other words, I argue that elected officials have certain *overriding* interests in broadcasting — irrespective of their ordinary policy preferences — tied to protecting the national media landscape from external dominance. These interests are triggered when the country faces an international exogenous shock. The argument thus aligns with Culpepper’s (2010) claim that elected officials tend to become more actively involved when policy issues are noisy — that is, when

they gain high visibility, become politically charged, and attract public attention.

Commercial Actors

The main classes of stakeholders included in the category of *commercial* actors are private telecommunications and infrastructure firms and commercial media content providers.

Just as state actors are not a homogeneous group, business interests also vary widely, often pursuing different and sometimes competing goals. However, just as politicians have an overriding interest in protecting national autonomy in radio and television from foreign threats, commercial firms share the fundamental goal of generating profit. They are thus also active players in a political game alongside other societal interests seeking to steer radio and TV policy in a particular direction.

Having established this fundamental premise, I distinguish between commercial firms engaged in program production and those involved in distribution, as each sphere of intervention demands a distinct set of skills. The primary stakeholders with competence in “carriage” are private companies specializing in the physical and technical infrastructure of broadcasting and communication, including telecommunications providers, satellite operators, cable companies, and electronics manufacturers. By contrast, the main commercial stakeholders in programming include private broadcasters, commercial television and radio networks, newspapers, and other for-profit entities involved in content creation and production (see Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 1–2; Humphreys 1996, 176).

I assume that the managers of commercial content providers share fundamental interests with executives of private telecommunications firms. Both groups are primarily driven by profit, pushing them to seek out and exploit new markets for radio and TV services. While commercial broadcasters may occasionally produce niche content, their dependence on advertising revenue generally pushes them toward programming that attracts broad audiences. Consequently, commercial broadcasters have a natural tendency to engage in program syndication and form networks, as these strategies enhance economies of scale.

Similarly, the main interest of content distribution providers lies in developing and disseminating new media technologies, thereby securing a dominant market position in telecommunications provision. Since the ability to experiment with new technology depends on the level of market liberalization, I expect these commercial enterprises to actively oppose government interventions that could stifle innovation.

This conceptualization of commercial actors' interests and policy preferences thus builds on conventional definitions of the "free market" model of broadcasting. As established in the literature review, the essence of a commercial media system, in its ideal-typical form, is its fundamental drive to absorb new markets and expand its reach, often competing with — or even eroding — the public service domain (Croteau and Hoynes 2001, 15–17; Lewis and Booth 1989, 6–10).

Taken together, the driving forces of commercial enterprises with a stake in the production and distribution of radio and television programs are somewhat less complex compared to state actors. While private businesses may pursue goals that do not obviously aim to generate financial returns, their primary driving force is to make profit. Consequently, their main interest is to develop new products and services in order to capture a larger market share in the broadcasting sector from private competitors or the state.

Third Sector Actors

The main classes of stakeholders included in the category of *third sector actors* are community broadcasters, nonprofit organizations, and individuals.

Like state and commercial actors, the third sector encompasses a diverse range of stakeholders from various fields, often pursuing distinct or even competing goals. However, just as commercial firms are united by an overarching interest in profit-making, third-sector groups share a strong commitment to ensuring that alternative voices are not excessively sidelined by mainstream forms of broadcasting, whether publicly or commercially funded. Consequently, in political struggles over radio and television policy, third-sector agents primarily act as defenders of minority interests against the influence of state and capital (see Lewis and Booth 1989, 10).

For both state and commercial actors, I distinguished between

stakeholders and their interests based on whether they are engaged in the production or distribution of programs. This distinction is less relevant for third-sector agents, since managing the “hardware” for professional and large-scale broadcasting operations is typically too resource-intensive for grassroots nonprofits. The exception is in more rudimentary forms of broadcasting, such as community radio, where these agents may take on carriage responsibilities. Beyond this, I assume that the primary interest of third-sector actors lies in shaping the nature of program content in radio and television — either by directly producing programs or by ensuring that their perspective is considered in the broader formulation of broadcasting policy.

I identify three types of stakeholders who share the overarching concern of safeguarding minority voices from being marginalized by state and commercial mainstream broadcasting, while also pursuing distinct interests. To begin, there are actors bound by geographical proximity, such as community groups, primarily concerned with ensuring that local perspectives are reflected in radio and television programming. Furthermore, nonprofit organizations — including religious congregations, labor unions, and educational institutions — seek to use broadcasting to advocate for their causes and shape public discourse. Finally, individuals — such as amateur radio operators — have historically played a significant role in radio and television. These non-institutional actors typically advocate for the right to use broadcast media for peer-to-peer communication.

This conceptualization of third-sector actors’ interests and policy preferences builds on Lewis and Booth’s (1989, 4–8) description of the “community” type of broadcasting in *The Invisible Medium*. As noted in the literature review, this form of broadcasting has a distinct nonprofit character, aiming to cultivate a sense of community among listeners and viewers while empowering them to shape their cultural identities and preferences. Furthermore, community broadcasting positions itself in explicit contrast to both public and commercial models by addressing audiences as active participants rather than passive consumers or objects to be improved and informed.

In line with this description, I argue that third-sector actors should be regarded as part of the “private” broadcasting sector, yet distinct from commercial actors in that their overriding interest is not

profit-making. Instead, these alternative nonprofit groups are united by a desire to communicate with like-minded individuals. Furthermore, they are driven by a shared overarching concern to prevent their perspectives from being excluded from radio and television programming, since both forms of mainstream broadcasting, whether commercially or publicly funded, tend to omit or marginalize certain minority viewpoints.

Explaining Stability and Change in Broadcast Governance

Building on the tripartite stakeholder conceptualization outlined in the previous subsection, the rest of the theoretical discussion develops the study's actor-centered argument to explain variation in broadcasting policy within and across nations.

I argue that broadcasting policy is shaped by a tripartite power struggle among state agencies, commercial enterprises, and third-sector groups over control of either "content" or "carriage." In line with a rationalist view on institutional development, I assume that representatives of these groups have distinct interests that they seek to advance in competition with other influential political agents (see Hall and Soskice 2001; North 1990; Williamson 1975). I thus expect equilibrium outcomes in the production and distribution of radio and television programs to ultimately depend on which of these actors succeed in advancing their agendas during critical policymaking episodes (Thelen and Steinmo 1992, 17).

As discussed in the literature review, no comparative study has yet examined how interactions among state agents, commercial enterprises, and third-sector groups have influenced the long-term development of radio and television across Western democracies. Instead, most analyses have attributed enduring country differences in media regulation to entrenched structural features of nations' political systems. Yet previous studies have not sufficiently specified which types of policy legacies are relevant in the media sector and what variation in outcomes they are expected to generate. Moreover, existing research has only partially theorized how deep-seated institutional arrangements at the "meso" level mediate interest group dynamics at the "micro" level and how this might result in policy variation.

I argue that we can gain a better understanding of how entrenched

national institutional arrangements have influenced the development of radio and television in Western democracies by viewing these policy legacies as relatively enduring structures resulting from historical political struggles (see Hall 1986, 19; Gourevitch 1978; Katznelson and Weingast 2005). Based on this historical institutionalist understanding of what constitutes a policy legacy, I define “the national institutional environment” as the power asymmetries among state agents, private businesses, and third-sector groups embedded in countries’ policy frameworks for radio and television. This definition helps illustrate how power struggles over broadcasting interact with the national institutional context in which they unfold and how this interaction can drive policy variation.

In his study of welfare state retrenchment under Reagan and Thatcher, Paul Pierson (1994) highlights that power struggles among political agents inevitably occur in a world already replete with institutions, which reinforce asymmetrical power relations among competing interests. This can grant certain groups long-term advantages over others in shaping policy, leading to the persistence of institutional arrangements even in the face of political efforts to reform or dismantle them (see also Steinmo 1993; Weir 1992, 188). Building on this perspective, I argue that to explain enduring differences in broadcasting policy *across* nations, we must analyze how power relations among different actors were structured at the time of radio’s emergence and how these dynamics shaped the institutions that were created for broadcasting across democracies in Europe and North America (see also Ikenberry 1988, 222).

As pointed out by Hall and Taylor (1996, 954), processes of institutional creation typically involve a clash of power among actors with deep stakes in which new policies that are adopted. Moreover, such decision-making situations often unfold under highly uncertain and fluid conditions. According to Gourevitch (1986, 239), this contingency can enable willful actors to shape outcomes in a more voluntaristic manner than under normal conditions, as the typical structural constraints on action are temporarily relaxed. Drawing on this perspective, I expect cross-national variation in broadcasting policy to stem from the contingent outcomes of strategic interactions when countries first established their radio policies and how power

relations among actors were structured within existing institutions at the time (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 354–355).

In his study on the sequencing of political development and how early decisions shape institutional trajectories, Sidney Verba (1971, 308) uses the metaphor of a “branching tree” to illustrate the process that unfolds once a decision is made during an institution’s critical foundational moments. The idea is that choices made at these junctures set in motion long-term sequences of institutional development that can diverge significantly across countries. Moreover, once a particular path is chosen, it becomes progressively more difficult to return to the initial point when multiple alternatives were still available (Mahoney 2000, 513).

An explanation for why choices close off alternative options and lead to the establishment of path-dependent institutions is that public policies, once established, often create “spoils.” As noted by Weir and Skocpol (1985, 143–144) in their study on state structures and Keynesian responses to the Great Depression in Sweden, Britain, and the United States, institutions tend to establish certain groups as authoritative voices who gain an advantage in shaping subsequent policy developments. Vested interests benefiting from existing institutional arrangements thus have strong incentives to defend and potentially expand the prevailing order. Consequently, once a group gains an institutional advantage, it tends to be self-reinforcing: insiders accumulate expertise, experience, and connections that outsiders challenging the status quo may struggle to match (see also Weir 1992, 191–192). In line with this view, I argue that the durability of a nation’s institutional framework for radio and television largely depends on how effectively it serves the interests embedded within it.

While comparative media scholars recognize that national differences in media policy have remained remarkably persistent over time, there is also broad consensus that shifts in the overarching policy environment can bring about comprehensive institutional change. As noted in the literature review, previous studies has identified international integration and new technology as major drivers of change in the media sector. However, they have only to a limited extent theorized how such macro-level forces are mediated by institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level.

To better understand the sources of institutional change in broadcasting, I argue that communications scholarship can benefit from historical institutionalism's conceptualization of institutional development as an interplay between extended periods of path-dependent stability and critical junctures that periodically disrupt these trajectories (see Fioretos, Falleti, and Sheingate 2016, 3). Critical junctures are historical choice points marked by relative structural indeterminism, during which willful actors have greater capacity to shape outcomes than during periods of path-dependent stability (see Hall and Taylor 1996; Mahoney 2000). According to Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, 341), this is why institutional change is far more likely to occur whenever a country's path-dependent broadcasting trajectory is exposed to an external systemic shock.

I identify two types of critical junctures that drive change in the radio and television sectors: technology-driven shocks and international shocks. International shocks comprise external threats to national autonomy, sudden intensifications of international competition, or heightened geopolitical pressures. The main effect of these shocks is to influence how policymakers prioritize between different goals and decide which policy instruments to use to achieve them.

By contrast, the primary effect of technological shocks is to fundamentally reshape the technological landscape, rendering ineffective the policy instruments previously used by policymakers to regulate broadcasting. I identify two major technological junctures that fundamentally revolutionized mass communications in this field:

1. *Transition from Wireless Telegraphy to Broadcasting (1920s)*
The transition from wireless telegraphy to broadcasting in the 1920s redirected focus from two-way communication to mass media, necessitating new regulatory frameworks.
2. *Transition from Scarcity to Unlimited Bandwidth (1970s–1980s)*
The rise of FM radio, cable, and satellite TV in the 1970s and 1980s disrupted the technical rationale for spectrum monopolies and created opportunities for a wider range of actors.

I wish to emphasize that not all technological innovations will have such a transformative impact on policy. Television, for instance, was

an entirely new medium. Despite this, its emergence in the 1930s and 1940s did not fundamentally change the technological environment. TV relied on the same basic infrastructure as radio and was indeed initially regarded as merely “radio with pictures.” Consequently, the advent of terrestrial television never triggered any major efforts for policy reform, whereas the other two innovations did.

Besides altering the policy setting and the effectiveness of instruments, new communication technologies can empower certain interests at the expense of others. The main theoretical expectation concerning revolutionary technological innovations is that they will empower private interests at the expense of the state. Commercial companies benefit the most, particularly in carriage but also in content production, as they can capitalize on expanded market opportunities. The third sector primarily gains opportunities in content creation, as lower technological barriers enable grassroots and nonprofit actors to thrive in programming niches. By contrast, when technological changes enable decentralization, the state’s role in direct ownership tends to weaken, particularly in distribution technology but also in program production. Instead, reliance shifts to softer forms of control, such as subsidies or content regulation.

International shocks, on the other hand, often prompt elected officials to intervene in broadcasting policy, strengthening state-led efforts to address perceived foreign threats. This argument is consistent with previous research in crisis management on how crises can trigger institutional change. For example, Boin and Hart (2003, 544) argue that episodes characterized by threat and uncertainty can serve as a trigger for governments to “do something,” creating an opening for institutional reforms that wouldn’t occur during normal times.

The argument that policymaking on radio and television under such crisis conditions differs fundamentally from more “normal” circumstances further builds on Pepper D. Culpepper’s analysis of how the state’s responsiveness to business interests varies between periods of “quiet” politics — when policy issues are technical, low-profile, and largely insulated from public scrutiny — and “noisy” politics, when issues become highly salient, politically charged, and subject to intense public debate (see also Culpepper 2016).

Similarly, I argue that third-sector actors often suffer when states

become more interventionist in response to an international threat. Commercial firms, however, may benefit from crises if state strategies depend on partnerships with private affiliates. In some cases, external threats to national autonomy can even trigger a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting the state, the private business sector, and the third sector against a common foreign adversary.

This actor-centered argument about the effects of exogenous systemic shocks on media systems contributes to longstanding debates in political science on the sources of institutional change. Specifically, it draws on previous work on how shifts in the broader policymaking environment can redistribute power within domestic politics, prompting politicians to prioritize entirely new goals (see, for instance Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978). The argument also resonates with Peter A. Hall's (1993) ideas on how institutional change can be triggered by adjustments to policy instruments and, in some cases, by fundamental paradigmatic shifts in the broader policy framework.

Finally, I emphasize that political struggles over the control of radio and television during critical junctures never occur in isolation. In line with Ikenberry (1988, 222), these struggles are always mediated by pre-existing power relations and institutional outcomes rooted in deeper historical contexts. Since nations' policy trajectories in the broadcasting sector are path-dependent, changes in the broader policymaking environment affecting multiple countries will not produce identical results everywhere. Instead, the effects of these forces will be mediated by the institutional setting and interest group dynamics each country has inherited from earlier policymaking episodes. Hence the importance of tracing the history of radio and television in Europe and North America "forward" from the foundational decisions on radio in the early 1900s to the present day (see Møller 2021).

Method of Causal Inference and Collection of Empirical Material

Consistent with an actor-centered approach that traces decision-making processes “forward,” the comparative case studies on Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States begin in the early twentieth century, when broadcasting emerged as a phenomenon. As scholars within historical institutionalism have pointed out, processes of institutional creation typically involve a clash of power among actors with deep stakes in which new policies that are adopted (Hall and Taylor 1996, 954). These decision-making situations often unfold under highly uncertain and fluid conditions.

According to Gourevitch (1986, 239), this contingency can enable willful actors to shape outcomes in a more voluntaristic manner than under normal conditions, as the typical structural constraints on action are temporarily relaxed. From this perspective, enduring cross-national differences in broadcasting policy stem from the contingent outcomes of decisions and strategic interactions during critical junctures deep in the past (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 354–355). This is the fundamental rationale for “going back and looking” at the foundational moments when countries established their first radio policies and how power relations among actors were structured within existing institutions at the time (see Pierson 1994).

STRATEGY FOR PROCESS-TRACING AND CAUSAL INFERENCE

To test the theory on the role of interests in shaping broadcasting policy during and between critical junctures, the study relies on two distinct strategies of causal inference. On one hand, the cases are analyzed *cross-sectionally*. If critical junctures occur in similar units and under similar conditions, then different decisions by similar actors can produce different outcomes, allowing for variation (see Gerring 2004, 342–343). This moves us into the realm of counterfactual analysis and narrative process tracing. Taking contingency into account, the cross-national comparisons aim to illustrate that a counterfactual path in one country may be a factual outcome in another (Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 359–360).

This is why it is not enough to reconstruct the consequences

of *actual* decisions; I must also consider which alternative policy paths were seriously considered in different countries but ultimately not pursued. For that reason, I need to explicitly state which outcomes would have been plausible had the relevant agents made other choices (Berlin 1974, 176). This approach increases overall analytical leverage by facilitating the identification of negative cases and “near misses” — that is, critical policymaking episodes where theoretical expectations would suggest a given outcome, but contingencies prevented it from being realized (see Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 352).

On the other hand, the cases are analyzed *longitudinally* to better understand patterns of continuity and change in broadcast governance. As Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, 348) point out, critical junctures are typically followed by extended periods of path-dependent stability, as agents face a broader-than-usual range of feasible options only during a brief phase. Once decisions are made during the critical juncture, a path-dependent process is set in motion, constraining future choices. A key constraining factor is that institutions grant “spoils” to certain groups, providing them with both incentives and advantages to preserve the status quo (see Weir 1992).

Hence, the theoretical expectation is that institutions for governing radio and television in Western democracies will remain in a stable equilibrium as long as they continue to serve the vested interests within them. As discussed in the theory section, strategic interest alliances embedded in existing institutions are expected to leverage political connections, privileged access to information, and other organizational or financial resources to protect their positions from challengers. One of the purposes of process-tracing countries’ broadcasting policy trajectories “forward” is thus to test whether there is empirical support for this proposed mechanism behind institutional persistence within countries over time (see Collier, Brady, and Seawright 2004; George and Bennett 2005).

Another purpose of analyzing the cases longitudinally is to examine how policymaking dynamics shift when path-dependent processes are disrupted by new critical junctures. Here, counterfactual reasoning is leveraged to reconstruct how a country’s radio and television system might have developed in the *absence* of an exogenous shock from new technology or acute international threats.

Unlike situations where technological shocks affect multiple countries simultaneously, the primary purpose of counterfactual analysis in this context is not to examine the consequences of different choices made by similar actors across national settings. Rather, the aim is to compare policymaking on broadcasting in nations that were affected by a critical juncture with those that weren't or experienced it at a later stage. This allows me to test the study's claim about the (varying) effects of new technology and international shocks on the broader policymaking environment and the power dynamics among the state, private businesses, and the third sector.

As discussed in the preceding section, international shocks are expected to drive demand for a centralized response, prompting elected officials to assume a more prominent role in the governance of broadcast media. If this theory holds, the empirical evidence should show that politicians take the driver's seat ahead of government bureaucrats whenever a country confronts these types of foreign threats. Another observable implication is that policymakers and other societal groups should express deep concern and a sense of urgency in addressing the threat in a way that sharply contrasts with the period immediately preceding its emergence. Otherwise, it may signify a gradual accumulation of turbulence that culminates in a tipping point rather than a discrete event that shocks the broadcasting system (see Capoccia and Kelemen 2007, 351).

If an event truly constitutes an international shock, the empirical material should also reveal that third-sector groups lose ground in the radio and television sector. This is because smaller actors are expected to be marginalized when the state prioritizes a unified approach — unless that approach requires collaboration with non-profit actors. If that is the case, we might observe a rally-around-the-flag effect, whereby the state, private corporations, and third-sector agents unite against a common foreign adversary.

Revolutionary communication technologies, by contrast, are expected to weaken the state by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective. If this theory holds, government officials should express a sense of lost control whenever the effects of new technology become palpable, prompting them to explore alternative ways to regulate radio and television.

Simultaneously, the empirical material should show that private actors advance their positions in the wake of a technological shock. As discussed in the previous section, the theory stipulates that both commercial companies and non-profit agents tend to benefit from new technology. The former gain an advantage in both carriage and content, while third-sector agents typically gain momentum in program production. At the same time, it should be underscored that the magnitude of these advantages will always be shaped by prior decisions and power relations rooted in deeper historical contexts. Moreover, the advancement of the private broadcasting sector following a technological shock may be wholly or partially offset by subsequent interest group struggles or new critical junctures.

Overall, the purpose of the empirical case studies is to provide evidence that corroborates these predicted associations in countries affected by either of the two types of critical junctures. Equally important is to provide evidence that the expected effects *failed* to materialize in countries that did not experience a corresponding shock (see Goertz and Starr 2002). This highlights the value of combining narrative process-tracing with counterfactual analysis as a method for comparing policymaking on broadcasting across countries over long time periods. Through this strategy of causal inference, we can gain a better understanding of how the development of radio and television in Western democracies has been shaped by the interplay among interests, institutions, and the broader policymaking environment in which these interactions have taken place.

EMPIRICAL SOURCES AND CASE SELECTION

In conducting this process analysis, I rely on a broad range of primary and secondary sources that serve complementary purposes. To begin, the empirical case studies draw heavily on the national literature on radio and television in the examined countries. This material is primarily used to trace the long-term development of broadcasting policy within nations and facilitate broad cross-national comparisons. Additionally, I use the secondary literature to assess key scholarly debates on the history of radio and television in individual countries — identifying areas of consensus and points of contention. Overall, the national literature's main function is to provide institutional and

historical context for the specific policymaking episodes analyzed in each case study.

Primary sources are used to complement these macro-level descriptions with finer-grained evidence that illuminates the factors influencing key actors' beliefs, policy preferences, and decisions during critical policymaking episodes. The main goal of this approach is to empirically substantiate the study's claims about the role of individual agents in shaping broadcasting policy. This nevertheless raises questions about the strategies I use to infer actors' actual intentions and considerations from the studied material, given that their underlying motives cannot be directly observed.

To begin, the analysis places particular weight on primary sources that reveal how actors involved in key decisions have justified their actions and considerations in *private* settings. This includes archival records documenting deliberative processes among government officials, written correspondence, and minutes from meetings of major government inquiries and committees. Of course, the ways in which the involved actors justify their actions do not necessarily align with their underlying motives. However, as Jacobs (2011, 27) points out, relying on documents that capture the considerations raised in private settings increases the likelihood of uncovering sincere reasoning before policy decisions, rather than rhetoric crafted for public consumption or post hoc justification.

Another strategy for inferring actors' motives is to examine broader ideological and organizational commitments that are not directly tied to the specific action being explained. This can involve identifying an organization's stance on media policy or the dominant media ideology within a political party. Alternatively, I trace a policymaker's position on similar issues over time. As Axel Hadenius (1984) points out, these strategies can help assess the extent to which an actor's decisions align with the commonly acknowledged preferences of the organization they represent or with their own *track record*. This can either weaken or strengthen the case for the actors' stated motives.

The material used to infer actors' motives in this indirect manner includes both primary and secondary sources. Literature on radio and television in various countries is leveraged to situate key decisions within a broader institutional and historical context, for instance,

in relation to the media ideologies of political parties or individual actors. Whenever such indirect motive indicators are available, they are presented in the empirical case studies. I also seek to engage with as wide a range of the national literature as possible to assess whether a particular interpretation is widely accepted or contested.

Furthermore, the actor motives stipulated in standard historical accounts of broadcasting are cross-checked against primary sources that offer more detailed contextual insights than the secondary literature. These sources include reports from major commissions of inquiry, internal ministry memoranda, and transcripts of parliamentary debates. Additionally, I incorporate materials that reflect the perspectives of a broader range of societal actors on proposed policies. This includes newspaper clippings, stakeholder responses to public inquiries, and written correspondence between government officials and external groups.

The primary sources were retrieved from various archives across the four examined countries. The material for the Swedish case studies comes from Radio Sweden's Document Archive and the National Archives in Stockholm. For France, all documents were collected from the main holdings of the *Archives Nationales* in Pierrefitte-sur-Seine, outside Paris. The Canadian case studies are based on materials sourced from Library and Archives Canada's main depot in Ottawa, while the U.S. cases rely on documents from the National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland.

The choice to examine these particular four nations was motivated, in part, by the ambition to include countries representing different ideal types in Hallin and Mancini's classificatory framework in *Comparing Media Systems*. As we recall from the literature review, France falls under the "Polarized Pluralist" model, while Sweden is classified under the "Democratic Corporatist" model. By contrast, Canada and the United States are both categorized as belonging to the "Liberal" ideal type.

On the other hand, the case selection was motivated by the study's historical-institutionalist logic, which posits that enduring differences in broadcasting policy across nations can be traced back to the initial decisions made in this domain. In line with this perspective, Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States were selected because

they adopted widely divergent models for organizing their broadcasting systems in the 1920s and 1930s, when radio broadcasting first emerged as a phenomenon.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

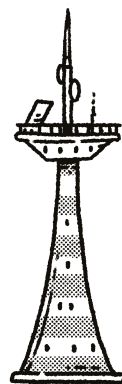
The subsequent chapter empirically examines why Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States adopted such distinct radio models during the interwar period. It opens with an overview of each country's policy choices and the factors that shaped them, followed by individual case studies.

At the outset of each country case study, I outline how the national media literature has depicted the period under review and how this aligns with comparative media research. This helps assess how the study's empirical findings fit within existing scholarship and clarify what its actor-centered argument contributes to prevailing interpretations of each country's early radio history. More specifically, the introductory sections outline the key policymaking episodes that form the focus of each case study, guided by theoretical expectations about the interplay between interests, institutions, and shifts in the broader policymaking environment.

The first empirical chapter concludes with a summary discussion that highlights the main takeaways and sets the stage for the next comparative case study on the Advent of Television. The empirical chapter on television focuses on the postwar period and follows the same fundamental structure as the initial chapter on radio. The same approach is applied to the third and final comparative case study, which examines the fragmented broadcasting landscapes that developed in Western Europe and North America from the 1970s onward. Finally, the dissertation wraps up with a broader concluding discussion, summarizing key findings and takeaways. This section also outlines the implications of the main findings for interpreting current developments in the media sector.

CHAPTER 2

The Birth of Radio



As discussed in the literature review, there is broad consensus within comparative political communications that contemporary broadcasting systems have been shaped by media policies implemented earlier in history (see Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 301; Humphreys 1996, 115; Syvertsen et al. 2014, 2–3). The conventional view holds that two distinct models for governing broadcasting in democracies emerged in the early twentieth century. There was the “free market” system prevalent in the United States, where radio was organized as a private enterprise dominated by the advertising industry. Then there was the European “public service” approach epitomized by the BBC (see Engblom and Wormbs 2007, 10–12; Pavani 2018, 15; Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm 1956).

However, the empirical evidence presented in this chapter reveals a much more complex picture regarding the kinds of broadcasting models that European and North American countries adopted during the interwar period — a diversity that is partly concealed by the binary distinction between “public” and “private” systems.

While it is true that the United States had an entirely private radio system dominated by large commercial networks like NBC and CBS, a significant number of smaller stations were operated by educational institutions, religious associations, and labor unions that did not primarily derive their income from advertising. The defining

feature of French interwar broadcasting was that similar third sector groups were responsible for producing most programs. Unlike in the United States, however, the physical transmission stations were owned and operated either by private corporations or the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs.

In Sweden, the corresponding Telegraph Administration handled the entire distribution network, while the programming operations were managed by a monopoly company owned by commercial interests. Canada also adopted a mixed public-private system, but in contrast to Sweden, private community stations operated alongside the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. Against this backdrop, I argue that the differences in how nations regulated radio during the interwar period can be better understood by analytically distinguishing between the production and distribution of programs and identifying whether these functions were carried out by state agencies, private corporations, or the third sector.

Congruent with the historical institutionalist claim that cross-national variation stems from interest group struggles and contingent decisions during processes of institutional creation, the analysis begins in the fall of 1920, when broadcasting was officially inaugurated in the United States. This did not mark the beginning of radio communications, but what was revolutionary was that, for the first time, radio programs began to be aired to a broader audience on a regular basis (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 40).

As the activity of broadcasting took hold in different parts of the world, questions arose about how the new medium should be regulated. The novelty of radio broadcasting as a phenomenon meant that there were no suitable precedents for policymakers to rely on when determining how it should be organized and financed. Most countries had enacted pioneering radio laws before the First World War, but these were designed for so-called wireless telegraphy, which relied on communication between two fixed points.

Since broadcasting was fundamentally about mass communication, these pre-existing frameworks would soon prove obsolete for regulating the new technology. Consequently, I conceptualize the emergence of the new medium as a critical juncture, since it transformed the broader technological setting, rendering existing policy

instruments for governing radio communications ineffective. Amid these uncertain conditions, I argue that policy differences across nations reflected which state actors, private businesses, and third-sector groups were most successful in exploiting the situation of brief institutional fluidity to further their interests.

In the United States, the early 1920s saw a policy battle between large electronics manufacturers and radio amateurs over the latter's role in the system. The Radio Act of 1927 marked a significant victory for commercial interests, which successfully persuaded policymakers that the best public service could be achieved by restricting non-professional operators and promoting the development of advertising-funded national broadcast networks. (Benjamin 1998; Sarno 1969).

Similarly, in Sweden, the grassroots radio clubs that had helped introduce the medium were curtailed following the Conservatives' 1924 decision to organize broadcasting as a monopoly. Central to this decision was the fact that the policy agenda for broadcasting was largely shaped by the state Telegraph Agency, which formed an alliance with newspaper owners to take control of radio (Hultén 1980; Rahbek 2004). The Telegraph Administration in France, by contrast, initially lacked the capacity to enforce its legally mandated monopoly, resulting in private firms establishing radio stations alongside the state-operated ones. Given the regional nature of these stations, programs were typically produced by third sector groups from the vicinity of each station (Brochand 1994a; Méadel 1994).

In Canada, third sector groups played a more modest role in running independent program operations; however, their advocacy campaigns were key to the establishment of public broadcasting in 1932. These efforts were led by the Canadian Radio League, which brought together women's associations, labor unions and farmers' organizations to support the vision of a broadcasting system with an educational focus aimed at uniting the different parts of the country (Peers 1969; Vipond 1992).

To further support the claim about the role of interest group agency in shaping radio policy, each case study includes a counterfactual analysis of what models the various countries *might* have adopted if the balance of power between the state, private corporations, and the third sector had been different.

The Swedish case study explores a viable counterfactual scenario in which groups from the third sector could have played a greater role in programming alongside the commercial press. While the Minister of Communication in Hjalmar Branting's social democratic government recognized the importance of involving the newspapers, he also envisioned another societal sector as a key user of the new medium — namely, the popular movements. Had the Social Democrats not been forced to resign the year before the Conservatives handed program operations over to the press, Swedish broadcasting might have resembled the French model, whereby nearly all programs were produced by third-sector agents.

However, it was far from certain that non-governmental actors would be allowed to participate in French broadcasting at all, as a 1903 law had declared wireless communications a state monopoly. The reversal of this policy in 1920 was due to the postal and telegraph ministry's inability to compete with foreign electrical corporations in establishing international wireless connections. Policymakers, alarmed by the prospect of France falling behind other major powers in this strategically vital field, saw no alternative but to open the field to private exploitation. This laid the foundation for the mixed public-private structure that would define French radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s.

The case study on France thus illustrates how exogenous systemic shocks from international competition can trigger institutional change by prompting policymakers to reassess previous policy goals, potentially empowering commercial actors if essential to the state's strategy for countering foreign threats.

An almost identical point about how international shocks influence interest group dynamics is made in the case study on the United States. In the fall of 1919, the government supported the establishment of a patent trust composed of domestic electrical manufacturers to prevent the nation's radio traffic from being monopolized by the British-controlled Marconi Company in peacetime. At the same time, the counterfactual analysis reveals that it was far from certain that American radio would be managed by private interests in the first place. Instead, government ownership of wireless long appeared to be the most plausible solution for maintaining national control over

radio communications.

However, the Navy's case for a state monopoly ultimately slipped out of its hands following the 1919 congressional elections, when majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate shifted in favor of the more business-friendly Republicans. This set the stage for the corporations within RCA to shape American broadcasting into a predominantly commercial enterprise, dominated by a handful of national networks and their affiliate stations.

The expansion of these very networks into Canada in the late 1920s was the key reason why Canadian politicians decided to introduce a public broadcasting monopoly. Prior to this, the country had had an entirely private radio system. However, given the growing presence of U.S. networks in the Canadian market, third-sector groups were concerned that continuing the *laissez-faire* policy would result in a broadcasting landscape dominated by American productions, threatening the nation's cultural sovereignty.

As this threat to Canada's national identity dawned on an increasing number of societal actors, there was a rally-around-the-flag effect that culminated in the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation in 1932. This legislation led to a more unified, state-led approach to broadcast governance while also strengthening the position of domestic commercial radio stations. In other words, the Canadian case underscores the argument about the effects of international shocks, albeit in a somewhat different technological context than the American and French cases

In summary, it is worth noting that all countries except Sweden experienced more or less radical policy shifts during the interwar period as a result of external threats. These international shocks can thus be understood as critical junctures that triggered a fundamental reassessment of the prevailing regulatory order. Had the threats been absent, the opportunities for various groups to drive institutional change would likely have been very different. In other words, there was an element of chance regarding which broadcasting models the countries under study ultimately adopted in the 1920s and 1930s.

United States

INTRODUCTION

Scholars in comparative political communications have commonly attributed the dominance of private broadcasting in the United States to the nation's political tradition of favoring market solutions over government intervention (see Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 229; Pavani 2018). For instance, Fukuyama and Grotto (2020, 200) highlight that many media regulations implemented in Europe have been politically and legally untenable in the United States due to the prominence of the Constitution's First Amendment.

This perspective aligns fairly well with the development of American radio during the interwar years, as portrayed in the early national literature on the subject. The key policy event of this period, according to the standard account, was the 1927 Radio Act, which legitimized the private nature of radio while introducing a system of preferential licensing. It was after this that the development of broadcasting truly took off, and the market came to be dominated by large commercial networks providing nationwide radio services, including NBC and CBS. In *Big Business and Radio*, Gleason L. Archer (1939) argued that the commercial setup of U.S. broadcasting was the logical choice for a nation committed to capitalism, democracy and freedom — a view later typified in the work of Walter B. Emery (1960).

The late 1960s, however, marked the beginning of a more critical exploration of the origins of U.S. radio policy. Media historian Erik Barnouw (1966) argued that the question of broadcasting's organization and financing was far more contested than previously acknowledged. According to Louise Benjamin (1998, 233), the main opposition to the commercial setup came from amateur operators who fought to broadcast non-professional radio with as few restrictions as possible. Initially, these groups gained strong support from then-Secretary of Commerce, Herbert Hoover, who opposed direct advertising on the air and emphasized the medium's public interest dimensions (Sarno 1969, 191–192).

Practical experience during the 1920s would nevertheless demonstrate that a complete laissez-faire policy would lead to the breakdown of effective radio communication, as broadcast frequencies were

scarce and the problem of interference between stations worsened. In this context, large electrical companies managed to persuade policy-makers that the best public service could be achieved by restricting non-professional radio and facilitating the establishment of advertising-funded, national broadcast networks (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 84). Against this backdrop, the general consensus within the national literature is that, in the long run, it would likely have been difficult to prevent U.S. broadcasting from evolving into a predominantly commercial enterprise.

There has nevertheless been debate about *when* this system was consolidated and whether third-sector groups could have played a less restricted role. In perhaps the most accomplished revisionist history of early U.S. radio, Susan J. Douglas (1989, 314-317) argued that the economic, legislative, and ideological foundations of American broadcasting were effectively in place as early as 1922. By contrast, media historians like Robert W. McChesney (1993, 252) have argued that many fundamental questions of ownership and control remained unresolved until the mid-1930s.

McChesney highlights that the Depression years witnessed a growing criticism of commercial broadcasting, led by educationalists, labor unions, and religious associations, who argued that the existing model failed to meet the communication needs of a democratic society. This grassroots reform movement campaigned ardently for specific channels to be reserved for nonprofit broadcasting, although these hopes were ultimately dashed with the enactment of the 1934 Communications Act (Smulyan 1994). The law preserved the status quo and paved the way for radio, and later television, to be dominated by a handful of commercial networks. But this was not the only conceivable option, as suggested in early research. Instead, the revisionist history shows that the commercial system emerged because large corporations actively leveraged their superior technical, financial, and organizational resources to bring it about.

Without questioning this general historical narrative, I argue that an actor-centered institutional approach that considers the role of critical junctures can help explain how large private corporations came to secure such a privileged position in the first place. The chapter highlights that the idea of government ownership was in fact

far less remote than suggested in the standard history of U.S. radio.

Using contemporary news articles and records from the archives of the Commerce Department, I illustrate that during the First World War, there was significant support for allowing the Navy to maintain its wartime monopoly on wireless communications into peacetime. This was driven by a growing awareness among policymakers of the strategic importance of international communications and fears that the field might be dominated by one of the other major powers. Adding to these concerns was the fact that the American market for radio equipment manufacturing was almost entirely controlled by the British-owned Marconi company, which was believed to have ambitions of establishing a global monopoly (Aitken 1976).

Although Congress ultimately rejected the Navy's proposal for state ownership, its officials convinced the government that radio should remain under national control. This was to prevent British Marconi from dominating the burgeoning industry of international wireless communications and monopolizing all American radio traffic with Europe. It is worth noting the significant similarities between the U.S. case and the French situation at the time, as France was also engaged in the international radio race. During both countries' involvement in the First World War, military authorities had managed all wireless communication. However, as a direct response to the accelerating international competition in radio after the Armistice, both governments decided to relinquish this control in favor of large electrical corporations.

The similarities between France and the United States support the study's theory that states are prepared to undertake rather far-reaching interventions in the media landscape when confronted with an international shock they perceive as a threat to national autonomy. Furthermore, the cross-national comparison illustrates the idea that such critical junctures can empower commercial companies if the state depends on them to realize its strategic goals. The solution ultimately adopted by the U.S. government was to compel Marconi to sell its assets to a group of domestic electronics manufacturers within a patent trust called the Radio Corporation of America. The formation of RCA in October 1919 enabled the United States to become a global leader in the strategically vital radio field, counterbalancing

the British Empire's longstanding dominance in international communications (Howeth 1963). At the same time, the decision paved the way for American broadcasting to be dominated by large commercial corporations for decades to come.

EARLY DEVELOPMENTS IN WIRELESS COMMUNICATIONS: THE UNITED STATES' STRUGGLE FOR NATIONAL CONTROL

In line with the conventional view of U.S. media as market-oriented, the government initially adopted a *laissez-faire* approach to regulating radio, which experienced its major breakthrough at the beginning of the twentieth century. Behind these advancements were individual inventors and major electronics manufacturers such as the British-controlled Marconi company, which established an American subsidiary in 1902 to conduct research and experimentation in the United States (Aitken 1976, 184–187). At this stage, radio was not yet conceived as a medium for mass communication but rather as a tool for communication between two fixed points. Nonetheless, so-called wireless telegraphy promised significant commercial benefits by enabling ships to access weather information and optimize their freight capacity. Additionally, there was considerable interest among the armed forces in using wireless as a means to improve military communications (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 34).

However, from being initially left entirely to market forces, the burgeoning radio industry soon came under increasing scrutiny from the federal authorities. The background was that Marconi, which quickly had gained a dominant position in the U.S. market, was feared to have plans to establish a global monopoly in transoceanic wireless communications. The company enforced an exclusivity policy, refusing to communicate with vessels using systems other than its own.

Since this policy directly jeopardized maritime safety, Imperial Germany convened an international radio conference in 1903 as part of an effort to counteract Marconi's expansion. Here, eight countries, including the United States, agreed on a protocol mandating intercommunication between different radio systems, pending each country passing the enabling laws (Howeth 1963, 70). In connection with this, President Roosevelt appointed an Inter-Departmental Board on Wireless Telegraphy, marking the first government initia-

tive to address the issue of radio regulation.

Contrary to the prevailing view of a business-oriented media structure as the “natural” option for the United States, the Board emphasized that the necessary steps must be taken to regulate the establishment of commercial wireless stations both within the States and between nations. The report acknowledged that there could be special cases where private stations might serve a useful purpose, and that the Department of Commerce and Labor should therefore be authorized to issue licenses to individuals and companies. However, this was not to occur in a way that jeopardized the government’s use of radio for military communication. Therefore, the Board concluded that the best results could be achieved if the operation of public stations were placed under the jurisdiction of a single government department:

The Board believes it to be in the interest not only of governmental, but public economy and efficiency, to permit the naval stations to handle the public service. [...] As the needs of the Navy are paramount on account of the problem of national defense, private stations should not be allowed to locate to the disadvantage of the former.¹

The Roosevelt report triggered strong reactions from commercial radio interests who feared that the Navy’s claims on the government stations were merely the first step toward controlling *all* wireless. The essence of the criticism from Marconi and the National Electric Signaling Company was that the Board had completely disregarded issues of patent rights during its deliberations. This, they argued, could have serious repercussions for the radio industry’s capacity to innovate (Howeth 1963, 79–81).

In the face of these protests, Congress postponed the ratification of the Berlin protocols until the Titanic disaster, after which several countries agreed to update their existing radio laws to improve the safety of communications at sea. The U.S. Radio Act of 1912 introduced a similar licensing requirement for private entities as had

¹ *Report of the Inter-Departmental Board on Wireless Telegraphy in the Service of the National Government*. 1905. Washington: Government Printing Office, p. 10.

already been established in most other countries. At the same time, it was a significantly more liberal piece of legislation than anywhere else; in practice, the Secretary of Commerce could not deny an applicant a license (Benjamin 1998, 232). The law thus allowed private manufacturers, including Marconi, to continue experimenting with radio much as before.

The outbreak of the First World War would nevertheless fundamentally alter the premises of the struggle between the government authorities and the private radio sector. As pointed out by Frank Peers (1969, 8), the war starkly highlighted the importance of radio for national security, so all major powers were eager to avoid falling behind in its development.

The United States ultimately ensured a dominant position thanks to the 1919 establishment of a patent trust of electrical corporations called the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), which represented a compromise between government ownership and a Marconi monopoly. On one hand, the Navy was forced to abandon its ambitions of managing the commercial radio traffic in peacetime. On the other hand, naval authorities ensured that the operations were not taken over by the British-controlled manufacturer, which was compelled to divest its resources to the domestic electrical companies that were incorporated into the RCA (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 53–55).

The decision to entrust radio operations to the domestic electronics manufacturing industry should be understood in light of the fact that the race to control international wireless connections had entered a critical phase following the Armistice. At that time, nearly all coastal wireless telegraph stations in the United States were owned by Marconi, which also held the most significant patents in long-distance communication (Douglas 1989, 278). In other words, had it not been for the creation of the RCA, this vital infrastructure would, in all likelihood, have fallen into the hands of a company controlled by one of the belligerent powers (Peers 1969, 8).

This chapter argues that the threat to the United States' position in global communications after the First World War represented an international shock that compelled the government to reevaluate the existing policy for radio. This laid the foundation for the oligopolistic structure that would define U.S. radio broadcasting in the 1920s

and 1930s. Indeed, it was the corporations within RCA — including AT&T, General Electric, and Westinghouse — that would lead the development of the new medium and secure a dominant position for large commercial networks (Douglas 1989, 314–317). In other words, this development seems to align with the conventional view in existing communications scholarship of a private enterprise model as the “logical” media policy for the United States, with its longstanding liberal traditions (see, for instance, Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 229; Fukuyama and Grotto 2020, 200; Pavani 2018).

However, one can also imagine a counterfactual scenario in which the government had *refrained* from forming the Radio Corporation of America. In that event, the United States might have adopted a radically different policy for radio after the Armistice. In fact, delegating the country’s radio operations to the domestic manufacturing industry was a somewhat hasty decision. Instead, a state monopoly long appeared to be the most likely policy to counter Marconi’s expansion. In other words, government ownership of radio, even in peacetime, was not as far-fetched as the standard literature might lead one to believe.(see Sterling and Kittross 1990, 51). The reason was that the outbreak of the First World War triggered a rally-around-the-flag effect, favoring Navy control of radio, which extended beyond the war’s end.

Unlike in France, where the military authorities assumed control of all wireless facilities in the summer of 1914, private entities in the United States were permitted to operate much as before until the country entered the war three years later. This applied not only to large electric corporations like Marconi but also individual inventors and thousands of wireless amateurs, who primarily exchanged Morse messages with one another and organized themselves into radio clubs across the country (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 52). What started as an informal network gained a more structured form in the spring of 1914 with the creation of the American Radio Relay League (ARRL), which unified the amateurs at a national level.

Susan J. Douglas (1989, 206–207) writes that the amateurs surpassed both the U.S. Navy and United Wireless in the number of transmitter stations and often even in the quality of their equipment. Consequently, by the time of the outbreak of the war, the

United States had a very well-organized radio movement comprising third sector agents that operated a communications network stretching from coast to coast.

Within the military establishment there had nevertheless been growing concerns about the amateurs, whose transmissions caused significant interference with government-operated stations. Although the primary blame was placed on the non-professionals, commercial firms also contributed significantly to the problems. According to Douglas (1989, 209–210) the situation was becoming untenable: too many people wanted access to the airwaves simultaneously. But existing legislation provided no guidelines for establishing priority. Consequently, Naval officials began lobbying Washington to outright ban the amateurs, arguing that their frequent interference with official emergency messages warranted stricter military control.

In an interview with *The Wireless Age* magazine in early 1917, the Navy Secretary, Josephus Daniels, stated that the issue of interference between stations could only be resolved if all stations in the country — including those used for commercial purposes — were operated by the government:

Since only by the closest regulation can the best use of this art be obtained, not only for commerce and safety at sea, but for military purposes, radio telegraphy is a strict Government monopoly with the larger number of foreign nations, and in those foreign countries where commercial stations are permitted the Government control is generally so strong as to amount to a monopoly.²

Given the sensitive geopolitical situation, Daniels emphasized that the authority to take over and operate commercial stations in time of war would not suffice:

The stations must be in full Government operation before the first hint of possible hostilities.³

The Navy Secretary's statement should be understood in the context of ongoing hearings in the House of Representatives at the time,

² *The Wireless Age*. 1917, February, pp. 300–301.

³ *Ibidem*.

concerning a bill aimed at eliminating commercial interests from the ship-to-shore communications business. The proposal aimed to have all commercial traffic managed by government-operated stations, a move that sparked fierce protests from Marconi. Perhaps more surprising, however, was the Relay League's vigorous support for the so-called Alexander Bill, given that the amateur organization had previously clashed with government authorities over interference issues (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 52).

Here it is nevertheless important to remember that the mobilization of naval communications was already well underway. Given that hundreds of reserves with prior radio experience were actively volunteering in these efforts, amateur experimenters were well-positioned for recruitment into the war effort if it would come to that. Indeed, thousands of wireless amateurs were to be trained in the radio schools established in each naval district following the United States' entry into the First World War on April 6, 1917 (Howeth 1963, 289).

That same day, President Wilson had ordered that all radio stations in the country, except those already under army control, be transferred to the Navy Department. This included fifty-three commercial stations, most of which belonged to Marconi (Douglas 1989, 276). Still, naval officials remained convinced that the British-controlled manufacturer would attempt to assert dominance in the wireless field once the war ended. These concerns led to a new approach to the *domestic* radio manufacturing industry.

Invoking wartime necessity, the Navy acquired all stations operated by the Federal Telegraph Company and persuaded the Shipping Board of the need to purchase wireless installations for all seagoing vessels under American registry. Against this backdrop, it seemed to matter little that the Alexander Bill never made it out of committee before diplomatic relations with Germany deteriorated. While the Secretary of the Navy was eager to secure congressional approval to eliminate British influence from American commercial radio operations, the urgency for a legislated state monopoly diminished with nearly all of the country's coastal wireless stations already under naval control (Howeth 1963, 316).

But the Navy's possession of most physical transmitters was still no guarantee of curtailing Marconi's influence, since the company

retained some of the most critical patents in the radio field. Given the military authorities' pressing need for radio equipment for the war effort, the government imposed a moratorium directing American electric manufacturers to build the best possible devices regardless of patent ownership. In return, suppliers were guaranteed protection against infringement claims.

This arrangement ensured that the Navy obtained state-of-the-art equipment tailored to its specific needs, while companies like General Electric, Western Electric, and AT&T could shift their focus from litigation to research and development (Douglas 1989, 278). Hence, this was when the foundation was laid for the symbiotic relationship between the government and large domestic radio corporations that would culminate in the formation of RCA. Adding to this, nearly 10,000 amateur radio operators had been trained or were undergoing military instruction by the time of the Armistice (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 44). Against this backdrop, I argue that the war sparked a "rally-around-the-flag" effect, uniting government authorities, domestic private corporations, and the third sector against Marconi.

In this context, it is worth noting that support within the public sector for government ownership of radio in peacetime extended beyond military authorities. In a letter to the Chairman of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries in December 1918, the Secretary of Commerce, William C. Redfield, acknowledged that the radio art would likely not advance as quickly under such a policy as it might under private ownership. However, he pointed out that radio was fundamentally the means of communication at sea and that the Navy possessed both the necessary personnel and administrative machinery to manage the traffic. Consequently, a centralized model under a single government department was considered the most appropriate solution:

This Department regards Government ownership and operation of commercial radio service as necessary and inevitable and is convinced that one Department of the Government should have full control of the entire matter.⁴

The Commerce Secretary's statement should be viewed in light of the fact that naval authorities, just weeks after the Armistice, had begun pushing for hearings on a new proposal modeled on the aforementioned Alexander Bill. The new bill (H.R. 13149) stipulated that corporate radio activities would be prohibited and that all commercial coastal stations would be permanently operated by the Navy.

In his statement before the House Merchant Marine Committee on December 12, 1918, Navy Secretary Josephus Daniels emphasized that his department had established a viable organization to manage the nation's radio traffic in wartime. All that remained, he argued, was Congress's approval for this arrangement to apply in peacetime as well (Howeth 1963, 317). This would ensure that the field was not left open for Marconi to establish a global monopoly.

However, the hearings ultimately revealed a lack of congressional support for the proposal for government ownership. The main criticism focused on the Navy's actions during the war, as the authority had invoked wartime necessity to seize wireless facilities along the nation's coasts from private companies without congressional approval. Several lawmakers claimed that the naval authorities had clearly overstepped their emergency powers in what appeared to be an attempt to impose a monopoly on radio communications upon the government. According to Howeth (1963, 317), the 1918 midterm congressional elections marked the definitive death knell for the idea of Navy-controlled wireless, as the majority in both the Senate and the House shifted to the more business-friendly Republicans. Indeed, the revised Alexander Bill was tabled on January 16, 1919, and was never revisited for discussion thereafter. With this, the prospect of government ownership had been effectively removed from the agenda.

At this point, it was only a matter of time before the government would lift the wartime ban on private transmissions. When that happened, there would be a real risk Marconi would monopolize all transoceanic radio traffic. This was because, in the spring of 1919, the company had entered negotiations with General Electric (GE) over the patent for the so-called Alexanderson alternator: the state-of-the-

⁴*Letter from the Secretary of Commerce to the Chairman of the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries Regarding Government Ownership of Radio in Peacetime.* 1918, December 10. RG 40, Vol. 130. National Archives and Records Administration at College Park, Maryland [henceforth NARA], p. 1.

art device for long-distance communication (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 52). If the deal went through, it would grant Marconi an effective monopoly on all radio communications between the United States and Europe. In a counterfactual scenario, a significant portion of American radio traffic could thus very well have been controlled by a foreign conglomerate.

Instead, a domestic conglomerate of electrical corporations ultimately secured control over most radio manufacturing and international traffic in the United States. Marconi was forced to relinquish its holdings once it became clear that Congress would not accept foreign control (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 53). The turning point had come in the spring of 1919 when President Wilson was alerted to Marconi's plans to acquire GE's patents. In correspondence with Rear Admiral Bullard, the president noted that Britain currently dominated international telegraphy and that it was crucial for the United States to ensure control over radio communications to maintain the balance of power:

We must persuade the leaders of General Electric not to sell their machine to the Marconi Company but to organize, with their colleagues from other major electrical industry firms, a new company that could use the Alexanderson machine in establishing long-distance links under American control. — quoted in Brochand (1994a, 73–74)

The creation of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) a few months after President Wilson's decision ensured that a group of domestic companies gained access to Marconi's divested assets. The corporation's charter required that all officers be U.S. citizens, that 80 percent of its stock remain in American hands, and that a government representative sit on its board of directors. According to Sterling and Kittross (1990, 53), RCA thus became the government's "chosen instrument" for ensuring that the strategically vital international radio traffic remained under national control.

While RCA served as an instrument of the government's telecommunications policy, it simultaneously became the dominant commercial actor in the American radio market and the fourth major international player in the field alongside the British-owned Marconi

Company, CSF in France, and Germany's Telefunken (Howeth 1963). As a result, the United States quickly emerged as the global leader in wireless communications, counterbalancing the British Empire's longstanding dominance in international telegraphy.

THE BEGINNINGS OF U.S. BROADCASTING:
A STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE THIRD SECTOR
AND BIG BUSINESS INTERESTS

Given the prevailing view of radio as a technology for maritime and international two-way communication, most major electrical manufacturers believed that the future profit center for wireless lay in the production of transmitters. At the same time, the telecommunications landscape was evolving rapidly in the wake of the First World War, creating significant uncertainty about market dynamics, regulations, and potential uses of the technology.

Adding to this uncertainty was the fact that key patents were scattered among the major American electrical manufacturers, as the Navy-backed patent pool from the war had come to an end. This hindered the production of more advanced components, leading to speculation about whether the radio manufacturing industry would face a setback in peacetime (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 53–54).

However, through a cross-licensing agreement signed on July 1, 1920, RCA, General Electric (GE), and AT&T managed to forestall a patent war. The patent pool granted the participating companies access to the necessary technical components for operating a profitable communications system, in addition to facilitating a more stable and cooperative development of radio by promoting the establishment of industry standards and preventing disruptive legal battles. The main beneficiaries of this agreement were, of course, GE and RCA, which could now manufacture receivers, as well as AT&T, which could begin producing transmitters (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 55).

Simultaneously, government authorities welcomed an arrangement which meant that the state basically only had to deal with a single company rather than multiple competitors. Contrary to the common perception of the 1920s as a period of *laissez-faire* policies, Louise Benjamin (1998, 221–222) argues that the state's approach to private businesses during the presidencies of Warren Harding and Calvin

Coolidge was geared much more toward cooperation. In the radio sector, this was evident in how closely Commerce Department officials collaborated with radio industry leaders during the 1920s to establish a functional structure for the fledgling industry. This public-private partnership can be seen as an extension of the corporatist radio policy the United States had recently adopted in response to the threat from international competitors.

Only months after the signing of the patent pool agreement, the United States would experience yet another exogenous shock that fundamentally disrupted the policymaking landscape, but this time it was of a technological nature. As noted by Susan J. Douglas (1987, 299), the summer of 1920 saw a soaring interest in radio, particularly among the thousands of individuals recruited for the war effort who now sought to apply their technical skills in peacetime. Department stores across the country began selling amateur wireless sets with which people could pick up signals.

This development caught the attention of the managers at Westinghouse — the only major electronics corporation operating outside the patent trust — who were eager to establish a postwar market for the company's manufacturing capability (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 58–59). They believed that efforts to develop radio telephony⁵ as a confidential means of communication between *two* parties were misguided; its true potential lay in mass communication. Consequently, Westinghouse began constructing a powerful transmitting station in Pittsburgh that would broadcast daily programs, hoping this would boost sales of wireless receiving sets among amateurs and other individuals looking for something to listen to (Douglas 1987, 300).

On November 2, 1920, Westinghouse's station KDKA reported the results of the presidential election between Warren G. Harding and James M. Cox to an estimated few thousand listeners. This event is often cited as the first scheduled and publicly announced broadcast in which listeners could tune in to hear a specific program and is widely recognized as the beginning of commercial radio broadcasting (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 60).

⁵Radio telephony entailed transmitting *voice* over radio waves, allowing real-time spoken communication without the need for wired connections. This made the emerging technology distinct from radiotelegraphy, which had long relied on Morse code (Peers 1969, 5).

Over the next year and a half, a “broadcasting boom” swept across the United States (Douglas 1987, 300). By early 1922, the Commerce Department had issued licenses to approximately one hundred broadcasting stations, most of which were owned by commercial establishments such as department stores, newspapers, and radio manufacturers — including Westinghouse, General Electric, and AT&T (Sarno 1969, 193). Alongside these, however, was also a significant number of stations operated by churches, educational institutions, and amateurs (Banning 1946, 132–133). Thousands of war-trained radio experts built sophisticated amateur stations, broadcasting weather reports, music, and lectures to hobbyists equipped with self-assembled, relatively inexpensive crystal set receivers (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 61).

The fact that both non-professionals and major business interests were at the forefront in the early development of American broadcasting testifies to the study’s theoretical point that revolutionary communication technologies tend to empower both commercial actors and third-sector groups. In addition, it highlights the importance of distinguishing analytically between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector.

As more broadcasters went on air, the situation grew increasingly chaotic in major cities, where too many stations crowded a limited bandwidth. Their transmissions interfered with one another in a way that hindered good reception, making it difficult for radio stations to build and maintain an audience (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 55–56).

At the same time, policymakers were unable to address the interference problems, as the entire development was unfolding within the inadequate regulatory framework of the Radio Act of 1912, which had been passed long before broadcasting was conceived (Peers 1969, 9). As we recall from the previous section, the law required anyone engaging in interstate or international wireless communication to obtain a license. However, in practice, the Secretary of Commerce had no discretion to deny a license to any applicant, leaving him unable to limit the number of stations on air (Benjamin 1998, 232). The need for new radio regulations was becoming increasingly apparent.

Given the dominant position that the major electrical manufacturers had secured following the 1919 RCA agreement and the cre-

ation of the patent pool the following year, the government realized that no legislation could pass without the backing of the radio industry. This was mainly because these firms possessed the technical expertise indispensable for establishing and operating the backbone of any broadcasting system: the “hardware” component.

According to Benjamin (1998, 224), this was the background to the many meetings — both informal and formal — that were arranged between Commerce Department officials and the radio industry throughout the 1920 to set an agenda and develop a new organizational structure for U.S. radio. In other words, the alliance that government authorities had forged with these manufacturing giants in international wireless telegraphy during and after the First World War now extended into the broadcasting era.

According to the conventional view, this close public-private collaboration laid the foundation for the pioneering Radio Act of 1927, which favored the development of large commercial broadcasting networks at the expense of amateurs and other third-sector groups. As noted in the introduction to this case study, the early national literature on American broadcasting largely accepted this historical narrative. In *Big Business and Radio*, Gleason L. Archer (1939) suggested that a commercial setup was the logical choice for a nation committed to capitalism, democracy, and freedom — a view later exemplified in the early work of Walter B. Emery (1960).

No one can deny that the electric manufacturers’ size and indispensable technical expertise granted them a significant voice in shaping the initial regulatory frameworks for broadcasting in the United States. This was especially true after 1921, when Westinghouse abandoned its independent course and joined the RCA-backed patent pool, effectively making American radio manufacturing a private monopoly (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 55).

However, there has been debate about *when* the commercial system was consolidated and whether third-sector groups could have played a less restricted role. In perhaps the most accomplished revisionist history of early U.S. radio, Susan J. Douglas (1989, 314–317) argued that the economic, legislative, and ideological foundations of American broadcasting were effectively in place as early as 1922. By contrast, media historian Robert W. McChesney (1993, 252) con-

tends that many fundamental questions of ownership and control remained unresolved until the 1930s.

Building on this revisionist history of early U.S. radio and drawing on original archival evidence from the records of the Commerce Department, the remainder of this chapter illustrates that the preference for large, advertising-funded radio operations was not a given from the outset. Rather, it was something that gradually took shape over the 1920s as large corporations actively leveraged their superior technical, financial, and organizational resources to bring it about. Consequently, I align with the more recent literature in arguing that the dominance of commercial elements in U.S. broadcasting occurred later than suggested by the standard account.

The chapter shows that policymakers initially *opposed* direct advertising in radio, were concerned about the formation of a private monopoly, and demonstrated considerable understanding of amateur broadcasters' needs. However, attitudes shifted as station interference became unmanageable, and commercial radio companies blocked every legislative attempt that they perceived as a threat to their business interests. Taken together, this illustrates the study's theoretical argument that willful actors can shape outcomes in a more voluntaristic fashion during critical junctures compared to periods of path-dependent stability (see Hall and Taylor 1996).

In February 1922, upon realizing that the radio spectrum could not accommodate an unlimited number of broadcasters, then-Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover invited the managers of the major manufacturers to a National Radio Conference. The goal was to leverage the technical expertise of GE, RCA, Westinghouse, and AT&T to tackle the growing confusion over interference and to secure industry support for new legislation that could address these problems. Besides manufacturers, around 30 civilian engineering experts participated, including representatives from the largest amateur organization, the American Radio Relay League (Benjamin 1998, 222–224).

Ahead of the First Radio Conference, tensions had run high between major business interests and third-sector groups. According to Edward Sarno (1969, 190), the large electrical manufacturers placed virtually all the blame for interference problems on amateur operators and were reportedly seeking to limit their activities to free up

channels for commercial use. Amateur radio organizations, in turn, vehemently opposed potential government restrictions on their operations. They argued that interference was not caused by amateur transmissions but by the poor quality of the public's receiving sets (Sarno 1969, 190). In an interview with the *New York Times*, Hiram Percy Maxim of the Radio Relay League — one of the most outspoken advocates for the amateur position — attributed the proposed restrictions to pressures from “big concerns which manufacture and sell wireless apparatus to ‘broadcast listeners.’”⁶

At the inaugural radio conference on February 27, 1922, the Secretary of Commerce pushed back against the large manufacturers' narrative, declaring that he did not see third-sector radio activities as the primary cause of chaos on the airwaves. On the contrary, Hoover emphasized the significant role individual hobbyists had played in advancing the radio art and assured that any future legislation would protect amateur interests:

[I]t will be possible to accommodate the most proper demands and at the same time to protect that precious thing — the American small boy, to whom so much of this rapid expansion of interest is due.⁷

While Commerce Department officials recognized that securing the major manufacturers' support was essential for advancing new radio legislation, some expressed concerns that a small group of commercial enterprises might gain excessive control over such a powerful medium of publicity as radio. This included the Commerce Secretary, who asserted that the public interest in broadcasting must take precedence over private interests (Sarno 1969, 192). Hoover emphasized that it was a matter of national concern to ensure that future legislation granted the government the necessary control:

There is involved [...] in all of this regulation the necessity to so establish public right over the ether roads that there

⁶ *New York Times*. 1922, February 17, p. 19.

⁷ *Statement by the Secretary of Commerce before the First National Radio Conference*. 1922, February 27. RG 40, Vol. 131. NARA, p. 3.

may be no national regret that we have parted ways with a great asset into uncontrolled hands.⁸

According to the Secretary of Commerce, the medium's public interest qualities raised important questions about who would be responsible for broadcasting, under what conditions, and what type of content should be allowed. In stark contrast to the conventional portrayal of U.S. broadcasting as "market-oriented," Hoover insisted that a commercial ethos and direct advertising risked undermining broadcasting's potential as a force for education, entertainment, and the dissemination of information to the public:

It is inconceivable that we should allow so great a possibility for service, for news, for entertainment, for education, and for vital commercial purposes, to be drowned in advertising chatter, or for commercial purposes that can be quite well served by our other means of communication.⁹

In summary, the Secretary of Commerce established three fundamental principles at the inaugural National Radio Conference: (1) the primacy of the public interest in broadcasting; (2) the need to determine who should broadcast and for what purpose; and (3) the necessity of curbing direct advertising (Benjamin 1998, 222–223).

Notably, the Secretary won the conference participants' support in condemning the "direct sales talk" employed by companies to promote themselves and drive receiver sales. This highlights that radio advertising was not a given from the outset, even in the United States, further challenging the notion that a commercial model was the country's default path. Beyond the resolution against direct advertising, the 1922 conference primarily reached agreements on technical matters aimed at addressing interference, which was the overriding issue at the time. This included the need for a structured system for wavelength assignments and regulations on stations' permissible power (Peers 1969, 9).

These principles formed the basis for the first Congressional bill specifically addressing broadcasting, which was brought before the

⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 1.

⁹ *Ibidem.*

House Committee on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries in early 1923 by Maine Representative Wallace White (Sarno 1969, 192–193). However, both this proposal and the one introduced shortly thereafter by Senator Frank Kellogg in the Senate were blocked by the major radio corporations.

A key reason for their opposition was that the bills contained a clause allowing the Secretary of Commerce to deny licenses to entities deemed to be monopolizing radio — a provision that the electrical manufacturers within the RCA sphere argued would vest too much control in a single individual. Since no legislation could pass without the radio industry's support, the Secretary of Commerce was compelled to take a more conciliatory approach. Thus, he began cultivating personal relationships with the leaders of the major electrical corporations and forging alliances with them, aiming to establish a functional regulatory structure for radio (Benjamin 1998, 224).

According to media historian Heidi Tworek (2015, 470), a pivotal decision favoring major corporate interests was made during the Second National Radio Conference in the spring of 1923, when the Secretary of Commerce implemented a major spectrum reallocation that created three classes of radio stations. Large corporations were given preferential treatment, with industry giants like AT&T and Westinghouse receiving high-power stations, while universities, churches, and labor unions were assigned lower-power allocations (Rosen 1980). Perhaps unsurprisingly, the larger broadcasters welcomed the recommendations of the Second Radio Conference, while those relegated to the Class C band did not.

Broadcast historian Eric Barnouw (1966, 122) argues that Hoover's spectrum allocation appeared to reflect a value judgment in which educational and religious interests ranked low in priority. In that case, it signaled a shift in attitude toward the third sector compared to the inaugural radio conference, where the Secretary of Commerce had been a vocal advocate for the amateurs' cause.

The reason the Secretary of Commerce implemented the spectrum reallocation in the first place was that interference had deteriorated to such an extent that urgent measures were required while waiting for Congress to enact legislation. Between 1922 and March 1923, the number of broadcasting stations had surged from 60 to 581, while the

number of radio receivers grew from an estimated 600,000 to nearly two million (Sarno 1969, 193).

Hoover recognized that this could lead to chaos and pose an existential threat to radio, but he lacked the authority to restore order under the prevailing law. In a ruling from early 1923, the Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia upheld previous interpretations of the Radio Act of 1912, affirming that the Secretary of Commerce had no discretion to deny licenses. His mandate was limited to assigning wavelengths (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 84). Taken together, the chaotic situation in the airwaves following the U.S. broadcasting boom illustrates how revolutionary new technologies can render existing policy instruments obsolete, forcing policymakers to seek alternative means of intervention.

On February 18, 1927, Congress passed a new Radio Act that granted the U.S. government significantly more powerful legal means to combat interference than the Secretary of Commerce had enjoyed under the previous law. These powers were assigned to a newly established Federal Radio Commission (FRC), which could now impose stricter technical requirements on stations, such as determining their power levels and locations. An amendment to the law the following year further strengthened the FRC's licensing powers (Tworek 2015, 473). Since there was a prevailing belief that the number of channels that could operate simultaneously without interference was limited, a criterion for selecting licensees had to be established. Congress defined this criterion as "public interest, convenience, and/or necessity" (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 127). Although not explicitly defined in the Radio Act of 1927, this formulation would remain the foundation for discretionary control of U.S. broadcasting for decades.

As a result of these regulatory changes, the government largely brought interference under control. However, these measures also had significant consequences for different stakeholders' ability to broadcast. The heightened technical requirements meant that by the summer of 1928, the Federal Radio Commission had forced more than 100 amateur stations off the air (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 128).

That same year, the commission adopted a frequency assignment plan based on Hoover's 1923 scheme, which placed smaller noncommercial stations at a clear disadvantage *vis-à-vis* larger commercial

broadcasters. While low-wattage stations operated by third-sector groups typically had to share their frequency with one or more other stations, major industrial corporations secured exclusive access to channels that ensured strong reception of their programming (Benjamin 1998, 232). These so-called clear channels would become the backbone of the commercial radio networks — including CBS, NBC and Mutual — which significantly expanded their operations throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

Canada

INTRODUCTION

In comparative political communications, Canada has typically been classified within a “Liberal” media model, though one that has been substantially modified due to issues of national identity (see, for instance Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 198–248).

This depiction aligns well with the nature of the country’s radio broadcasting system at the end of the interwar period, which reflected a compromise between private ownership and public control. The 1936 Broadcasting Act allowed for the establishment of private community stations, while requiring them to contribute to the “national interest in broadcasting.”¹⁰ This included supporting the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in delivering a national programming service to various parts of the country. It is worth noting that the Corporation’s own Board of Governors held overall responsibility for ensuring that all outlets in the system contributed to the legislation’s overarching national goals. This symbiotic arrangement between the private and public sectors formed the basis of what has come to be known as the “single” system of Canadian broadcasting (Ellis 1979, 77).

Within the national literature, there is consensus that this peculiar system originated with the 1929 report of the so-called Aird Commission, which recommended the introduction of a public monopoly

¹⁰*CBC Report on the development of the national broadcasting system*. 1950, January 1. Record Group 134539, Volume 287. Libraries and Archives Canada (henceforth LAC), pp. 5–6.

modeled on the British Broadcasting Corporation (see, for instance Armstrong 2016, 25; Raboy 1990; Vipond 1994, 1). According to Frank W. Peers (1969, 47–48), the commissioners reached this conclusion largely because they believed that broadcasting held significant unrealized potential for education and fostering a national spirit. This would require a more comprehensive program service and better coverage for Canada's widely dispersed population, which was deemed difficult to achieve through an entirely private system.

It may therefore seem somewhat puzzling that Canada ultimately adopted a mixed public-private model, but this can be more easily explained by considering the role of interest groups and international shocks in shaping early Canadian broadcasting. The chapter begins by highlighting Michael Nolan's point that Canada had an entirely private radio system prior to the enactment of the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act (1984, 1–2). For almost a decade, there were no principled debates in Parliament about the organization of broadcasting. Instead, the system was regulated on an ad-hoc basis by the Department of Marine and Fisheries (Raboy 1990, 22).

The turning point came with the establishment of the Aird Commission, whose initial deliberations would revolve around the issue of American influence on Canadian radio. The reason was that, in 1928, the NBC network had announced plans to expand into Canada, followed by CBS incorporating a station in Montreal. As a consequence, policymaking was conducted on the premise that a continuation of the private enterprise model might result in radio programs being dominated by American productions (Peers 1969, 48).

Since this foreign influence raised concerns among policymakers about the nation's cultural sovereignty, I argue that the inroads made by U.S. networks into the Canadian radio market around 1930 constituted an international shock that activated elected officials' interest and compelled them to completely reconsider public policy in this field. The question was which alternative approach could better protect the nation's autonomy in broadcasting in light of the threat from the American networks.

It was far from certain that the government would end up adopting the Aird Commission's recommendations, as existing private stations — fearing expropriation — launched a major campaign to pre-

vent their implementation (Armstrong 2016, 27). Moreover, the Conservatives, who regained power in 1930, initially advocated for the establishment of an advertising-funded national radio service under the auspices of the Canadian Pacific Railways (O'Brien 1964, 230). Within the national literature, there is broad consensus that Prime Minister R.B. Bennett ultimately changed his stance in light of the widespread popular support that emerged in favor of public broadcasting. This, in turn, was largely due to the the lobbying efforts of the Canadian Radio League — a grassroots movement that united a broad spectrum of societal actors around the vision of a non-commercial broadcasting system with an educational focus aimed at bringing together the different parts of the country (Raboy 1990, 31).

It is worth noting that the composition of the League closely mirrored the 1930s reform coalition in the United States, which *failed* in its attempts to challenge the dominance of the commercial networks. In both cases, third-sector groups such as labor unions, educational institutions, and religious associations were instrumental in pushing for a more “public” system. This highlights the importance of analytically distinguishing between different interests within the “private” sector to explain why countries adopted such different organizational frameworks for broadcasting in the interwar period.

To illustrate this point, we can imagine a counterfactual scenario in which the Canadian reform movement would have failed to convince politicians of the value of public broadcasting. In that case, Canada might have developed a radio system modeled on — or even subordinate to — the American one.

That this did not happen was largely due to the fact that the Canadian Radio League enjoyed much broader support than its counterpart in the United States. As pointed out by Peers (1969, 53–60), it was not only grassroots groups that backed the conclusions of the Aird report, but also business organizations, newspapers, and politicians from both the Conservative and Liberal parties. According to Margaret Prang (1965, 31), the League’s success lay in its ability to channel the strong national sentiments prevalent in Canada at the time and project them onto the broadcasting debate by framing the conflict as a choice between “the state or the United States.” Therefore, Canada’s establishment of a national public broadcaster in 1932

alongside the existing private stations can be attributed to a “rally around the flag” effect.

THE DAWN OF CANADIAN BROADCASTING: A DECADE OF LAISSEZ-FAIRE

In comparative political communications, Canada is often categorized under a North American “Liberal” media model, defined by its reliance on market forces rather than extensive government intervention. From the end of the First World War and well into the 1920s, much indeed seemed to indicate that Canadian radio would develop along similar lines as in the United States. To begin, broadcasting commenced almost simultaneously in both countries. In December 1920, just weeks after KDKA’s pioneering broadcast in Pittsburgh, the Canadian Marconi Company initiated the first radio transmissions to a broader audience from its station XVA (later CFCF) in Montreal (Nolan 1984, 4).

From this point, Canadian broadcasting quickly evolved into a private sector venture, with an ownership structure that closely resembled that of the United States. In both countries, the vast majority of outlets were commercially run by newspapers and firms supplying radio equipment, although licenses were also issued to amateur radio clubs, churches, educational institutions, and other grassroots operators (Peers 1969, 16).

From the mid-1920s onward, however, the broadcasting systems of the two neighboring countries began to diverge. As noted in the chapter on the United States, the Commerce Department initially interpreted the 1912 Radio Act very liberally, granting licenses to virtually everyone who applied. This policy, however, proved unsustainable as hundreds of stations went on air, interfering with one another’s broadcasts.

The realization of the scarcity of the electromagnetic spectrum led Congress to pass the 1927 Radio Act, which introduced a system of preferential licensing. This restriction on private stations’ right of establishment was, in other words, not rooted in an ideological stance but in the recognition that regulating broadcasting under the same principles as the print press would inevitably lead to the collapse of effective radio communication. The consequence of this law was that

many non-professional broadcasters were squeezed out of the system in favor of large commercial networks such as CBS and NBC, which could now seriously expand their operations.

In Canada, by contrast, there had been no principled debate about broadcasting in the House of Commons at the corresponding time. Nor had any radio conferences been organized, like those in the United States, aimed at charting a course for the medium's organization with input from relevant stakeholders. Instead, the system continued to be regulated on an ad hoc basis by the Department of Marine and Fisheries, which periodically responded to new developments (Armstrong 2016, 24). That this *laissez-faire* approach persisted throughout the decade had much to do with Canada's geographic and demographic conditions, as these meant that issues with interference were never nearly as pressing as they were in the U.S.

According to Michael Nolan (1984, 7), officials from the Marine Department's Radio Branch initially believed that the vast distances between urban centers allowed for nearly unlimited expansion of radio. Indeed, in a 1923 memorandum to the British Sykes Committee on Broadcasting, the agency concluded that the absence of restrictions on the issuance of licenses had not resulted in significant interference. On the contrary, it had fostered the development of the new medium:

[W]hile it might at first sight seem uneconomical to allow more than one station in any one area [...] this policy has the advantage that the friendly competition between stations in regard to quality of transmission and quality of programmes, has done much to develop the art, and has unquestionably functioned to the benefit of the broadcast listener¹¹

At the same time, the vast distances and scattered population meant that few Canadian businessmen believed it would be profitable to establish larger stations outside the major urban centers. Consequently, while broadcasting in the United States developed into a more pro-

¹¹ *Report by the Department of Marine and Fisheries on Broadcasting in Canada for the British Broadcasting Committee*. 1923, 19 May. RG R1074-0-7-E, Vol. 5. LAC, pp. 1–2.

fessionalized commercial industry from the mid-1920s onward, Canadian radio retained a significantly more regional and rudimentary character. Most transmitters were of low-power and less technically advanced than those in the United States.

As a result, Canadians, from the very beginning, listened more to American stations than their own. Even in Toronto, the largest city in the wealthiest Canadian province at the time, there was no competition to U.S. stations. However, this did not prompt the public authorities to adopt a more coordinated approach. Instead, Canadian policymakers continued to regard broadcasting as just another business throughout the 1920s (Peers 1969, 20).

By the late 1930s, by contrast, the situation had changed dramatically. At this point, Canada had established two statutes declaring broadcasting to be a national concern that, as a basic principle, should be overseen by the state. The 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act even mandated the expropriation of all commercial stations already operating within the system, though this provision was later eased in the revised legislation.

The 1936 law, on the other hand, required private community stations to support the public broadcaster — the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) — in delivering a national service to various parts of the country. Furthermore, the CBC's Board of Governors was vested with coordinating powers, granting them the authority to establish and direct policy for both the public and private elements of the system. In stark contrast to the *laissez-faire* approach that had defined Canadian radio policy during the 1920s, the country had thereby established a highly unified broadcasting service. This peculiar public-private structure is what has since come to be referred to as the “single” system of Canadian broadcasting (Ellis 1979, 77).

This chapter illustrates that Canada's radical policy shift during the interwar years can be traced to the sense of urgency policymakers experienced when they realized that continuing with a private system would likely lead to Canadian radio being flooded with American programming. The concern was that this would undermine the country's national identity. As this threat to the nation's cultural sovereignty dawned on an increasing number of societal actors, there was a rally-around-the-flag effect that culminated in the creation of

the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation in 1932. The central argument of this chapter, therefore, is that U.S. networks' plans to expand into Canada in the late 1920s marked an international shock, igniting elected officials' interest in broadcasting for the first time and forcing a fundamental reevaluation of public policy in this field.

THE STATE OR THE UNITED STATES:
THE CANADIAN STRUGGLE FOR
NATIONAL CONTROL OF RADIO

The search for a new policy began in the spring of 1928, when broadcasting was discussed in the House of Commons for the first time in a more principled manner.¹² The background was that the Minister of Marine, Arthur Cardin, had revoked the licenses of a number of stations affiliated with Jehovah's Witnesses for launching a series of attacks against other churches (Peers 1969, 31).

In the full debate in the Committee of Supply between May 31 and June 1, 1928, the focus nevertheless shifted from the free speech dilemma to whether there was a risk that Canadian radio could fall under the control of foreign entities. The backdrop was that the American NBC network was reportedly planning to expand into Canada (Armstrong 2016, 28). During the parliamentary debate, Labour Party representative J.S. Woodsworth warned of the imminent risk that Canadian private stations would be absorbed into the American commercial radio networks:

It is only a comparatively short time before these small broadcasting stations will be bought up by big American companies. I may be afraid of handing power to any one government, but I would rather trust our own Canadian government with the control of broadcasting than trust these highly organized private commercial companies in the United States.¹³

The Labour Party member's analysis of the American threat marked

¹²*House of Common Debates*. 1928, April 12. 2nd Session, 16th Parliament, Vol. II. Ottawa: F.A. Acland, pp. 1951-1952.

¹³*House of Common Debates*. 1928, 31 May. 2nd Session, 16th Parliament, Vol. III. Ottawa: F.A. Acland; p. 3622.

a turning point for the disinterested and laissez-faire-oriented approach that had characterized Canadian broadcast governance up to that point. Previously, radio had been seen as just another business, but now it suddenly dawned on an increasing number of policymakers that its takeover by a foreign power might jeopardize the country's national identity (Peers 1969, 34).

In line with the study's theoretical expectations about the effects of international shocks, the inroads of U.S. networks into Canada prompted *elected* officials to take a greater interest in broadcasting issues and to rethink their approach to its governance. This conclusion can be drawn from the Marine Minister's statement before the House Committee, where he asserted that the principles governing the press were not necessarily applicable to radio:

[T]he use of the air has never been free, and so far as radio is concerned, the use of the air cannot be free, because if it were open to anyone to use the few channels of communication that we have in the radio service, the result would be chaos.¹⁴

With this statement, the Minister of Marine conveyed that a change in Canada's broadcasting landscape was necessary. Canadian broadcasting had for the first time become a matter of public controversy, calling for a national policy. The question was which alternative approach could better protect the autonomy of the nation's radio system in light of the threat from the American networks. Since the government lacked the necessary facts to decide on a new system, MacKenzie King's Liberal administration appointed a Royal Commission on Broadcasting on December 6, 1928, to investigate the issue (Prang 1965, 5–6).

The conventional view holds that the so-called Aird Commission faced a choice between two distinct approaches: the American "private enterprise" system or a public service monopoly modeled after the BBC (see Armstrong 2016, 25). However, the reality was more complex. The Order in Council that established the commission's mandate outlined three broad possibilities for addressing the inter-

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 3658.

related challenges of existing stations' uneven geographical coverage and the fact that a majority of Canadians preferred U.S. programs.

One option was to maintain the current system with private stations but subsidize them. Another was to have a publicly owned and funded company manage broadcasting operations. The third alternative was to allow *provincial* governments to establish and operate radio stations. The Commission was generally not seen as partisan, but if its members held any bias at the time of their appointment, it leaned *against* public ownership (Charlesworth 1936, 42).

Yet despite this, in its report from September 11, 1929, the Aird Commission recommended establishing a public broadcasting monopoly and that all existing commercial stations should be expropriated. The proposed monopoly did not fully align with any of the alternatives outlined in the Commission's original terms of reference, but the idea was that all Canadian radio stations should be owned and operated by a single national company whose status would correspond to that of a public utility. Furthermore, the company's operations would be partially funded by public funds (Peers 1969, 45). At first glance, this might suggest that the commissioners drew their primary inspiration from how broadcasting was organized in Britain — one of several countries they visited in their search for a new broadcasting model for Canada.

This was indeed the case, but only in part, since the Royal Commission accepted that programs could be partially funded through (indirect) commercial advertising — unlike the fully license-funded BBC. The most significant difference was that all program production was to be handled by the provinces. The Commission's proposal was thus a modified version of the British public service monopoly, adapted to Canadian federalism and bilingualism (Peers 1969, 51).

In essence, the defining feature of the proposed model was that a quasi-governmental body would establish and operate the distribution network, while regional governments would oversee programming. This example shows how distinguishing analytically between content and carriage sharpens our understanding of governance across different spheres of intervention within broadcasting, allowing for a more nuanced description of nations' radio and television systems.

The Aird Report was thus a flat rejection of the assumption that

had prevailed in Canada until that point: that listeners were best served by a number of advertising-supported stations competing with one another. A major reason the commissioners concluded in favor of a state monopoly was their desire to establish a more comprehensive program service, as they believed broadcasting had largely unrealized potential beyond mere entertainment (Peers 1969, 47). In the final report, they repeatedly highlighted the culture-shaping objectives of having a national radio system:

The potentialities of broadcasting as an instrument of education have been impressed upon us; education in the broad sense, not only as it is conducted in the schools and colleges, but in providing entertainment and of informing the public on questions of national interest.¹⁵

The commissioners strongly emphasized broadcasting's role in nation-building and its potential to unite citizens across a diverse and dispersed country:

In a country of the vast geographical dimensions of Canada, broadcasting will undoubtedly become a great force in fostering a national spirit and interpreting national citizenship.¹⁶

At the same time, the report identified the growing influence of American radio as a significant threat to realizing the vision of a public broadcasting system with a national vocation and an educational focus, even if this was not stated explicitly:

At present the majority of programs heard are from sources outside of Canada. It has been emphasized to us that the continued reception of these has a tendency to mould the minds of the young people in the home to ideals and opinions that are not Canadian.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Report of the Royal Commission on Radio Broadcasting*. 1929, Ottawa: F.A. Acland, p. 6.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

The Aird commissioners' concerns about the potential cultural impact of American radio programs were not unwarranted, as NBC had announced plans to expand its services into Canada just as they began their deliberations in early 1929. That same year, a station in Montreal joined the CBS network, as did one of the two principal stations in Toronto. According to Armstrong (2016, 25), this development decisively shaped how the commissioners weighed different options. Although none of them were doctrinarily opposed to private enterprise, they now had to contend with the highly plausible scenario that radio programming would be dominated by American content if a private model were chosen (Peers 1969, 48). Since the commissioners were determined to prevent such a development at all costs, recommending an expanded role for the state in broadcasting was the only viable option.

Most of the newspapers that commented on the Aird Report after its release in September 1929 followed a similar line of thought as the commissioners regarding the necessity of public broadcasting. It was evident that an entirely new line of conflict was beginning to crystallize. For instance, the *Manitoba Free Press* argued that the rapid expansion of commercial radio in the United States had cast the entire question of Canadian broadcasting in a new light compared to the period before 1928:

The alternative, then, is not between private enterprise in Canada and Dominion Government monopoly [...] but between big business monopoly control from across the line and Government monopoly here.¹⁸

Overall, newspapers largely supported the Royal Commission's conclusions, with only a minority remaining neutral or openly critical (Raboy 1990, 29). The same was true for third-sector actors such as radio clubs and educational institutions, which wholeheartedly supported the idea of a national broadcasting system. A recurring opinion expressed during the Commission's hearings had been that broadcasting should be "Canadian for Canadians" and that people were generally willing to pay for this (Peers 1969, 41).

¹⁸Radio as a Dominion Monopoly. 1929, September 23. *Manitoba Free Press*.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the Aird Report found its strongest critics among owners of existing private stations and within the radio manufacturing and retail industries. These commercial actors were open to establishing a regulatory commission similar to that in the United States but were firmly opposed to the idea of publicly owned and operated broadcasting stations (Peers 1969, 40). On this point, they generally found support from newspapers that were themselves owners of private radio station. This included the *Montreal Gazette*, which predicted that it would not be long before the proponents of public ownership lined up against the advocates of private ownership (Raboy 1989, 29).

However, the private stations' criticism did not sway the Minister of Marine, whose department began working on legislation expected to be introduced in Parliament early in 1930. The Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, announced that a bill based on the Aird Commission's conclusions would likely be referred to a Special Committee, given the highly technical nature of the issues under consideration (Peers 1969, 55–56). The bill was only awaiting the Marine Minister's approval before being submitted to the Cabinet. When that happened, the legislative effort to ensure all Canadians had access to distinctly Canadian cultural and educational radio programming could officially begin.

Here, it is worth stepping back to take stock of the situation in early 1930. The Liberal government was on the verge of pushing through legislation that, if it broadly followed the Aird Report's recommendations, would give Canada a public broadcasting service with greater state involvement than in many Western European democracies. In France, public and private stations operated alongside each other at the time, while in Sweden, only the distribution network was run as a monopoly by a state agency. When it came to programming, the commercial press held a majority stake in the national public broadcaster, *Radiotjänst*. This stands in contrast to the proposed Canadian model, where both the distribution network and programming would be managed by government bodies, albeit at different tiers of the federal system.

However, in the midst of this critical decision-making situation, a combination of contingent events caused the public broadcasting ad-

vocates to lose momentum. The backdrop was that the stock market had crashed in late October 1929, just weeks after the Aird Commission released its report. Initially, the onset of the Great Depression did not seem to affect the preparation of the bill, but it made the government think twice about committing to the vast capital expenditures implied by the proposed model (Armstrong 2016, 27).

Subsequently, in mid-February 1930, the Prime Minister called an election and announced that he would not move forward with the broadcasting bill, fearing it would become a point of political contention during the campaign. Broadcasting did not become an election issue, but the Liberals unexpectedly lost power to the Conservatives, who had no clearly defined broadcasting policy. This abruptly halted progress on the Aird Report (Peers 1969, 56).

The great uncertainty that followed the change of government gave proponents of commercial radio a window of opportunity to rally their forces. According to Frank W. Peers (1969, 57), advertisers and private station owners — including some newspapers — formed the backbone of this resistance to head off the bill. They launched intense lobbying campaigns against the implementation of the Aird Commission's recommendations alongside major commercial organizations such as the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), the private sector's industry association, and the Canadian Pacific Railways (CPR) (Armstrong 2016, 27).

Given that the new Conservative Prime Minister had previously worked as a solicitor for the private railway company, contemporary commentators speculated whether R.B. Bennett was considering giving his former employer responsibility for the proposed national broadcasting service (Vipond 1994). The Canadian Pacific Railways had previously been working with private stations to provide facilities for McGill University's educational programs, an initiative the Conservative leader had viewed as a compelling model of public service. Considering the ties between the Prime Minister and the CPR, supporters of public broadcasting grew increasingly concerned that the Aird plan might be abandoned altogether (O'Brien 1964, 230).

It was against this backdrop that a grassroots movement took shape in the fall of 1930 to challenge the proponents of commercial broadcasting. Rather than exploiting radio as an advertising medium,

the founders of the so-called Canadian Radio League envisioned the creation of a national public service focused on education and cultural enrichment which could unite the different parts of Canada (Armstrong 2016, 27). To promote this vision, the League established divisions at both the national and regional levels and launched an extensive information and lobbying campaign to garner support for the core conclusions of the Royal Commission on Broadcasting.

One key difference, however, was that the League's members sought a less provincial and more national outlook than the public service model proposed in the Aird Report. They even conceded that local needs could be met by smaller, short-range private stations of the kind already operating within the system under the auspices of non-profit organizations Peers (1969, 66). In other words, the League did not oppose private ownership *per se*, only the commercial ethos. Once again, this illustrates the importance of making an analytical distinction between large business interests and groups from the third-sector when referring to "private" broadcasting.

On that note, the Radio League's founders — Alan Plaunt and Graham Spry — were highly committed to building support across a broad cross-section of Canadian society, including women's organizations, labour and farm groups, churches and educational institutions. According to Peers (1969, 68–69), they presented the organization as an independent and impartial body representing Canadian public opinion on broadcasting. While officially non-partisan, it was also so in practice, enjoying political backing from prominent figures in both the Conservative and Liberal parties.

Notably, influential organizations within the private business sector also endorsed the concept of public broadcasting. The financial community was well-represented on the Radio League's national council (Peers 1969, 76). Crucially, the League managed to enlist the support of the commercial press. Given that some newspapers owned stations and advocated for private ownership, the press held something of a swing role in determining the organizational model for Canadian broadcasting (Dewar 1982, 42). In Sweden, newspaper publishers supported the idea of a public monopoly company (in which they themselves owned the majority of shares). By early 1931, a similar pattern had emerged in Canada, with only 8 out of

27 newspapers opposing public ownership (Peers 1969, 77).

At this point, the *Financial Post* reported that the government was beginning to tilt toward accepting the principles of the Aird report, having been impressed by “a steady, disinterested, influential lobby” that had garnered nationwide support and exerted constant pressure on ministers and business elites (quoted in Peers 1969, 68). According to Margaret Prang (1965, 31), the Radio League did not create the national sentiment it expressed, but was effective in channeling that sentiment and projecting it onto the broadcasting issue. Put differently, one could say that the League had helped trigger a rally-around-the-flag effect in favor of public broadcasting.

Despite the widespread societal support for the Aird Commission’s conclusions, the future organization of Canadian broadcasting remained unresolved, as a vigorous opposition continued to advocate for maintaining the current system based on private enterprise (O’Brien 1964, 195). In the spring of 1931, the Radio League argued that this opposition stemmed from two main sources:

1. The Canadian Pacific Railway, through newspapers and the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB), employing public methods.
2. The American Radio Group, utilizing subtle lobbying.

Among these, the alliance between the commercial railway company and the CAB was considered the most formidable opponent due to its ties to the Prime Minister (Armstrong 2016, 27). This underscores the study’s point that policymaking on broadcasting is always constrained by past decisions. It is highly unlikely that Canada would have developed a powerful trade organization for private broadcasters — now seeking to block public broadcasting reform — if the government had not maintained a *laissez-faire* policy since 1920. To illustrate this point, consider the situation in Sweden, where no such lobby organization materialized. This was because the Swedish government established a monopoly as early as 1924, expropriating all the local private stations that had conducted pioneering broadcasts in the country.

The Canadian broadcasting question was finally decided in the spring of 1932, after the Conservative government appointed a Spe-

cial Committee on Radio Broadcasting in the House of Commons. The hearings revealed — unsurprisingly — that the Canadian Association of Broadcasters and the Manufacturers' Association advocated for the continuation of the present system. The manufacturers, however, were open to a mixed public-private arrangement with government subsidies, weakening the case for the advocates of *exclusive* private ownership (Peers 1969, 81–85). Instead, the case for public ownership would be strengthened, largely thanks to the activities of the Canadian Radio League, supported by third-sector organizations and expert witnesses, whose statements would decisively tilt the balance in favor of a national radio monopoly modeled on the recommendations in the Aird Report (Vipond 1994, 1).

According to Peers (1969, 90), the testimony generally considered to have made the strongest impression on the members of the Special Committee was that of Graham Spry, one of the co-founders of the Canadian Radio League, on April 18, 1932. In his address, Spry argued that radio was no more a business than the public school system and that a national system of broadcasting necessarily had to be based on the principle of a state monopoly. The key reason was the medium's potential to strengthen the country's national identity:

For a nation, so widespread in its range and so varied in its racial origin, radio broadcasting, intelligently directed, may give us what provincial school systems, local newspapers, and the political system have yet to give us, a single, glowing spirit of nationality making its contribution to the world.¹⁹

At the same time, the representative of the Canadian Radio League identified a major threat to the realization of the vision of broadcasting as a national public service — namely, the alleged collusion between opponents of the Aird Report at home and commercial interests in the United States. Spry argued that Canadian private business interests were collaborating with American radio networks to oppose nationalization and rhetorically questioned the reasons behind this:

¹⁹ *Minutes of Proceedings and Evidence from the Special Committee on Radio Broadcasting*. 1932, April 18. Ottawa: F.A. Acland, p. 546.

Why are the American interests so interested in the Canadian situation? The reason is clear. In the first place, the American chains have regarded Canada as part of their field and consider Canada as in a state of radio tutelage, without talent, resources, or capacity to establish a third chain on this continent.²⁰

Spry claimed to have information that the American radio networks were prepared to — and were already taking concrete steps to — expand into Canada beyond the links they had already established with stations in Montreal and Toronto. Hence, their opposition to the introduction of a publicly owned Canadian chain. According to the co-founder of the Radio League, this situation fundamentally reframed the question of the future of Canadian broadcasting, which could no longer be reduced to a simple choice between private or public ownership at the national level:

The question before this committee is, whether Canada is to establish a chain that is owned and operated by Canadians, or whether it is to be owned and operated by commercial organizations, associated or controlled by American interests? The question is the State or the United States.²¹

In the weeks following the Special Committee's final public session on April 21, 1932, the press speculated on which model the government might adopt. The Canadian Radio League remained uncertain about the intentions of both the committee and the government. While some newspapers suggested that the government was likely to adopt the Canadian Pacific Railway's proposal, others dismissed it as a desperate attempt by the Dominion's largest single company to obstruct the government from taking the actions it had to (Peers 1969, 95).

The final report issued by the Special Committee on May 9, 1932, emphasized the importance of radio broadcasting for national needs and its potential contributions to educational, social, and cultural

²⁰ *Ibidem.*, p. 564.

²¹ *Ibidem.*, p. 565.

development. While acknowledging the achievements of broadcasting pioneers, the committee found that the existing system failed to meet the necessary standards in quality and scope to maximize its benefits. Consequently, the committee recommended the creation of a public broadcasting system consisting of government-owned high-power stations alongside secondary low-power stations designated for community use (Armstrong 2016, 28).

These would be funded through a combination of advertising revenue and license fees. Additionally, a three-member commission — the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Commission (CRBC) — would be granted the authority to regulate and oversee all broadcasting in Canada and to establish a national network service by acquiring all but the smallest private stations (Peers 1969, 96).

The Canadian Radio Broadcasting Act was introduced in the House of Commons on May 18, 1932. In connection with this, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett delivered a speech indicating that the planned expansion of U.S. radio networks into Canada had prompted the Conservative Party leader to reconsider his policy priorities. Having previously been favorably inclined toward a commercial broadcasting model under the auspices of the Canadian Pacific Railway, he now acknowledged the necessity of a unified approach with greater government oversight to counter the American threat:

[T]his country must be assured of complete Canadian control of broadcasting from Canadian sources, free from foreign interference or influence. Without such control radio broadcasting can never become a great agency for communication of matters of national concern and for the diffusion of national thought and ideals.²²

In summary, the development of Canadian broadcasting in the late 1920s and early 1930s illustrates the study's argument that international shocks tend to capture the interest of elected officials and prompt them to adopt a state-led approach. In the Canadian case, the perceived threat from the United States was so significant that it triggered a rally-around-the-flag effect. This was most evident in

²²*House of Common Debates*. 1932, 18 May. 2nd Session, 17th Parliament, Vol. III. Ottawa: F.A. Acland, pp. 3035–3036.

the remarkably broad support enjoyed by the reform movement, the Canadian Radio League, which attracted backing from third-sector groups, business organizations, and government officials across the political spectrum. The same dynamic was reflected in the vote on the 1932 bill in the House of Commons, where it received almost unanimous support. According to Peers (1969, 102), only a single member registered dissent.

At the same time, the rally-around-the-flag effect was evident only in the broad societal support for establishing a national public broadcasting system — not in which groups were actually allowed to participate in its operation. Small, private radio stations that had previously operated in Canada were marginalized as the government prioritized a more unified, state-led broadcasting policy. From being controlled in a rather ad-hoc fashion by a few bureaucrats at the Department of Marine for most of their existence, these grassroots stations were now regulated by a highly visible and publicly appointed Commission with the dual role of regulator and competitor (Vipond 1994, 4). In line with the study's theory on how international shocks can shift the balance of power among different stakeholders, the introduction of the new regulatory body represented a change for the worse for third-sector broadcasters.

By contrast, the slightly larger commercial stations that had operated in the country since the early 1920s would benefit significantly, as it soon became clear that the state alone lacked the capacity to deliver the national broadcasting service it had set out to provide. The Aird Report had stipulated that all private stations should be expropriated. Although the 1932 Broadcasting Act was based on this recommendation, it did not explicitly require that all broadcasting stations be state-owned. As it became evident that the state-run broadcasting company, CRBC, lacked the financial and administrative capacity to establish its own network, the government chose to collaborate with the private stations (Vipond 1992, Chapter XI).

Consequently, on June 23, 1936 — only four years after the decision to establish a public radio monopoly — the Howe government introduced new legislation that reinforced the primacy of the state in broadcasting while simultaneously recognizing the role of private stations in contributing to the system's national objectives (Arm-

strong 2016, 29). This was achieved by integrating them as affiliates of the newly established national public broadcaster, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). The CBC was primarily tasked with program creation, while its private affiliates were responsible for distributing these programs across different regions of the country. At the same time, the CBC was entrusted with the authority to regulate all elements of the radio system — both public and private — to ensure that they collectively served the same national goals.

Thus, the 1936 Radio Broadcasting Act legitimized a distinctive mixed public-private structure, which has since come to be known as the “single” system of Canadian broadcasting. Private stations were allowed to continue operating as affiliates to the public system, delivering centrally produced programs in exchange for subsidies. Combined with increasing advertising revenues, this created the most favorable economic conditions in years for commercial broadcasters, who had been struggling financially in the wake of the stock market crash in 1929 (Vipond 1994, 4). The fact that this “single” system emerged in response to the threat from American radio networks underscores the study’s argument that international shocks represent a type of critical juncture that can empower private businesses if the state relies on them to counter a foreign adversary.

Sweden

INTRODUCTION

Comparative political communications scholars have argued that the Nordic countries have been characterized by a view of media as social institutions rather than merely private businesses, as reflected in the prominent role played by “socially relevant groups” in the governance of public broadcasting (Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 165–187; Humphreys 1996, 155–158; Syvertsen et al. 2014). However, this characterization only partially aligns with the structure of Sweden’s radio system during the interwar period.

While it is true that in 1924 the government established a public broadcasting company to be funded by license fees rather than advertising revenue, no ownership shares in Radiotjänst were allocated

to organized social groups such as trade unions, religious communities, or temperance organizations. Instead, ownership was granted to the press and the radio manufacturing industry. In other words, the governance of broadcasting was characterized by a form of corporatism, but in contrast to the conventional depiction of Swedish media, the state partnered with commercial interests rather than the third sector.

In this chapter, I argue that the puzzle of why Sweden adopted this peculiar broadcasting model can be better understood by analytically distinguishing between the groups involved in program production and those responsible for operating the physical infrastructure required for program delivery. Within the national literature, there is broad consensus that the public-private hybrid solution arose because the policy agenda for broadcasting was largely set by the state Telegraph Administration, which teamed up with newspaper owners to take control of the new medium (see, for instance Elgemyr 1997; Hadenius 1998, 21–22; Heimbürger 1974).

As Julius Rabe (1949, 115) explains, the Telegraph Agency never intended to engage in program production, since radio was seen as having its greatest potential in education. Instead, the public authorities emphasized the unique position of the press to guide radio onto a path of public enlightenment, arguing that their contribution would be more effective if they were allowed to pursue this goal within a company that they owned. With the establishment of Radiotjänst in 1924, commercial newspapers not only secured a monopoly on news broadcasting but also achieved its central goal of eliminating competition for advertising revenue from private radio (Elgemyr 1984, 59). This arrangement laid the foundation for Sweden's distinctive broadcasting model, where a state agency managed the distribution infrastructure, while program production — barred from including advertising — was controlled by a privately owned monopoly.

At the same time, the chapter stresses the need to distinguish between different elements within the “private” sector, as it was not predetermined that the responsibility for program production would be entrusted to commercial interests. Using contemporary newspaper articles and records from the archives of the Ministry of Communications, I highlight that Hjalmar Branting's second Social Democratic

government was, in fact, open to giving third-sector groups a larger role. As pointed out by Karin Nordberg (1998, 35–39), the first regular broadcasts in the country had been conducted by amateur radio clubs, which established small transmitters across the country to broadcast local programs in collaboration with popular movements.

One can only speculate whether the radio clubs might have had a better chance of continuing their grassroots operations if the Social Democrats had not been forced to resign in the spring of 1923 — a year before the Conservatives made their definitive decision on broadcasting. In that event, the structure of Swedish interwar radio might have been more akin to that of France, where the Post and Telecommunications Agency operated the state-run distribution network, while programs were produced by amateurs, artists, and other third sector groups from the vicinity of each station.

In reality, however, the Swedish radio clubs were unable to challenge the alliance between the Telegraph Administration and the press, who successfully leveraged their political connections and issue-specific expertise to protect their vested interests. The broader takeaway is that there was an element of chance in the fact that it was ultimately the newspapers, and not the popular movements, that were tasked with producing programs for radio. This decision would have long-term consequences for the structure of Sweden's broadcasting system and the third sector's opportunities to gain access to it.

THE QUEST FOR CONTROL: A STATE-COMMERCIAL PACT TO CENTRALIZE SWEDISH RADIO

This chapter presents archival evidence from the early years of Swedish radio that strongly supports the prevailing view that the state has played an active role in Scandinavian broadcasting. At the end of the First World War, virtually all radio communication in Sweden was managed by a single state agency: the Telegraph Administration. In addition to operating all coastal stations for wireless telegraphy, the agency was responsible for training all radio operators for the merchant fleet (Heimbürger 1953, 348).

As the official licensing authority for radio since the enactment of the 1907 Wireless Telegraphy Act, its officials had also established

important international connections in the field, making them well aware of the developments unfolding in broadcasting in the United States (Hultén 1980, 121). At a conference in Copenhagen in late 1922, the various Scandinavian telegraph authorities agreed on the principle that broadcasting stations needed to be under state control (Elgemyr 1997, 12). This testifies to the fact that the Swedish agency had a clear vested interest in assuming a central role in this emerging field from the very beginning.

In an interview from early 1923, the head of the Telegraph Administration, Seth Ljungqvist, emphasized the great uncertainty surrounding the nature of broadcasting. Although no one could say for certain what the new medium would be used for, Ljungqvist was convinced that its significance and reach would be immense. According to Olof Hultén (1980, 125), it was precisely the medium's perceived impact that led government officials to emphasize the need for the state to control the messages sent to the public. Among other concerns, the head of the Telegraph Agency viewed with some apprehension the possibility that receivers in western and southern Sweden could pick up signals from foreign stations — a problem for which there was no satisfactory technical solution at the time:

One cannot put up screens in the air to prevent owners of receiving devices on one side of the border from taking in what is transmitted on the other.²³

The control aspect was also a central theme in the Telegraph Agency's first official statement on broadcasting, which was submitted to the government in February 1923. In this memorandum, the agency referred back to the decision of the Copenhagen Conference, citing “political, economic, and social reasons” for why all transmission stations needed to be under the control of the state:

It is inherent in the nature of things that a means of communication, through which one can establish direct simultaneous contact with an unlimited number of the country's inhabitants, could, if not placed in the right

²³Våra erfarenheter hittills: två intervjuer. 1923. *Radio*. Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 9.

hands, be exploited for one-sided political purposes.²⁴

The Administration emphasized that the state in Sweden had so far managed all wireless communications. Therefore, it saw no reason to relinquish control over the most critical aspect of the new medium, namely the transmission stations. The agency thus positioned itself as the obvious candidate to oversee the construction and operation of the radio distribution network. In doing so, the Telegraph Administration simultaneously established two of the key principles of Swedish broadcasting, namely that radio would be operated as a state monopoly and that it would be *exclusively* funded through license fees on receivers (Hadenius 1998, 22).

The Telegraph Authority categorically dismissed the option of funding radio through advertising. The agency pointed to experiences in the United States, where this funding model had allegedly been banned due to the risk of private monopolies. However, the main argument for a license-funded monopoly was that a system based on private licensing would struggle to be economically viable in a sparsely populated country like Sweden:

A system relying primarily, or even significantly, on income from radio advertising would only be viable in the very largest cities, but even there, it must be deemed entirely unfeasible, and any such notion should be firmly dismissed.²⁵

In the eyes of the Telegraph Administration, there were strong social reasons to ensure that broadcasting reached a wider audience, further reinforcing the case for keeping transmission stations under state ownership. Such control would ensure oversight of the content and quality of the programs. This was paramount, as the Administration envisioned that broadcasting would become a cultural force of the utmost importance, with the potential to alleviate the “boredom of rural life.” Above all, the government agency highlighted the importance of radio as an educational tool:

²⁴ *Statement by the Telegraph Administration on the organization of radio broadcasting.* 1923, February 21. RG 1208-01, Vol. A 3-4. Riksarkivet [henceforth RA], p. 10.

²⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 9.

The dissemination of information in the form of lectures on subjects of public interest can hardly be achieved more effectively than through broadcasting.²⁶

Because the new medium was seen as having its greatest potential in education and the dissemination of general information, the Telegraph Administration believed it was essential that programming operations, too, were entrusted to reliable entities:

As developments in this field are expected to lead to the new communication medium being used for education and public enlightenment, it would be prudent for the state to take an active role from the beginning.²⁷

However, the Telegraph Administration did not envision itself becoming involved in program production, as the agency's expertise was primarily in the technical domain. Instead, the plan was for this activity to be carried out by one or several companies that would lease access to the state-owned transmitter stations (Hultén 1980, 126). In other words, the government agency only opposed the involvement of private corporations within its own sphere of interest, namely the management of distribution technology. It did not object to the involvement of profit-driven companies within the realm of programming. This highlights the importance of distinguishing analytically between the production and distribution of programs, as well as the interests associated with each activity.

Specifically, the Telegraph agency proposed that responsibility for radio programming be assigned to a joint-stock company comprising the Swedish radio manufacturing industry and the press, which it saw as key to ensuring the accurate and responsible delivery of information over the airwaves:

There is likely no better provider of news content, which is essential to broadcasting, than the central wire service of the Swedish press. [...] Involving this organization

²⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 7.

²⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 11.

ensures full guarantees of impartiality and objectivity in the selection of news items.²⁸

According to the national literature on early Swedish radio, the Telegraph Agency's emphasis on the press's involvement must be understood in light of the strong ties that existed between public authorities and newspaper publishers at the time (see, for instance, Hadenius 1998; Hultén 1980, 122; Rahbek 2004, 40). These ties dated back at least to the 1860s, considering that the Swedish Telegram Agency (SvT) relied on the state-owned telegraph networks for its operations and, by virtue of its semi-official status, maintained close cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Hadenius 2003, 46).

At the time of broadcasting's emergence, the Swedish wire services were embroiled in a highly contentious conflict that divided the press into two camps. Although the situation calmed in 1921 when the competing agencies merged into Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå (TT), there were strong fears within the press that uncontrolled news dissemination via radio could reignite conflict within the industry (Elgemyr 1984, 53). Additionally, radio advertising posed a potential threat to the financial foundation of newspapers. Against this backdrop, TT had a strong vested interest in ensuring the press's participation in the burgeoning field. As the head of the news agency, Gustaf Reuterswärd, candidly explained in a confidential letter from 1922:

The reason we are interested in this activity is essentially that we wish, in the interest of the press and the public, to control this branch of news dissemination. — quoted in Elgemyr (1984, 52)

The newspapers' concern about avoiding competition from broadcasting thus aligned with the Telegraph Administration's goal of safeguarding radio news from being exploited for propaganda. According to Elgemyr (1997, 24), this was a key reason why the head of the Administration insisted on press involvement as a prerequisite when he initiated concession negotiations with electronics manufacturers AEG and SRA in the fall of 1922.

²⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 21.

Given its essential role in supplying transmitter and receiver equipment, it was inevitable that the Swedish radio industry would be included in the organization of broadcasting in some form. However, an arrangement similar to that in Britain — where private radio manufacturers initially operated the transmitter stations — was not even considered by the Telegraph Board, which was adamant about managing this task itself (Hultén 1980, 125). Instead, the Board envisioned that the primary participation of the radio industry, aside from supplying the “hardware,” would be as co-owners of the concessioned programming company along with the press.

This was precisely the broadcasting model the Swedish government would go on to implement in the fall of 1924. The electronics industry and the press became co-owners of the concessioned programming company, Radiotjänst, while the management of transmitter stations was entrusted to the Telegraph Board. A defining feature of this public-private monopoly was, in other words, that programming was entrusted to commercial interests, while technical operations were handled by a state agency. The participation of the Telegraph Agency and the electronics industry in technical matters was a given from the outset. However, as Elgemyr (1984, 51) notes, the decision to entrust responsibility for radio programming to another mass medium made Sweden unique among countries that established public service monopolies during this period.

According to the national literature, Sweden’s adoption of this unique public-private broadcasting model must be seen in the context of the Telegraph Administration’s central and influential role in radio matters since the early 1900s. As pointed out by Per Rahbek (2004, 41), the agency had gained substantial experience in international communication and deep knowledge of technical developments in the field through its role as the licensing authority for wireless telegraphy since 1907. As the undisputed expert authority on radio matters, the state Telegraph Administration thus had considerable leeway to shape the policy agenda for broadcasting on its own terms (see also Heimbürger 1974).

There are numerous examples of how the Telegraph Administration leveraged its informational advantage to push through its vision of broadcasting. In its memorandum to the government, the agency

emphasized the importance of keeping the distribution infrastructure under state ownership to ensure the necessary control over messages.

However, as pointed out by Hultén (1980, 126), it failed to mention that in Britain, the state's need for control had been addressed without the Post Office directly owning the transmitters. Furthermore, the Administration was highly proactive in forging alliances with stakeholders in civil society and the business sector. For instance, the agency launched the first experimental broadcasts in collaboration with the Swedish Radio Company and various societal groups in religion, science, and the arts, which were enlisted to enrich the programs (Mattsson 1949, 101–105).

Perhaps most notably, that same year, the Telegraph Administration unilaterally initiated concession negotiations with the domestic radio manufacturing industry. In other words, concession negotiations with the private manufacturers began before the broadcasting issue was brought up for public discussion. During these negotiations, the Telegraph Administration insisted that press involvement was a prerequisite for approval (Elgemyr 1997, 24). Against this backdrop, one might get the impression that Sweden's peculiar public-private broadcasting model was largely settled even before the Administration submitted its memorandum to the government in early 1923.

But as Elgemyr (1997, 67) points out, this was only partially true. What had been more or less established by this time was that government involvement and control would be necessary both during the establishment phase of broadcasting and for its ongoing operation. This was particularly true for the construction and management of the transmission network, where it was a foregone conclusion that the Telegraph Administration would hold a monopoly. Neither was there any question that the operation would be financed in any way other than through receiver licenses, given the Administration's firm rejection of advertising. However, it was not a given that *programming* would be organized as a monopoly. Despite broad recognition of the medium's potential impact and a shared consensus among stakeholders on the need for some form of control, the Telegraph Authority had considered the option of allowing multiple entities to rent access to its transmitters (Hultén 1980, 125). Consequently, it remained a more open question who or which groups would assume responsibil-

ity for content production, although the newspapers clearly held an advantageous position.

In the remainder of this chapter, I explore a counterfactual scenario, considering what *alternative* model Sweden might have adopted for radio broadcasting if program operations had not ultimately been handed over to the press. I highlight the fact that Sweden's very first experimental broadcasts were carried out by local amateur radio clubs with close ties to the temperance movement. These clubs drew inspiration from the amateur radio initiatives that had driven the introduction of broadcasting in the United States and, like their American counterparts, played a key role in sparking public interest in the new medium.

The radio clubs did not oppose the idea of state-owned transmission stations (Elgemyr 1997, 57). However, they strongly objected to organizing programming as a monopoly. Had these grassroots organizations prevailed, it is conceivable that Swedish broadcasting might have developed along similar lines to France, where local artists and amateurs oversaw programming at stations operated by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. This underscores the importance of distinguishing between content and carriage, as well as whether these activities are carried out by the state, private businesses, or third-sector groups. By examining the interplay between these elements in their original historical context, we can better understand why it was ultimately the commercial press, rather than the popular movements, that were entrusted with producing Swedish radio programs.

THE POLICY PATH NOT TAKEN: PLACING RADIO PROGRAMMING IN THE HANDS OF THE THIRD SECTOR

In line with the theory that revolutionary communication technologies tend to empower third-sector groups to thrive in programming niches, around thirty amateur radio stations broadcasting local programs were established across Sweden in the years leading up to 1925, when Radiotjänst launched the first official public broadcasts. As Karin Nordberg (1998, 35–39) details in her dissertation, these grassroots stations were founded by radio clubs closely tied to popular movements, drawing inspiration from the rapid expansion of amateur

broadcasting in the United States. The Telegraph Agency did not object to this as long as the stations remained experimental (Hultén 1980, 122–123).

Despite the broadcasts' rudimentary nature, these radio clubs played a key role in fueling public interest in radio, as evidenced by the fact that the number of licensed receivers increased tenfold in just one year. Additionally, *Svenska Radioklubben* — the largest and most nationally oriented of these clubs — amassed as many as 1,200 members at its peak (Hadenius 1998, 16–17). The newspapers referred to the development as a “radio mania.”

One who was positively inclined toward the popular movements' use of the new medium was Anders Örne, minister of communications in Hjalmar Branting's second Social Democratic cabinet. According to Elgemyr (1997, 63), Örne did not necessarily view broadcasting as a competitor to the popular enlightenment movement or civic associations. Rather, the communications minister envisioned radio as a valuable tool for rural areas, which lacked the cultural resources available in larger cities. This perspective was reflected in an interview conducted with the minister in early 1923, just before the Telegraph Board issued its first statement on the broadcasting issue:

The city dweller has entirely different ways to pass the evening [...] attending meetings, theaters, and cinemas. In the countryside, however, people are more isolated and therefore have a greater need for this new means of communication, which connects them to the outside world faster than anything else.²⁹

As a journalist, the Social Democratic communications minister had published several writings on the ideas of cooperation and the movement's need for its own press. In other words, he strongly emphasized the role of the press in democratic work and public opinion formation (Hultén 1980, 124). The minister expressed similar ideas in the interview with the Swedish Radio Club's official magazine regarding the role broadcasting could play in the work of popular movements. From this, it is clear that Örne did not necessarily envision radio be-

²⁹Våra erfarenheter hittills: två intervjuer. *Radio*. 1923. Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 8.

ing organized as a monopoly; the minister believed that a system with multiple outlets could promote greater pluralism in programming:

Perhaps not everyone finds it so enjoyable to receive a temperance lecture or a political speech on their wireless.³⁰

However, we will never know whether the popular movements could have played a greater role in a more decentralized Swedish radio broadcasting system under a Social Democratic administration. In April 1923, just weeks after the Telegraph Administration submitted its statement, Hjalmar Branting's second government was forced to resign, leaving the broadcasting issue in the hands of Ernst Trygger's Conservative government (Hadenius 1998, 22).

During a government meeting on June 29, 1923, officials reviewed and debated stakeholder responses to the Telegraph Administration's statement. It soon became clear that the incoming government would prioritize control (Hultén 1980, 128–129). This is reflected in a statement recorded in the cabinet minutes by the new Minister of Communications, Sven Lübeck, which closely aligned with the Administration's proposal for a centralized broadcasting model with substantive government involvement:

The significance of the new means of communication fully justifies state intervention to establish a purposeful arrangement of the activity in question and to place it under state control from the outset.³¹

The Minister particularly stressed the importance of state-owned transmitter stations for military reasons and the ability to reach all people:

Given the vast potential to reach the public with all kinds of messages from transmitting stations, it is essential that

³⁰ *Ibidem*.

³¹ *Statement by the Minister of Communications before the cabinet meeting on the organization of radio broadcasting*. 1923, June 23. RG 1208-01, Vol. A 3-4. RA, p. 12.

the state retains the right to oversee and regulate their construction and use for radio broadcasting purposes.³²

Regarding funding models, the Conservative minister of communications rejected advertising-supported broadcasting, agreeing with the Board's preference for financing through license fees (Hadenius 1998, 23). However, the minister refrained from taking a position on the crucial point of whether programs should be managed by a single company or multiple companies. But as pointed out by Olof Hultén (1980, 129), the government never returned to the monopoly question. Instead, the matter was left to the Telegraph Administration for reconsideration.

According to Hadenius (1998, 21–23), the government's decision to allow the Telegraph Administration to continue leading the ongoing concession negotiations reflects the passive role politicians took in the early organization of radio broadcasting. This can be understood in the context that, unlike France and the United States, Sweden did not experience an international shock. While this did not prevent policymakers from advocating for a strongly state-led and unified broadcasting model, I argue that this outcome was driven more by the policy preferences of influential vested interests than by an overriding foreign threat.

The state-run Telegraph Administration largely set the agenda for Swedish broadcasting by leveraging its technical expertise and forging alliances with key commercial interests, notably the radio manufacturing industry and the press. Against this backdrop, in October 1924, the Conservative government decided on a public-private monopoly in which the Telegraph Administration handled the technical aspects, while programming was entrusted to *Radiotjänst*, with the press as the majority owner Hadenius (1998, 29). In sum, this chapter has illustrated how strategic actors can decisively shape outcomes during moments of institutional creation and that Sweden could very well have developed a more decentralized radio model, granting greater influence to the popular movements from the third sector rather than the commercial press.

³² *Statement by the Minister of Communications before the cabinet meeting on the organization of radio broadcasting.* 1923, June 23. RG 1208-01, Vol. A 3-4. RA, p. 12.

France

INTRODUCTION

There is a widespread conception within comparative political communications research that French media is difficult to classify, but that the governance of broadcasting has been characterized by a high degree of state “dirigisme” (see, for instance, Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 90; Humphreys 1996 and Kelly 1983). This image aligns fairly well with the early development of radio in France, as depicted by media historians like Jean-André Tudesq (1977, 381–382).

Shortly after the breakthrough of wireless telegraphy in the early twentieth century, the new technology was subordinated to the state monopoly that for decades had been applied to telegraphy and other communications networks. The decree of February 7, 1903, was the first to regulate wireless communications and established radio as a public service under the authority of the Minister of Post and Telegraphs (PTT) (Brochand 1994a, 58–59). As Pascal Griset (1983, 88) points out, there were important companies in the electronics industry that advocated for private radio, but during this period, they were exclusively engaged in manufacturing devices. These firms were not permitted to own or operate their own transmission stations, as this remained a prerogative of the government.

The firm control that the state exercised over wireless between 1900 and 1920 nevertheless stands in stark contrast to the development of French radio *broadcasting* during the interwar period. Christian Brochand (1994a, 62–63) notes that, early on, the new medium was subordinated to the existing monopoly legislation, but that in practice, France failed to measure up to the comparatively well-funded and centralized systems of Britain or Germany.

Instead, the 1920s and 1930s saw the consolidation of a peculiar broadcasting system that allowed a diverse array of societal groups to participate in the creation of radio programs and the day-to-day management of stations (Scales 2018, 14–15). These stations — whether owned by the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs or private firms — had a catchment area on a regional rather than national scale. This, argues Cécile Méadel (1994, 375–377), testifies to the local nature of early French radio and that policymakers lacked a strong

conception of broadcasting as a “public service” — a portrayal that stands in complete opposition to the conventional characterization of France as “dirigiste”.

This chapter argues that France’s radical transition from a state monopoly to a decentralized and predominantly private interwar radio system can be better understood by considering the role of international shocks in provoking institutional change (see Neulander 2009, 185–191). Just as in the United States, there was a significant fear among French policymakers after the First World War that the strategically important field of international radio communication would be dominated by other major powers. Despite this, large parts of the French state apparatus opposed, up until the very end, the option of relaxing the monopoly as a way to address the crisis.

Documents from the extra-parliamentary commission on wireless telegraphy reveal that this resistance only began to wane when high-ranking officials within the post and telegraph administration realized that France would inevitably fall behind other nations unless the radio field was opened up to private exploitation. On October 29, 1920, the PTT Minister signed an agreement with the *Compagnie Générale de la Télégraphie Sans Fil* (CSF) that effectively broke the state monopoly and granted the radio-electrical trust a concession to establish radio installations for communication with foreign stations (Tudesq 1977, 384).

Just as in the United States, the threat from international competition thus led French policymakers to reassess their earlier objectives in the radio sector and the policy instruments they were willing to employ to achieve them, paving the way for an increased role for private interests.

The chapter simultaneously argues for the importance of analytically distinguishing between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector and identifying which groups were responsible for either the production or distribution of programs. This approach enables a better understanding of the structure of France’s interwar radio system and the role of state agencies, private businesses, and third-sector groups in shaping it.

Within the national literature, there has been a debate about what constituted the central line of conflict in the struggle over early

French radio. According to Scales (2018, 14), the conventional historical account has highlighted the competition between private and public stations as the key dynamic (see, for instance Brochand 1994a; Ulmann-Mauriat 1999). By contrast, radio historian Cécile Méadel (1994, 613) argues that the main conflict was not between public and private, but between those advocating for a “radio of the Nation” and those supporting a “radio of amateurs”.

These conflicting perspectives are more reconcilable if we consider the fact that the majority of authorized radio stations were owned by the state or commercial companies, while the programs broadcast from these stations were predominantly produced by local artists, voluntary associations and amateurs. Drawing on original archival material from the main commissions of inquiry on radio from the interwar years, this chapter illustrates how two parallel struggles unfolded between the state and the “private” sector during the final decades of the Third Republic.

On one hand, a conflict arose between commercial radio stations and the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, which sought to re-establish its statutory monopoly over the management of the radio communications network. On the other hand, the ministry attempted to wrest control over program production from the local management councils. However, these efforts at re-centralization were only partially successful, as the non-governmental actors responsible for both of these activities put up strong resistance against the PTT. As a result, France was left with a broadcasting system that, until the Popular Front government’s resignation in 1938, had a tripartite structure involving governmental, commercial, and third sector organizations that fulfilled distinct functions.

THE PRE-BROADCASTING YEARS: AN EXTERNAL THREAT UNDERMINES THE FRENCH STATE MONOPOLY ON RADIO

In line with the prevailing view of French media governance as “dirigiste,” France became one of the first countries in Europe to place radio under a state monopoly. The decree of February 7, 1903, was based on a telegraphy law from 1837, which stipulated that communication links were, as a basic rule, a governmental matter (Emery

1969, 238).

By extending these provisions to wireless, the government aimed to ensure that private firms' participation in this burgeoning field — if allowed at all — remained subordinate to the paramount needs of the state. As in Sweden, the main stakeholders were the Telegraph Administration (PTT) and the armed forces, which saw significant potential in radio as a means to streamline their civilian and military communications activities. Private firms, by contrast, were not allowed to operate wireless facilities, but they played a key role in *supplying* the government agencies with radio equipment.

Initially, however, the French radio manufacturing industry was far more rudimentary than its British or German counterparts, causing the country to lag behind in the development of wireless telegraphy. This was exploited by international firms such as Marconi, which repeatedly offered the Army and the PTT the opportunity to purchase its devices, but to no avail. Government officials feared that the British-controlled manufacturer, if it gained a foothold in the French market, would use its patent rights to establish a manufacturing monopoly similar to what it had achieved in Canada. This was something that the government wanted to avoid at all costs, as it did not want such a critical infrastructure to be controlled by a foreign company (Brochand 1994a, 58–59).

Against this backdrop, French radio only truly gained momentum around 1910, when domestic manufacturers such as the *Société française radioélectrique* (SFR) and the *Compagnie générale radio électrique* (CGR) scaled up their operations and began collaborating more actively with the state authorities (Ibid., 69).

Just like in the United States, the ties between the public and private sectors deepened during the First World War, as a planned radio economy was established to meet the armed forces' pressing need for communication devices. This effort was led by the Technical Directorate of Military Radiotelegraphy, which played a key role in refining the technology. However, the most significant technological advancements came from the private manufacturing sector, which dramatically scaled up its production of devices and began to seriously catch up with foreign competitors like Marconi and Telefunken.

A key event in this development was when the country's primary

radio-electric companies joined a patent trust under the auspices of the *Compagnie Générale de la Télégraphie Sans Fil* (CSF) in January 1918 (Tudesq 1977, 367–368). The CSF-SFR trust quickly became the leading radio manufacturing company in France and the third largest in the world, meaning that, by the time of the Armistice, France could finally boast an internationally competitive radio industry (Brochand 1994a, 71). This, in turn, sparked a debate about the private sector's role in radio during peacetime and how the existing monopoly legislation should be interpreted.

The background to this debate was that the accelerating development of wireless telegraphy during the war had highlighted the strategic importance of radio, not least as a means of rapid international exchange of information. Above all, there was a pressing need to establish uninterrupted and reliable connections with the United States following its entry into the war in 1917. This was why reason the Army had begun constructing a powerful wireless telegraph station for commercial service with the Americas in Croix d'Hins, outside Bordeaux (Tudesq 1977, 383).

The initial plan was for the Croix d'Hins station to be operated in peacetime by the Post and Telegraph Authority, which had been designated as the responsible body for radio communications under the 1903 decree. Within the War Department, however, there was significant skepticism about the PTT's ability to oversee the delicate and challenging installation work of the highly complex 2,000-horsepower plant. According to a 1920 report by General Gustave Ferrié, existing regulations prevented the PTT Administration from recruiting the technical personnel needed for the station's future operation. The broader concern was that this lack of capacity could increase pressure on the government to relinquish its monopoly on radio and, consequently, its control over a key strategic asset:

This solution [relaxing the monopoly] would present very serious drawbacks from a national perspective: the events of the war have amply demonstrated the enormous military, political, and commercial importance of long-distance communications via wireless telegraphy. [...] It would, therefore, be profoundly immoral and disheartening [...] for the country to be ultimately exploited solely for the

material profit of a private company, meaning for the benefit of a small group of individuals, some of whom might not even be French nationals.³³

The War Department's concerns should be understood in light of the fact that both domestic companies and international manufacturers like Thomson-Houston had begun lobbying the PTT for a concession following the Armistice. As we saw in the case study on the United States, the race for international wireless communications had entered a critical phase in the summer of 1920, just months before the inauguration of broadcasting. The main contenders in this struggle were the American RCA, the German Telefunken, and Marconi, supported by the British government.

The only real challenger was CSF, but the French radio-electric trust had so far not enjoyed the same level of political support as its foreign competitors (Brochand 1994a, 77). The conglomerate had repeatedly approached the PTT authorities with requests for a concession to construct and operate the nation's facilities for international wireless communications, though to no avail. In a letter to the CSF director in April 1920, the PTT Undersecretary even rejected the proposal for a public-private partnership:

[I]t would be highly desirable to open private correspondence with the United States via the Croix d'Hins station as soon as it is operational [...] However, I must inform you that it does not seem feasible to entrust the operation of radiotelegraph stations to a company, even under a shared-management arrangement.³⁴

In other words, the public authorities had no intention of transferring the operations to a private company, let alone a foreign one (Griset 1983, 88). PTT officials were aware that this approach had been adopted by the British government to meet the needs of the Empire.

³³ *Report by the War Department regarding the provisional plans for organizing wireless telegraphy.* 1920, May 3. RG F90, Vol. 20815, Archives Nationales [henceforth AN], pp. 4–5.

³⁴ *Letter from the PTT Under-Secretary to CSF concerning the company's proposal to handle long-distance connections.* 1920, April 30. RG F90, Vol. 20815. AN, p. 1.

However, the head of the Telegraph Administration rejected such a model for France, citing the monopoly legislation and radio's importance for national security. This is evident from the minutes of the meeting of the extra-parliamentary committee on wireless telegraphy on 30 July 1920:

[T]here is no reason to justify the abandonment of this monopoly, as general safety reasons would oppose the relinquishment of wireless telegraphy operations to services other than those of the State.³⁵

Just a few months later, however, the PTT undersecretary had completely reconsidered his previous staunch opposition to relaxing the state monopoly. At the extra-parliamentary committee's final meeting on October 27, 1920, the representatives agreed to sign a convention with CSF, authorizing the company to establish wireless installations for communications with foreign stations (Tudesq 1977, 384). According to Pascal Griset (1983, 90), the concession was a compromise that paved the way for substantial state control. For instance, the PTT administration needed to approve all installations and could mandate CSF to integrate with its services. Most importantly, the authorization was intended as a temporary solution: the agreement stipulated that the facilities would revert to the state free of charge after 30 years.

Critical to the changed stance was the realization among officials within the PTT and the armed forces that the question of radio governance could not be reduced to a conflict between governmental and industrial interests. The larger issue at stake was France's continued ability to exert influence on the international stage. It was only when it dawned on policymakers that France was bound to fall behind the other major powers unless the private sector was involved that their resistance to entrusting this strategically important operation to CSF began to wane.

Contributing to the sense of urgency was the fact that France was almost entirely dependent on foreign submarine cables at the time. The growing international competition in radio after the First World

³⁵ *Meeting Minutes of the Extra-Parliamentary Commission on Wireless Telegraphy*. 1920, July 30. RG F90, Vol. 20815. AN, pp. 6-7.

War thus served as a critical juncture, pushing French policymakers to reevaluate their earlier goals and the policy instruments they were willing to use to achieve them. This, in turn, laid the foundation for the mixed public-private structure that would define French radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s.

Policymakers' shift in attitude toward maintaining the state monopoly can be traced to the late summer of 1920 and the second meeting of the Technical Section of the Commission on Wireless Telegraphy. At this meeting, Paul Brenot, director of the manufacturer SFR, emphasized that the nation's substandard infrastructure for wireless communications hindered French industrialists from meeting their foreign clients' needs for fast and reliable telegram transmissions. Furthermore, foreign companies were reluctant to collaborate with the state.

Brenot did not dispute the principle of the monopoly. However, he argued that it was indispensable, at the very least, for French wireless firms to be granted the right to establish their own facilities on French soil to support their operations abroad. At the same time, the former military engineer emphasized that improving France's infrastructure for international communications was a concern for all French citizens and therefore could not be reduced to a struggle between vested interests in the public and private sectors:

The issue goes beyond industrial interests. The importance of wireless telegraphy as a tool of political influence and as a factor in economic prosperity is now beyond question. It is imperative to counter foreign competition immediately. This is a matter of national interest.³⁶

The deputy Pierre Robert remarked that if the matter was truly so urgent, it was necessary to reach a swift decision on how to improve the country's communications infrastructure. However, since this would likely involve committing state expenditures, the members of the sub-commission did not believe it was their place to make a hasty decision. Instead, the matter was referred to the undersecretary of

³⁶ *Minutes of the second meeting of the Technical Sub-Commission of the Extra-Parliamentary Commission on Wireless Telegraphy*. 1920, August 2. RG F90, Vol. 20815. AN, pp. 2-4.

the Post and Telegraph Authority, Louis Deschamps, who, just days earlier, had ruled out the option of private exploitation.

It nevertheless appears as though Deschamps was impacted by the sub-commission's conclusions regarding the urgency of the situation and the potential necessity for unconventional solutions. Just weeks later, the head of the PTT wrote a letter to the Permanent Market Commission, emphasizing that the organization of the nation's domestic radiotelegraph system was closely intertwined with the broader issue of France's position in the global telecommunications landscape. In light of the rapid advancements in international communications following the Second World War, the undersecretary warned that France risked losing its competitive edge unless it adapted to the evolving demands of the field:

Radio telegraphy, which excels at both long-range and short-range transmission, places our nation in a competitive position. I believe it is essential to maintain this advantage while also ensuring that no opportunity for economic refinement is overlooked, so that our country does not fall behind. This effort must be pursued with determination and without delay to keep pace with advancements.³⁷

According to Deschamps, a major challenge lay in the fact that all other major powers had entrusted the operation of wireless telegraphy stations to private companies, which typically maintained exclusive relationships with one another. This left the PTT authority facing a difficult dilemma in managing the critical telegram traffic with the United States: either negotiate with the French company CSF, or risk the cessation of the Franco-American radio connection. The latter scenario was categorically dismissed:

It is not acceptable to consider this second possibility, which would amount to the abandonment of our operational means at a time when it is more essential than ever

³⁷*Letter from the Under-Secretary of PTT to the President of the Permanent Market Commission regarding the need to involve private interests in international wireless communications.* 1920, August 28. RG F90, Vol. 20815. AN, p. 1.

to enhance the speed of telegraph traffic.³⁸

In light of the need for a swift solution, the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs declared that it was in his authority's interest to negotiate with the *Compagnie Générale* — a solution that had also been recommended by the Extra-Parliamentary Committee. Consequently, on October 29, 1920, Deschamps signed an agreement with CSF for the construction, installation, and operation of two stations for international wireless telegraphy.

With this decision, the foundation was laid for a radically different French radio policy than the one that had prevailed since the early days of wireless telegraphy. What had once been a monopoly system where only government agencies could operate their own wireless stations had now expanded to include large commercial corporations. The lack of personnel with the necessary technical expertise at the PTT Authority was a key factor preventing France from adopting the solution long considered in the United States, namely government ownership. French politicians were essentially forced to relinquish the monopoly after the First World War to avoid falling behind in the accelerating competition within the wireless field.

Overall, this illustrates the study's theoretical point about how critical junctures related to national security and geopolitical pressures tend to prompt politicians to reassess their goals and reconsider the policy instruments they are willing to use to achieve them. In France's case, maintaining the state monopoly was no longer the overriding goal once it became clear to policymakers that the country would inevitably lag behind other major powers unless the wireless field was opened to private exploitation.

This further underscores the study's argument about the effects of critical junctures on the power relations between the state, private businesses, and the third sector. In France, the signing of the Deschamps convention deepened the partnership between the state and commercial interests, empowering the latter. At the same time, the state could now claim a strategically important asset in the form of a globally competitive radio industry. The third sector, however, was not included as part of the compromise.

³⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 2.

According to Brochand (1994a, 71), the signing of the so-called Deschamps agreement sent shockwaves across France. The under-secretary faced criticism both internally from the PTT administration and from left-wing parties, as CSF had connections with the Radio Corporation of America. They argued that the agreement infringed on the state's radio monopoly and granted a private firm a quasi-monopoly over wireless communications with foreign countries (Tudesq 1977, 385). Among the harshest critics were Léon Blum and Édouard Herriot, who accused Deschamps of "selling France by pieces" (Griset 1983, 92).

However, the existing radio legislation was vague regarding the ramifications of the monopoly. Hence, when the *Conseil d'État* issued its opinion on whether the agreement with CSF was consistent with the PTT administration's licensing powers under the 1903 decree, the response was affirmative:

[T]he proposed agreement with the Compagnie Générale de TSF does not require legislative ratification, as it does not impose financial obligations on the State. It falls entirely under the authority of the government and the responsibilities of the Secretary of State for Posts, Telegraphs, and Telephones.³⁹

Although the PTT's agreement with CSF had originally been intended as a provisional solution to secure the viability of the country's international telegram traffic, it would prove easier said than done for state authorities to halt the expansion of private interests in the radio sector once they had relinquished their monopoly.

THE BEGINNINGS OF FRENCH BROADCASTING: A TRIPARTITE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE TAKES SHAPE

The challenge of keeping private interests out of the radio landscape extended beyond international communications via wireless telegraphy, as broadcasting experienced its breakthrough in the United

³⁹Legal opinion by *Conseil d'État* and the legal council on whether parliamentary approval is necessary for the validity of the proposed agreement between the State and CSF. 1920, October 28. RG F90, Vol. 20815. AN, p. 1–2.

States shortly after the signing of the Deschamps Convention. In other words, it took only weeks after an external threat to France's national autonomy steered the country onto a new policy trajectory before the radio system faced yet another exogenous shock — this time of a technological nature.

As seen in the preceding chapters, the revolutionary aspect of this innovation was that it, virtually overnight, marked a shift from a technical paradigm based on point-to-point communication to a state where a single transmitter could reach a broader audience. The birth of broadcasting thus constituted a critical juncture because the new medium completely transformed the technical environment, rendering existing regulatory frameworks ineffective.

Initially, French policymakers struggled to distinguish between the two forms of radio communication (Tudesq 1977, 383–384). This was reflected in the fact that the decrees issued between 1921 and 1922 to govern the earliest experimental broadcasts failed to recognize that the new medium was a form of mass communication (see Méadel 1994, 23; Scales 2018, 27). As a result of the ambiguity concerning what the experimental radio stations *were* and which legal provisions were applicable, the PTT authority exercised its licensing powers based on the same principles that had recently guided the concession to CSF (Brochand 1994a, 62–63). Consequently, the Telegraph Administration adopted a relatively liberal policy, similar to that initially implemented by its Swedish counterpart. As we saw in the case study on Sweden, this policy meant that broadcasting in the country was pioneered by radio clubs tied to popular movements.

Similarly, French wireless amateurs thrived in the early years of broadcasting, amid the confusion between radiotelegraphy and the new medium. As in the United States, individuals who had learned about wireless during the war formed clubs with experimental licenses, while other hobbyists outright disregarded the licensing requirements and set up small broadcasting stations on their own (Brochand 1994a, 102). Most of these stations were low-power, with a range limited to the immediate surroundings of the city where they were located. After the Armistice, these amateurs became an important customer base for major radio-electric manufacturers, including SFR, which also established experimental stations and primarily fi-

nanced their operations through advertising revenues.

This development aligns with the theory that revolutionary communication technologies tend to empower actors within “private” broadcasting, both commercial companies and groups from the third sector — often to the detriment to the state. Indeed, the government largely remained passive in the face of individuals and companies defying the prohibition against regular private broadcasts, allowing these groups to gain a foothold at an early stage (Brochand 1994a, 102–103). But while the PTT administration responded far more reactively to the development of broadcasting than its Swedish counterpart, French government authorities were not entirely absent from the field. The military had conducted broadcasts from the Eiffel Tower in 1921, while the PTT authority began airing educational programs and academic lectures from its station at its technical university in the spring of 1923 (Browne 1989, 66).

It was at this point that broadcasting truly gained momentum in France, and the realization dawned that it was a form of mass communication. However, as state trials, commercial ventures, and wireless amateurs expanded in scope and began to resemble regular broadcasts, the radio system grew increasingly disorderly (Brochand 1994a, 62–63). It had become clear to French policymakers that existing regulatory approaches to radio had become obsolete. Consequently, they were forced to explore alternative means of intervention, in line with the theoretical expectations regarding the effects of technological critical junctures on the broader policymaking environment.

The decree of November 24, 1923, was the first to regulate the relationship between private and public radio stations intended for “transmissions of communications of general interest to the public” (Méadel 1994, 25). Through this, the government extended the principles of telegraph legislation from the middle of the nineteenth century to also encompass mass communication via the airwaves, thereby reaffirming the longstanding state monopoly on communications.

At the same time, the operating conditions were set in a liberal manner, allowing the PTT minister to issue private licenses as an exception to the monopoly. This relatively liberal arrangement laid the foundation for what has come to be known as France’s regime of *liberté contrôlée*. The cornerstone of this regime was that the state

reserved the right to regulate the system as a whole, while private companies and radio amateurs were permitted to set up and run stations temporarily and on a revocable basis (Méadel 1994, 25).

In other words, this foundational decision on broadcasting was based on the same principles of public-private cooperation that had informed the recent agreement between the PTT authority and *Compagnie Générale* in international wireless communication. Taken together, this illustrates the study's argument about how past decisions shape subsequent policymaking by embedding vested interests within existing institutions.

According to the standard historical account of French interwar broadcasting, the 1923 decree marked the beginning of a growing conflict between private and public interests in the radio sector. Christian Brochand (1994a, 135) argues that the postal administration's primary goal was to establish a more coherent and homogeneous service operated by the state, independent of commercial concerns. Operators of private stations, on the other hand, sought to profit from advertising (see also Scales 2018, 14; Ulmann-Mauriat 1999). This perspective on the main political cleavage in French interwar radio thus aligns with the conventional distinction between "public service" broadcasting and "free market" systems.

By contrast, radio historian Cécile Méadel (1994, 613) argues that the key conflict was not between public and private interests but rather between those advocating for a "radio of the Nation" and those supporting a "radio of amateurs." In the remainder of this chapter, I argue that these conflicting perspectives become more reconcilable when considering that the majority of authorized radio stations were owned by the state or commercial companies, while the programs broadcast from these stations were predominantly produced by local artists, voluntary associations, and amateurs. With this in mind, the chapter illustrates how two parallel struggles unfolded between the state and the "private" radio sector during the final decades of the Third Republic.

On one hand, a conflict emerged between commercial radio stations and the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs, which sought to reassert its statutory monopoly over the management of the radio communications network. On the other hand, the ministry attempted to

wrest control over program production from the local management councils. In sum, the analysis of these parallel power struggles demonstrates how distinguishing analytically between the production and distribution of programs — and whether these functions were carried out by state agencies, private corporations, or the third sector — can provide a better understanding of the policy dynamics that shaped French interwar radio.

If we begin with the conflict between the state and commercial corporations on the “hardware” side, the primary representative of the radio manufacturing industry during the 1920s and 1930s was the *Syndicat professionnel des industries radioélectriques* (SPIR). As in other countries, French manufacturers were eager to safeguard the right to private radio broadcasting, as they had a vested interest in commercially exploiting the medium to promote their devices and sell advertising (Emery 1969, 239). Following the decree of November 1923, private stations began popping up across the country.

The rapid expansion of commercial radio prompted government authorities to respond, as they did not want to fall behind. The first government to attempt a more coordinated approach, positioning the state as the principal actor in broadcasting, was the left-wing alliance Cartel des Gauches (Méadel 1994, 26). Starting in 1924, the government began drafting a plan for a national network that would provide all French citizens with opportunities for intellectual and social education through broadcasting. However, the draft legislation was never submitted to parliament, as the government collapsed in April the following year. Additionally, the Chamber of Deputies refused to allocate the necessary funds. As a result, the PTT administration had to settle for a more modest network with lower power and quality than initially envisioned (Brochand 1994a, 135).

As a sign of how uncoordinated French broadcasting was in its early years, the distribution of state and private stations was highly uneven. Most were concentrated in the south of France, where several cities had both a private and a public station, while many areas in the north had no stations at all (Méadel 1994, 611).

Fast-forwarding to the early 1930s, a dozen larger commercial stations had managed to establish themselves, albeit under restrictions that prevented them from fully outcompeting the state stations

(Méadel 1994, 19–20). From this point on, the PTT administration intensified its efforts to centralize the radio network. In 1930, a commission was appointed to investigate the technical feasibility of constructing a government-owned and operated network that would cover all of France (Brochand 1994a, 153–154). However, implementing the so-called Ferrié Plan proved far more complicated than state authorities had anticipated, as the PTT administration lacked the necessary resources (Brochand 1994a, 159–162).

The result was yet another period of paralysis, where French broadcasting remained highly uncertain, with no clear political consensus on the relationship between commercial and public stations. This state of paralysis in controlling distribution technology largely persisted until the final years of the Third Republic. Despite repeated attempts by state authorities to centralize the distribution network, the system retained its mixed public-commercial structure, originally established following the Deschamps Convention of 1920.

When it came to control over programming, French broadcasting was characterized from its earliest days by a large number of amateurs who set up stations, often without authorization. Since these third-sector groups had far greater opportunities to establish themselves compared to their counterparts in Sweden, they were also able to develop valuable expertise in program production — an area where the PTT administration largely lacked competence. As a result, programming activities at each station were led by the same enthusiasts and local voluntary associations that had originally kickstarted French radio a few years earlier (Méadel 1994, 27).

This informal organizational structure became more formalized with the Decree-Law of 1926. It stipulated that while the state would manage the stations, the design and production of programs should be entrusted to groups representing the public interest, including general-interest associations, authors, composers, and artists (Méadel 1994, 27). However, these third groups were now required to operate within so-called *associations gérantes*, effectively legalizing the model that had already existed in practice. What was peculiar about this model was that third-sector groups managed programming for *both* private and state-run stations.

The 1930s nevertheless saw a growing conflict between the third

sector and the state-run PTT administration, which became increasingly frustrated with the fact that the presidents of local managing councils were ruling their stations like autocratic feudal lords isolated on their lands. This was increasingly perceived as an obstacle to the government's efforts to establish a more professionalized and unified public service, modeled after the BBC (Méadel 1994, 108–111).

The first significant step toward wresting control over programming from the local management councils was taken by PTT Minister André Mallarmé, who served in Gaston Doumergue's second administration. The most controversial decision he made during his brief term in office was to dissolve the program-producing managing associations altogether. His intention was to establish entirely new councils directly under his authority. For example, the minister would have the right to appoint both a director and an accountant for each station (Méadel 1994, 45–51).

However, Mallarmé faced widespread criticism for his decrees, with the strongest opposition coming from the umbrella organization for the program-producing associations, the *Fédération Nationale de la Radiodiffusion*. A few weeks after the publication of Mallarmé's decrees, on October 21, 1934, the Federation sent a letter to all parliamentarians, urging them to block the proposal. They voiced concern over what was seen as creeping statism behind the proposed reforms of the management councils:

[T]hese decrees contain nothing less than a model for managing the national broadcasting network inspired by theories of near-absolute state control.⁴⁰

In the end, the opposition to Mallarmé's proposed reform proved too widespread for the PTT minister to proceed with his initiative. Moreover, when the Doumergue government fell on November 8, 1934, the PTT minister was forced to resign in favor of Georges Mandel, who immediately acceded to the protests and promised to present a new bill that the volunteer associations could accept (Méadel 1994, 48).

⁴⁰Letter from the *Fédération Nationale de Radiodiffusion* regarding frustration with the statism underlying the decrees of the Minister of PTT. 1934, October 21. RG 20000417, Vol. 11. AN, p. 1.

In summary, the federation of managing associations played a central role in organizing resistance against the decrees from PTT ministers that would have stripped them of their authority over programming. This illustrates the study's argument about how interest groups embedded in national institutions at an earlier stage can sustain path dependence by blocking reform attempts. In France's case, it was third-sector actors who blocked reform attempts in radio programming, while commercial firms primarily challenged the state's control over the underlying distribution infrastructure. Given how entrenched these "private" vested interests were within their respective spheres of intervention, it would take an exogenous systemic shock for the government to dismantle their institutional privileges, paving the way for a paradigm shift in the governance of French broadcasting. This story will be explored in the next empirical chapter on the advent of television in the postwar period.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have seen that there was much greater variation in how countries in Europe and North America initially organized their radio systems than suggested by the conventional distinction between "private enterprise" and "public service" models. It is true that the system in United States was dominated by large private radio networks such as NBC and CBS, which primarily derived their income from advertising. Alongside these, however, were also numerous smaller, non-commercial stations operated by third-sector groups.

The defining feature of French interwar broadcasting was that similar third sector groups were responsible for producing most programs. Unlike in the United States, however, the physical transmission stations were owned and operated either by private corporations or the Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs. In Sweden, the corresponding Telegraph Administration handled the entire distribution network, while the programming operations were managed by a monopoly company owned by commercial interests. Canada also adopted a mixed public-private system, but in contrast to Sweden, private community stations operated alongside the publicly funded Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Against this backdrop, I have argued that the differences in how nations regulated radio during the interwar period can be better understood by analytically distinguishing between the production and distribution of programs and whether these functions were carried out by state agencies, private corporations, or the third sector.

The chapter has further made the case that the variation in nations' policy orientations largely depended on which interest groups that most successfully leveraged the uncertainty surrounding broadcasting's inauguration to their advantage. In the United States, the early 1920s saw a policy battle between large electronics manufacturers and radio amateurs over the latter's role in the system. The Radio Act of 1927 marked a significant victory for big business interests, which successfully persuaded policymakers that the best public service could be achieved by restricting non-professional operators and promoting the development of commercially funded national broadcasting networks.

Similarly, in Sweden, the third sector radio clubs that had helped introduce the medium were curtailed following the Conservatives' 1924 decision to organize broadcasting as a monopoly. Central to this decision was the fact that the policy agenda for broadcasting was largely shaped by the state Telegraph Agency, which formed an alliance with newspaper owners to take control of radio. The Telegraph Administration in France, by contrast, initially lacked the capacity to enforce its legally mandated monopoly, resulting in private firms establishing radio stations alongside the state-operated ones. Given the regional nature of these stations, programs were typically produced by third sector groups from the vicinity of each station, giving the system a distinctly grassroots character.

Canada was the only country whose broadcasting structure from the early 1920s underwent a fundamental transformation later in the interwar period, considering the 1932 decision to move from an entirely private system to a public monopoly. The third sector groups within the Canadian Radio League played a crucial role in this decision, as their advocacy campaigns were instrumental in persuading politicians and public opinion that the country needed a distinctly Canadian broadcasting system.

The backdrop was that U.S. radio networks had started to pen-

etrate the Canadian market, sparking fears that maintaining an entirely private system would lead to programming being overwhelmingly dominated by American productions. As this threat to the nation's cultural sovereignty became evident to a growing number of societal actors, there was a rally-around-the-flag effect that culminated in the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation — the predecessor to the CBC. I argued that the expansion of U.S. networks around 1930 served as an international shock that prompted policymakers to reassess previous goals.

Although Canada was the only country to experience an international shock in the early 1930s, the chapter has shown that the broadcasting systems in France and the United States were profoundly shaped by similar crisis situations in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.

For instance, it was far from certain that French non-governmental groups would be allowed to engage in broadcasting at all, considering that wireless telegraphy had been operated as a state monopoly before 1920. However, policymakers saw no alternative but to open the field to private exploitation in peacetime, as the Telegraph Administration was incapable of competing with foreign electrical corporations in establishing international communication links. In other words, the relaxation of the monopoly was a necessary evil to prevent France from falling behind the other major powers in this strategically vital field. The example illustrated how commercial agents can benefit from international shocks if the state depends on them to counter a foreign threat.

In the United States, the government took similar measures to ensure that the commercial actors serve the national interest by supporting the formation of a trust of domestic electronics companies in 1919. The context was that the U.S. market for radio equipment manufacturing was entirely dominated by the British-owned Marconi company, which was believed to have ambitions of establishing a global monopoly. By acquiring Marconi's assets, the Radio Corporation of America quickly rose to global leadership, a position it later used to shape broadcasting into a predominantly commercial enterprise dominated by large networks.

The key takeaway is that the radio systems in the examined na-

tions could have developed very differently in the *absence* of these international shocks, as they prompted politicians to reassess previous policy goals and redistributed power among competing interests. Once this window of opportunity closed, the development of broadcasting largely followed the established trajectories, except in cases like Canada, where a new external shock intervened later on. This path dependence arose because the groups that had been most successful in leveraging the uncertainties surrounding the birth of broadcasting gained an advantage over those that later attempted to challenge the status quo.

For instance, the French Telegraph Administration stepped up its efforts to centralize radio operations in the 1930s as part of an attempt to reestablish its legally mandated monopoly. However, the agency achieved only partial success due to strong resistance it met from commercial stations and third sector groups that were already involved in the production and distribution of programs. In Sweden, the Social Democrats commissioned an investigation in 1933 that recommended nationalizing not only the distribution network but also radio program operations. However, the proposal was warded off by the Telegraph Administration and the newspaper-owned program company Radiotjänst, as these actors had acquired expertise in their respective areas that no other entity could realistically match.

In the United States, a reform movement emerged in the 1930s as third sector groups pushed back against the system's oligopolistic tendencies, demanding greater space for nonprofit and educational content. This backlash, however, was to no avail, as the government, through the enactment of the Communications Act of 1934, largely reaffirmed the system's predominantly commercial nature.

Even Canada's early radio system was not completely dismantled, despite the country experiencing an external shock from the expansion of American networks in the 1930s. It is worth noting that the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act prescribed a fully state-owned monopoly and the expropriation of private stations that had operated since the 1920s. In practice, however, this decision could not be enforced, as the publicly funded CRBC relied on private stations to deliver a national programming service to different parts of the country. This dependency was a key reason why Canada introduced a new

Broadcasting Act already in 1936, establishing the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) and legitimizing the private stations' role in the system. This case once again illustrated how commercial agents can benefit from international shocks if the state relies on them to counter a foreign threat.

Taken together, the structures that were ultimately established for radio in Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States during the interwar period became more or less "locked in," resulting in a prolonged period of path dependence in broadcast governance. This theme will be explored further in the next chapter, which examines how the policies and interest groups established in the radio sector influenced decision-making regarding the organization and funding of television in the aftermath of the Second World War.

CHAPTER 3

The Advent of Television



In the previous chapter, we observed how the novelty of radio broadcasting as a phenomenon meant that there were really no suitable precedents for policymakers to rely on when deciding how the medium should be organized and financed. One might imagine that a similar situation unfolded when television made its real breakthrough after the Second World War.

However, although the leap from audio to visual broadcasting was undeniably significant, the core attribute of the technology — the capacity to instantaneously connect with a theoretically unlimited audience — was not new. As Kuhn (1995, 77–79) points out, there was initially a widespread perception that television was simply “radio with pictures.” Moreover, television relied on the same technical infrastructure as radio, including broadcast towers and frequency management systems. Against this background, the conventional view in existing communications scholarship is that it was logical for policymakers to graft television’s organization onto the structures already established for managing radio (see, for instance, Day 1995, 16–17; Peers 1979, xiv; Wirén 1986, 164–166).

On an overarching level, this study concurs with the standard characterization of broadcasting in the early postwar decades as a period marked by significant policy continuity. Among the examined countries, France was the only one to seriously stand out from this

pattern, as its decentralized radio landscape of the 1920s and 1930s was replaced by one of the most centralized public broadcasting organizations in all of Western Europe during de Gaulle's presidency. I attribute this radical shift to policymakers' growing awareness of radio's potential as a medium of propaganda. However, contrary to the national literature, which emphasizes the years during and after the Second World War as formative, I argue that the key shift took place already in 1938.

Prior to this, French policymakers had repeatedly tried to centralize radio operations but had not fully succeeded because entrenched vested interests from the private business sector and the third sector resisted these efforts. It was only when Nazi Germany escalated its psychological warfare by broadcasting propaganda from border radio stations that the government seriously set out to concentrate all information activities within a unified radio organization. The French case study thus reaffirms the study's argument that international threats heighten elected officials' interest in broadcasting and drive them to reconsider previous policy choices, typically in a more *dirigiste* direction.

By contrast, countries that did not experience a comparable shock largely followed a path of continuity, carrying over policies from the interwar period into the 1950s and 1960s. This pattern was evident in the United States, where the same commercial networks that had previously solidified their positions in radio led the development of advertising-funded network television. Although public broadcasting emerged in the late 1960s, it remained a peripheral service within a predominantly private system.

Sweden also kept the same system for television as for radio, both in terms of funding and the interests embedded in the institutional framework. The state Telecommunications Agency upheld its monopoly over the distribution network, while Radiotjänst (later Sveriges Radio) extended its exclusive rights in radio programming to encompass television. Furthermore, programs within the public broadcasting monopoly remained entirely free from advertising, as the television service, like the earlier radio service, was funded exclusively through license fees.

A similar trajectory of continuity was observed in Canada, where

both liberal and conservative postwar governments helped maintain the “single” broadcasting system that had been established in the 1930s. In other words, public and private stations continued to co-operate in delivering a national television service in the same way they had with radio during the latter part of the interwar period. Then, as now, the basic rationale behind this unified broadcasting policy was to ensure that programming was not flooded with content from stations in the United States. The difference was that the encroachment of American networks into Canada in the interwar years had constituted an exogenous shock, while by the postwar era, it had transformed into a latent threat, shaping virtually all decision-making.

While both the Canadian and Swedish case studies testify to a high degree of policy continuity since the foundational decisions on radio in the 1920s and 1930s, they also demonstrate that this continuity did not necessarily arise from institutional inertia. Rather, both cases reveal more or less intense power struggles among competing interests over whether the existing order should be maintained or reformed as television made its entrance.

In this context, the tripartite actor conceptualization and the content-carriage distinction illuminate the interest group dynamics that kept both Canadian and Swedish broadcasting policy on a stable path throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The main argument is that the stability of the prevailing equilibrium in each country largely depended on the willingness and capacity of third-sector organizations to challenge it.

In both Canada and Sweden, commercial interests gained significant momentum in the postwar period, largely because television was much more expensive than radio. Against this backdrop, there was broader support among different stakeholders for financing the new medium through advertising. By the mid-1950s, both countries found themselves at a crossroads, weighing whether to adopt a more “market-oriented” policy for television or maintain the status quo with a dominant national public broadcasting service. The kingmakers in this struggle were groups from the third sector, who sided with the advocates for the continued primacy of the CBC and Radiotjänst/Sveriges Radio, believing their interests would be best served within the framework of public service broadcasting.

The analytical distinction between commercial and non-commercial elements within the “private” media sector also sheds light on the policy dynamics that steered television in the United States toward a slightly more “public” orientation in the postwar period.

The American case study reveals that the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was rooted in a counterreaction to the dominance of commercial radio and TV networks, spearheaded by labor unions and educational institutions. In the 1940s, these third-sector groups joined forces with officials within the Federal Communications Commission to push through the so-called Fairness Doctrine, designed to prevent large networks from shaping a biased public agenda. Subsequently, educational organizations secured dedicated channels for nonprofit television, providing these third sector interests with an institutional foundation that they later leveraged to advocate for the introduction of public broadcasting.

It should be acknowledged that these reforms did not fundamentally alter the predominantly private ownership structure of U.S. broadcasting, as public television remained a relatively marginal service compared to the commercial networks. That said, the alliance between federal authorities and nonprofit interests helped push through minor shifts that, while not directly affecting the ownership of radio and television facilities, slightly rebalanced power away from large commercial enterprises in favor of the state and the third sector.

A comparable modest shift in the balance of power among interest groups occurred in Canada with the introduction of the 1958 Broadcasting Act, which established an independent regulatory authority. This was a concession to commercial broadcasters, who accepted the system’s unified framework but opposed the CBC’s dual role as both public broadcaster and regulatory agency. Similarly, Sweden retained the same television system as for radio, with one notable adjustment: a minor structural reform of the public service company that granted popular movements equal shares alongside the press, which had previously held the majority.

Overall, the chapter demonstrates how an actor-centered approach that distinguishes between elements of the “private” broadcasting sector can offer a more nuanced understanding of how path dependence in broadcast governance is shaped by institutions and interests.

United States

INTRODUCTION

The conventional account of U.S. radio and television in the decades following the Second World War emphasizes significant continuity in broadcast governance from the preceding period. McChesney (1993, 251) argues that the most fundamental questions of ownership and control of broadcast media had been settled as early as 1934 with the enactment of the Communications Act. After this, argues Baughman (1992, 20), people generally approved of the private nature of broadcasting; only a small minority questioned its commercial and oligopolistic foundations (see also Lazarsfeld 1946).

Eric Barnouw (1968, 1970) underscores that the television boom after the war was driven by the same commercial networks that had dominated radio during the interwar years. According to James Day (1995, 16-17), this meant that television largely developed along the pre-existing institutional paths, which were grounded in the idea that the best public services would emerge from a largely unfettered private enterprise. Overall, the standard account of U.S. postwar broadcasting appears fully aligned with the prevailing view within comparative political communications, linking the prevalence of commercial radio and TV to the country's longstanding traditions of limited government and liberal institutions (see Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 246).

However, more recent analyses have nuanced the view that there was widespread consensus on the superiority of the prevailing system. van Cuilenberg and McQuail (2003) identify 1945 as the starting point of a partially new policy paradigm characterized by "public service" media policy. While no one disputes that the system continued to have a predominantly private ownership structure, media historians like Pickard (2011, 174-175) have shown that the postwar period witnessed a popular uprising against commercial radio. This movement was less focused on ownership and more concerned with the social contract between broadcasters and the public.

To a large extent, this struggle was driven by a grassroots media reform movements with antecedents in the 1930s, which argued that questions involving the social responsibility of mass media and their prescribed role in a democratic society remained unresolved (see

Alford 1966; Toro 2000). Elizabeth Fones-Wolf (2006, 4) describes how a loose media reform coalition emerged in the 1940s, consisting of FCC officials, public intellectuals, and educators, working to promote public service, and make broadcasting more representative and democratic. The culmination of this era of progressive broadcasting policy was the 1967 amendment to the Communications Act, which established the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, marking the first time the United States had a publicly funded broadcasting service (Avery and Pepper 1980; Burke 1971).

In this chapter, I argue that this transition from a fully private broadcasting system to one incorporating publicly funded outlets can be better understood through an institutionalist perspective that analytically differentiates between commercial and non-commercial elements within the “private” media sector. To illustrate this, I draw on secondary literature and documents from the archives of the Federal Communications Commission, which detail the efforts of third sector organizations to counteract unchecked commercialism and gain greater access to their own communication channels.

The first part of the chapter demonstrates how labor unions were instrumental in pushing through the so-called Fairness Doctrine in 1949, aimed at preventing the large networks from setting a biased public agenda. The next major fight against the dominance of commercial broadcasters was led by educational organizations, initially through lobbying efforts to secure specific channels reserved for non-profit broadcasting. In the 1960s, the struggle shifted toward strengthening the financial foundation of educational television, culminating in the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (see Alford 1966; Burke 1971; Hill 1954).

THE AMERICAN PATH TO PUBLIC BROADCASTING: THIRD-SECTOR ACTORS AND THE STATE PUSH BACK AGAINST COMMERCIAL NETWORKS

In the previous chapter, we observed how the formation of the Radio Corporation of America in 1919 laid the foundation for broadcasting in the United States to be dominated by large commercial networks. The logic of the system was that media companies like CBS and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) broadcast centrally pro-

duced radio programs to various parts of the country, either through their own facilities or via local private stations acting as their affiliates. Since the networks' primary source of income came from advertising, the programs tended to have a character that appealed to the broad masses.

Provided the significance of large business interests in U.S. radio, it was more or less given even before the outbreak of the Second World War that these would dominate the burgeoning field of television too. In the fall of 1938, the Radio Corporation of America announced that it was to begin production of television receivers and start a limited program service from the NBC's transmitter in New York City. This service was inaugurated on April 30, 1939, marking the first occasion on which the American public could watch television broadcasts.¹

Because consumer demand for television sets was very high, a full-fledged TV boom occurred after the war, when the first regular broadcasts got underway. The market quickly came to be dominated by the same commercial networks and affiliates that had provided national radio service during the interwar period. This included CBS and NBC, as well as two newcomers, Dumont and ABC (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 255–258). According to Baughman (1992, 20), people generally approved of this oligopolistic structure. James Day (1995, 16–17) similarly argues that there was broad consensus that the best public service in broadcasting would emerge by allowing market forces to operate as freely as possible, ensuring that audiences received programs they genuinely desired.

However, more recent analyses have nuanced this standard account of U.S. broadcasting in the postwar period. They highlight that several constituencies criticized the commercial logic for generating programs that served big business interests and advertisers rather than the public at large. According to Toro (2000), this revolt against commercial radio was a continuation of the media reform efforts of the 1930s, which came to fruition in a more pronounced way after the Second World War.

A key reason for this revival was that officials within the Federal Communications Commission — many of whom were ardent New

¹*FCC Memorandum (C4-7-2) on the historical development of television broadcast services and regulation.* 1943. RG 173, Vol. 149-I. NARA, pp. 4–5.

Dealers — grew increasingly concerned about the dominance of corporate interests (Pickard 2011, 180). Against this backdrop, the federal agency adopted a partially new approach to regulating radio and television in the 1940s, aimed at combating unchecked commercialism and thereby making broadcasting more representative and democratic (Fones-Wolf 2006, 4). According to van Cuilenberg and McQuail 2003, this marked the beginning of an era of “public service” communications policy which culminated in the introduction of the Public Broadcasting Act in 1967.

The fact that the United States introduced public broadcasting in the 1960s might at first glance seem to challenge the prevailing view in existing communications scholarship, namely that the nation’s exceptionally strong constitutional protections for freedom of speech have precluded more extensive government interventions in the media sector (see, for instance, Fukuyama and Grotto 2020, 200; Hallin and Mancini 2004b). However, here it should be pointed out that the publicly funded segment of the system was never close to challenging the large commercial networks. To begin, the legal mandate of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB) was limited to promoting educational content on a localized basis. Furthermore, the organization struggled with internal conflicts and a lack of financial support from federal authorities.

According to the literature on American television, these are the main reasons why the public broadcasting service in the United States never attained the same national standing as the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (see Avery and Pepper 1980, 128–131; Sterling and Kittross 1990, 389–391). Given that the CPB remained a marginal service compared to the system’s private component, the 1967 reform appears more compatible with the prevailing view of the country’s media as “market-oriented.” The introduction of public broadcasting can, in other words, be seen as a mere “scratch” on an otherwise predominantly private setup — at least in terms of which sectors owned and operated the majority of broadcasting outlets.

However, I argue that a perspective that solely focuses on ownership structures and the relationship between “public” and “private” broadcasting risks underestimating the significance of the initiatives that the public authorities undertook after the Second World War

to counterbalance the dominance of commercial media. While private outlets continued to dominate U.S. broadcasting, Pickard (2011, 178) notes that in the 1940s and 1950s, the FCC implemented policies that shifted focus from ownership to the social responsibility of mass media in a democratic society. At the same time, Elizabeth Fones-Wolf (2006, 4) notes that the FCC's policy initiatives were part of a broader pushback against commercial broadcasting, involving public intellectuals, left-leaning groups within the cultural establishment and third-sector organizations.

This chapter highlights how labor unions and educational institutions played a key role in advancing reforms that helped shift the balance of power somewhat away from large commercial enterprises in favor of the state and the third sector.

The primary example is the 1949 establishment of the so-called Fairness Doctrine, which required radio and television stations to provide space for competing viewpoints when addressing controversial issues in their programs. This affirmative obligation placed a restriction on the freedom of speech of broadcast licensees that would have been entirely unthinkable for the printed press. In other words, although the doctrine did not change the system's predominantly private ownership structure, it redefined the social contract between broadcasters and the public realm in a way that had significant implications for the nature of program content.

Another key reform was the FCC's 1952 decision to allocate specific television channels for educational purposes (see Alford 1966). This provided grassroots organizations with an institutional foundation that they later leveraged to push for the introduction of public broadcasting (Burke 1971, 132–133). Against this backdrop, I argue that the United States' postwar shift from an exclusively private broadcasting system to one including publicly funded outlets is better understood through an institutionalist lens that analytically differentiates between various groups within the “private” media sector and considers their interactions with the public authorities.

To illustrate the origins of the alliance between nonprofit groups and progressive government officials and how these groups coordinated their pushback against large business interests, we must pick up where the previous chapter left off. We recall that, until 1927, the

government's policy had been that practically anyone who wanted could set up a broadcasting station. This meant that the early American radio landscape was populated by both large corporations and a wide range of amateurs and other non-profit organizations.

However, a continuation of this complete laissez-faire approach proved to be untenable, since only a limited number of stations could broadcast in a given area without interfering with each other. When policymakers realized this, Congress was forced to establish a licensing system that limited access to the airwaves. The Radio Act of 1927 raised the technical requirements for operating a broadcasting station, crowding out many smaller players. Meanwhile, the Federal Radio Commission (FRC) tended to allocate the most advantageous channels to commercial broadcasters. This, in turn, paved the way for American radio to be dominated by private corporations with strong ties to the electrical manufacturing industry and the advertising business (see Benjamin 1998; Douglas 1989).

The FRC's policies sparked a backlash from public intellectuals and various third-sector organizations, who protested against the prevailing order for neglecting the needs of educational institutions, religious associations, and labor organizations. However, the reform movement lost momentum following the enactment of the 1934 Communications Act, which solidified the existing arrangement and established the Federal Communications Commission (FCC).

Given the assumption of spectrum scarcity — that there was a natural limit to the number of channels that could be accommodated within the electromagnetic spectrum — the FCC was granted discretion to choose among competing applicants when issuing broadcast licenses. Beyond administering this system of preferential licensing, the Commission was also tasked with regulating broadcasting in the country more broadly. This was to be done in line with the principle of “public interest, convenience, and/or necessity” (Sterling and Kittross 2002, 560). Taken together, the fundamental questions regarding ownership and control in U.S. broadcasting had largely been settled by the mid-1930s (see McChesney 1993, 251).

However, as pointed out by Pickard (2011, 178) important questions about broadcasters' social responsibility remained unanswered. These issues came into sharp focus during the Depression years, a

period when radio's importance as a tool for shaping political opinion was becoming increasingly apparent. According to Méadel (1994, 94), the 1932 presidential election marked the first time candidates used radio in a more organized manner for their campaigns.

Once in office, President Roosevelt's fireside chat series became a central part of his administration's efforts to explain government policies to the American people and convey self-assurance during times of despair and uncertainty. At the same time, an increasing number of non-governmental groups began harnessing radio's persuasive potential for *their* political purposes. Among these were figures from civil society, such as the controversial Catholic radio preacher Charles Coughlin, whose incendiary broadcasts reached tens of millions, fueling hostility toward ethnic minorities and attacking the New Deal (Warren 1996, 2). Others came from the private business sector, like the commercial radio station WAAB, which, between 1937 and 1938, frequently aired editorials supporting individual political candidates and taking one-sided positions on various controversial issues.

This was the backdrop to the Federal Communications Commission's first policy intervention targeting the nature of the programs broadcast by radio stations: the so-called Mayflower Decision of 1940. In this decision, the Commission laid down that, under the American system, the responsibility for a radio station's conduct must rest primarily with the broadcaster. However, given the inherent limitations of radio frequencies, the Commission held that broadcast licensees violated their "public interest" obligations under the 1934 Act if they actively used their facilities to support their own partisan ends:

Radio can serve as an instrument of democracy only when devoted to the communication of information and the exchange of ideas fairly and objectively presented. A truly free radio cannot be used to advocate the causes of the licensee. It cannot be used to support the candidacies of his friends. [...] In brief, the broadcaster cannot be an advocate.²

The premise was that radio stations operated in a public domain as holders of a limited number of broadcast licenses. Given that

² *Mayflower Broadcasting Co.* 1940, May 29. 8 FCC, pp. 339–340.

only a limited number of individuals could potentially establish a broadcast station, the principles governing the printed press were not applicable to broadcasting in promoting the First Amendment's aim of viewpoint diversity. Consequently, the FCC held that freedom of expression on the air presupposed that broadcast licensees provide full and equal opportunity for the presentation of all sides of important public questions in a fair and objective manner, and without bias. In essence, the Commission affirmed that the public interest took precedence over the private interest.

The Mayflower Decision sparked a heated debate over whether the Federal Communications Commission's intervention in broadcasters' programming activities was consistent with its authority under the current Act and, by extension, the Constitution. On one side stood public authorities, represented by the FCC and the judiciary, alongside the third sector, notably labor unions and educational institutions. These groups argued that requiring broadcasters to act fairly was crucial to advancing the public interest, given the scarcity of available channels. Otherwise, there was a significant risk that large corporate interests would exploit their privilege as public trustees to set a biased public agenda that served their own interests. The commercial broadcasters, by contrast, expressed concern that the policy violated the Constitution's First Amendment.

However, in 1943, when the Supreme Court ruled on the National Broadcasting Company's (NBC) constitutional challenge, it affirmed that the FCC's authority under the 1934 Act extended beyond the technical aspects of radio. Given that the electromagnetic spectrum could not accommodate everyone who wished to use a broadcast channel, the Court deemed it necessary to devise a method for selecting among the many applicants. Against this backdrop, Justice Felix Frankfurter declared that the FCC could not be seen merely as a traffic officer, policing stations to prevent them from interfering with one another's broadcasts:

[T]he Act does not restrict the Commission merely to supervision of the traffic. It puts upon the Commission the burden of determining the composition of that traffic.³

³*National Broadcasting Co. v. U. S.*, 1943. 319 U.S. Reports 190, pp. 789–790.

The Supreme Court's ruling established the important principle that broadcasting possessed unique characteristics that justified a form of government control that, from a constitutional perspective, would be unthinkable for other forms of expression. However, while the NBC case affirmed a broad interpretation of the Commission's powers, it left many First Amendment questions unresolved. The main controversy centered on the interpretation of the 1940 Mayflower case's statement that a broadcaster "cannot be an advocate."⁴

Against this backdrop, the Federal Communications Commission launched hearings in the fall of 1947 to clarify whether broadcasters should be prohibited from editorializing on controversial matters of public interest. The transcripts from these hearings — preserved in the FCC's archives at the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland — reveal that labor unions and educational institutions were particularly eager to maintain the ban on editorializing.

Several briefs submitted to the Commission by third-sector organizations argued that free expression of views on social, economic, and political issues served as a check on corporate power. However, this presupposed a reasonably equal opportunity for these views to be expressed — something that was not the case in radio due to the scarcity of frequencies. Against this backdrop, the Institute for Education by Radio questioned whether commercial stations should have unrestricted editorial freedom:

[I]t is one thing for an idea to be sold by survival in competition with conflicting ideas. It is something else for an idea to be sold because there is no other idea to be purchased. Doesn't editorializing by radio station owners mean the molding of public opinion by the large powerful corporate interests in the country?⁵

The Communication Workers of America made a similar argument as the Institute for Education by Radio, asserting that without re-

⁴ *Summary of General Session of the Institute for Education by Radio concerning Radio and Editorializing*. 1947, May 5. RG 173, Vol. 3385. NARA, pp. 97–98 [US_173_3385_010].

⁵ *Brief by the Institute for Education by Radio to the FCC on editorializing by broadcast licensees*. 1947, September 16. RG 173, Vol. 3385. NARA, pp. 1–2.

strictions, large commercial enterprises could leverage their near-monopoly position to shape a biased public agenda:

The chance for the great bulk of people in America to air their views is already too slim. To grant business interests another outlet for controlling the thinking of the nation will create a greater unbalance. [...] If radio stations are permitted to editorialize we shall have a completely controlled public opinion in this country.⁶

When the FCC published its Report on *Editorializing by Broadcast Licensees* in 1949, it arrived at a compromise. On one hand, the prohibition on editorializing was lifted. On the other hand, the report imposed a twofold affirmative obligation on broadcast licensees:

1. To address controversial public issues, though not necessarily in the form of station editorials.
2. To identify and seek out all responsible viewpoints on controversial issues and provide an opportunity for these contrasting perspectives to be heard.

This marked the birth of the Fairness Doctrine, which did not impose direct government control over broadcasters' programming. However, it signaled that the FCC would assess the fairness of a broadcaster's coverage of controversial issues when reviewing license renewals. Consequently, broadcasters had a strong incentive to comply if they wanted to stay on the air.

The establishment of the Fairness Doctrine marked an important first step in the Federal Communications Commission's efforts to curb the dominance of commercial networks and safeguard the viewpoints of minorities and non-profit groups. At the same time, the doctrine was part of a broader initiative launched by progressive FCC officials in the early postwar years to strengthen third-sector groups' ability to make their voices heard on radio and television (Fones-Wolf 2006; Pickard 2011).

⁶ *Brief by the Communications Workers of America to the FCC on editorializing by broadcast licensees*. 1947, September 16. Rg 173, Vol. 3387. NARA, pp. 1-2.

In the 1940s, educational groups were quick to take advantage of the opportunity to broadcast noncommercial content over the FM band. As a result, these groups intensified their lobbying efforts toward the FCC, advocating for dedicated channels to be reserved for educational broadcasting (Avery and Pepper 1980, 127). The most active interest organization was the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), which organized research and information campaigns highlighting the near-total absence of educational programming in commercial broadcasters' schedules (Alford 1966).

While special FM frequencies had been reserved for educational purposes since the early 1940s, educational advocates successfully convinced the Commission in 1952 to set aside dedicated channels for educational television. Altogether, the channel reservations in the 1940s (for radio) and in 1952 (for television) allowed educational broadcasters to operate without competing directly with commercial stations. After three decades of commercial broadcasting, third-sector broadcasters had finally gained an opportunity to prove their worth (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 269). In the 1960s, the struggle shifted toward strengthening the financial foundation of educational television, culminating in the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 (see Burke 1971; Hill 1954).

Canada

INTRODUCTION

The development of Canadian broadcasting after the Second World War, as typically portrayed in existing communications scholarship, is largely a story of policy continuity from the preceding period. Ellis (1979, 77), Peers (1979), and Raboy (1989) all agree that the fundamental structure of the system was not markedly different from what had been established for radio in 1932.

As Weir (1965, 257-258) points out, public and private broadcasters continued to cooperate closely in producing and delivering a national television service, much as they had done with radio. Above all, the notion that radio and television had a "national" purpose remained the key component of federal broadcasting policy, as re-

flected in the 1968 Broadcasting Act. This legislation reaffirmed the principle that Canadian broadcasting was as a “single” system, obliging both public and private radio and television stations to foster a sense of Canadian unity in their programs (Peers 1979, xvi). Overall, the postwar developments seem to align fairly well with Hallin and Mancini’s claim that an otherwise “Liberal” media model has been partially modified in the Canadian context due to issues of national identity (2004, 198–248).

The previous chapter illustrated how the national vocation of Canadian broadcasting policy was rooted in an international shock that occurred during the Depression years, namely the plans of American commercial networks to make inroads into the Canadian radio market. Up until that point, policymakers had maintained an ad-hoc and laissez-faire approach to radio regulation for over a decade (Nolan 1984, 1–2). This stance was completely reversed once policymakers and other societal actors realized that a purely market-based media system would likely be inundated with U.S. programming.

The main argument presented in this chapter is that the increased availability of American programming — which had constituted an international shock in the 1930s — had now become a latent threat influencing virtually all policymaking in the field. This is evident when one analyzes archival material from the major government commissions that were established in the 1950s and 1960s to examine the future organization of radio and television. These commissions unanimously emphasized the importance of public-private cooperation to ensure the availability of original Canadian programming as an alternative to content from the United States. Hence, the main structuring factor was not the tension between private and public stations in Canada. Instead, the dominant line of conflict was the one established in the 1930s, namely that between American broadcasting and the Canadian system as a whole.

Simultaneously, the case study demonstrates that this policy continuity did not necessarily arise from institutional inertia. Rather, it reveals more or less intense power struggles among competing interests over whether the existing order should be maintained or reformed as television made its entrance. In this context, the tripartite actor conceptualization and the content-carriage distinction illuminate the

interest group dynamics that kept Canadian broadcasting policy on a stable path throughout the 1950s and 1960s. The main argument is that the stability of the prevailing equilibrium in each country largely depended on the willingness and capacity of third-sector organizations to challenge it.

In Canada, business interests gained significant momentum in the postwar period, largely because television was much more expensive than radio (Peers 1979, 283-284; Stewart and Hull 1994, 4; Raboy 1990, 7-9). Against this backdrop, a broader range of stakeholders supported structuring the new medium along more “commercial” lines. By the mid-1950s, both Canada and Sweden found themselves at a crossroads, weighing whether to adopt a more “market-oriented” policy for television or maintain the status quo with a dominant national public broadcasting service. The kingmakers in this struggle were groups from the third sector, who sided with the advocates for the continued primacy of the CBC and Radiotjänst/Sveriges Radio, believing their interests would be best served within the framework of public service broadcasting.

In other words, although Canadian grassroots groups played only a marginal role in directly operating radio and television broadcasts during the early postwar decades, their support contributed to legitimizing the prevailing order. Overall, this demonstrates how an actor-centered perspective that analytically distinguishes between different elements within the “private” sector can provide a better understanding of institutional path dependence and the policy dynamics that underlie it.

SUSTAINING THE “SINGLE” BROADCASTING SYSTEM: CANADIAN CONCERNS OVER THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN PROGRAMS BECOME LATENT

In the previous chapter, we witnessed how Canada transitioned from a fully private radio broadcasting system in the 1920s to a mixed public-private model through the 1936 Broadcasting Act. This legislation solidified a peculiar setup, characterized by a dominant public broadcaster — the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) — running a national programming service alongside private community stations. What made this organizational framework unique was

that private stations were expected to contribute to the cultural objectives of the legislation by carrying CBC programs to various parts of the country in exchange for not having to pay for the material. Moreover, both public and private services were allowed to derive income from advertising. Considering this symbiosis, it was a quite unified radio service that had taken root in Canada by the time of the outbreak of the Second World War. This came to be known as the “single” system of Canadian broadcasting (Ellis 1979, 77).

With television quickly gaining momentum in the United States after the war, the question for Canada was not whether to adopt the new medium, but rather when it would arrive and under which organizational framework it would operate. Militating in favor of maintaining the status quo was the fact that there already existed a policy framework for broadcasting into which television could potentially be integrated. This was a major difference compared to the 1920s, when radio arrived. At the same time, television was estimated to be up to seven times more expensive than radio (Sterling and Kittross 1990, 255–258). This gave momentum to business interests, private broadcasters, and certain conservative politicians, who argued that the new medium should be organized more along commercial principles to cover the vast capital and operating costs.

By the late 1960s, these tensions had largely been resolved through two additional statutes that, on the one hand, appeased the demands of those who wanted a more “private” broadcasting system. A major step in this direction was taken through the 1958 Broadcasting Act, which established an independent broadcast regulator outside the CBC to create a more equal relationship between public and private elements of the system (Stewart and Hull 1994, 6–7).

Simultaneously, the Broadcasting Act of 1968 reaffirmed the basic principle that radio and television should primarily serve as an instrument of national purpose, and that both the public and private segments had a responsibility to contribute to this overarching aim. According to Robert Armstrong (2016, 20), this marked the beginning of the modern era in Canadian broadcast regulation, although the new legislative framework was, in many respects, a continuation of the unified structure established during the interwar period.

I argue that this path dependence in Canadian broadcast gov-

ernance can be traced back to the same external threat that had prompted policymakers to establish the “single” system in the first place. In other words, the penetration of U.S. broadcasting into the Canadian market continued to serve as the fundamental structuring factor for all policymaking in this area. As had been the case in the interwar years, American television networks produced expensive, advertising-financed programs that spilled over into Canada via border stations. As imported TV signals became increasingly available in major cities like Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver in the 1940s, pressure mounted on the government to launch Canadian television and “repatriate” these viewers (Armstrong 2016, 32).

The underlying reason was the widespread belief that an overabundance of programs from the United States posed a threat to the nation’s cultural identity. Hence, there was a concern that, without significant government interventions to counteract such a development, Canadian broadcasting was bound to become a mere replica of its American counterpart. The key difference was that the increasing availability of U.S. programs in the 1930s had constituted an international shock that forced politicians to reconsider the previous *laissez-faire* approach. Now, by contrast, the threat from broadcasting in the United States had become latent.

That the threat had become latent was reflected in the fact that the entire debate about television — from the initial policy deliberations in the late 1940s to the reforms of 1958 and 1968 — centered on how the broadcasting system could preserve its distinctiveness amidst the influx of American programming. This debate was initiated in the spring of 1948, when the Board of Governors of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) declared that television held significant potential to strengthen the country’s national identity, provided that the programming remained relatively free from foreign content:

The Board believes that in line with fundamental radio policies laid down by parliament for radio broadcasting, television should be developed in Canada [...] with the overall aim of stimulating Canadian national life and not merely of providing a means of broadcasting non-Canadian visual material in this country. The Board will strive for the maximum provision of Canadian television

for Canadians.⁷

The Board's statement should be viewed in light of its mandate under the 1936 Broadcasting Act, namely to promote the "national interest in broadcasting" by determining and directing policy for both the CBC and private stations. The Governors did not have the final say in issuing private licenses but were required to make recommendations to the Department of Transport, which held that authority.⁸ In its policy statement, the Board made it clear that it strongly advocated withholding permission for Canadian private television stations in cases where there was a risk of them serving as outlets for non-Canadian systems. Such a scenario was regarded as a direct threat to the public interest.

However, completely barring private stations from participating in television was never under consideration. In a statement from the spring of 1949, the government affirmed the Board of Governors' position that the top priority must be to ensure Canadians across the country could access Canadian programming. This, in turn, would require significant public involvement. At the same time, it was pointed out that the existing radio system — built on a combination of public and private enterprise — had proven fully viable and enjoyed the support of a vast majority of disinterested Canadians. Therefore, the government saw no reason to alter this approach:

The Canadian Broadcasting Act provides that, for radio, there shall be a national system publicly owned and operated, and that there shall also be private stations, the operations of which are coordinated with those of the national facilities. This procedure will be adopted, with suitable adjustments, for the development of television.⁹

⁷*Statement on Television by the CBC Board of Governors.* 1948, May 17. RG 134539 Vol. 287. LAC, p. 1.

⁸*CBC Report on the development of the national broadcasting system.* 1950, January 1. Record Group 134539, Volume 287. LAC, pp. 5–6. [CA.134539.287.008].

⁹*Government Statement on Television Policy in Anticipation of the Conclusions of the Massey Report.* 1949, March 28. RG 134539, Vol. 287. LAC, p. 1.

To formally examine the principles of Canadian postwar broadcasting policy, Louis St. Laurent's Liberal administration included television as a subject of inquiry for the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters, and Sciences. When the so-called Massey Commission presented its report in 1951, it largely reaffirmed the conclusions the government had already outlined.

The commissioners established that television should, as a basic principle, be organized to serve Canadian needs. They recommended that the direction and control of broadcasting remain vested in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. In fact, the Commission considered the need for state control to be even more critical in television than in radio, given the new medium's potential to foster cultural programming and promote national cohesion:

Television, like radio, is akin to a monopoly, but its much more limited channels give added importance to a system of co-ordination and control. Like radio it is a valuable instrument of national unity, of education and of entertainment; how much more valuable it is difficult to say at present, but it promises to be a more popular as well as a more persuasive medium.¹⁰

The underlying reason why the Commission emphasized the need for state control was the same as that which had once justified the creation of the national system: the risk that Canadian television would be flooded with U.S. programs if its development was left entirely to market forces. This risk was seen as even more pressing in television, given the new medium's significantly higher costs compared to radio:

Because of the greater capital investment and greater operating costs the unfortunate tendencies of radio broadcasting will be intensified in television. The pressure on uncontrolled private television operators to become mere channels for American commercial material will be almost irresistible.¹¹

¹⁰ *Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences*. 1951. Ottawa: Edmond Cloutier, p. 301.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

Although the Commission warned of the risks associated with a purely commercial system, completely excluding private alternatives from the television field was not on the agenda. The report recalled that the 1932 Radio Broadcasting Act had originally envisioned expropriating the existing commercial stations in the system, but that this policy was later revised. The main reason had been that these outlets had contributed significantly to national goals, not least by providing local radio services:

It soon appeared [...] that these pioneers in the field of radio broadcasting had made a place for themselves in their own communities and that they could perform important national services.¹²

Against this backdrop, the Massey Commission affirmed that it was in the national interest to allow private broadcasters to continue participating in both radio and television and that they should be regarded as an integral part of the “single” national system. The Commission recommended that the CBC make appropriate agreements with Canadian private stations, provided these arrangements aligned with the underlying principles of the prevailing legislation. In practice, this meant that public stations were initially granted exclusive rights to the country’s largest television markets, while licenses were issued to private broadcasters wishing to serve regions not covered by the national broadcaster (Peers 1979, xv).

When Canadian television finally got underway, it was thus within a structure that was virtually identical to the one established for radio in the 1930s. The publicly funded CBC, which remained the dominant element, led the way with broadcasts from Montreal and Toronto in the fall of 1952. Already the following year, private television launched in Sudbury, Ontario. In the years that followed, the system gradually expanded with additional stations, including those owned and operated by the national public broadcaster, as well as privately owned affiliates operating at the local level. By 1955, there were seven CBC stations and 22 private affiliates. The latter broadcast some imported programs from the United States, but their primary role was to deliver program content to remote parts of

¹² *Ibidem.*, p. 281.

the country on behalf of the national public broadcaster (Armstrong 2016, 34).

If we analytically distinguish between the actors involved in content and carriage and compare ownership structures between public and private outlets, Canada's television system, at first glance, appears more diversified than Sweden's, despite both operating within a public-private framework. This was because, in Sweden, the public-private collaboration operated within a monopoly framework: the state Telecommunications Agency managed all underlying technology, while Sveriges Radio had sole responsibility for radio and television programming.

In Canada, by contrast, private licensees produced their own programs *and* operated their own facilities. Alongside these, the CBC functioned primarily as a program-producing entity but also owned and operated its own network of transmitters. Together, this would suggest a relatively balanced ownership structure between private and public outlets across both analytical dimensions, at least compared to Sweden.

Here we must nevertheless remind ourselves of how intertwined the public and private services were, both in terms of program production and distribution. As we recall from the previous chapter, the 1936 Broadcasting Act provided for *one* national structure with private stations functioning as a coordinated element within a unified system. This meant that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation relied on private stations to fulfill its responsibility to Parliament, namely to promote the national interest in broadcasting. To ensure that all elements of the system contributed to the legislation's overarching goals, the Corporation's Board of Governors held the authority to determine and direct policy for both the public service and the private stations. As explained in a CBC memorandum for internal consumption:

In its present form the national broadcasting system is an intricate combination of publicly and privately owned facilities, of public and commercial resources. All are co-ordinated by the CBC under a single responsibility to Parliament. Obviously the various elements have to be co-ordinated if they are to contribute effectively to the

working of a national system.¹³

Furthermore, the memorandum attests to the fact that the collaboration between the CBC and its private affiliates extended beyond the production and distribution of programs to also include funding structures — an area of intervention where the public and private services were equally intertwined. The CBC derived income from both license fees and advertising, while private stations had much of their programming subsidized by not having to pay for the programs they carried on behalf of the national service. On top of this, they were allowed to air advertisements (Peers 1979, 42).

This symbiotic arrangement allowed private stations to thrive economically under government protection from external competition. Above all, the unified “single” system advanced the broader objectives of politicians, whose primary commitment remained focused on safeguarding the Canadian broadcasting system from American influence. Taken together, this illustrates the study’s theoretical point about how external threats to national autonomy tend to trigger state-led responses that can occasionally involve collaboration with private corporations.

In line with the study’s theoretical expectations, the now latent external threat from U.S. broadcasting also led to a significant curtailment of third-sector groups’ opportunities to conduct their own television broadcasts. By analytically distinguishing between different elements within the “private” media sector, we can see how Canada’s postwar television system was, in fact, even more unified than the interwar radio system that emerged in the wake of the 1929 Aird Report. As noted in the previous chapter, American and Canadian radio had initially shared the feature that stations were operated by both private corporations and grassroots organizations. Even following the establishment of the national system in the 1930s, a variety of *unaffiliated* radio stations continued to operate alongside the CBC and its private affiliates.

According to Robert Armstrong (2016, 34), this structure was distinct from that of television, where virtually all private TV stations were affiliated with the national broadcasting service. Moreover,

¹³ *CBC memorandum for internal consumption concerning the possible creation of a separate regulatory board*. 1955. RG 134549, Vol. 312. LAC, p. 2.

these private affiliates effectively dominated the local TV markets, as the CBC initially granted only one license per city. Taken together, the unified character of the system meant that the third sector's opportunities to operate independent television broadcasts outside the framework of the national system were severely circumscribed. By contrast, the relationship between the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and its commercial affiliates was, on the whole, more harmonious and collaborative than ever before (Peers 1979, 51).

While both commercial stations and the CBC thrived under the "single" broadcasting system, that didn't mean there were no tensions between its public and private elements. The main conflict centered on the CBC's dual role as both program producer and regulator, a concentration of power that representatives of the private broadcasting sector viewed as incompatible with fundamental democratic principles (Peers 1979, 55).

The Canadian Association of Radio and Television Broadcasters (CARTB) contended that the existing legislation authorized the CBC to operate a national "service," which they viewed as distinct from the concept of a national "system" (Raboy 1989, 121). While the Association accepted the idea of a national service, they argued that there were in fact two parallel systems: one public and one private. Viewing the CBC and private stations as competitors, they deemed it unjustifiable for the public entity to regulate its own competition.

The private broadcasters had momentum because actors who had wholeheartedly supported the idea of a public monopoly in the 1930s now showed greater sympathy for their position. Conservative newspapers like *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Telegram* in Toronto had always advocated for private broadcasting, but now additional publishers joined the ranks of CBC's critics.

Perhaps more importantly, many conservative politicians who had previously supported public broadcasting had grown disillusioned with the CBC due to its role in disseminating government information and the restrictions on political broadcasting during the war (Peers 1979, 56–57). One could therefore say that cracks were beginning to show in the "single" broadcasting system, as it no longer enjoyed the same broad support as it had during the interwar period.

Proponents of private broadcasting often drew an analogy be-

tween television and the railway system, which also featured a public and a private component. Unlike in broadcasting, however, the Board of Directors of the public railway enterprise — the Canadian National Railways — had no control over its private competitor: the Canadian Pacific. What the CARTB desired was a similar arrangement for broadcasting, namely the creation of a *separate* regulatory board (Peers 1979, 55–56).

In a statement before the 1953 Parliamentary Radio Committee, the Association's general manager, T.J. Allard, assured that the desire for such a board was in no way an attack on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, nor would it adversely affect the Corporation's position. On the contrary, Allard argued, the establishment of a separate regulatory board would promote the full development and utilization of both public and private broadcasting:

Such a reform would be simple. It would not affect or diminish the proper powers of government by one iota. It would, however, remove the well-founded complaint that the present system gives an impression of injustice and discrimination. It would remove a basic violation of principle.¹⁴

Two years later, this position was echoed by CARTB's former president, Finlay Macdonald, who argued that a separate regulatory board would not undermine the existing system but would merely create a more level playing field between its constituent elements:

If broadcasting in Canada was placed in the hands of an independent regulatory body, nothing herein would weaken the CBC's position. Quite the contrary. The CBC might not even have to suffer the ignominy of being an equal among equals.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Opening statement by CARTB General Manager, T.J. Allard, before the 1953 Parliamentary Committee on Radio.* 1953, May 6. RG 134539, Vol. 287. LAC, p. 7.

¹⁵ *Address by former president of CARTB, Finlay Macdonald, before the Canadian Public Relations Society on the illegitimacy on the CBC's prominence.* 1955, November 1. RG 134549, Vol. 312. LAC, pp. 9–10.

The national public broadcaster, by contrast, argued that the question of a separate board was more than a simple matter of transferring some powers from the CBC to a new body. Instead, it raised fundamental questions about the entire structure of Canadian broadcasting. In a confidential statement, the Corporation deemed it unreasonable to be stripped of its coordinating powers while still being held accountable for providing a national service:

In such a situation there will be a fundamentally unsound divorce of authority from responsibility. The CBC would be responsible for having national service carried by private stations, yet would not have the necessary authority.¹⁶

The Corporation further argued that the comparison with the railway system was misleading, as the competition between public and private broadcasting was considered minimal compared to the high degree of cooperation between the two services. Above all, the CBC emphasized that private stations did not have to pay for the programs they aired on behalf of the national service:

In television, at present, the CBC is providing services costing millions of dollars to 23 private stations, all those operating in the country. The service goes free to the stations, and in addition they derive some revenues from carrying it.¹⁷

The CBC had no intention of subsidizing private businesses by providing programs for free. Rather, it was a means of fulfilling its responsibility to deliver national television services to people in all regions of Canada. The Corporation was guided solely by the standard of promoting the national interest as it worked to reconcile the various claims about how the public interest in broadcasting could best be achieved. With broadcasting declared a public trust, the

¹⁶ *Ibidem.*, p. 7.

¹⁷ *CBC memorandum for internal consumption concerning the possible creation of a separate regulatory board*. 1955. RG 134549, Vol. 312. LAC, p. 2–3.

CBC saw it as essential for the broadcaster-regulator to perform certain coordinating functions — even if this occasionally limited the freedom of private stations (Raboy 1990, 119).

To summarize, the main conflict in Canadian television during the 1950s was not about whether the system should include private or public outlets. Unlike the debates of the interwar period, it was now widely accepted that both had essential roles to play. There was also broad agreement on the importance of maintaining the system's national vocation. The questions centered on how the balance between the system's public and private components should be structured, both in terms of ownership and the distribution of responsibilities between the two sectors.

The key issue, according to Raboy (1990, 119–120), was how the “national” purpose of the existing Broadcasting Act should be interpreted — specifically, whether Canadian broadcasting should remain a unitary system or be overseen by an independent regulatory authority outside the CBC.

To clarify these issues, the Liberal government appointed a new Royal Commission on Broadcasting in December 1955, marking the most comprehensive examination of Canadian broadcasting to date (Peers 1979, 43). In addition to providing guidance on licensing and control of private stations, the so-called Fowler Commission was tasked with recommending a new television policy and proposing measures to ensure an adequate proportion of Canadian programming across the system as a whole (Armstrong 2016, 34).

In doing so, the Commission was to consider two fundamental principles: first, that Canadian broadcasting must give expression to Canadian ideas and aspirations and reach the greatest possible number of Canadians; and second, that the broadcasting and distribution of Canadian programs by a public agency should remain the central feature of Canadian broadcasting. The terms of reference thus indicated that no radical policy changes were on the agenda. The focus remained on maintaining a distinctly Canadian system, with the key question being how best to achieve this goal.

When the Fowler Commission finally presented its conclusions on March 15, 1957, the implications were largely a blessing of the status quo. On one hand, the Canadian system was now officially

designated as a “single” system. On the other hand, the mixed nature of this single system was acknowledged, meaning that radio and television should be provided both by the CBC and by private broadcasters. It was proclaimed that the public broadcaster would never gain a monopoly. At the same time, it was emphasized that private stations, while autonomous, would have to be held accountable for their actions and that their performance would be judged individually (Raboy 1990, 126–127).

A significant, albeit incremental, policy shift compared to before was that the entity tasked with this monitoring function of the system would no longer be vested in the CBC, but in a separate regulatory body. By achieving one of its most important policy goals, it thus appeared as if private broadcasters for the first time would be on equal ground with the public element of the system. Besides these specific recommendations, the Commission’s report resulted in a reevaluation of some of the key assumptions that had guided Canadian broadcasting since the Aird Commission in the 1920s. As recently as the Massey Commission in 1951, it was expressed that the main functions of broadcasting in any democratic country are to “inform, educate, and to entertain” (Raboy 1990, 127). The Fowler Commission now declared that Canadian broadcasting was expected to serve an additional purpose besides these three functions, namely to sell goods.

Following the Progressive Conservative Party’s victory in the 1958 election — which ended 22 years of Liberal rule — newly elected Prime Minister John Diefenbaker swiftly began drafting legislation based on the Fowler Commission’s findings. On August 18, 1958, the government introduced an updated Broadcasting Act, which closely followed the Commission’s recommendations. A key innovation was the establishment of a new regulatory body, the Board of Broadcast Governors (BBG), which operated with greater independence from the public broadcasting service than its predecessor (Burke 1971, 6–7). By recognizing both the CBC and private operators as more equivalent and subjecting them to more impartial oversight, the legislation weakened the “Single System” that had defined Canadian broadcasting since the first legislation in 1932 — at least from a legal perspective (Raboy 1990, 133).

However, in broad terms, the Canadian radio and television sys-

tem continued to follow the fundamental principles established in the Aird Report of 1929. While it is true that a newly independent media regulator placed the public and private services on more equal footing, the 1958 Broadcasting Act still stipulated that the broadcasting service should be “basically Canadian in content and character,” reflecting the enduring expectation that broadcasters uphold a distinct national vocation (Burke 1971, 41).

This expectation became even more explicit with the updated Broadcasting Act of 1968, which declared that both public and private Canadian broadcasters had a responsibility to contribute to national unity (Raboy 1990, 180). Taken together, the evolution of Canadian broadcasting in the early postwar decades reveals an ongoing power struggle between the state and commercial interests, which led to the latter gaining ground compared to the 1930s. At the same time, the threat posed by American broadcasting, which had emerged during the interwar period, had not disappeared — it had merely become latent. This explains why Canadian broadcast governance largely followed a path of continuity in the 1950s and 1960s.

Sweden

INTRODUCTION

According to existing comparative communications scholarship, the Nordic countries have been distinguished by their “social responsibility” approach to broadcast governance, in which “socially relevant groups” typically have played a prominent role (Humphreys 1996, 155–158; Kelly 1983; Syvertsen et al. 2014). However, from the previous chapter, we recall that this characterization was not particularly representative of Sweden’s broadcasting system during the interwar period. Although it is true that radio was introduced by popular movements, their amateur operations were discontinued following the government’s 1924 decision to create a public monopoly.

Instead, commercial interests gained a dominant position, as newspapers were made the majority owners of Radiotjänst — the broadcasting company granted exclusive rights to program production. In other words, Sweden’s radio system during the interwar years was

characterized more by its *lack* of third sector representation compared to the other examined nations.

The conventional portrayal of Swedish media as corporatist fits somewhat better with the structure of the nation's broadcasting system after the Second World War, given that the popular movements, for the first time, gained ownership shares in the public broadcaster.

Apart from this minor policy shift, however, no fundamental changes were made to the organizational structure established during the interwar years. Stig Hadenius (1998, 144) highlights the Social Democrats' decision in 1956 to operate television financially and organizationally like radio. This meant that the state Telecommunications Agency retained responsibility for the distribution network, while Radiotjänst (later Sveriges Radio) maintained exclusive rights in program production.

The central aspect was that Swedish television continued as a license-funded monopoly with programs that were free from advertisements. Karl-Hugo Wirén (1986, 164–166) suggests that the continuation of this non-commercial arrangement can be seen as a natural extension of the foundational decisions on radio in the 1920s, as these provided a crucial precedent for the TV policies of the 1950s. This perspective, in other words, suggests that the development of Swedish broadcasting in the early postwar decades was marked by significant institutional inertia.

However, the general consensus within the national literature is that the issues surrounding the organization and funding of television were far more contested than they might initially appear. For instance, Nina Wormbs (1997, 94–97) highlights that the electronics and film industries presented numerous proposals for introducing advertisement-funded television in the postwar period. Furthermore, advocates for advertising were present among the representatives in the 1951 Commission of Inquiry on Television, including the state Telegraph Administration (Hadenius 1998, 141–142).

Within the commission there was nevertheless an equally strong counter-alliance consisting of Radiotjänst, the Social Democrats, and the Newspaper Publishers' Association, advocating for the preservation of the status quo. In one of the few studies explicitly theorizing the role of interest group struggle in shaping broadcasting policy,

Wirén (1986, 164–166) argues that around 1954, the issue had polarized into two distinct camps. However, it was not given from the outset which faction — the commercial or the anti-commercial one — would prevail.

To explain why Swedish television was ultimately assigned to a license-funded monopoly company with popular movements as co-owners, this chapter adopts an actor-centered perspective that analytically distinguishes between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector. A key reason television was ultimately incorporated into the same organizational framework as radio was that the inquiry paid particular attention to the opinions of cultural institutions and popular movements with an educational profile.

These third-sector groups generally believed that commercial or advertising interests risked undermining television’s potential to provide reliable and impartial information as well as culturally valuable programming. This is evident from the submissions to the 1951 Commission of Inquiry, which reveal that the popular movements believed their interests could be best served within the framework of a public monopoly. According to Wirén (1986, 110), their responses reinforced a tendency already present within the inquiry, namely to view the television issue through the lens of education and societal responsibility. The third sector’s support thus decisively tipped the balance in favor of maintaining the status quo.

DECIDING ON A MODEL FOR SWEDISH TELEVISION: HOW AN ANTI-COMMERCIAL INTEREST ALLIANCE PRESERVED THE STATUS QUO

In the previous chapter, we observed how the amateur radio clubs that had helped introduce broadcasting in Sweden were forced to cease their grassroots operations following the government’s 1924 decision to monopolize the industry. However, it was not a fully state-controlled monopoly. It was only the responsibility for establishing and operating the radio distribution network that was assigned to a state agency, namely the Telegraph Administration. Program production, by contrast, was handed over to Radiotjänst — a company owned by newspapers and the radio manufacturing industry. In the 1930s, the Social Democrats had attempted to nationalize

the program production too. However, this proposal was ultimately blocked by the governmental and commercial interests already embedded in the system, a resistance facilitated by the widespread perception that the existing arrangement was functioning relatively well (Rahbek 2004, 92–100). In this way, a peculiar mixed public-private model for broadcasting had taken root in Sweden.

When television emerged after the Second World War, there were factors both supporting and opposing the idea of integrating the new medium into the same organizational and financial framework as radio. Militating in favor of maintaining the status quo was the fact that broadcasting as a phenomenon was no longer novel, meaning television did not bring the same level of uncertainty that radio had in the 1920s.¹⁸ For instance, television relied on the same basic technical infrastructure as radio, including broadcast towers and frequency management systems. In other words, policymakers were not faced with the same urgent need to design a policy framework from scratch.

Indeed, the Social Democratic government initially adopted a highly cautious approach to the new medium. According to Stig Hadenius (1998, 137), some representatives believed that TV was a typically American phenomenon: a superficial and trivializing medium unsuited to the Swedish temperament. Furthermore, the Social Democrats were longstanding opponents of advertising in radio, so they strongly supported the existing license-funded Radiotjänst monopoly.

There were, at the same time, groups from the public administration, academia, and the private business sector that were eager to launch Swedish television as soon as possible. These groups joined forces in 1947 to form the so-called Board for Television Research (*Nämnden för televisionsforskning*) at the initiative of the Royal Institute of Technology and the electronics company L.M. Ericsson. Its purpose was to explore the technical and economic conditions for introducing Swedish television operations and to conduct some initial experiments (Nilsson and Werthén 1950). The Board was highly critical of the government for procrastinating on the issue, as evident in

¹⁸This contrast was highlighted by the 1951 Commission of Inquiry on Television, arguing that the rapid growth of radio had been much due to the fact that it had been a new invention, looked upon as a technical miracle. Television, by contrast, was not expected to generate a similar level of interest, as radio and sound film had already become commonplace in the eyes of the public.

a letter to the Minister of Communications in late 1950:

If test broadcasts are not initiated as soon as possible in Sweden, there is a serious risk that our country will fall behind in the important cultural and technological field represented by broadcast television.¹⁹

The Board underscored that launching experimental operations was only part of the work required to determine the conditions for introducing television in Sweden. Numerous technical, economic, and organizational issues also needed thorough investigation and consideration. Crucially, the capital and operating costs of television were estimated to be up to seven times greater than those of radio (Peers 1979, xv). This led several committee members to conclude that it would be justifiable to fund at least parts of the operation through advertising. Faced with the prospect of television being organized under an alternative, commercial setup, pressure mounted on the Social Democrats to act. Consequently, in 1951, the government appointed a Commission of Inquiry on Television (Hadenius 1998, 136).

The fact that the Commission's composition was based on the principle of interest representation would, at first glance, seem to favor a continuation of the status quo. This approach ensured that the Telegraph Administration and Radiotjänst — both part of the existing license-funded monopoly organization for radio — were granted key positions. According to Wirén (1986, 109-110), the national public broadcaster opposed advertising on television, since it was in its capacity as an anti-commercial preserver of high culture that the company had earned its credentials for creating and maintaining the monopoly in the first place. Radiotjänst had a powerful ally in Social Democrat Ossian Sehlstedt, who represented the press. Additionally, the Liberal chairman Anders Olsson was a newspaperman.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the close ties between newspaper publishers and public authorities had been a key reason why radio programming had been entrusted to a press-owned company — an arrangement unique by international standards (Elgemyr 1984, 51).

¹⁹*Letter from the Committee for Television Research to the Minister of Communications regarding the importance of initiating experimental television broadcasts.* 1950, November 21. RG A04, Vol. F7-1. SRA, p. 1.

As had been the case with radio during the interwar period, newspapers opposed the idea of advertising-funded television, viewing it as a threat to their revenue and audience base. Within the inquiry, there was, in summary, a strong anti-commercialist alliance comprising Radiotjänst, the Social Democrats, and the Newspaper Publishers' Association (*Tidningsutgivarna*). They advocated for television to be organized and financed in the same way as radio, namely as a state monopoly funded by license fees, with Radiotjänst as the concessioned broadcaster.

Although the inquiry was structured in a way that slightly favored the anti-commercialist faction, this advantage was largely offset by the representatives from the electronics industry and the Telegraph Administration. The Administration had thus "switched sides" compared to the 1920s, when it had been a staunch advocate for a license-funded radio monopoly. Now, by contrast, the state agency supported advertising-funded television, as a commercial model was believed to facilitate a faster introduction of the medium and cover its high costs (Wirén 1986, 109). In this position, the telecommunications authority found strong allies within the Board for Television Research, particularly in the radio manufacturing industry and the technical universities. The Advertisers' Association, along with a wide range of organizations representing nearly the entire private business sector, also advocated for commercial TV (Hadenius 1998, 140–141).

Here it is worth noting that, within the inquiry, the main dividing line between those who supported and those who opposed advertising on television did not fall between "public" and "private" actors. Rather, it was the groups concerned with program production that favored the status quo, while those involved in the underlying technology pushed for advertising. Hence, the inquiry's anti-commercial flank was largely counterbalanced by the advertising advocates within the "technical" faction.

This highlights once again the importance of analytically distinguishing between the production and distribution of programs and the groups involved in these activities. This perspective helps elucidate why it was highly ambiguous which organizational model Sweden would choose for television — an ambiguity further compounded by the fact that the inquiry's terms of reference remained neutral on the

key issue of funding (Wirén 1986, 111–112).

To explain why Sweden ultimately organized television as a non-commercial Radiotjänst monopoly with popular movements as co-owners, this chapter further stresses the significance of differentiating between various elements within the “private” broadcasting sector. From the previous chapter, we recall that it had been more or less a foregone conclusion that the distribution network for radio broadcasting would be managed by the Telegraph Authority (Elgemyr 1997, 67). The state agency would never have agreed to relinquish this responsibility to the private radio manufacturing industry, and it actively exploited its dominant position and licensing powers to prevent such a scenario. The main battle had, in other words, been about which groups would be entrusted with managing radio programming. Here, the press emerged as the principal winners through their majority ownership in the monopoly company Radiotjänst.

But it could just as easily have been a decentralized model, with private corporations and popular movements renting access to the state-owned transmitters. Against this backdrop, I argued that the policy dynamics that created Sweden’s interwar radio system can be better understood by analytically distinguishing between the production and distribution of programs and whether these functions were carried out by state agencies, private corporations, or the third sector.

Applying this perspective to the struggle over Swedish television in the 1950s reveals a much more open situation compared to the interwar period, both in terms of which groups would oversee programming *and* who would operate the distribution network. Although the Telegraph Administration aligned with business interests on the issue of advertising, it found itself competing with radio manufacturers such as Ericsson and *Svenska Radioaktiebolaget* (SRA) over who would manage the transmitters.

This conflict was not new, but the Administration’s leadership position relative to the manufacturing industry was far less secure than it had been in the 1920s. As we recall from the previous chapter, the 1922 concession application from the business consortium stipulated that the Swedish radio manufacturing industry, rather than the Telegraph Authority, would manage the radio transmitters (Wibom 1928, 54). However, leveraging its licensing authority, the state agency had

vetoed this proposal, leaving the electronics companies to settle for minority ownership in Radiotjänst.

In television, by contrast, the Telegraph Administration found itself at a disadvantage compared to major radio manufacturers such as Luxor, SRA, and Philips. A key reason was the higher costs and technical complexity of the new medium. The business interests thus had significant momentum and were eager to introduce advertising-funded television as quickly as possible. Leveraging their technical and financial advantages, the private manufacturing industry, in particular, saw an opportunity to move from their relatively marginal role as part-owners of the public service company to a more prominent position as owners and operators of their own television stations (Hadenius 1998, 138–139).

If this ambition were realized, it would mark the first time a non-governmental actor managed part of the technical infrastructure in the Swedish system since the pioneering broadcasts by radio clubs in the early 1920s. In that event, the Swedish radio and television landscape would become more similar to that in Canada, where commercial and publicly funded outlets co-habitated.

Against this backdrop, the struggle over Swedish television took a notable turn in the autumn of 1953, when the aforementioned electronics companies, in collaboration with the industrial firm AGA, formed a consortium to launch commercial broadcasts on an experimental basis for a four-year period. According to Hadenius (1998, 140), a key aim of this initiative was to expose audiences to advertising — which they had not yet encountered in radio — with the expectation that public acceptance of this funding model would pave the way for its permanent adoption, as in the United States.

However, unlike American commercial TV stations, which to varying degrees produced their own programming, the industrial companies did not intend to engage in this activity themselves. Instead, they envisioned a solution similar to what the Telegraph Administration had initially considered in the radio sector: allowing multiple entities to rent airtime on the consortium's transmitters. This is evident from its concession application submitted to the public Commission of Inquiry on October 14, 1953:

Buyers of program time are not only companies within

industry and trade seeking to disseminate consumer information and general awareness about their products, but also many associations, organizations, and institutions that wish to use TV to provide information about their activities and are willing to pay for this.²⁰

The envisioned setup was that the distribution network would be managed by a limited company, called “The Television Company,” while external parties would handle program production. These external producers would include public agencies, such as Radiotjänst and the National Board of Education; commercial firms, like advertising agencies and the film industry; as well as various organizations from the third sector.

In this context, it is worth noting that the Cooperative Union and the Farmers’ Association were included among the concession applicants alongside the large industrial companies. It was, in other words, an alliance between business interests and third-sector groups, as further evidenced by the fact that the consortium made a sharp distinction between commercial and non-commercial content to be aired on its network:

Alongside the paid programs, a portion of the program time will be reserved for unpaid programs, including newsreels and reports, cultural and educational programs, entertainment, etc. This broadcast time will be funded by the revenue from the paid programs.²¹

Together, this illustrates the importance of analytically distinguishing between the production and distribution of programs and whether the groups responsible for these tasks come from the public sector, private enterprise, or the nonprofit sector. During the interwar period, the Telegraph Administration could potentially have entrusted radio programming to the popular movements, but the choice ultimately fell on the press. Now, by contrast, private businesses forged ties with the previously sidelined third sector in what appears to be an effort to anchor the idea of commercial TV among the public.

²⁰ *The Industry Consortium’s concession application to conduct experimental television broadcasts*. 1953, October 14. RG 321308-2, Vol. 2. RA, pp. 1–2.

²¹ *Ibidem.*, pp. 1–2.

According to Hadenius (1998, 140), the advances of this advertising-supporting alliance from the “private” sector caused concern within the “public” part of the Swedish broadcasting system. This was particularly true for stakeholders involved in program production, notably Radiotjänst. The business consortium’s application had envisioned a considerably more marginal role for the license-funded public broadcaster than what it currently enjoyed in radio, so Radiotjänst’s monopoly position was clearly under threat.

The situation was not improved by the fact that the personnel within the press-owned company lacked the necessary expertise to produce television programs of sufficient quality to fulfill the company’s *raison d’être* as a promoter of education and high culture. In light of this situation, the national public broadcaster wrote to the Television Commission, emphasizing the urgent need for additional funding to begin the necessary training:

Radiotjänst wishes to stress the importance of having access to as trained and experienced personnel as possible, especially in terms of program production, during these experimental broadcasts. Therefore, it seems necessary to initiate the training of personnel for television as soon as possible.²²

Despite these difficulties, Radiotjänst had a significant advantage over the commercial-grassroots consortium in that it had two important allies — the Newspaper Publishers’ Association and the Social Democratic Party — both of which were staunch opponents of advertising-funded television (Hadenius 1998, 141). In a letter to the Minister of Communications in late 1953, the broadcasting company warned that approving the business consortium’s application for test broadcasts risked paving the way for low-quality television programming:

Granting the requested concession would result in television being managed in such a way that economic interests would dominate the design of the programming. Such a

²² *AB Radiotjänst’s opinion on the Television Commission’s proposals regarding experimental activities in the field of television*. 1953, January 22. RG 321308-2, Vol. 2. RA, p. 2.

company would likely face significant challenges in maintaining the qualitative and content-related standards that must be upheld for television programs.²³

Memoranda from Radiotjänst's internal archives in Stockholm indicate that the directors of the public broadcasting service were not doctrinally opposed to advertising:

Due to the significant investment and operational costs associated with television, advertising revenue cannot and should not be dismissed without thorough examination.²⁴

However, as pointed out by Wirén (1986, 111), opposition to advertising became a strategic move for the broadcasting company to safeguard its monopoly position. In both internal communications and public statements, Radiotjänst consistently emphasized television as an educational tool and a factor in shaping public opinion. This, argued the national public broadcaster, meant that television's organizational and financial structure had to be examined in light of the societal and cultural principles that had originally guided the establishment of Radiotjänst's program operations:

Properly utilized, television could become an excellent instrument for cultural awakening and orientation, basic democratic education, stimulation of political interest, as well as relaxing and pleasant entertainment. However, it is doubtful whether television would seriously and creatively address these challenging tasks if advertising interests were to dominate.²⁵

In the same way that Radiotjänst emphasized the societal importance of maintaining the license-funded monopoly, the company's majority

²³ *Letter from Radiotjänst to the Minister of Communications regarding the dangers of granting a television concession to a commercial company.* 1953, December 21. RG 321408-2, Vol. 2. RA, pp. 2-3.

²⁴ *Internal Radiotjänst memorandum outlining the pros and cons of various organizational models for television.* 1953, February 2. RG A04, Vol. F7-1. SRA, p. 2.

²⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 9.

owner — the press — also argued that a broader societal interest was at stake in keeping television ad-free. This was due to the potential consequences advertising in television could have for newspapers' finances and, by extension, the diversity of media offerings, as pointed out by the Newspaper Publishers in their submission to the Commission of Inquiry in late 1953:

[I]t is highly probable that in Sweden the substantial costs associated with television advertising could not be added to the existing advertising budgets of companies without significantly reducing allocations to other advertising media. Such a reduction would likely affect newspaper advertising significantly. [...] At a time when smaller newspapers are particularly vulnerable, it seems justified, even from a general societal perspective, not to exacerbate their situation by depriving them of much-needed revenue.²⁶

The Social Democrats, who maintained close ties to the newspaper industry, overwhelmingly shared the press's concerns about advertising-funded television. The Minister of Communications, Sven Andersson, feared that a commercial model would infringe on the independence of programming activities. Like officials in the U.S. Federal Communications Commission, Andersson also worried about the risk of large business organizations setting a biased public agenda. Against this backdrop, the government ultimately rejected the business consortium's application for experimental television broadcasts (Hadenius 1998, 143–144). Thus, the anti-commercial alliance — comprising both commercial interests and public agencies — had, at least temporarily, warded off the advances of the advertising advocates in the consortium featuring for-profit and third-sector groups.

At the same time, the coalition involving Radiotjänst, the Newspaper Publishers, and the Social Democrats had a significant weakness: none of these actors possessed the technical expertise necessary to initiate test broadcasts. Their specialization was mainly in

²⁶ *Submission by the Swedish Newspaper Publishers' Association to the Commission of Inquiry on Television concerning the commencement of experimental TV broadcasts.* 1953, December 1. RG A04-F7, Vol. F7-1. SRA, p. 1.

program production. Collaboration with the private manufacturing industry on technical matters was, for obvious reasons, out of the question. The only viable partner was the Telegraph Administration, which already managed the distribution network for radio.

On one hand, the public agency shared Radiotjänst's view on the importance of launching TV with solid program offerings from the outset, as there was otherwise a risk that the initiative would lose momentum once the initial excitement faded. On the other hand, the Administration had a somewhat different view on how this was best to be achieved. As the collector of radio license fees, the Telegraph Authority considered it fundamentally inappropriate to use these funds to finance an experimental television operation under the auspices of Radiotjänst, as stated in its submission to the Television Commission in early 1953:

The Telegraph Board would like to point out that the broadcasting operation does not generate a surplus that could be used for television, as is the case in certain other countries. Furthermore, the Board considers it fundamentally incorrect to use radio license fees for television as long as radio has so many needs yet to be met.²⁷

Instead, the Telegraph Agency argued that an experimental TV operation should be funded through advertising and would be most likely to win audience approval if the film industry's expertise was leveraged to create high-quality programs. Against this backdrop, the Administration bypassed the Commission of Inquiry on February 16, 1954 and unilaterally granted a license for ad-funded test broadcasts carried out by the Sandrew film studios (Wirén 1986, 91).

The so-called Sandrew Week, held in Stockholm in May that year, proved to be a success. According to Hadenius (1998, 141), the experimental week demonstrated the interconnectedness of film and television. The programs included everything from educational TV and religious broadcasts to music and study circles. Furthermore, the commercial spots were generally not perceived as particularly offen-

²⁷ *The Telegraph Board's opinion on the Television Commission's proposals regarding experimental activities in the field of television.* 1953, January 29. RG 321408-2, Vol. 2. RA, p. 13 [SE_RA.321408-2.2.1006].

sive. In other words, there seemed to be promising prospects for a television model that, if made permanent, would significantly depart from the core principles that had characterized Swedish broadcasting policy thus far: monopoly and advertising-free programming.

There is reason to pause and analyze the political landscape at the beginning of 1954. At this point, there were not just two but three fully viable alternatives for how Swedish television could potentially be organized. It is true that there was a binary conflict line regarding the financing of television, with license advocates opposing advertising advocates. Organizationally, however, the following three potential solutions were on the table:

Table 3.1: Viable regulatory alternatives for Swedish television, February 1954

Actor Constellation	Carriage	Content
Commercial-Third Sector	Radio Industry	Various
Public-Commercial	Telegraph Agency	Newspapers/Radiotjänst
Public-Commercial	Telegraph Agency	Film Industry

To begin, it can be noted that the partnership between the radio manufacturing industry and third sector organizations represented a new type of actor constellation in the Swedish broadcasting sector. As we saw in the previous chapter, it was never a realistic option for commercial interests to take charge of the radio distribution network. In the case of television, by contrast, they saw an opening and formed an alliance with the Cooperative Union and the Farmers' Association to further this goal.

Another possibility was maintaining the status quo, which would have occurred if television had been placed under the joint management of Radiotjänst and the Telegraph Administration. Unlike in the interwar period, however, the Administration was no longer certain it wanted to align with the newspaper-owned broadcasting company. Instead, when considering collaboration on TV program production, the state agency turned its attention to another commercial medium: the motion picture industry.

This scenario once again highlights the importance of analytically distinguishing between content and carriage, as well as whether the groups involved in these activities are state agencies, private en-

terprises, or third-sector agents. The nonprofit-commercial coalition possessed the necessary resources to manage both the distribution and production of TV programs but lacked political support. Radiotjänst, on the other hand, enjoyed political backing and could handle TV program production if provided with the necessary resources. However, the monopoly company could not rely on the Telegraph Administration to handle the technical aspects, as the latter had shifted its focus to the film industry. Given the success of the *Sandrew Week*, one could imagine that the most likely solution to the Swedish TV question in early 1954 was an advertising-funded model under the auspices of the Telegraph Administration (carriage) and the film industry (content).

Given the growing risk that Swedish television would be organized along commercial lines, the government-appointed Commission of Inquiry accelerated its work. First, it denied the film studios' application to conduct extended experimental TV broadcasts. Instead, in October 1954, the commission assigned this task to Radiotjänst. A month later, the inquiry completed its report, with the majority concluding that television, like radio broadcasting, should be placed "at the service of society, culture, public education, and homes" (Hadenius 1998, 141). Advertising was banned, as it was seen as a threat to the integrity of this mission, and television was to be financed in the same manner as radio — through license fees.

In summary, the inquiry recommended that the existing radio monopoly be expanded into a combined radio and television monopoly. At the same time, it emphasized the importance of ensuring that broadcasting had deep roots in Swedish society, advocating for a broader ownership structure. According to Wirén (1986, 164–165), these negotiations came as an unpleasant surprise to press representatives, as they would not retain the majority stake they had previously held in Radiotjänst. Under the new arrangement, 40% of the shares would be allocated to third sector organizations, 40% to the press, and 20% to business organizations.

The press representatives accepted this arrangement, having secured their primary goal of preventing television advertising. Meanwhile, a broader range of organizations were invited to subscribe to shares, including free churches, the temperance movement, educa-

tional associations, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, and the Federation of Swedish Farmers (Hadenius 1998, 141).

In summary, the fundamental conflict over whether the Swedish broadcasting system should take a commercial or non-commercial form remained unchanged from the interwar period. However, a minor policy shift occurred, sidelining newspapers in favor of various third-sector groups. This shift underscores the importance of making an analytical distinction between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector.

According to Wirén (1986, 110), this minor policy shift in favor of the third sector reflected the strong influence that the Commission of Inquiry took from the opinions of independent cultural and educational organizations. Through its surveys and hearings, the inquiry actively engaged educational organizations and public authorities, whose responses reinforced a tendency already present within the majority of the commission: to view the television issue through the lens of education and societal responsibility.

A review of submissions from third-sector organizations to the Commission of Inquiry clearly shows that these groups were highly supportive of television as an educational medium. For instance, the National Federation of Swedish Housewives’ Associations, emphasized that TV could be a valuable tool for public education — but only if programming remained free from advertising:

The Housewives’ Federation would like to strongly emphasize the importance of keeping television’s informational activities entirely free from commercial and other irrelevant interests.²⁸

The Swedish Handicraft Society took a similar anti-commercial stance as the Housewives’ Association, supporting the extension of the existing public service radio model to encompass television:

Television should provide reliable and impartial information, culturally valuable programming, and pleasant en-

²⁸ *Brief from the Swedish Housewives’ Associations to the Commission of Inquiry on Television*. 1952, August 30. RG 321408-2, Vol. 2. RA, p. 1.

tertainment. Irrelevant commercial or advertising interests should therefore not influence program selection or presentation.²⁹

A Radiotjänst memorandum for internal use reveals that the public service company actively sought to involve these third sector in early television trials as part of its strategy to secure broad representation of various societal interests, hoping to create opportunities for collaboration and foster discussions on key issues while television was still in its early stages:

It is of great importance that the start of Swedish television operations is of high quality and that the programs have a broad and representative character, providing content that captures the audience's interest. With this in mind, it is desirable that individuals within Swedish cultural life [...] and our grassroots movements are engaged early on for active participation.³⁰

In summary, third-sector actors' strong opposition to commercial TV was a key factor in the Swedish government's decision to organize the new medium under principles nearly identical to those of radio. While a vocal pro-commercial faction advocated for a different model, grassroots educational groups and cultural civil society associations played a decisive role in tipping the balance toward preserving the status quo.

A parallel can be drawn to the situation in Canada during the 1950s, when a struggle unfolded between the CBC and commercial broadcasters over whether the system should take a more "public" or "private" direction. In that case, the strong support for public broadcasting among farmers' groups, labor unions, and women's associations was decisive for the 1955 Fowler Commission's recommendation to maintain the "single" national system (see Armstrong

²⁹ *Brief from the Swedish Handicraft Society to the Commission of Inquiry on Television*. 1952, September 3. RG 321408-2, Vol. 2. RA, p. 1.

³⁰ *Radiotjänst memorandum on the importance of including popular movements in television's trial operations*. 1954, November 17. RG A04, Vol. F7-1. SRA, p. 1.

2016, 34). Overall, the case study has demonstrated how policymaking on broadcasting is always constrained by pre-existing institutions and interest group dynamics, often reinforcing path dependence.

France

INTRODUCTION

Existing scholarship in comparative political communications has highlighted the strong ties between the political sphere and broadcasting as a defining feature of French media policy. According to Humphreys (1996, 181), policymaking within broadcasting has been characteristically “dirigiste” and voluntaristic, reflecting the central executive’s comparatively unconstrained ability to act.

This portrayal aligns closely with the structure of French broadcasting during the early years of the Fifth Republic. In *Histoire de la télévision sous de Gaulle*, Jérôme Bourdon (2014) details how the Gaullists blatantly instrumentalized the state broadcasting service in a way that was unparalleled in any other Western European democracy. According to Denise Bombardier (1975, 21), the state broadcaster ORTF — nominally founded in 1964 as a public service company — fell far short of granting its journalists the autonomy enjoyed by their counterparts in organizations like the BBC. This, argue Hallin and Mancini (2004b), is one of the main reasons why comparative media scholars have often highlighted French radio and television under de Gaulle as the quintessential example of the “government model” of broadcast governance.

Within the national literature on the media in France, there is, at the same time, broad consensus that the government’s strict control over broadcasting did not originate with the Fifth Republic. Instead, most scholars emphasize the significance of earlier developments in the radio sector. For example, Raymond Kuhn (1995, 77–79) points out that the state monopoly was originally established to manage and regulate radio services. Through a decree issued in November 1945, the provisional government extended this organizational framework to include television, which was entrusted to the monopoly company Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (RTF). According to Eck (1991,

131), this decision was largely shaped by the significant role radio propaganda had played during the Second World War.

Aware of radio's potential to shape public opinion, policymakers prioritized the establishment of a unified broadcasting service capable of efficiently reaching the entire population with information about the government's upcoming plans and tasks. Jean Montaldo (1974, 23) argues that this top-down approach to information dissemination was cemented during the Fourth Republic, as successive administrations treated broadcasting as their "exclusive domain." Overall, the conventional view is that the twin ideas of state monopoly and political control became deeply ingrained in the minds of French politicians during the turbulent years surrounding the Liberation. This, in turn, would have far-reaching consequences for the organization and development of French radio and television later in the postwar period (see, for instance, Kuhn 1995, 90).

In this chapter, I align with the conventional view that politicians' recognition of radio's propaganda potential was a key reason why French broadcasting policy took on such a "dirigiste" character in the 1950s and 1960s. I also agree with the standard account that the philosophical and infrastructural foundations for the highly centralized system that would define French broadcasting in the decades following the Liberation were laid during the Second World War. However, the chapter makes a theoretical point that the *institutional* foundations of French postwar broadcasting had largely been established even before the war.

As we recall from the previous chapter, the Post and Telegraph Agency had gradually attempted to centralize control over radio programming from the local management councils but had only partially succeeded. It was only after 1938, when the threat from Nazi Germany intensified, that public authorities initiated more serious efforts to concentrate all information activities within a unified radio organization to counter the foreign propaganda.

The main argument, therefore, is that France experienced yet another international shock during the interwar period that enabled a fundamental change in the regulatory order. In line with the study's expectations regarding the effects of such critical junctures, elected officials were prompted to intervene to counteract the threat from

Nazi Germany, favoring a state-led broadcasting organization. I illustrate this point by drawing on reports from the Commission of Foreign Affairs of the Chamber of Deputies and material from the archives of Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française.

COUNTERACTING THE NAZI PROPAGANDA:
FRANCE'S PATH FROM DECENTRALIZED RADIO
TO "DIRIGISTE" POSTWAR BROADCASTING

In the previous chapter, we observed how France relaxed the state monopoly on radio in the aftermath of the First World War, as the country faced a genuine risk of falling behind other major powers in the race to establish international wireless connections. This international shock laid the foundation for an interwar broadcasting system that ran completely counter to the conventional image of French media governance as "dirigiste" (see, for instance, Dyson and Humphreys 1988; Hallin and Mancini 2004b). In theory, the state monopoly was maintained, but in practice, a peculiar system took shape where the state and private corporations established parallel transmitter networks, while grassroots organizations assumed responsibility for nearly all program production.

During the 1930s, the Telegraph Administration intensified its efforts to reestablish its legally mandated monopoly, though these attempts met with only partial success. The reforms initiated by PTT Minister Georges Mandel undeniably resulted in a more centralized broadcasting landscape. However, the state's control remained far from absolute, since the agency faced strong resistance from private stations and local management councils already embedded in the system. Consequently, France's tripartite structure for radio — characterized by power-sharing among the government, private corporations, and civil society — remained intact into the latter half of the 1930s (Méadel 1994, 73–75).

Against this backdrop, it would take yet another international crisis for France to establish the centralized and politicized system that defined the postwar period and has since come to epitomize the "government model" of broadcasting within existing communications scholarship (Humphreys 1996, 181). This system, first formalized through a statute in 1959, mandated that radio and televi-

sion be operated as a “public service” under the state broadcaster *Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française* (RTF, renamed ORTF in 1964). In practice, however, the Gaullist party blatantly exploited the broadcasting service during the early years of the Fifth Republic — not only as a means of disseminating information to citizens but also to advance its own political agenda (Bombardier 1975, 21).

The national literature on French television has highlighted the Second World War and its immediate aftermath as the formative period when politicians began to approach broadcasting in this instrumental manner. This argument is based on the fact that it was during the German Occupation that Charles de Gaulle developed the broadcasting skills which he would later employ as president in the 1950s and 1960s. It was between 1940 and 1944 that de Gaulle made his historic broadcasts to the people of Occupied France from the studios of the BBC, and, according to Anthony Smith (1973, 157), first discovered the political potential of the medium.

Raymond Kuhn (1995, 54) also emphasizes the success of the Free French station as a decisive factor in shaping Gaullist views on broadcasting. Kuhn highlights that it was during this wartime period that the Provisional Government in Algiers decided all private stations would be expropriated following the liberation. According to Brochand (1994b, 31), the nationalization was facilitated by the fact that private stations operating before the war had either been taken over by the Germans (in the occupied zone) or were operating under strict control of the Vichy government (in the unoccupied zone). In summary, this perspective suggests that it was during the Second World War that the philosophical and infrastructural foundations were laid for the highly centralized system that would characterize French broadcasting in the decades following the Liberation.

Without disputing this historical account, this chapter highlights that the *institutional* foundations of French postwar broadcasting were largely established already before the war. The critical shift can be traced to the Munich Agreement in September 1938, after which Nazi Germany intensified its psychological warfare by broadcasting propaganda from bordering radio stations targeting French listeners. This compelled the newly inaugurated Radical government, led by Édouard Daladier, to impose further restrictions on the airwaves

and develop a more coherent counter-propaganda program than his predecessors (Scales 2018, 14). The main argument, therefore, is that France experienced yet another international shock during the interwar period that enabled a fundamental change in the regulatory order. In line with the study's expectations regarding the effects of such critical junctures, elected officials were prompted to intervene to counteract the threat from Nazi Germany, favoring a state-led broadcasting organization.

To illustrate how this external shock contributed to the dismantling of the prevailing institutional structure for radio, we need to pick up where the previous chapter left off — namely, the lead-up to the general elections in the spring of 1936. Until this point, radio had played a very marginal role as a tool for shaping public opinion. However, a shift had occurred following the 6 February 1934 crisis, which exacerbated the political polarization in the country and led parties and candidates from across the political spectrum to increasingly use radio in their campaigns (Scales 2018, 59–60).

Once in power, the Popular Front was the first government to more systematically exploit broadcasting for cultural and opinion-shaping purposes. Its most significant reform was the creation of the *Conseil Supérieur de la Radiodiffusion*, tasked with raising the artistic quality of broadcasts by promoting educational, recreational, and public affairs content (Emery 1969, 242–243). Following the creation of this body in the fall of 1936, government authorities could, for the first time, deliver more professional and streamlined broadcast content to a broader audience (Méadel 1994, 134–135). One could say that France was beginning to lay the conceptual and institutional foundations for a “public service” broadcasting system.

At the same time, Léon Blum's leftist alliance lacked a distinct media ideology or a fully developed policy program for radio upon taking power. The government did crack down hard on the local management councils, whose strong position represented the greatest threat to its vision of state-supported high-quality programming (Scales 2018, 14). However, wresting control over programming from these grassroots groups proved easier said than done, as they received strong backing both from within the postal union and from private corporations. According to reports from the PTT authority,

the councils' presidents continued to govern the stations like feudal lords, with little regard for the state power financing them (Méadel 1994, 133). While the decree of October 27, 1936, strengthened the PTT authority's role in the programming and operation of state stations, the management councils were not outright abolished (Ibid., 108–111). In other words, the system's institutional structure for programming remained unchanged.

Concerning the distribution network, one might have expected the Popular Front to target commercial radio stations equally hard, especially given the left-wing parties' anti-capitalist stance on nationalizing the press. However, the government adopted a markedly disinterested approach. According to Cécile Méadel (1994, 102), most socialists regarded the private stations with a kind of benevolent neutrality. Méadel (1994, 139–141) attributes this indifference to the Popular Front leaders' limited awareness of the structural changes underway in the radio sector. For example, the first true government propagandist, Marceau Pivert, never developed any comprehensive plan for organizing radio propaganda (Ibid., 122–123).

To summarize, Léon Blum's left-wing government took several measures to centralize the broadcasting system, but these were mainly aimed at realizing the medium's potential as a cultural force. Despite Nazi Germany having remilitarized the Rhineland in the spring of 1936, the Popular Front launched no significant counter-propaganda efforts during its term in office. As a result, the institutional structure of the French radio system that had prevailed since 1920 remained intact until the very final years of the Third Republic.

The critical shift occurred in connection with the Munich Agreement in September 1938, after which Nazi Germany intensified its psychological warfare by broadcasting propaganda from bordering radio stations. According to Christian Brochand (1994a, 190–191), millions of French listeners tuned in daily to neighboring Radio Luxembourg to hear "the Führer's endless harangue," which the government was incapable of preventing. However, after a French private station aired a speech by Hitler in 1939, politicians were finally forced to take more drastic measures to counter the foreign propaganda (Scales 2018, 14).

Édouard Daladier's new Radical administration implemented the

first steps toward a more coherent counter-propaganda program on the basis of the law of July 11, 1938, concerning the general organization of the nation in wartime. The law stipulated that in peacetime, a general information service would be established under the supreme authority of the President of the Council. The primary task of the so-called General Commissioner for Information would be to gather and disseminate information deemed vital to the nation's interests while coordinating the information services of various ministries to ensure a unified outward message.³¹

Subsequently, on July 29, 1939, the government unified all French radio programming into a single channel. The decree transferred overall responsibility for broadcasting from the PTT Ministry to a completely new service under the authority of the President of the Council, with the PTT Minister acting as a close advisor. With this reform, the Post and Telecommunications Ministry was stripped of its powers over radio for the first time since the First World War, marking the first step in dismantling the prevailing institutional structure of French broadcasting (Brochand 1994a, 184–186).

The next step in this institutional transformation came on September 1, 1939, with the establishment of *Radiodiffusion Nationale* (RN) — France's first official national public broadcaster and the precursor to *Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française* (RTF). The organization was to be led by a General Director, who would oversee radio programming in accordance with decrees issued by the government. This director was directly subordinate to the Prime Minister, who, in practice, held veto power over all programming decisions (Brochand 1994a, 184–186). In a report to the President of the Republic, Prime Minister Édouard Daladier explained the rationale behind this heavy centralization of broadcasting:

The decree of July 29, 1939, brought broadcasting directly under the authority of the President of the Council, giving the Government a powerful instrument of moral defense in critical circumstances. [...] By granting Radiodiffusion Nationale a homogeneous and strongly hierarchical

³¹Letter from the President of the Council to the President of the Republic regarding the establishment of an organization to coordinate information efforts in times of war. 1939, July 30. RG F43, Vol. 1. AN, p. 1.

structure, the Government fulfills its commitments made at the urging of Parliament.³²

The formalization of the new national radio organization, combined with the introduction of the General Commissioner for Information, allowed the Daladier government to establish a more unified and flexible operational structure for delivering a consistent message via radio than any of its predecessors.

At the same time, the institutional structure that had governed French radio since the early 1920s had not yet been fully dismantled. Many regional stations continued to transmit on shortwave without the government knowing exactly who was behind these broadcasts, while commercial stations persisted in broadcasting independent programs. Additionally, the local management councils remained in operation (Brochand 1994a, 184–187). This exemplifies the study's argument that power relations between interest groups, embedded in institutions from earlier historical contexts, constrain all subsequent policymaking and can impede comprehensive institutional change.

Against this backdrop, it was not until the government implemented its mobilization plan that the commercial and third sector interests embedded in the existing institutional framework were decisively rooted out.

The plan stipulated that the state network would remain fully operational during hostilities and that the entire private network would be requisitioned. Smaller amateur stations in the regions were placed under strict state control. Crucially, the government dissolved the local management councils, which had been producing programs for state-run stations for over a decade. In their place, newly appointed local program officers were required to broadcast information from the national radio service. With this, the decentralized broadcasting structure of the interwar period had been fundamentally reformed (Brochand 1994a, 186–191).

Taken together, the French experience during the final decades of the Third Republic supports this study's theoretical argument that international shocks typically push policymakers' priorities in a more

³² *Report from the President of the Council to the President of the Republic regarding the subordination of the Radio administration under the direct authority of the government.* 1939, September 1. RG F43, Vol. 1. AN, p. 1.

dirigiste direction. Furthermore, it illustrates how third-sector actors are often marginalized when the state prioritizes a unified, state-led approach to counter a foreign threat. In France's case, the local management councils, which had been responsible for producing radio programs since the early 1920s, saw their opportunities to engage in broadcasting severely curtailed. Indeed, it would take until the 1970s before French third-sector actors once again had the chance to operate independent radio broadcasts outside the state monopoly — a theme explored in the following and final empirical chapter.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have observed how the examined countries largely organized television according to principles similar to those previously established for radio. The major exception to this general pattern was France, where the decentralized radio landscape of the 1920s and 1930s — comprising public, commercial, and third sector agents — was replaced by one of the most centralized public broadcasting organizations in all of Western Europe.

In explaining this radical shift in the postwar period, I argued that the heightened threat from Nazi Germany after 1938 prompted public authorities to concentrate all information activities within a unified radio organization to counter the foreign propaganda. This marked the beginning of more serious efforts by the government to reintroduce the statutory state broadcasting monopoly that it previously had been unable to enforce. The French case study thus illustrated how international shocks can heighten elected officials' interest in broadcasting and drive them to reconsider previous policy choices, typically in a more *dirigiste* direction.

By contrast, countries that did not experience a comparable shock largely followed a path of continuity, retaining policies from the interwar period into the 1950s and 1960s. In Sweden, the state Telecommunications Agency maintained its monopoly on managing the distribution network, while Radiotjänst (later Sveriges Radio) extended its exclusive rights to produce radio programs to include television. In the United States, public broadcasting was established in 1967. Still, television continued to be dominated by the same commercial

networks — NBC, ABC, and CBS — that had previously solidified their positions in the radio sector. In Canada, private stations and the national public broadcaster, CBC, continued to collaborate to deliver a distinctly Canadian radio and television service. In other words, the “single” system — established in the 1930s in response to the threat from American networks — remained virtually unchanged.

Without challenging this overarching depiction of the development of broadcasting across Europe and North America in the postwar period, I have stressed the need of adopting an actor-centered perspective that distinguishes analytically between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector. Through this institutionalist lens, we have been able to explain minor policy shifts that did not necessarily change the ownership structure of the system but nonetheless altered the power balance between public, commercial, and third sector groups.

For instance, in both Canada and Sweden, we observed that commercial interests gained significant momentum in the postwar period, largely because television was much more expensive than radio. Against this backdrop, there was broader support among different stakeholders for financing the new medium through advertising. By the mid-1950s, both countries were therefore at a crossroads, weighing whether to adopt a more “market-oriented” policy for television or maintain the status quo with a dominant national public broadcasting service. The kingmakers in this struggle were groups from the third sector, who sided with the advocates for the continued primacy of the CBC and Radiotjänst/Sveriges Radio, believing their interests would be best served within the framework of public service broadcasting.

The analytical distinction between commercial and non-commercial elements within the “private” media sector also helped illuminate the policy dynamics that steered television in the United States toward a slightly more “public” orientation in the postwar period. The American case study revealed that the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was rooted in a counterreaction to the dominance of commercial radio and TV networks, spearheaded by labor unions and educational institutions. In the 1940s, these third-sector groups joined forces with officials within the Federal Communications Commission

to push through the so-called Fairness Doctrine, designed to prevent large networks from shaping a biased public agenda. Subsequently, educational organizations secured dedicated channels for nonprofit television, providing these third sector interests with an institutional foundation that they later leveraged to advocate for the introduction of public broadcasting.

Overall, the chapter has demonstrated how an actor-centered approach that analytically distinguishes between different elements of the “private” broadcasting sector can offer a more nuanced understanding of how processes of path dependence are shaped by the interplay between institutions and interests. The key takeaway is that the stability of the prevailing equilibrium in each country largely depended on the willingness and capacity of third-sector organizations to challenge it.

In the following decades, third-sector groups would play an increasingly central role in shaping broadcasting across Europe and North America. This was largely due to technological advancements in the 1970s and 1980s that lowered the barriers for these groups to operate their own radio and television broadcasts — a theme explored in greater detail in the final empirical chapter.

CHAPTER 4



A Fragmented Media Landscape

If the initial decades following the Second World War were marked by significant continuity in broadcast governance from the interwar radio era, the decades after 1970 saw transformative changes. None of the examined countries reversed their policy trajectories due to a foreign threat, but their radio and television systems were severely disrupted by new communication technologies advancing so rapidly that public authorities could not have realistically prevented their adoption. This included FM radio, cable television, and direct broadcast satellites, which pushed governments across Western democracies to deregulate their broadcasting sectors by eroding the spectrum scarcity rationale that policymakers had long invoked to justify stricter regulation of broadcast media than print.

The main argument advanced in this chapter is that the emergence of new communication technologies in the 1970s and 1980s constituted a technological shock, weakening states' ability to regulate the media landscape by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective. Simultaneously, barriers to entry for private media actors were lowered, leading to increasingly fragmented and "market-oriented" broadcasting landscapes across Western Europe and North America by the late 1990s. At face value, this development thus appears to support the prevailing theory in comparative political communications that national media systems have converged in a more commercial direction (see, for instance, Dyson and Humphreys 1988, 1;

Jackson and Vipond 2003, 76–77; Kuhn and Perry 1999, 301–305).

The effects of new technology were *least* pronounced in the United States and Canada, given that private outlets had long been part of the media landscape. By contrast, the changes were far more profound in France and Sweden, where state monopolies had been maintained since the 1950s and 1960s. Still, while all examined countries deregulated broadcasting in response to transformative new technologies, the changes were neither uniform across nations nor simultaneous. To explain cross-national differences in how governments dismantled restrictions on radio and television in the late twentieth century, this chapter highlights how processes of convergence and path dependence were shaped by power structures among state agents, private businesses, and third-sector groups embedded within *pre-existing* broadcasting institutions.

To illustrate the role of institutions and interests in mediating the impact of new technology, this chapter leverages parallels between the French and Swedish cases in a counterfactual analysis, exploring the alternative trajectories these countries might have taken if third-sector agents had acted differently when governments first began loosening restrictions on broadcasting.

By the mid-1970s, FM radio technology had advanced to the point where various civil society organizations in both countries began demanding the right to operate independent broadcasts outside the state monopolies. In Sweden, the centre-right government took a lenient approach, allowing popular movements to broadcast neighborhood radio on an experimental basis, provided the programs remained advertisement-free. In France, by contrast, both the Giscardians and the Socialist Party cracked down on the small illegal community stations that had emerged across the country in anticipation of new legislation. These differences in the relationship between the state and the third sector proved pivotal at this juncture, steering the countries' broadcasting landscapes onto diametrically different policy paths.

In France, the third sector mobilized a backlash against the government's heavy-handed approach in the early 1980s, as hundreds of pirate radio stations went on air, ultimately forcing liberalization. According to Agnès Chauveau (1997), the initial reforms swiftly turned France into one of the most market-oriented broadcasting sys-

tems in Europe, contradicting the Socialists' mantra of "controlled deregulation." In Sweden, by contrast, deregulation proceeded in a more orderly manner. It was not until the early 1990s that the government relaxed the longstanding ban on advertising in terrestrial broadcasts. The catalyst for this decision was the advancement of satellite technology, which had reached a point where policymakers could no longer prevent households from accessing commercial TV programs from foreign-based media companies.

A similar situation unfolded in Canada, where concerns about radio and television programming being overwhelmed by content from the United States had existed since the interwar period. Early on, Canadian policymakers recognized that once cable and satellite transmissions reached sufficient maturity, preventing foreign broadcasts from reaching the population would be impossible. The solution chosen in Canada was to preserve the broadcasting system's national vocation while increasingly seeking to achieve it by enhancing the system's competitiveness and supporting domestic content producers from both the commercial and third-sector.

Policymakers' underlying objective of protecting the national integrity of the broadcasting system remained unchanged from the 1930s, when Canada had decided to establish a unified national broadcasting system to shield itself from the encroachment of American commercial radio networks. However, technological advancements forced a search for new policy means to achieve it. Thus, the Canadian case illustrates the argument that transformative communication technologies often render existing policy instruments ineffective, typically compelling states to adopt more indirect forms of intervention, such as subsidies and content regulations. It also underscores that policymaking on radio and television never occurs in a vacuum but is continuously shaped by institutional arrangements and interest group dynamics rooted in deeper historical contexts.

Because broadcasting in the United States had been predominantly commercial since the interwar period, this was the country where the impact of new technologies on ownership structures within radio and television was least pronounced. The proliferation of FM radio, cable TV, and satellites primarily reinforced the competitiveness of an already market-oriented system.

While new communication technologies did not fundamentally alter the structure of the American broadcasting system, they had significant implications for programming regulation by rendering obsolete the spectrum scarcity rationale for maintaining the so-called Fairness Doctrine. As we recall from previous chapters, this doctrine, upheld by the Federal Communications Commission since 1949, aimed to counter the risk of large commercial broadcasters using their oligopolistic position to set a biased public agenda. Specifically, the doctrine imposed an affirmative obligation on broadcast licensees to offer a right to respond to personal attack and present different viewpoints when covering controversial topics.

The turning point came in the late 1970s when FM radio technology had advanced to the point where, in most major cities, there was greater diversity in broadcast media than in print outlets. Only then did a critical mass of policymakers begin to recognize that the spectrum scarcity rationale for restricting radio and TV licensees' First Amendment rights had likely outlived its relevance. Consequently, Congress initiated the process of dismantling the Fairness Doctrine, which was ultimately carried out in 1987 by the Reagan-appointed FCC leadership. Taken together, the U.S. case illustrated how new technology can drive institutional change by rendering existing policy instruments obsolete, often empowering and expanding the diversity of media outlets.

While commercial outlets undeniably gained significant momentum across Western democracies in the late twentieth century, this chapter demonstrates that third-sector groups also benefited from new communication technologies. This underscores the importance of analytically distinguishing between different elements within the "private" broadcasting sector. Furthermore, the findings show that the impact of new technology on power relations among state actors, private businesses, and third-sector groups varied considerably across countries. Overall, this reinforces the study's argument that shifts in the broader policy environment are always mediated by pre-existing institutions and national interest group dynamics.

United States

INTRODUCTION

In the comparative literature on media systems, there is a general consensus that the United States shifted significantly towards a “pure” market model of broadcasting during the 1980s and 1990s (Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 230; Pavani 2018, 19). The policy event that has garnered the most scholarly attention is the 1987 repeal of the so-called Fairness Doctrine, which for decades had compelled broadcasters to provide evenhanded coverage of controversial issues in their programming. Additionally, the Federal Communications Commission’s (FCC) longstanding license renewal process was reduced to a mere formality (Fukuyama and Grotto 2020, 212-213).

In doing so, the government relinquished one of its primary policy tools for influencing broadcast programming and shaping which groups had access to radio and television outlets. It is true that public broadcasting continued to exist, but it remained a marginal service in an otherwise overwhelmingly private system. This increasingly market-oriented system was later codified through the 1996 Telecommunications Act, which aimed to provide for a “pro-competitive, deregulatory national policy framework” designed to “accelerate rapidly private sector deployment in advanced telecommunications and information technologies” (Senate Conference Report, quoted in Sterling and Kittross 2002, 591).

Within the national literature on U.S. broadcasting, there is broad consensus that the proliferation of new program delivery systems was the primary driver of the shift toward a more “market-oriented” radio and television system. Ken Auletta (1991, 560-561) likens cable television to an earthquake that cracked the foundations of the commercial over-the-air broadcasting networks, which had dominated the country’s radio and television system since the 1920s. The reason for this was that cable, when it made its major breakthrough in the early 1980s, created an abundance of available broadcast channels. This, in turn, eliminated the longstanding spectrum scarcity rationale for the government to control programming content and discretionarily restrict the number of broadcasting licensees. In summary, the dominant view holds that technological advancements, coupled with

an ideological climate favoring market-liberal ideas, account for the extensive deregulation of the American broadcasting market in the 1980s and 1990s (Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 230).

Without disputing this conventional account of the development of U.S. broadcasting in the late twentieth century, this chapter argues that the decisive trigger for the deregulatory push was not cable's expansion in the 1980s but the development of local FM radio in the late 1970s. Since broadcasting in the United States had been predominantly commercial since the early 1920s, the proliferation of FM radio, cable TV, and satellites merely reinforced the competitiveness of an already market-oriented system. Against this backdrop, I argue that the most consequential impact of emerging communication technologies in the late twentieth century was the erosion of the longstanding spectrum scarcity rationale underlying the Fairness Doctrine, which for decades had required broadcasters to present diverse viewpoints on controversial issues in their programming.

As noted in the previous chapter, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) had introduced this doctrine in 1949, backed by third-sector groups, to counteract the risk of large commercial broadcasters using their oligopolistic position to set a biased public agenda. In this chapter, I present original archival evidence from hearings by the House Subcommittee on Communication and Power, showing that judicial authorities were highly critical of the Fairness Doctrine for undermining its own goal of promoting greater pluralism in broadcast viewpoints. Their concern was that it discouraged broadcasters from addressing controversial issues altogether. Despite this, the Federal Communications Commission persistently refused to relax the policy. As revealed by internal memoranda, FCC officials argued that the natural limitation on the number of broadcasting stations remained a reality, which justified the continued obligation for fair reporting.

The turning point came in the late 1970s when FM radio technology had advanced to the point where, in most major cities, there was greater diversity in broadcast media than in print outlets. Only then did a critical mass of policymakers begin to recognize that the spectrum scarcity rationale for restricting radio and TV licensees' First Amendment rights had likely outlived its relevance. Consequently,

Congress proposed a bill was proposed in 1978 to repeal the Fairness Doctrine on a trial basis in the country's ten largest radio markets, marking the first step toward its full abolition just over a decade later. Taken together, case study illustrates how new technology can drive institutional change by rendering existing policy instruments obsolete, forcing policymakers to seek out alternative means of intervention. It also highlights how technological advancements tend to empower and expand the diversity of "private" broadcast outlets.

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the major networks were among the strongest advocates for *maintaining* the existing regulatory order, while small stations sought the repeal of the Fairness Doctrine. This was because the large commercial players preferred stability and predictability, whereas the doctrine's requirement for balanced coverage imposed a significant financial and operational burden on grassroots media. At the same time, contemporary news articles and internal memoranda from the Office of Telecommunications Policy contradict the idea that policymakers upheld the Fairness Doctrine with the *intention* to favor large commercial players.

On the contrary, the doctrine was long viewed as a safeguard against big corporations monopolizing public discourse to the detriment of community and minority viewpoints. This illustrates the importance of making an analytical distinction between commercial and nonprofit interests within the "private" sector to better understand the policy dynamics underlying the deregulation of the American broadcasting landscape at the end of the twentieth century. In conclusion, I am inclined to agree with Compaine and Gomery (2000) that it would be misleading to view this process merely through the lens of "commercialization."

THE REPEAL OF THE FAIRNESS DOCTRINE: NEW TECHNOLOGY ERODES LONGSTANDING BROADCAST PROGRAM REGULATIONS

At the end of the previous chapter, we saw how the introduction of public broadcasting upended the conventional view of U.S. media as exclusively market-oriented. Those who had been instrumental in pushing for the reform were third sector groups who, due to the foundational radio policies of the interwar period, largely had been

excluded from the broadcasting system in favor of the major commercial networks and their affiliates.

The central rationale behind the introduction of public broadcasting had been to provide a counterbalance to these big business interests. Unlike in Canada, however, the original intention was not to create this counterbalance through a centralized national program service but rather by supporting local stations with an educational profile. In this way, the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was symbolically important in that it recognized the state's role in ensuring the continued existence of noncommercial radio and television.

However, the political support for public broadcasting would erode significantly during the presidency of Richard Nixon, who, in the summer of 1972, vetoed a bill aimed at providing increased funding for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Nixon's main concern, as reflected in a statement before the House of Representatives, was that the organization originally established to serve local stations would instead become the center of power and the focal point of control for the entire public broadcasting system:

The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 made localism a primary means of achieving the goals of the educational broadcasting system. Localism places the principal public interest responsibility on the individual educational radio and television stations, licensed to serve the needs and interest of their own communities. By not placing adequate emphasis on localism, H.R. 13918 threatens to erode substantially public broadcasting's impressive potential for promoting innovative and diverse cultural and educational programming.¹

In *The Vanishing Vision*, James Day (1995, 15-28) argues that the ensuing uncertainties about public broadcasting's funding undermined the possibilities for planning its long-term development. This, combined with contentious squabbles among the fragmented organization's constituent elements, collectively thwarted the estab-

¹Statement by President Nixon before the House of Representatives vetoing the bill to increase funding for public broadcasting. 1972, 30 June. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 26. NARA.

lishment of a national public television system on par with Canada (Avery and Pepper 1980, 127). Because public broadcasting has played a relatively minor role in an overwhelmingly private system, it is not generally considered the government policy with the greatest impact on U.S. radio and television programming content

Instead, the national literature has highlighted the so-called Fairness Doctrine as the most significant public intervention in the post-war period (Sterling and Kittross 2002, 560–567). From the previous chapter, we recall that the Fairness Doctrine was a set of policies issued by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), originating with its report on *Editorializing by Broadcast Licensees* from 1949. The report set forth a twofold affirmative obligation on broadcast licensees:

1. First, to speak out on controversial public issues, although not necessarily in the format of station editorials.
2. Second, to ascertain and seek out all responsible viewpoints on controversial issues and afford the opportunity for such contrasting viewpoints to be heard.²

Like public broadcasting, the Fairness Doctrine had its roots in a concern for community and minority groups in society. Following the powerful expansion of television after the Second World War, lawmakers grew increasingly wary that the monopoly audience control of the three main commercial networks — NBC, ABC, and CBS — could be misused to set a biased public agenda.³ To prevent this, the Federal Communications Commission required broadcast licensees to devote time to contrasting views on issues of public importance.

The logic behind this policy was that broadcasters, under the 1934 Communications Act, had a duty to further “public interest, convenience, and/or necessity”. The FCC interpreted this clause to mean that the right of any individual licensee to broadcast their own

²Excerpt from the hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations concerning the Fairness Doctrine. 1968, 5 March. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

³Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. *Fairness Doctrine*. Available: www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/topic-guide/fairness-doctrine

particular views was secondary to “the paramount right of the public in a free society to be informed and to have presented to it [...] different attitudes and viewpoints.”⁴ The federal regulator did not engage in direct censorship. However, the FCC would take into account whether a broadcaster’s presentation of controversial public issues had been of questionable fairness when the station’s license was up for renewal. In other words, broadcasters had an incentive to play by the rules if they wanted to stay on air.

The Commission’s indirect approach to program regulation, often referred to as “regulation by lifted eyebrow,” may seem rather modest compared to countries like France and Sweden, where the state held a monopoly on this activity. Still, many found it highly controversial. Critics conceded that the purpose of the Fairness Doctrine — to increase viewpoint diversity and promote discussion of issues of interest in the community served by each station — was commendable.

The problem lay in the doctrine’s vague and indefinite standards, both in defining what constituted a controversial public issue and in determining what “fairness” required the licensee to do in specific circumstances. This vagueness, according to critics, had a restraining effect regarding the topics broadcasters chose to address in the first place, an argument furthered by attorney and future FCC Commissioner Glen O. Robinson in his testimony before the House Special Subcommittee on Investigations in the spring of 1968:

It seems difficult to deny that the fairness doctrine does constitute a restraint on broadcasters’ free speech — a restraint sufficient to raise serious constitutional problems, and one which is no less real by virtue of the fact that it does not directly seek to inhibit free speech but merely places burdens or restrictions upon its exercise.⁵

The constitutional issue concerned the First Amendment’s clear prohibition against the government abridging freedom of speech and the press. Comparisons between the regulation of the press and broad-

⁴ *Report on Editorializing*. 1949. 13 FCC 1246, 1249.

⁵ *Excerpt from the hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations concerning the Fairness Doctrine*. 1968, 5 March. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

casting were indeed common among those arguing that the Fairness Doctrine might be unconstitutional, including Robinson:

Attempt to tell newspapers [...] that they must treat all controversial issues “fairly” — as judged by a government agency — and there would be a hue and cry which would fairly rock the foundations of Capitol Hill.⁶

The fundamental counter-argument that defenders of the doctrine consistently returned to in favor of applying different rules to print media compared to radio and television was that of “spectrum scarcity.” From the chapter on U.S. radio, we recall that, until 1927, the government’s policy had been that practically anyone who wanted to could set up a broadcasting station.

However, a continuation of this complete laissez-faire approach would have led to the destruction of effective radio communication, since only a limited number of stations could broadcast in a given area without interfering with each other. When policymakers realized that this policy was a practical impossibility, Congress was essentially forced to establish a licensing system that limited access to the airwaves. When the Supreme Court upheld the FCC’s licensing procedure as constitutional in the so-called NBC case of 1943, it was indeed with reference to the unique circumstances of spectrum scarcity:

Unlike other modes of expression, radio inherently is not available to all [...] and that is why, unlike other modes of expression, it is subject to governmental regulation.⁷

This decision established an expansive view of the Commission’s powers, though it left many constitutional questions unanswered. Critics argued that the most obvious shortcoming of the spectrum scarcity logic was that, despite the physical limitations on frequency availability and the corresponding restriction on the number of broadcast facilities, radio and television stations still outnumbered any other competing mass communications media. Against this background,

⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁷ Justice Felix Frankfurter’s opinion in *National Broadcasting Co. v. United States*. 1943. 319 U.S. 190, pp. 215-216.

Glen Robinson argued before the House committee that it was unjustified to treat broadcasting differently from the press:

If radio is not available to all, neither is any other significant mass communications medium. It is impossible, therefore, to distinguish radio and television from newspapers, movie theaters, or magazine and book publishers on this basis. If barriers to entry and limitations on access to the use of mass communications media are to be relied on as a basis for imposing regulation of free speech, such regulation should not discriminate against radio and television but should extend to all communications media.⁸

Amid growing criticism of the Federal Communication Commission's regulatory powers, the Supreme Court's handling of the *Red Lion* case in the spring of 1969 marked a crucial juncture in shaping the future of U.S. broadcast regulation. The issue centered on the constitutionality of the Fairness Doctrine's second main component besides the FCC's test of overall fairness, namely the so-called personal attack rules. These stipulated that whenever a station attacked the honesty, character, or integrity of an individual or group, or took a partisan stance on political candidates, it had to provide the targeted party with a script of the broadcast beforehand, along with an opportunity to respond using the station's facilities.⁹

When the Supreme Court issued its landmark decision on June 9, 1969, it established a comprehensive First Amendment theory that upheld both the licensing system and the Commission's Fairness Doctrine. To begin, Justice Byron White, writing for a unanimous Court, reaffirmed Justice Frankfurter's thesis that licensing was permissible due to the scarcity factor and that the First Amendment did not grant anyone an inherent right to operate a broadcasting station.

[I]f there is to be any effective communication by radio,

⁸ *Excerpt from the hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations concerning the Fairness Doctrine*. 1968, 5 March. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

⁹ *Excerpt from the hearings before the Special Subcommittee on Investigations concerning the Fairness Doctrine*. 1968, 5 March. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

only a few can be licensed and the rest must be barred from the airwaves.¹⁰

The Court thus concluded that an unabridgable right to broadcast — like the individual right to speak, write, or publish — would frustrate the very purposes of the First Amendment. Yet though the licensing system was deemed essential for furthering First Amendment interests in broadcasting, the Court found there were still uncertainties about how those interests should be defined and implemented. The key question was whether the licensees chosen by the government should be granted an absolute and unrestricted right to promote their own views, or whether there should be provisions to safeguard the First Amendment interests of those citizens who, by necessity, were *denied* the opportunity to operate a broadcasting station.¹¹

The *Red Lion* Court started from the assumption that the First Amendment's core purpose was to enhance the welfare of the public by ensuring the broadest possible dissemination of information from diverse and opposing sources. Given this, the Court argued that the Amendment was intended not solely to protect the speech of particular individuals but also to foster and sustain the informed public opinion essential for the vitality of democratic society and its institutions as a whole. Echoing the FCC's 1949 Report on Editorializing, the Court thus affirmed:

[I]t is the right of the viewers and listeners, not the right of the broadcasters, which is paramount.¹²

Against this premise and given the scarcity of broadcast frequencies, the Supreme Court asserted that the First Amendment impelled, rather than prohibited, the government to establish a system to ensure the public's right to be informed about important issues and to hear competing viewpoints on them:

It does not violate the First Amendment to treat licensees given the privilege of using scarce radio frequencies as

¹⁰ *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*. 1969. 395 U.S. 367, p. 389.

¹¹ *FCC Report (74-702) Concerning the Handling of Public Issues under the Fairness Doctrine and the Public Interest Standards of the Communications Act*. 1974, 27 June. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 11. NARA, pp. 4-5.

¹² *Red Lion Broadcasting Co. v. FCC*. 1969. 395 U.S. 367, p. 390.

proxies for the entire community, obligated to give suitable time and attention to matters of great public concern. To condition the granting or renewal of licenses on a willingness to present representative community views on controversial issues is consistent with the ends and purposes of those constitutional provisions forbidding the abridgment of freedom of speech and freedom of the press.¹³

Here it is worth noting the Supreme Court explicitly designated broadcast licensees as proxies for the public in the communities they served, rather than as “speakers.” This again highlights that there was a concern from U.S. public authorities for community and minority viewpoints in relation to dominant actors, and that such grassroots interests were recognized as distinct from other “private” interests. In this spirit, the Court argued that the purpose and foundation of both the licensing system and the Fairness Doctrine were aligned with those of the First Amendment, namely:

to preserve an uninhibited marketplace of ideas in which truth will ultimately prevail, rather than to countenance monopolization of that market, whether it be by the Government itself or a private licensee.¹⁴

The Supreme Court’s ruling was a landmark moment in U.S. broadcasting, as it gave constitutional legitimacy to a policy that had been highly contested. In this way, the status quo was maintained. The critics’ arguments that the scarcity rationale had become outdated did not resonate with the justices. While conceding that advances in technology had led to more efficient utilization of the broadcast spectrum, they noted that the spectrum had become so congested that it had at times been necessary to suspend new applications. In its final opinion, the Court therefore concluded:

Nothing in this record, or in our own researches, convinces us that the resource is no longer one for which there are more immediate and potential uses than can be accommodated.¹⁵

¹³ *Ibidem.*, p. 394.

¹⁴ *Ibidem.*, p. 390.

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*, p. 399.

However, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, the Fairness Doctrine would only remain in effect until 1987, when it was repealed by a unanimous vote of the Federal Communications Commission. In both comparative media research and the national literature on U.S. broadcasting, this policy shift has typically been linked to the neoliberal ideological trends of the time and the proliferation of new systems for delivering programs.

Gomery (2008, 295) highlights the fact that the deregulation of broadcasting began following the election of President Ronald Reagan in 1980. As Ken Auletta (1991) points out, this coincided with the real breakthrough of cable television, which he likens to an earthquake that cracked the foundations of the prevailing regulatory order (see also Sterling and Kittross 2002, 483–484). Theoretically, this technological push can be understood as a critical juncture which, by *de facto* introducing a multichannel environment, eliminated the scarcity rationale for both discretionary licensing and the requirement on broadcasters to provide balanced programming.

In the following, I present original archival evidence supporting the study's theoretical claim that technological advances tend to drive radio and television sectors in a more market-oriented direction. However, contrary to the standard account of U.S. broadcasting, I argue that the primary catalyst for the deregulatory shift came from advancements in FM radio in the late 1970s, rather than cable.

The material shows that the decisive push occurred around 1976–1977, when it dawned upon key stakeholders who upheld the status quo — notably Congressmen and judicial authorities — that the number of radio stations vastly outnumbered newspapers in several of the nation's largest markets. Only then did they truly realize that the spectrum scarcity rationale had outlived its purpose, whereupon Congress initiated its most serious attempt thus far to review the half-century-old Communications Act.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1969 Red Lion case ruling, however, it seemed as though some of the most vocal critics of the prevailing regulatory order had lost momentum and accepted the status quo, albeit reluctantly. Several prominent jurists maintained their principled critique of the Fairness Doctrine from a First Amendment perspective and many argued that the scarcity rationale for regula-

tion was an outdated myth. At the same time, they could no longer deny that the Doctrine and the existing licensing procedure enjoyed constitutional legitimacy following the Supreme Court's decision.

A new public body in the audiovisual field — the Office of Telecommunications Policy (OTP) — was one of the actors that were ambivalent about the current regulatory approach. The OTP had been established by President Nixon in 1969 as part of a broader federal interest in regulating and guiding telecommunications. In an internal memorandum from 1971, its officials, on one hand, directed strong criticism at the FCC for what was perceived as a pervasive and expanding control over broadcast program content:

[O]ne is forced to conclude that FCC content control is too deeply ingrained in the broadcast structure to ever root it out. The only way to halt the increasing pace of content control would be to change the basic economic structure of the industry — a task that would be facilitated by the widespread introduction of new technology such as cable television.¹⁶

On the other hand, the Office acknowledged that there were still certain barriers to entry in the broadcasting market, which justified the current policy of treating licensees as proxies/trustees for the public — rather than as “speakers” — in order to promote the diversity goal of the First Amendment:

In short, we can accept a certain degree of content control as a historical necessity, but we can recognize it as a necessary evil and limit it whenever feasible.¹⁷

Amid this growing criticism from the White House about overstepping its authority in content regulation, the Federal Communications Commission initiated a broader inquiry into the efficacy of the Fairness Doctrine in the summer of 1971. However, an outright repeal

¹⁶ *Office of Telecommunications memorandum concerning the FCC's control of broadcast program content*. 1971, 15 September. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*.

of the Doctrine was out of question, as is evident from the inquiry's explanatory memorandum:

We stress that we are interested in fundamental policy — not in a re-hash of legal considerations nor in recommendation of statutory revision. Thus, this Commission cannot abandon the fairness doctrine or treat broadcasters as common carriers who must accept all material offered by any and all comers.¹⁸

After three years of hearings, the FCC published its report which stated that a reconsideration of the doctrine's existence could only be warranted when time and technology had eroded the necessity for the government to demand fairness on the air:

We believe [...] that the problem of scarcity is still very much with us, and that despite recent advances in technology, there are still substantially more individuals who want to broadcast than there are frequencies to allocate.¹⁹

As the ultimate arbiter of the rules that would govern the U.S. audiovisual market within the framework of the 1934 Communications Act, the Commission thus affirmed the status quo:

The effective development of an electronic medium with an abundance of channels (through the use of cable, or otherwise) is still very much a thing for the future. For the present, we do not believe that it would be appropriate — or even permissible — for a government agency charged with the allocation of the public channels [...] to ignore the legitimate First Amendment rights of the general public.²⁰

¹⁸*FCC Announcement of Broader Inquiry into the Fairness Doctrine*. 1971, 11 June. RG 417, Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA, pp. 1–2.

¹⁹*FCC Report (74–702) Concerning the Handling of Public Issues under the Fairness Doctrine and the Public Interest Standards of the Communications Act*. 1974, 27 June. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 11. NARA, p. 6.

²⁰*Ibidem*.

A turning point occurred in the latter half of the 1970s, when several prominent institutions that had previously defended the Fairness Doctrine admitted that it might actually be counteracting its own purposes. One of the first to point out that the government's fairness requirements risked inhibiting rather than encouraging the dissemination of opinion was Judge J. Skelly Wright of the U.S. Court of Appeals in Washington. Despite this, Wright argued that it still had a role to play, considering that the broadcast industry wielded a much more effective and powerful influence on public attitudes and opinions than print media:

Newspapers play an important role in discovering and disseminating information, but the broadcast medium is the place where our society's attitudes and values are shaped. And before we de-regulate the public media in the name of the First Amendment and allow the licensees or the advertisers that support them to manipulate public opinion as they desire, we should proceed with the greatest caution.²¹

The archival records illustrate the importance of analytically distinguishing between commercial and third sector interests in the "private" broadcasting sector. Throughout, we see that U.S. public authorities were very intent on protecting community and minority viewpoints from being suppressed by the market power of large corporations. For this reason, the legitimacy of the Fairness Doctrine would be further challenged in the fall of 1975, when the Federal Trade Commission announced that the current system in fact favored the major over-the-air networks by shielding them from competition from new communication services:

It is entirely possible, with today's technology, for a single set to receive hundreds of signals. One reason it doesn't happen is that it is contrary to the network broadcasters' interests to have it happen, and the broadcasters have

²¹ *Excerpt from a newspaper interview with Appeals Judge J. Skelly Wright advocating for a broader review of the Fairness Doctrine.* 1973, 11 June. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA, pp. 2–3.

persuaded the government to adopt [...] regulatory policies which keep it from happening.²²

The federal antitrust agency argued that there would be even more vigorous debate and an even broader representation of interests if the government allowed more entrants into the audiovisual media market, which, in a more unrestricted form, would naturally lean toward airing diverse views. However, the Fairness Doctrine was said to turn these incentives upside down, resulting in greater homogeneity in broadcast programming:

The Fairness Doctrine, like our fair trade laws, is an instance in which benevolent-sounding words have masked a miscarriage of our free market system. It is high time for Congress to abolish it.²³

In line with the FTC's expectations, it wouldn't be long before the entry of new broadcasting services practically forced a reassessment of the prevailing regulatory order. The decisive push occurred in the fall of 1976, when the White House announced that it planned to propose that the Fairness Doctrine be dropped on a trial basis in the nation's ten largest radio markets.

As indicated by internal correspondence from the Office of Telecommunications Policy, Ford administration officials argued that the requirement for broadcasters to air all sides of a controversy was no longer valid in large cities due to the "astounding growth in radio in the last several years."²⁴ At the same time, the FCC announced that it intended to exempt radio stations in markets with fewer than 10,000 inhabitants from certain administrative burdens.

The pressures from technological change eventually prompted Congress to initiate its first major review of the Communications Act in decades. In a speech before the National Association of Broadcasters in the

²² *Address by the Federal Trade Commission at UCLA on the Fairness Doctrine, Competition and the First Amendment*. 1975, 29 October. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 11. NARA, pp. 1–3.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ *Internal Correspondence from the Office of Telecommunications Policy Regarding the Suspension of the Fairness Doctrine on an Experimental Basis*. 1975–1976. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA.

spring of 1977, the chairman of the House Communications Subcommittee, Lionel van Deerlin, declared that broadcasters should be entitled to the same First Amendment protection afforded to newspapers:

I am on record in favor of repealing the Fairness Doctrine. [...] As I don't need to tell you, the Fairness Doctrine was conceived at a time when there was a scarcity of broadcast outlets. This scarcity no longer exists in radio — especially in major markets.²⁵

Van Deerlin highlighted the fact that there were 36 radio stations in Washington D.C. and only 2 daily newspapers, while nationally there were more than 8,000 radio outlets compared to 1,700 daily newspapers:

If scarcity is to be the basis for limiting First Amendment rights, then we have, I suggest, a much more serious problem with newspapers than with radio stations.²⁶

Finally, the Democratic congressman from California declared that all the conditions were in place to eliminate scarcity in all radio markets if barriers were removed to the development of new technologies. Besides cable, one option would be to augment existing services through the increased establishment of low-power, narrow-bandwidth radio stations. This would address both the issue of diversity and the concern for localism. According to Van Deerlin, the number of new voices would then be limited only by economic realities:

We are on the threshold of an era of abundance in communications technology, and I expect that it will be radio that leads the broadcasting industry into this new era. You will have my support.²⁷

²⁵ *Address by the Chairman of the House Communications Subcommittee before the National Association of Broadcasters concerning the future of the Fairness Doctrine.* 1977, 28 March. RG 417 Entry No. UD UP 5, Box 12. NARA, pp. 1–5.

²⁶ *Ibidem.*

²⁷ *Ibidem.*

As described by Sterling and Kittross (2002, 563–564), Van Deerlin eventually introduced a bill titled the Communications Act of 1978, designed to do away with the “public interest, convenience, and/or necessity” clause of the current legislation and to replace the FCC with a five-member Communications Regulatory Commission whose mandate would be limited to regulating “only to the extent market forces are deficient.” This development seems to align with the conventional view that the United States transitioned towards a more “pure” market system in the late twentieth century.

In this chapter, I have argued that this transition occurred because new communication technologies rendered the existing rationale for regulation obsolete, enabling institutional change. Contrary to the prevailing view that the Fairness Doctrine was repealed in response to cable’s expansion in the 1980s, this chapter has demonstrated that the triggering factor was, in fact, the increasing availability of FM radio in the 1970s. This illustrates the theory that new technology tends to empower private actors and promote greater diversity in the broadcasting sector.

Canada

INTRODUCTION

Both the national and comparative media literature portray a complex picture of Canadian broadcasting at the end of the twentieth century, characterized by both continuity and change. The 1991 Broadcasting Act undeniably marked a shift toward a more competitive and market-oriented environment by lowering barriers to entry for new communication services, enabling more private operators to enter the market (Salter and Odartey-Wellington 2008, lxxi). At the time of the Conservative Mulroney administration’s reforms, Raboy (1989, 70) observed that developments in Canada, at first glance, neatly aligned with the broader trend in Western democracies.

As in many European countries, the concept of broadcasting as a public sphere activity appeared to be eroded by technological advancements, government spending cuts, and the emergence of commercially-driven media. This view is largely shared by Jackson and Vipond

(2003, 76–77), who argue that public broadcasting paled in the face of the advances by five major conglomerates, which had seized control of most of the country’s assets for producing and distributing radio and television programs by the turn of the millennium. Overall, the authors interpret this development as evidence of a robust convergence in the corporate sector, consistent with prevailing theories in comparative communications research.

At the same time, there is consensus that the state did not entirely relinquish its ambition to influence the program content communicated to the citizenry. As mentioned in earlier chapters, comparative media scholars have argued that a distinct variant of the “Liberal model” has taken root in Canada, driven by concerns that a purely market-driven system would be dominated by programs from the United States (Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 267–277).

This doctrine largely persisted throughout the twentieth century, albeit in new forms. While it is true that economic considerations gained greater weight in Canadian broadcasting policy from the early 1980s onward, industrial priorities were far from the central focus of the inquiries that informed the new legislation. On the contrary, both the Applebaum-Hébert Report (1982) and the Caplan-Sauvageau Report (1986) advocated for *increased* public sector offerings and stricter regulation of private programming (Lapointe and Le Goff 1988, 246). The 1991 Broadcasting Act reaffirmed the principle that the radio and television system should be “effectively owned and controlled by Canadians” and that all of its elements — public and private — should contribute to “a public service essential to the maintenance and enhancement of national identity and cultural sovereignty” (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage 2003, 37).

This chapter argues that while policymakers’ national goals for broadcasting remained unchanged, technological advancements in the 1980s and 1990s forced a search for new means of intervention to achieve them. Early on, Canadian policymakers recognized that once cable and satellite transmissions reached sufficient maturity, preventing foreign broadcasts from reaching the population would be futile.

The solution chosen in Canada was to preserve the national vocation of the broadcasting system while increasingly seeking to achieve it by enhancing the system’s competitiveness and supporting domes-

tic content producers from both the commercial and third sectors. Thus, the case study illustrates that transformative communication technologies tend to empower actors in the “private” sector by render existing policy instruments ineffective. This compels states to adopt more indirect forms of intervention, such as subsidies and content regulations, to achieve their broadcasting objectives.

Furthermore, I argue that the prevailing distinction between “private” and “public” obscures key political dynamics underlying the legislative reform of 1991. As pointed out by Marc Raboy (1989, 71–73), the most significant and innovative aspect of Bill C-136, which formed the basis for the new law, was its acknowledgment of various marginal forms of radio and television, including community, provincial, and native broadcasting. Raboy argues that this recognition was the result of years of advocacy by indigenous groups, women’s organizations, community broadcasters, educational networks, and independent producers to be included in the Canadian broadcasting system. Taken together, this example underscores the need to distinguish analytically between corporate interests and third-sector movements to understand how “private” actors shape processes of convergence in the broadcasting sector.

KEEPING CANADIAN BROADCASTING CANADIAN: SAFEGUARDING THE NATIONAL SYSTEM’S INTEGRITY IN A CHANGING TECHNOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

At the end of the previous chapter, we witnessed how the Liberal administration of Lester Pearson passed the 1968 Broadcasting Act with the complete assent of the opposition parties. This law differed from similar statutes in other countries by defining a substantial purpose for broadcasting, requiring radio and television stations to promote national unity.

There is broad consensus in the literature that the underlying purpose of the Act was to safeguard the country’s cultural sovereignty in light of the fact that a large proportion of Canadians preferred to consume radio and television programs from the United States (Armstrong 2016; Peers 1979; Raboy 1990). This underscores that policymakers took the threat of American cultural influence just as seriously as they had in the 1930s, when U.S. networks began making

inroads into the Canadian radio market.

The difference was that, at that time, the increasing availability of foreign programs acted as a critical juncture: an emergency shock that triggered a policy shift away from the previous *laissez-faire* approach. At this point, by contrast, the threat had become latent, influencing almost all policymaking in the field. Taken together, the development of Canadian radio and television during the initial post-war decades was characterized by striking policy continuity from the foundational decisions of the 1930s, which had established the CBC and the mixed public-private system.

This chapter nevertheless demonstrates that the conditions for maintaining the existing regulatory order changed dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s due to the rapid proliferation of new communication technologies. Cable television and satellites had a profoundly disruptive impact on the system because they severely limited policymakers' ability to shield the system from the influx of program content from foreign private broadcasters. This risked undermining the cornerstone of the existing legislation: to promote national unity.

For that reason, the breakthrough of these technologies can be seen as a critical juncture that pushed the prevailing regulatory order in a more market-oriented direction. At the same time, federal authorities remained committed to maintaining the Canadian identity of the broadcasting system. Hence, this chapter focuses on policymakers' uphill struggle to rein in the effects of new technology through alternative strategies to preserve the system's distinctiveness.

The increased proliferation of cable systems in the late 1960s represented the first technological shock to the prevailing structure of the Canadian broadcasting system. What was originally called Community Antenna Television had begun already in 1952 as a way to bring television to areas too far from the originating station. But it was not until the 1968 Act that cable undertakings were formally recognized in law and became subject to federal broadcasting policy.

This marked the beginning of cable's real breakthrough. Canadian cable grew by 45 % within just a year of the reform, at which point six systems had over 30,000 subscribers, making them larger than any in the United States.²⁸ Canada thus became one of the first

²⁸ *Montreal Star*. 1969, December 13.

countries in the world to have to confront the regulatory challenges posed by the new technology. The uncertainty of the situation was acknowledged by Pierre Juneau, the Chairman of the new communications regulator — the Canadian Radio and Television Commission (CRTC) — in a speech before the Cable Television Association in the summer of 1969:

The technical evolution of the medium is unprecedented in any previous media, as are the possibilities the future is opening before us. [...] It is clear that no traditional approach to policy and regulation would be satisfactory. And it is equally clear that we cannot turn to other countries' experience for guidance. In cable television, we are pioneers, and we must set our own course.²⁹

Early on, the Commission stated that it primarily envisioned cable as a means to increase the availability of local programming. The relative affordability of community programming via cable was considered a significant advantage:

A basic studio can be set up for about \$10,000, and programs are being produced for less than \$100 an hour — very low figures indeed, compared with what a television station must pay.³⁰

The Commission acknowledged that television programming produced by the community could hardly match the professional production techniques of conventional television. At the same time, the significantly lower costs were seen as an advantage that compensated for the lack of polish, as they enabled people to engage in something that was meaningful and close to them. As long as excessive ownership concentration was avoided, this could significantly enhance the cultural fabric of local communities, stated the CRTC Chairman:

²⁹ *Transcript of speech by the Chairman of the CRTC before the Canadian Cable Television Association concerning the regulation of cable.* 1969, June 14. RG 134549, Vol. 66, LAC, pp. 5–6.

³⁰ *CRTC memorandum on cable television in Canada.* 1971, January. RG 134539, Vol. 66. LAC, pp. 28–30.

[C]ablecasting should expand the community's horizons, and deepen its sense of identity. The Commission believes cable's role is primarily a local one, and we are not now prepared to accept the idea of cable networks.³¹

The Commission's optimistic view of cable TV as a means to increase civil society's participation in broadcasting once again illustrates the study's theoretical point about the importance of analytically distinguishing between commercial and non-commercial elements within the "private" media sector. The expectation that cable television would significantly lower program production costs supports the theoretical argument that new technology tends to empower private ownership — though not necessarily *corporate* ownership.

However, the majority of these third sector cable operators did in fact not engage in local program production but instead plucked signals from existing over-the-air television stations. Furthermore, a significant portion of these operators relied heavily on importing American programs via so-called microwave. This placed the CRTC in a tricky dilemma. On one hand, the import of signals from the United States was crucial for the survival of many small cable operators. On the other hand, the coverage area for U.S. networks and their advertising markets in Canada would likely expand significantly if no action was taken. According to a statement by the communications regulator in the winter of 1969, such a development would jeopardize the very foundation of the existing regulatory framework:

[T]he Commission is convinced that acceleration of the present trend of extending coverage of U.S. networks of stations [...] by using microwave or other techniques will, in a relatively short time, risk disrupting the Canadian broadcasting system as established by the Broadcasting Act of 1968 and as developed in Canada since the Aird Report of 1929.³²

³¹ *Transcript of speech by the Chairman of the CRTC before the Canadian Cable Television Association concerning the regulation of cable.* 1969, June 14. RG 134549, Vol. 66, LAC, pp. 7–8.

³² *CRTC statement on the import of U.S. programs by Canadian cable operators.* 1969, December 3. RG 134539, Vol. 66. LAC, p. 3.

To safeguard the legislation's basic policy orientation, the CRTC issued a series of policy statements between 1969 and 1971 that marked a departure from the laissez-faire approach that had long characterized the federal authorities' stance on cable. The first major decision was issued on December 3, 1969, when cable systems located too far from the American border were outright prohibited from using microwave technology to import U.S. programs.

The policy sparked fierce protests from cable companies and viewers who saw it as an undue restriction on their freedom of choice. However, press reactions were mostly positive, emphasizing that the Commission's efforts to curtail the accelerated spread of American cablevision were entirely in line with the mandate given to it by Parliament. This was the stance of *The Financial Post*:

It will be tragic for Canada's nationhood and development if the storm [...] obscures the real objectives of the CRTC which are to nurture an independent Canadian broadcasting industry that keeps the flow of ideas free of complete foreign domination.³³

In 1971, the communications regulator issued another major policy statement that formally incorporated cable television into the country's broadcasting system. Until this point, cable operators had been subject to CRTC regulation, but unlike the CBC and private terrestrial stations, they were not required to adhere to a set of public service obligations based on federal policy.³⁴ From now on, however, cable companies were expected to provide a local channel and an educational broadcasting channel at the request of provincial governments. The Commission primarily justified the new policy by arguing that cable companies, through their practice of redistributing signals from one location to another, were undermining the law's fundamental objective of ensuring that broadcasting remained relevant to the community it served:

[B]roadcasters have come to draw very large amounts of their programming from national networks [...] or have

³³ *The Financial Post*. 1969, 13 December.

³⁴ *CRTC Report on cable television in Canada*. 1971, January. RG 134539, Vol. 66. LAC, pp. 1-3.

purchased syndicated programs which, whether Canadian or foreign, have not been intended to reflect any specific community.³⁵

In addition to the new regulations specific to cable, the CRTC's primary tool for curbing the influx of United States programming in the early 1970s consisted of Canadian content regulations. These regulations, rooted in the 1958 Broadcasting Act, stipulated that the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) should aim to broadcast at least 60% Canadian programming.³⁶ Private over-the-air broadcasters, in turn, were required to target a 50 % quota. In exchange, they were protected from American competition (Lapointe and Le Goff 1988, 247–248).

This arrangement, wherein both private and public radio and television stations received direct or indirect subsidies to promote the legislation's cultural goals, had constituted the defining feature of the so-called "single" Canadian broadcasting system since the 1930s. Through its policy initiatives in the cable sector around 1970, the federal communications regulator demonstrated that it was willing to leverage a broad range of regulatory powers to maintain this system, even in the face of new communication technologies.

CRTC reports and news articles nevertheless indicate that, already by the late 1960s, there was a general awareness that technological advancements would soon make it impossible to try to block American programs through a legislative "iron curtain." An editorial in *The Ottawa Citizen* from the winter of 1969:

Vetoing distribution of U.S. television by cablevision companies using the microwave system ignores the realities of our times. Before long satellites orbiting above the earth's surface will make possible the global distribution of all programs. How would the CRTC "protect" this country from such an invasion of "foreign" entertainment?³⁷

The Commission itself acknowledged that forthcoming technological

³⁵ *Ibidem.*, 28–30.

³⁶ *Statement by the CBC concerning CRTC amendments to the Canadian content requirements.* 1971, September 21. RG 134539, Vol. 66. LAC, pp. 1–3.

³⁷ *The Ottawa Citizen.* 1969, December 11.

advancements would necessitate a structural transformation of the Canadian broadcasting system if it were to maintain its distinctiveness:

The Canadian broadcasting system must now improve rapidly or risk disappearing as a system. To ensure its survival, it is more and more apparent that it must increase the extension of services which the population requires, and improve the quality and variety of these services.³⁸

According to Marc Raboy (1990, 198), the debate on Canadian broadcasting fractured in a partly new direction during the 1970s as a result of the multifaceted challenge presented by the increased proliferation of new communication technologies. At its core, cable television was putting an end to channel scarcity. The main effect of this technology was to render obsolete the existing policy instruments that policymakers had used to achieve the legislation's national goals, in line with theoretical expectations regarding how transformative communication technologies shape the broader policy environment.

But cable was merely the beginning of a technological revolution that would greatly expand the carriage and coverage capacity of program delivery systems. With the impending widespread introduction of even more powerful distribution technologies, such as direct-broadcast satellites and fiber optics, the concept of distance in communications would become meaningless. This shift would inevitably lead to increasingly fragmented audiences and increase their access to American programming — a trend already evident in many parts of Canada.

The Trudeau government declared that the growing complexity of the field made the need for more comprehensive federal involvement urgent, prompting the prime minister to establish an entirely new Department of Communications. In an interview with *The Financial Post* in the spring of 1971, the Minister of Communications Eric Kierans explained that a strong technological imperative forced planners to act quickly if the broadcasting system was not to be overwhelmed by new electronic communication devices:

³⁸ *CRTC statement on the import of U.S. programs by Canadian cable operators.* 1969, December 3. RG 134539, Vol. 66. LAC, p. 3.

If we don't move into this kind of technology [...] Canada will be far behind other nations, and we could become a helpless maple syrup republic. I think there is a great deal to worry about moving into the new age.³⁹

In a statement before the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Film and Assistance to the Arts in the fall of 1979, David Macdonald — the Minister of Communications in Joe Clark's Conservative government — described the shift from a state of scarcity to an abundance of channels as a “nightmare of opportunity.” The nightmare, according to Macdonald, stemmed from the fact that it would become even harder for the CBC and private broadcasters to populate even the basic television dial with sufficient high-quality Canadian programming. The risk was that the new channels would instead be flooded with cheap foreign content.

At the same time, the greatly expanded channel offering presented an opportunity to broaden participation in radio and television programming. This, in turn, could allow Canada's diversity to be reflected more effectively. According to the Minister, the essence of the problem permeating Canadian television lay in the significant gap that still existed between the distribution capacity of the country's telecommunications systems and the limited availability of programming from domestic producers:

Canada has created one of the most sophisticated delivery systems for television programs in the world, while its program production capability remains greatly underdeveloped in comparison. [...] Thus, while there is an acute shortage of domestic television productions, present-day technology potentially permits access to an abundance of foreign programming.⁴⁰

According to the Minister of Communications, there was, in this new technological reality, an obvious limit to what could be achieved

³⁹Interview with the Minister of Communications Regarding the Effects of New Communication Technology on Canada's Broadcasting System. 1971, March 13. *The Financial Post*.

⁴⁰*Statement by the Minister of Communications, David Macdonald, to the Standing Committee on Broadcasting, Film and Assistance to the Arts*. 1979, November 29. RG 3783736, Vol. 126. LAC, pp. 5–6.

through content regulations to ensure that Canadians would choose to watch Canadian programming:

To seek to preserve the status quo or even to gradually increase Canadian content on our national networks is, in reality, an argument for a diminished Canadian presence as channels multiply. The traditional tools of state funding and content quotas are, by themselves, inadequate.⁴¹

In summary, the Minister argued that the longstanding debate about the role of public broadcasting in the Canadian system had been overtaken by a broader and more pressing question, namely what role Canadian broadcasting as a whole should play in the rapidly evolving communications landscape. This required a new regulatory perspective. This illustrates how new technology tends to push states to seek out alternative means of intervention to regulate broadcasting, typically moving towards more indirect forms of control.

According to Macdonald, the new regulatory perspective could involve greater use of independent program producers, further regionalization of television operations, and the provision of more native language programming. Together, such measures could contribute to reflecting Canada's diversity while also addressing the communication needs of local and regional communities. This illustrates the point that new technology tends to empower the "private" broadcasting sector, though not necessarily commercial firms but also groups from the third sector.

Indeed, a common denominator among the two major broadcasting inquiries of the 1980s was their shift toward a more "industrial" communications policy. This shift began when the Minister of Communications in the new Liberal government, Francis Fox, established the Applebaum-Hébert Committee — the first government inquiry into Canadian federal cultural policy since the 1951 Massey Commission (Armstrong 2016, 47).

The committee's report, released in November 1982, highlighted that in the near future, no government or regulatory agency would be

⁴¹ *Transcript of speech by the Minister of Communications before the Canadian Broadcasting League concerning the impact of new distribution technologies*. 1979, October 25. RG 3783736, Vol. 126. LAC, pp. 1–2.

able to prevent the average person from accessing a wide array of U.S. services via satellite. Instead, the only viable way for Canada to secure a strong programming presence in its own audiovisual landscape would be to fully harness its technological and creative resources to produce Canadian programs and services that Canadians would want to watch and hear (Raboy 1990, 282–284). The report's main novelty was its recommendation that the private sector, rather than the CBC, take the lead in driving programming, marking a fundamental shift in Canadian radio and television policy.

After the Conservatives came to power in 1984, Brian Mulroney's government was committed to reversing some of the foundational principles of Liberal economic policy, with broadcasting identified as one such area. Indeed, the new Minister of Communications, Marcel Masse, announced plans for a comprehensive review of Canadian broadcasting policy. In his directives to the so-called Caplan-Sauvageau Task Force, Masse emphasized the importance of increased reliance on private sector initiatives and the need for fiscal restraint.⁴²

It is also worth mentioning that the task force's deliberations took place against the broader backdrop of the Conservative government's key objective of liberalizing trade relations with the United States (Raboy 1990, 294). At face value, this shift thus seems to align with the prevailing narrative of a neoliberal wave during the 1980s that paved the way for the unfettered commercialization of the Canadian broadcasting landscape (see, for instance, Jackson and Vipond 2003).

The 1986 Task Force's report indeed reflected a shift toward greater reliance on the private sector in program production. Simultaneously, the report reaffirmed the traditional foundation of Canadian broadcasting as an essentially public service composed of different sectors. Notably, the report advocated for *increased* public sector offerings and stricter CRTC control of private sector programming as measures to improve the overall performance of the Canadian broadcasting system (Lapointe and Le Goff 1988, 245).

This challenges the notion of a wholesale shift toward unfettered commercialization. Instead, as Lapointe and Le Goff (1988) argue,

⁴² Press release about Communications Minister Marcel Masse's appointment of the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy. 1985, May 8. RG 4886673, Vol. 41. LAC, pp. 1–3.

the Caplan-Sauvageau report was but another response to the perpetual problem of American programming and Canadian cultural identity, except for the fact that it was initiated in a period of rapid technological change. This, in turn, underscores a notable degree of path dependence in Canadian broadcast governance over time.

It is also worth highlighting that the provisions of Bill C-136, which laid the foundation for the 1991 Broadcasting Act, were heavily influenced by public interest groups lobbying the government not to “sell out” Canada’s cultural sovereignty. According to Raboy (1990, 301), an alliance of interests comprising the country’s artistic and cultural communities succeeded in securing several amendments to the bill that recognized various previously marginalized forms of radio and television.

Notably, the revamped Broadcasting Act formally acknowledged community broadcasting as a distinct component of the Canadian broadcasting system (Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage 2003). According to Raboy (1989, 74), this represented the culmination of years of advocacy for inclusion in the Canadian broadcasting system by women’s groups, indigenous communities, community and educational broadcasters, independent producers, and a broader array of cultural organizations. In summary, this development underscores the importance of analytically distinguishing between corporate and third-sector elements within the “private” broadcasting sector in order to understand the dynamics of institutional stability and change in the governance of radio and television across Western democracies.

Sweden

INTRODUCTION

The national literature on Swedish broadcasting generally depicts the late twentieth century as a period marked by rapid and sweeping structural transformations. This marked the first time private, advertising-supported radio and television outlets could broadcast, dramatically increasing both the supply and competition in the industry. The pivotal event, according to Lena Ewertsson (2001, 277), occurred on New Year’s Eve 1987, when the investment company

Kinnevik launched a Nordic satellite channel and effectively broke the television monopoly.

The most important political decisions regarding commercially funded broadcasting were made in 1991, when the Swedish Parliament authorized an advertising-funded terrestrial TV channel, and in 1993, when the center-right government introduced private local radio. The new government also gave radio and TV distribution a more private character in 1992 by corporatizing *Televerket*, the state agency primarily responsible for the country's communication networks (Engblom and Wormbs 2007, 11-12). Overall, Sweden's development appears to align with the thesis of convergence toward an increasingly privatized media sector.

Although Sweden undeniably followed the global trend toward a more "market-oriented" broadcasting system in the late twentieth century, there is consensus within the literature that this transformation was less pervasive compared to other countries in Western Europe. Engblom and Wormbs (2007, 14) argue that the political decisions of the 1990s, along with the emergence of new systems for program delivery, accentuated the conflict between those seeking to preserve and develop the public service systems and those advocating for greater market influence.

As in the UK and other Scandinavian countries, the Swedish government designated the public broadcasting companies as "digital locomotives" to lead the transition to information societies (McQuail and Siune 1998; Syvertsen and Skogerbø 1998, 233). This not only mitigated the marginalization of public broadcasting but also alleviated policymakers' concerns that the radio and television sectors would be dominated by global media giants. According to Syvertsen et al. (2014, 76-77), this reflects how a form of "Media Welfare State" has continued to influence Scandinavian broadcasting policies in the multichannel era.

In line with the prevailing view that the structure of today's Swedish broadcasting system continues to bear clear traces of the earliest decisions in the field, the first part of this chapter advances an argument about institutional path dependence and the role of vested interests in sustaining it. By the mid-1970s, the national public broadcaster had assumed a highly dominant position in the broadcasting

market, much due to its expanded responsibilities within television. Material from the National Archives and Sveriges Radio's Document Archive reveals that Sveriges Radio effectively leveraged its dominance to block multiple initiatives by third-sector groups seeking access to independent media channels.

To illustrate the role of interests in shaping processes of convergence in the late twentieth century, the chapter leverages the parallels between the French and Swedish cases in a counterfactual analysis of the alternative trajectories these countries might have taken if third-sector agents had acted differently.

In France, both the Giscardians and the Socialist Party cracked down on the small illegal community stations that had emerged across the country in anticipation of new legislation in the late 1970s. By contrast, the Swedish centre-right government took a lenient approach, allowing popular movements to broadcast neighborhood radio on an experimental basis, provided the programs remained advertisement-free. These differences in the relationship between the state and the third sector proved pivotal at this juncture, steering the countries' broadcasting landscapes onto markedly different policy trajectories.

In France, the third sector mobilized a backlash against the government's heavy-handed approach in the early 1980s, as hundreds of pirate radio stations went on air, ultimately forcing liberalization. The initial reforms swiftly turned France into one of the most market-oriented broadcasting systems in Europe, contradicting the Socialists' mantra of "controlled deregulation." In Sweden, by contrast, deregulation proceeded in a more orderly manner. It was not until the early 1990s that the government relaxed the longstanding ban on advertising in terrestrial broadcasts.

The catalyst for this decision was the advancement of satellite technology in the late 1980s. Drawing on relevant secondary literature, internal reports, and inquiry materials from the Swedish National Archives, I demonstrate that resistance to advertising remained steadfast within the Social Democratic government until this point. However, with the advent of satellites, it was no longer practically feasible for policymakers to block the influx of advertising-funded programming through legislation, which forced institutional change.

Hence, the key argument is that new technology naturally tends

to empower actors in the “private” broadcasting sector by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective. The advancement of satellite technology reached a point where policymakers could no longer prevent households from accessing commercial TV programs from foreign-based media companies. In doing so, satellites undermined one of the central legitimating principles of Sweden’s regulatory approach since the 1920s: the ban on advertising in broadcast programs.

THE INCREMENTAL PATH TO LIBERALIZATION: SWEDEN’S THIRD SECTOR RESHAPES THE PUBLIC BROADCASTING MONOPOLY

In the previous chapter, we saw how the organizational model originally established for Swedish radio in the 1920s was replicated for television after the Second World War. Although there had been a coalition of influential state, business, and third sector interests with both the ambition and the capacity to introduce commercial television, the Social Democrats decided to retain the state monopoly. A key reason was that the party strongly opposed the idea of advertising on the air, similar to the actors who had prevailed in the interwar struggle over radio: the public broadcaster Radiotjänst (later Sveriges Radio) and its majority owners, the newspapers.

It was largely thanks to this alliance of interests that television was incorporated into the existing regulatory framework for broadcasting. This illustrates the study’s theoretical point about how policy decisions made at one point in time can contribute to maintaining an institutional equilibrium by establishing vested interests with the incentives and resources to defend the status quo. The defining feature of the Swedish equilibrium order was that commercial interests were co-owners of a single, license-funded public broadcasting company, whose programs, however, remained free from advertisements.

This regulatory framework would nevertheless be gradually reformed from the late 1960s onward, starting with the 1966 Radio Act, through which the popular movements, rather than the press and other business interests, were made the majority owners of the national public broadcaster (Wirén 1986, 257).

The background to this policy shift was that third sector groups across the country had grown increasingly dissatisfied with Stock-

holm's dominance within radio and television. In the 1950s and early 1960s, pirate radio from international waters had posed the first real threat to Sveriges Radio's monopoly (Karén 1999, 16). Now, educational groups and other popular movements across the country were increasingly demanding the right to conduct independent radio and television broadcasts to have their needs for communication and education satisfied.⁴³ Once again, the third sector proved to be an important agent of change within broadcasting, underscoring the need to analytically distinguish between nonprofit actors and commercial interests when analyzing policy developments in the field.

However, as described by Stig Hadenius (1998, 196–203), both Sveriges Radio and the Social Democrats were highly reluctant to relax the monopoly. The national public broadcaster — whose dominance in the media system had solidified after taking on television — firmly rejected the proposal from the 1960 Commission of Inquiry on Radio (SOU 1965:20/21) to introduce so-called special broadcasting for the popular movements. The broadcaster also opposed the idea of geographic competition within the monopoly through the introduction of a second TV channel with local production.

The Social Democratic government was more open to the idea of internal competition and decentralization but was determined to avoid the excesses that competition in its pure form was feared to bring. This was reflected in the strict directives given to the Radio Inquiry to maintain the current system with one company funded by license fees, explicitly forbidding any proposal for a second, advertising-financed TV channel (Hadenius 1998, 198–199).

When the Ministry of Communications took a stance on the inquiry in spring 1966, they reached a compromise with Sveriges Radio that sidelined the newspapers. According to Karl-Hugo Wirén (1986, 257), the government saw newspaper ownership in the public broadcaster as a potential threat to democracy. Then-Minister of Communications Olof Palme argued that it would be problematic if the press gained excessive influence over the media landscape. He also warned of the risks of commercial logic infiltrating the broadcasting system, citing the United States as a cautionary example.

⁴³ *Report from Östersund University ahead of the launch of community radio.* 1980, November. RG 42701, Vol. F3-1. RA, pp. 8–10.

At the same time, the minister acknowledged that radio and television could also be exploited to serve the purposes of the state, as evidenced by the situation in many dictatorships. Against this backdrop, Palme highlighted the “third way” of Western Europe as the best, albeit imperfect, model in his statement accompanying the bill for the new Radio Act:

In my opinion, there is no reason to change the fundamental principles for broadcasting operations in our country. We should hold firm to the idea of radio and television as independent “public service” entities, serving the public through their program operations vis-à-vis the authorities and vested interests.⁴⁴

Although the Minister of Communications opposed fundamental organizational changes, he argued that radio and television operations needed stronger anchoring in the broad layers of the population. It was against this backdrop that the Cooperative Association, the Trade Union Confederation, the Central Council of the Swedish Church, and the Council of Sweden’s Free Churches were granted a majority of the shares in the national public broadcaster through the 1966 reform. Furthermore, the company was divided into six independent program units that were to operate in “stimulating competition” with one another (Rahbek 2004, 181–182).

This was a concession on the part of Sveriges Radio, which could still take solace in remaining a unified company. For the Social Democrats, the new Radio Act meant that the party had achieved its primary goal: to limit commercial elements within broadcasting. In summary, the shared interests between the governing party and the public broadcasting company contributed to largely maintaining the prevailing regulatory order.

During the 1970s, however, the right-wing opposition began directing increasingly sharp criticism at the public broadcasting service for being inefficient and holding an overly dominant position in the

⁴⁴ *Minister of Communications Olof Palme’s statement on Proposition 1966:136 concerning a new Radio Act* (cited in a report on public information in Sveriges Radio). 1972. RG T42, Vol. E1-1. Sveriges Radio’s Document Archive (henceforth SRA).

media market. Similar criticism of public broadcasters was prevalent in many parts of Western Europe at the time, but it is undeniable that Sveriges Radio had significantly expanded its operations in recent years. By the mid-1970s, the company employed 4,250 people, compared to 2,500 a decade earlier. During the same period, its costs for radio and television operations rose from 184 million to 732 million kronor (Hadenius 1998, 265).

It is also worth noting that the public broadcasting service, despite an increasing share of local production since the reforms of the 1960s, still lacked a distinct regional organization. Indeed, the strong centralization of programming was a major criticism raised by the 1969 Radio Inquiry (RUT 69), which challenged the notion that the Swedish way of organizing broadcast media was in any sense “natural” or dictated by a lack of space in the airwaves. This is evident from an internal memorandum:

What has prevented organizations, municipalities, schools, universities, and private companies from establishing their own local radio transmitters is, of course, nothing other than the legislation and financing methods that exist (the monopoly and license financing).⁴⁵

According to the inquiry, limiting the range of transmitter stations would suffice to create space for significantly more radio and TV stations than those currently in operation. Against this backdrop, the inquiry’s 1974 report proposed the introduction of a system comprising 36 local radio stations, coordinated by a specialized company owned by popular movements and interest organizations. Judging by internal documents from shortly before the report’s publication, the inquiry believed that there were compelling reasons to allow this organization to operate independently of Swedish Radio:

The main argument for local radio having its own governance is [...] the unreasonable situation that is emerging, which means that all air-distributed information, culture, entertainment, etc., is gathered under one umbrella. Just

⁴⁵ *Memorandum for internal consumption from the 1969 Radio Inquiry regarding the governance of local radio.* 1974, May 31. RG 322851, Vol. 1. RA, pp. 19–20.

as it would be unreasonable to have only one publishing house, [...] or all theaters under a central theater board [...] it is, of course, unreasonable that all radio and TV activities are managed from a single entity, Sveriges Radio AB.⁴⁶

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Sveriges Radio itself was largely critical of the proposals presented by the inquiry. Although the national public broadcaster accepted the concept of a special local radio, the structure envisioned by RUT 69 was deemed economically and administratively inefficient. This is evident from an internal SR memorandum from 1973:

SR already has an existing organization that only requires expansion in the relevant locations; technology and facilities are available [...] Establishing an entirely new company would be a very costly solution.⁴⁷

Much like during the preparation of the 1966 Radio Act, the Social Democrats established a working group of departmental officials and political experts to draft a local radio bill in close collaboration with the public broadcasting company. Notably, the proposal that was adopted by the Riksdag in 1975 deviated significantly from the original directives of the RUT 69 inquiry.

The idea of 36 local radio stations managed by an independently owned central company was rejected. Instead, a system of 24 stations was established, granting them significant independence while keeping them connected to a central subsidiary of the national public broadcaster called *Sveriges Lokalradio AB* (LRAB) (Hadenius 1998, 235). In summary, the establishment of public local radio represented a step toward a less centralized programming structure, providing greater opportunities for groups outside metropolitan regions to have their voices heard on the airwaves. At the same time, the fact that the new local radio was organizationally subordinate to Sveriges Radio meant that the monopoly ultimately remained intact.

⁴⁶Ibidem.

⁴⁷*Memorandum regarding the local radio experiment in Sveriges Radio.* 1973, March 22. RG T42, Vol. E1-1. SRA, pp. 6–7.

It is worth noting that Swedish broadcasting during the late 1960s and 1970s shows several parallels with the situation in France. As we will see in the French case study, the monopoly company ORTF faced similar criticism to that of Sveriges Radio for being overly large and inefficient. Another similarity was that the pressures for liberalization largely came from third sector groups that felt excluded from the broadcasting system. Furthermore, France and Sweden both implemented incremental reforms during the 1970s that partially addressed demands for increased decentralization. As Karl-Hugo Wirén (1986, 21) points out, the Giscardian government's division of ORTF in 1974 closely resembled the reform carried out in 1978 by the Swedish centre-right, which restructured Sveriges Radio into a parent company overseeing four subsidiaries with equal status: the TV Company, National Radio, Local Radio, and Educational Radio.

According to Stig Hadenius (1998, 267), the transformation of Sveriges Radio into a conglomerate was a compromise aimed at liberalizing the broadcasting sector without dismantling the monopoly altogether. The Liberals and the Moderates had long advocated for advertising on TV and doubted that competition could be satisfactorily achieved within the framework of a single organization. At the same time, the right-wing parties had to contend with the fact that the national public broadcaster had become a significant power factor in the audiovisual sector and that the Social Democrats — who had governed Sweden for over 40 years at the time of the 1976 election — were strongly opposed to advertising (see also Engblom and Wormbs 2007, 11–12).

Against this backdrop, Hadenius (1998) argues that the new government sought to introduce something new without overly challenging Sveriges Radio or the Social Democrats. This once again underscores the study's theoretical argument about path dependence and how vested interests can constrain the scope for comprehensive reforms in the absence of major external shocks. As in France, the restructuring of the Swedish public broadcasting service meant that it was no longer a unified entity, but neither was it entirely fragmented.

Not even the introduction of neighborhood radio, which broke Sveriges Radio's *de facto* monopoly, fundamentally challenged the status quo. The reform explicitly aimed to allow non-profit organiza-

tions, congregations, unions, and other societal groups to broadcast local radio to reflect their activities without being bound by balance and impartiality requirements.⁴⁸

In the bill introduced to the Riksdag in 1978 by the Liberal Minister of Education and Cultural Affairs, Jan-Erik Wikström, community radio was compared to a small newspaper or magazine.⁴⁹ In other words, small local stations were intended to serve as *partisan* voices for the organizations operating them, in stark contrast to public radio.

Within Sveriges Radio, there was concern that the proposal, although experimental in nature, could mark the first step toward a more fragmented audience and the erosion of the public broadcaster's operations (Hadenius 1998, 265–266). However, in his statement accompanying the bill, the Minister of Education explained that community radio would be far less expensive than its public counterparts, relying instead on “simple equipment” and “voluntary contributions.”⁵⁰ Thus he assured that the grassroots nature of neighborhood radio — both in terms of orientation and resources — made it distinct from public local radio and therefore should not be regarded as its competitor.

When the first community radio trials finally got underway in the spring of 1979, it marked the first time that independent outlets broadcasted outside the state monopoly since the early 1920s. Of the nearly 500 local organizations that enrolled in the experimental scheme, trade unions and sports clubs participated only to a limited extent, while religious, immigrant, and educational associations accounted for over half of the broadcasts.⁵¹ An interview series in the newspaper *Dagen* highlights that enthusiasm for community radio was particularly strong among Christian congregations — the clearly dominant group. For instance, the leader of the Christian Democrats,

⁴⁸ *Report from Östersund University ahead of the launch of community radio.* 1980, November. RG 42701, Vol. F3-1. RA, pp. 19–20.

⁴⁹ *Proposition 1977/78:91 on the Continued Operations of Radio and Television.* 1978, February 16. p. 220.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem.*

⁵¹ *Summary of the Swedish Neighbourhood Radio Committee's Proposal to the Minister of Education.* 1981, March. RG 420701, Vol. F3-2. SRA, pp. 5–6 [SE_RA_420701_F3-2_1005].

Alf Svensson, emphasized that the new communication opportunities for nonprofit organizations represented an important step in fostering a strong civil society:

Community radio offers an opportunity to convey Christian messages but also to show what those building society are working on. I believe it will be beneficial for our democracy for people to understand how local representatives work.⁵²

The pastor in the Church of Sweden, Erland Svala, also emphasized the grassroots nature of community radio and its role in promoting a more pluralistic communication landscape:

I think it will be an invaluable addition to Swedish society because our democracy is so peculiar. There is a great flow of information from the top to the base of society, but there is poor communication between people at the base. Many balk at the idea of letting people say whatever they want on the radio. But let them say whatever they want openly! That would mean an enormous amount for informational democracy.⁵³

Both within the public broadcasting service and the Social Democrats there was nevertheless strong skepticism about allowing organizations to spread such one-sided messages. In an interview, the former Minister of Education, Bertil Zachrisson, labeled community radio as a “sectarian” activity that the party intended to scrap if victorious in the upcoming elections. The former minister did not deny the importance of accommodating the desire of popular movements to have their voices heard. However, he argued that these needs could best be met within an expanded Sveriges Radio, which had recently established a dedicated local radio service.

Zachrisson’s position was echoed by the local radio director, Stig Liedbecker, who argued in a TV interview that the purpose of having an independent community radio outside the monopoly was unclear:

⁵²Interview with eight Christian voices about a free community radio. 1979, February. *Dagen*.

⁵³*Ibidem*.

I have said before that I think community radio is somewhat redundant and unnecessary because we have established local radio throughout the country, and you cannot get closer to the people than we do in local radio.⁵⁴

But the main reason the Social Democrats opposed community radio was the risk of it being taken over by powerful and large business interests. According to Zachrisson, there was a clear danger of commercialization:

The monopoly guarantees a free and economically independent operation. There is a risk that less scrupulous organizations would outsource their programming to advertising agencies if community radio were introduced.⁵⁵

The development of French community radio during the exact same period illustrates that the Social Democrats' concerns were not entirely unfounded. As we will see in the case study on France, Mitterrand's Socialist government introduced an emergency law in the fall of 1981 that authorized the hundreds of local radio stations that had previously operated illegally, thus effectively abolishing the state monopoly. Once this step was taken, the floodgates to a more commercialized broadcasting landscape were essentially opened, as many community radio stations simply disregarded the ban on broadcasting advertisements. This effectively forced the government to lift the ban in 1984, marking the beginning of a shift toward a significantly more commercialized radio and television sector (see, for instance, Kuhn 1995; Kuhn and Perry 1999).

The situation in France was nevertheless markedly different from that in Sweden, where the ban on advertising on community radio had led to only four investigations by the Neighbourhood Radio Committee. According to the Committee's proposal to the Minister of Education in the spring of 1981, which recommended making the

⁵⁴ *Transcript of segment about the inaugural community radio broadcasts in Swedish Television*. 1979, April 27. RG 420701, Vol. F3-1. RA.

⁵⁵ Interview with the Social Democrats' former Minister of Education, Bertil Zachrisson, regarding the party's stance on community radio. 1979, February. *Dagen*.

experimental operation permanent, no transmission rights had been revoked on account of advertising offenses. This was seen as evidence that concerns about commercialization were unfounded:

The ban on advertising has prevented community radio from being used to further commercial ends [...] The community radio transmissions provide daily evidence that community radio caters to needs which other media do not meet.⁵⁶

The striking parallels between France and Sweden during the 1970s and early 1980s allow us to engage in a counterfactual thought experiment about how the development of Swedish broadcasting might have unfolded if third sector organizations operating neighborhood radio had been as defiant as their French counterparts with regard to the ban on advertising.

Both countries effectively broke their state monopolies around 1980 through community radio reforms that were nearly identical in design. Only nonprofit organizations were permitted to broadcast, and advertising was strictly prohibited. The key difference was that the environmentalist movements and other regional and alternative groups dominating French community radio widely disregarded the ban, whereas archival evidence shows that Swedish grassroots organizations were highly law-abiding. The extensive violations of the law in France forced the government to accept radio advertising as early as 1984, after which the broadcasting sector became heavily commercialized in a very short time. In Sweden, by contrast, a corresponding transition did not occur until the 1990s, and even then, it unfolded under significantly more controlled circumstances compared to France.

In summary, the development of Swedish broadcasting between the late 1960s and early 1980s illustrates the study's overarching theoretical argument about institutional path dependence and the role of vested interests in sustaining or transforming it. On several occasions during this period, Sveriges Radio's monopoly was challenged by local interests demanding access to the broadcasting landscape.

⁵⁶ *Summary of the Swedish Neighbourhood Radio Committee's Proposal to the Minister of Education*. 1981, March. RG 420701, Vol. F3-2. SRA, p. 12.

However, by virtue of its dominant position and allies within the Social Democrats, the national public broadcaster successfully warded off all proposals favoring the establishment of independent outlets until the center-right government took office in 1976. Although the public radio monopoly was effectively broken following the introduction of community radio, it is important to emphasize that this was an experimental, local, and non-commercial operation.

Had Swedish third sector movements actively challenged this order in the same way as their more defiant French counterparts, the broadcasting landscape might have shifted in a more commercial direction already in the early 1980s. Instead, Sveriges Radio's monopoly remained intact in both television and national radio throughout the decade. Furthermore, the public broadcasting sector now included a well-established regional and local radio network. In other words, the broadcasting market was still heavily dominated by publicly funded outlets. Perhaps most importantly, the cornerstone of Swedish broadcasting policy since the foundational decisions on radio in the 1920s — the ban on advertising — had not yet been seriously challenged.

SATELLITES SHATTER THE TELEVISION MONOPOLY: NEW TECHNOLOGY FORCES THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATS TO EMBRACE BROADCAST ADVERTISING

Given the robustness of the alliance between the Social Democrats and the public broadcasting service, more pervasive external pressures for reform would be required before a reconsideration of the advertising ban could occur. In the remainder of this chapter, I advance a theoretical argument about how the proliferation of new communication technologies during the 1980s had precisely such a disruptive effect on the Swedish broadcasting system, serving as a critical juncture. The decade witnessed the real breakthrough of cable television, enabling a growing — albeit still relatively limited — Swedish audience to tune into foreign, often advertising-funded programs. However, the decisive trigger that forced the Social Democratic government to reconsider its long-standing opposition to advertising came with the first satellite broadcasts targeting a Scandinavian audience in 1987.

Through an analysis of party motions, working documents, and

responses to the 1989 Commission of Inquiry on Television, I illustrate the theoretical idea that new communication technologies tend to push broadcasting systems toward greater market orientation by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective, thereby weakening policymakers' ability to control the broadcasting system. The documents reveal that the accelerating pace and complexity of technological change led policymakers to recognize the futility of defending the television monopoly. Blocking Swedish households from accessing foreign programs via cable and satellite was simply no longer practically feasible. Consequently, the debate shifted from whether advertising would appear on radio and television to determining its permissible forms, illustrating how revolutionary technological shifts compel policymakers to adopt alternative means of intervention.

Although discussions about cable television had begun as early as the 1970s, it was not until the so-called Mass Media Committee presented its report in 1984 that the new distribution technology gained significant traction in Sweden. The committee recommended initiating experimental operations for the reception and distribution of satellite signals via cable (Wormbs 1997, 175–176). Following the introduction of the 1986 Cable Act, these operations were made permanent, and retransmission of satellite broadcasts was permitted under certain conditions. Consequently, cable networks expanded rapidly, allowing a growing number of consumers access to foreign television programs for the very first time.

In her dissertation, Lena Ewertsson (2001, 277) writes that approximately 200,000 Swedish homes had access to an international TV selection by early 1987. A party motion from the same year reveals that this was a development the ruling Social Democrats had not fully anticipated:

[W]e must be aware that the introduction of cable TV alongside the development of video technology represents nothing less than a cultural revolution. However, awareness of the profound changes to our lives seems relatively limited.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ *Social Democratic party motion concerning the changes that cable and satellite bring to cultural life*. 1987, January 15. RG M12, Vol. F7-1. SRA, p. 1.

Much like Canadian policymakers, the motion writers recognized cable's potential to serve local communities' communication needs. Their main concern, however, was that the new Cable Board, responsible for issuing licenses, did not assess applicants' suitability. According to the ruling party, stricter legislation was needed to prevent the spread of one-sided messages:

[A] decision on how propaganda in programs should be regulated must be made. Do we want community radio's unrestrained propaganda on TV? Or should we adopt other standards, similar to those applied to Swedish TV? The current cable legislation does not impose any impartiality requirements. This must be reviewed.⁵⁸

By contrast, the opposition parties argued that the new distribution opportunities via cable *reduced* the need for state regulation, as they rendered obsolete the technical arguments for maintaining a monopoly. Echoing arguments put forward by Canadian policymakers, the Liberal Party further argued that lowering the barriers for the adoption of new technology would increase demand for program producers and, in turn, facilitate the entry of third sector groups into the TV market. According to a party motion, this would almost organically lead to greater pluralism in broadcasting:

[T]he ability to expand both freedom of expression and freedom of establishment in radio and television has increased due to technological advancements [...] As these opportunities have been utilized, more voices have been able to make themselves heard.⁵⁹

Party leader Bengt Westerberg further emphasized that the decentralization of programming activities would be facilitated by the growing ease and decreasing cost of program production:

In the debate, it has sometimes been questioned whether local programs can be produced at reasonable costs while

⁵⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 4.

⁵⁹ *Liberal Party motion regarding the development of new media*. 1987, January 26. RG M12, Vol. F7-1. SRA, pp. 7-8.

maintaining sufficient quality to attract viewers. [...] Here it should be noted that there is access to technical equipment that is both cheaper and easier to handle compared to just a few years ago.⁶⁰

Against the backdrop of the new technological circumstances, all centre-right parties argued that the conditions for maintaining Sveriges Radio's television monopoly no longer existed. Its persistence, according to the Moderates, was simply a matter of political will:

The only reason SR remains a monopoly appears to be the unwillingness of those in power to increasingly allow citizens the opportunity for free program choices.⁶¹

A major turning point in the Social Democrats' ability to uphold the monopoly through legislation would occur on New Year's Eve 1987, when the satellite channel TV3 launched the first advertising-funded television broadcasts targeting a Scandinavian audience. Behind this bold challenge was the investment firm Kinnevik, which mobilized financial and human capital to distribute TV directly to cable systems via satellite capacity, thereby effectively breaking the longstanding Swedish tradition of ad-free broadcasting (Ewertsson 2001, 277).

It did not matter that the Cable Act prohibited advertising in cable and satellite broadcasts aimed at Sweden, since the Act's licensing requirement applied only to the retransmission of channels from satellites in fixed traffic. By contrast, "direct broadcasting satellites" of the type used by TV3 were exempt.⁶² This, in turn, illustrates the study's theoretical argument about how the increasing speed of technological innovation over time tends to undermine the practical ability of state authorities to prevent the establishment of new communication systems. Given the disruptive effects of satellite technology, the battle over the monopoly had now entered an entirely new phase.

⁶⁰Ibidem., p. 8–10.

⁶¹*Moderate Party motion regarding the abolition of the monopoly in light of technological changes.* 1987, January 26. RG M12, Vol. F7-1. SRA, pp. 1–3.

⁶²*Draft report from the 1989 Commission of Inquiry on television policy.* RG 324000, Vol. 1. RA, pp. 23–24.

A last-ditch attempt to block the influx of new communication technologies was made in 1988 when a state inquiry was initiated within the Swedish Cable Board to determine whether TV3's broadcasts complied with the law. Although one member publicly advocated for a ban, this option was quickly dismissed.

According to Hadenius (1998, 284), parts of the Social Democrats were arguably as opposed to commercial television as they had been in 1962, when the ban on broadcasts from international waters effectively put an end commercial pirate radio. The key difference this time, however, was the recognition of the impossibility of preventing international satellite broadcasts from reaching Swedish households. The pace of technological development simply moved too fast. Sverker Gustavsson, Secretary of State in the Ministry of Education, acknowledged that technological developments essentially forced a relaxation of the advertising ban:

Until now, we have refrained from using advertising as a way to finance Swedish television. Developments show that this attitude is no longer sustainable. The result of maintaining the advertising ban would not be to keep advertising-funded TV out of our country, but rather that satellite companies alone would exploit the advertising market. There are no practical ways to prevent such a development. — quoted in Hadenius (1998, 292)

Against this backdrop, the government appointed a Commission of Inquiry in the spring of 1989 to examine the conditions for creating a third terrestrial channel and assess the feasibility of financing it through advertising.⁶³ A review of the materials and responses to the TV inquiry reinforces the study's thesis that maintaining a continued ban on advertising would have been practically impossible due to the increasing complexity of new communication technologies. In a memorandum, the investigator noted that, at present, satellite transmissions could indeed be controlled due to the low signal strength of first-generation satellites. This required the signals to be retransmitted via cable networks. However, this would not always be the

⁶³ *Committee directives from the Ministry of Education regarding future TV policy*. 1989, April 13. RG 420509, Vol. 072. RA, pp. 1–2.

case:

In the long term, it will not be possible to impose requirements on satellite transmissions through regulations in recipient countries. As satellites' transmitters grow stronger, the significance of regulating retransmission in cable networks diminishes.⁶⁴

The investigator further noted that the current Swedish policy of ad-free broadcasting had been sustainable as long as the only TV broadcasts accessible in Sweden originated from domestic transmitters. However, a decision to continue excluding advertising as a source of funding for Swedish television would effectively hand over the Swedish market for TV advertising to foreign satellite-broadcasting companies. Consequently, the investigator argued that new approaches were necessary if the longstanding principle of Swedish broadcasting as a public service was to be upheld:

We are now entering a situation where it may become difficult or impossible to achieve our goals because the means we have used so far are proving insufficient. It is therefore important, I believe, that we are prepared to reconsider the methods to ensure that we can continue to achieve the goal of providing all of Sweden with access to quality Swedish television.⁶⁵

In 1991, the Riksdag adopted the Commission's proposal to establish a third terrestrial TV channel financed by advertising. This historic transition from monopoly to greater market orientation, however, unfolded under much more controlled conditions than in France. In France, the broadcasting system developed a highly commercial character just a few years after key liberalizing reforms. By contrast, in Sweden, the private TV concessionaire, TV4, was subject to a range of public service obligations, reflecting the state's continued role in shaping radio and television content — even within an increasingly “private” broadcasting sector.

⁶⁴*Draft report from the 1989 Commission of Inquiry on television policy.* 1989, July 21. RG 324000, Vol. 1. RA, pp. 23–24.

⁶⁵*Draft report from the 1989 Commission of Inquiry on Television.* 1989, August 30. RG 324000, Vol. 1. RA, pp. 12.

France

INTRODUCTION

Comparative media scholars argue that the main liberalizing reforms in the French audiovisual sector during the late twentieth century bore traces of the state *dirigisme* that had characterized the country under Gaullist rule. One key reform was the landmark law of July 29, 1982, which officially dismantled the longstanding state broadcasting monopoly and established an independent audiovisual regulatory authority, the *Haute Autorité*. However, as noted by Buob and Mérigeau (2001, 15-20), the government routinely disregarded the new agency's opinions, arbitrarily granting private concessions. Against this backdrop, Peter J. Humphreys (1996, 181) argues that French broadcasting policy remained distinctly voluntaristic even in the post-monopoly era and that the system continued to be marked by subtle politicization (see also Hallin and Mancini 2004b, 127).

On the whole, however, no one can deny that France's radio and television system became significantly more "market-oriented" by the end of the twentieth century. As Agnès Chauveau (1997) points out in *L'audiovisuel en liberté?*, the initial reforms in the 1980s quickly transformed France into one of the most commercialized broadcasting systems on the continent. Kuhn and Perry (1999, 301-305) notes that the Socialists authorized Europe's first terrestrial pay-TV service, two commercial TV channels, and private local radio, while the Right subsequently privatized the country's principal public service channel, TF1 (see also Buob and Mérigeau 2001).

Kuhn (1995, 231) argues that the success of commercial television caused public sector television to struggle significantly after the mid-1980s, a situation exacerbated by poor management of the remaining channels. This illustrates the consensus within the national literature that the deregulation of French broadcasting was relatively chaotic and paved the way for more commercial outlets than the reformers in the Socialist Party had originally envisioned (see also Prot 1985).

To explain why the deregulation of the broadcasting market in France unfolded so haphazardly, this chapter emphasizes the importance of considering how the effects of new communication technologies are mediated by pre-existing institutions and power dynamics

among competing interests at the national level. The chapter highlights that throughout the 1970s, the public monopoly was sustained by an interest coalition comprising the state broadcasting service, the telecommunications agency, and political parties from both the right and left. What ultimately triggered change was the fact that third-sector groups seized new opportunities to broadcast on the FM band, operating illegal stations across the country.

The chapter leverages parallels between the French and Swedish cases in a counterfactual analysis of the alternative trajectories these countries might have taken if third-sector agents had acted differently in this situation. In Sweden, the centre-right government took a lenient approach, allowing popular movements to broadcast neighborhood radio on an experimental basis, provided the programs remained advertisement-free. In France, by contrast, both the Giscardians and the Socialist Party cracked down on the small illegal community stations. These differences in the relationship between the state and the third sector proved pivotal at this juncture, steering the countries' broadcasting landscapes onto diametrically different policy paths.

In France, the third sector mobilized a backlash against the government's heavy-handed approach in the early 1980s, as hundreds of pirate radio stations went on air, ultimately forcing liberalization. The initial reforms swiftly turned France into one of the most market-oriented broadcasting systems in Europe, contradicting the Socialists' mantra of "controlled deregulation." In Sweden, by contrast, deregulation proceeded in a more orderly manner. It was not until the early 1990s that the government relaxed the longstanding ban on advertising in terrestrial broadcasts. Taken together, the chapter illustrates how contingent actions of interest groups during critical junctures can trigger institutional change and have lasting consequences for subsequent policy developments in broadcasting.

THE LIBERALIZATION OF FRENCH BROADCASTING: THIRD-SECTOR AGENTS DISMANTLE THE STATE MONOPOLY

In the case study on the United States, we observed how the proliferation of new communication technologies in the 1970s led to an abundance of channels, which triggered the repeal of the Fairness

Doctrine and the transition to a more “pure” market-oriented broadcasting system.

The conditions for a similar development were radically different in France at the corresponding time, as the state enjoyed a legal and practical monopoly over both the production and distribution of broadcast programs since the Liberation. In France there were neither cable operators nor any independent over-the-air broadcasters outside national monopoly at the end of the 1960s. It was against the backdrop of this strong centralization, and the Gaullist party’s blatant interventions in ORTF’s public affairs programming, that the state broadcasting service had come under increasing criticism in the postwar decades, reaching a peak during the events of May 1968.

Following Charles de Gaulle’s resignation and Georges Pompidou’s assumption of the presidency in the summer of 1969, new questions were raised about the future direction of French radio and television. Many hoped that the departure of the architect behind the highly instrumentalized broadcasting service would represent a first step toward a more liberal order. Indeed, among the first decisions made by the new Prime Minister, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, was to establish a parliamentary commission to investigate the problems with the current broadcasting system and how these could be addressed (Brochand 1994b, 156-157).

When the Commission for the Oversight of the Management of the ORTF presented its findings in the spring of 1972, it argued that the state monopoly had served important functions, such as avoiding the uncontrolled proliferation of communication networks and defending “issues related to language, advertising, morality, or politics.” At the same time, the Commission acknowledged that it would be difficult to enforce the monopoly in the long run, as the “true revolution in the field of audiovisual media” was making it easier for private actors to establish communication networks beyond state control:

If a developer equips a building with a cable distribution circuit without using public property, what oversight does the state have over this circuit? Currently, it seems that there is none, as demonstrated by the recent creation of the first French cable distribution network, with an autonomous production studio, at Port-Sud near Arpajon,

which was established without restriction on the grounds that it was private property.⁶⁶

Beyond the practical challenges of preventing private networks from emerging, there was also uncertainty about whether the state had the resources to manage the new technologies:

While our country seems prepared in terms of knowledge to tackle new technologies, it is uncertain that it currently has qualified personnel; it is also regrettable that our country is currently absent from the design and production efforts for new equipment.⁶⁷

Against this background, the Commission concluded that, in the long run, it would be futile for the state to cling to its distribution monopoly. Cooperating with the private sector was considered the least bad option to avoid control of the market by foreign commercial companies and to prevent the state monopoly from being replaced with a private one. These concerns were the reason for the creation of the public company *Société française de télédistribution* in 1972, which, in collaboration with private actors in the audiovisual field, was intended to study all aspects of establishing and operating cable distribution networks. However, this did not mean that the public authorities were prepared to abdicate all their responsibilities:

[The public authorities] intend, on the one hand, at the technical level [...] to impose certain rules that ensure a minimum of coherence among networks and prevent their uncontrolled development. On the other hand, in terms of programming, they seek to curb abuses, whether related to morality, advertising, politics, and to prevent unwanted foreign broadcasts from invading our airwaves. Thus, the concept of monopoly will be replaced by that of control.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Report (No. 2291) by the Commission for Oversight of the Management of the ORTF concerning the Evolution of the Audiovisual Sector and its Adaptation to New Technologies. 1972, 20 April. RG 19870378, Vol. 6. AN, p. 376.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem.*, p. 381.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem.*, p. 383.

The central policy dilemma was who would exercise this control and how. According to the Commission, the state Post and Telecommunications authority still had a role to play in managing the technical aspects. However, it was much less clear whether the ORTF was best qualified to oversee programming. As the provider of national programs, the public broadcaster was seen as inevitably being both judge and party.

The biggest problem, however, was that additional responsibilities would burden an institution already struggling with its massive size. With the prospect of a multichannel environment, it was deemed unrealistic for the ORTF to fill the newly available channel space with original programming. All of this together led the Commission to recommend that the programming monopoly should be gradually relaxed and that the state's role should shift to overseeing broadcast content through the establishment of "specifications".

A state radio-television organization will remain, continuing to play a privileged role, but its design and structures will inevitably be modified. Alongside this organization, there will be abundant audiovisual production over which the role of the state should be a simple, very light form of oversight, which could ideally be entrusted to a new body.⁶⁹

The reasons the Commission cited for the need to redefine the state's role in the audiovisual sector largely align with this study's theoretical claims about the effects of new communication technologies on ownership structures within radio and television. In program production, the increasing number of available channels was deemed to make it untenable for the state broadcaster to fill the content supply with original material alone. In distribution, the report foresaw growing difficulties in legally and practically preventing the establishment of new delivery systems due to the pace of technological change. This, combined with the increasing resource intensity of the new systems, made it almost inevitable that commercial companies would eventually enter the field.

⁶⁹ *Ibidem.*, p. 385.

At the same time, the conditions for such a transition toward increased private ownership were very different in France compared to many other countries with a comparable level of industrial development. In Canada and the United States, for instance, private cable services had begun operating in a regulatory vacuum as early as the 1940s and 1950s. As we saw in the case study on Canada, the emergence of new delivery systems indeed pushed toward further private ownership, but this occurred in a system where these elements were already the dominant players. In France, by contrast, the public authorities had taken control of virtually all radio and television activities in the country following the Second World War, so they found themselves in a completely different position to control market entry for new telecommunications services compared to their North American counterparts.

Indeed, in stark contrast to the Commission's recommendations to liberalize the broadcasting sector and establish an independent regulatory authority, Pompidou continued to staunchly defend the state monopoly during his presidency. As recounted by Jacques Chevallier (1976), the president even took over broadcasting from the portfolio of the prime minister, who was forced to resign and watch as his plans for more extensive deregulation were replaced by a symbolic reform in 1972. According to Kuhn (1980), Pompidou believed that broadcasting was distinct from the press and that liberalization would detract from the quintessential role of the ORTF as the official medium of the Republic:

Whether we like it or not, television is considered the voice of France, both by the French and by foreigners. This imposes a certain restraint. — quoted in Brochand (1994b, 187-189)

Following Pompidou's death and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing's accession to the presidency in 1974 on a platform of "change without risk," many believed that the time had come for a more extensive liberalization of the French broadcasting landscape. The ORTF, which had been one of the main edifices of the Gaullist state, was struggling with severe financial and administrative problems. There was also a widespread belief that the new president was in favor of commercial

competition for the state networks (Brochand 1994b, 210-211).

However, as Raymond Kuhn (1980, 80-83) discusses in his dissertation, Giscard d'Estaing's ability to maneuver was sharply limited by his reliance on the Gaullists in the National Assembly. Kuhn (1995, 149) argues that the President would have been running an unacceptably high risk if he had sought to adopt a policy that appeared to undermine "one of the central tenets of Gaullist faith." The prospects of forming an ad hoc coalition with the parliamentary Left were no brighter, as the Socialists and Communists were opposed on principle to the abolition of the monopoly. In light of the parliamentary situation, the Giscardians settled for a hybrid solution.

The law of August 7, 1974, retained the monopoly but dismantled the ORTF, replacing it with a system of regulated competition among separate public companies, each with its own institutional identity (Brochand 2006, 35). Although the state monopoly over programming and distribution remained, supporters of commercial television were not overly disappointed. According to Kuhn (1995, 147-149), they viewed the new statute as a step toward abolishing the monopoly, believing that breaking up the ORTF's unitary structure would eventually facilitate the introduction of private television channels. In other words, the situation in France closely resembled Sweden, where the centre-right government split *Sveriges Radio* into four subsidiaries in 1978 while maintaining the public monopoly.

Hence, the French government maintained its broadcasting monopoly throughout the 1970s through an alliance of interests spanning all political parties from the Socialist Left to the Gaullist Right. Politicians recognized that accelerating technological developments would eventually necessitate opening the sector to private interests. However, since the state post and telecommunications authority controlled most of the country's communication networks, private program delivery systems struggled to enter the French market — unlike in North America, where such systems had already emerged long before government intervention. As a result, the spread of cable systems did not become a critical juncture forcing policymakers to revise the regulatory framework.

The technological push that seriously disrupted the status quo came in the latter half of the Giscard d'Estaing presidency, when ad-

vancements in FM radio made transmission equipment significantly cheaper and easier to operate (Kuhn 1995, 95-99). As Prot describes in *Des radios pour se parler* (1985), regionalists, environmentalists, and other third-sector groups took advantage of this by setting up pirate radio stations across the country. Notably, France had no local radio in the late 1970s.⁷⁰ In other words, community and grass-roots interests were significantly underrepresented in the broadcasting ecosystem.

Now, these third sector groups retaliated against the state monopoly by establishing their own alternative broadcast media. It is estimated that there were over 100 unauthorized stations in operation by early 1978, a development that Kuhn (1995, 98) argues took the public authorities completely by surprise:

The government and the main political parties were clearly caught out by the phenomenon of pirate radio. Taken unaware by the pace of technological change, policy advisers embarked on a fast learning curve to help them appreciate its opportunities and constraints.

With the 1978 general election approaching, the government and the mainstream political parties were essentially forced to publicly clarify their positions on this contentious issue (Prot 1985, 45). Following the victory of the right-wing coalition, the Giscardian government chose to defend the state monopoly tooth and nail by taking a series of draconian measures against the pirate stations. In July, 1978, supplementary legislation was introduced that confirmed their illegality.

Many stations were shut down by force. The most notable case involved Radio Riposte, established by the Socialist Party to protest the Giscardians' heavy-handed approach and alleged media instrumentalization. The controversy peaked in 1979 when police raided the Socialists' headquarters searching for transmission equipment, and the Party's First Secretary, François Mitterrand, was summoned to court for infringing the state monopoly (Brochand 2006, 39).

⁷⁰Regional radio was introduced through the 1974 reform and entrusted to FR3, but its broadcasts covered a much larger area than local radio stations would have (Kuhn 1995, 95-99).

France's experience with pirate radio in the late 1970s illustrates the study's theoretical point regarding the impact of new technology on interest group dynamics and ownership structures in the broadcasting sector. The development of FM radio caught public authorities off guard, creating opportunities for private actors to establish themselves beyond state control. Moreover, the reduced cost and complexity of operating broadcast media empowered non-governmental actors to set up their own outlets. Above all, the emergence of new communication technologies in the late 1970s rendered existing monopoly legislation ineffective, forcing policymakers to pursue alternative means of intervention to regulate broadcasting.

With the 1981 presidential election approaching, the Socialists, who until very recently had maintained their longstanding defense of the state monopoly, now positioned themselves as champions of a more liberal broadcasting order. As Mitterand himself declared following his indictment:

In the history of France, there have always been times when people had to take risks for freedom [...] The Socialist Party has decided to launch a major campaign so that the public realizes how threatened freedom of information is in our country. — quoted in Brochand (2006, 39)

Indeed, shortly after Mitterrand won the presidential election in May 1981, the incoming Minister of Communications, Georges Fillioud, told the Council of Ministers that the time had come to redefine the role of the national public sector in audiovisual communications due to the rapid evolution of technologies in the field. He emphasized that key democratic values were at stake in this transformation:

Traditional mass communication methods and new audiovisual communication services [...] increasingly appear as key channels for informing citizens, fostering artistic creation and dissemination, and facilitating leisure activities. As such, they engage fundamental freedoms, particularly the right to free and pluralistic information, which is at

the very heart of democracy.⁷¹

The Minister of Communications announced that the government intended to introduce a new statute on audiovisual media that would guarantee the human right to communication, ensure full autonomy for public service companies from political influence, and allow more societal voices to be heard in the audiovisual sector.⁷²

To support this effort, an official advisory committee led by top civil servant Pierre Moinot was appointed to outline the broad orientations of the promised broadcasting reform. In his inaugural speech before the so-called Commission for Reflection and Orientation of Audiovisual Matters, Prime Minister Pierre Mauroy reaffirmed the government's commitment to respect autonomy and pluralism, with particular emphasis on the importance of decentralization of programming in radio and television:

This is an aspect that must be present in all sectors of government activity and must therefore be integrated into your reflections. The decentralization of audiovisual media should, in parallel with regional reform, provide a reflection of the diverse communities that make up the country.⁷³

The new Minister of Culture, Jack Lang, agreed on the importance of decentralizing both the production and distribution of audiovisual programs to enrich and diversify the content being broadcast. This is evident from the minutes of the Commission's first meeting:

Television must, in fact, serve as a means to counter the cultural isolation of certain regions and promote the recognition of regional and local cultures.⁷⁴

⁷¹ *Statement by the Minister of Communication before the Council of Ministers concerning the broad orientation of the audiovisual reform.* 1981, 22 June. RG 19920053, Vol. 1. AN, p. 1.

⁷² *Ibidem.*

⁷³ *Speech by the Prime Minister during the inauguration of the Commission for Reflection and Orientation on Audiovisual Matters.* 1981, 17 July. RG 19920053, Vol. 1. AN, p. 1.

⁷⁴ *Minutes of the first meeting of the Commission for Reflection and Orientation on Audiovisual Matters.* 1981, 7 July. RG 19920053, Vol. 1. AN, p. 3.

Notably, the Socialist leaders' emphasis on localized broadcasting and its potential to reduce cultural isolation in rural areas closely mirrored arguments Swedish Social Democrats had made for popular movement-driven radio in the early 1920s. After decades of being denied access to broadcasting, regional groups and third-sector organizations seemed poised to regain a position similar to the one they had held during the interwar period.

However, in stark contrast to the lofty rhetoric about localized communication and pluralism, the new Socialist government continued the repressive Giscardian practice of jamming certain stations for a time after taking office. Though sympathetic to the small thematic pirate stations catering to specific social groups through niche programming, they initially did not want to accommodate the pressure groups campaigning for the legalization of local independent radio. According to Kuhn (1995, 99-100), this was because the Socialists wanted to prevent large commercial enterprises ideologically hostile to Mitterrand from taking advantage of the uncertain political situation to set up their own networks.

This stance nevertheless sparked both internal and external criticism, making the government appear to retreat from a policy it had championed in opposition. The Socialists thus found themselves in a difficult position: on one hand, they were expected to deliver on their promises of decentralized broadcasting; on the other, they feared this could open the door to excessive commercialization.

The new government was clearly performing a very delicate balancing act between these distinct models, something that was further complicated by the fact that many new pirate radio stations had sprung up following the presidential election in May and were now demanding the right to derive income from advertising. According to the still-illegal grassroots operators, advertising was essential for the survival of the small stations the government claimed it wanted to promote. However, this was something the provincial press strongly opposed, fearing increased competition for revenue and audiences. This concern is evident in a letter that the National Syndicate of Free Periodical Publishers (SNEPG) sent to the Minister of Communications in May, 1981:

We are currently concerned about the development of lo-

cal radio stations, whose uncontrolled proliferation will undoubtedly harm us. The local advertising market is narrow, and competition there is already very intense. We hope that a sufficiently restrictive legislative text will be developed to prevent local radio stations from expanding to the detriment of our businesses.⁷⁵

A memorandum from the Minister of Communications to the Council of Ministers in August of the same year shows that the need for new legislation had become so urgent that it could not possibly wait until the Moinot Commission had completed its investigations:

[N]ew needs for expression and communication have emerged in the form of numerous private radio stations broadcasting in violation of current legislation. These needs call for an urgent modification of the legal regime applicable to their activity. Otherwise, their uncontrolled proliferation [...] would soon result in the unregulated monopolization of a scarce resource — the airwaves, whose distribution, on the contrary, must be democratically regulated.⁷⁶

It was the issue of advertising that gave the ministers responsible for audiovisual reform the greatest headache. This is evident in a memorandum written by officials from the Ministry of Communication on September 10, 1981, which outlined the minefield of political risks the government faced if it denied the private stations this right:

The number of “pirate” stations that have appeared since May 10 has exceeded 400. Most of these stations [...] agree on demanding access to advertising revenue as a means of subsistence. [...] This is a simple message that resonates well with public opinion. It consists of a series of politically risky arguments, as they contradict the

⁷⁵ *Letter from the SNEPG to the Minister of Communication concerning the financial threat from the uncontrolled proliferation of local radio stations.* 1981, 25 May. RG 19920053, Vol. 1. AN, p. 1 [FR_19920053.1_1007].

⁷⁶ *Memorandum by the Minister of Communications to the Council of Ministers concerning the draft law on local private radio stations.* 1981, 2 September. RG 19920146, Vol. 12. AN, pp. 1–2.

new government's stance and could create issues in public opinion.⁷⁷

According to the ministry officials, completely refusing advertising for local private radio stations amounted to condemning them to poverty. Furthermore, the government would appear in open disagreement with the Moinot Commission, which unanimously advocated regulated advertising. Finally, the Minister of Communications supported this proposal, seeing it as the only realistic approach in light of the current situation and the present and future capacity of the government to manage it. The memorandum thus concluded:

[W]ith or without authorization, local private stations will advertise. Prohibiting it risks a confrontation that the government cannot win. Authorizing it provides the means to control it.⁷⁸

The dilemma confronting the Socialist government once again illustrates the importance of making an analytical distinction between corporate media and third sector media within the "private" broadcasting sector. This distinction was acknowledged by the Senate Commission on Cultural Affairs in its report on the bill concerning private radio, which argued that the French had grown tired of the one-way communication that had characterized the country's broadcasting system since the Liberation and that they desired to speak for themselves:

Police actions against pirate radio stations and the indictment of their hosts have caused a great deal of public outcry. The current crisis shows that it is time to recognize the emergence of a new right: the freedom of expression via radio broadcasting.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Ministry of Communications memorandum for internal consumption regarding the danger of an explosion of pirate radio stations in the absence of swift legislation.* 1981, 10 September. RG 19920146, Vol. 12. AN, pp. 1–2.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem.*

⁷⁹ *Senate report on the bill providing for an exception to the state monopoly on broadcasting.* 1981, 15 September. RG, Vol. 12. AN, pp. 1–2.

The the law on private radio passed in the fall of 1981 meant that many alternative groups from the French third sector to gain access to local radio for the first time — both as listeners and as program producers. Kuhn (1995, 99-100) notes that the law, intended as a temporary solution, comprehensively smashed the state monopoly:

After 1981, the floodgates were opened to an apparently infinite number and astonishing variety of small, privately run, local stations. By the end of 1983, it was estimated that up to 850 were operating quite legally.

Consequently, pressure increased on the government to change its policy on advertising on private local radio, which it eventually did in 1984 through an amendment to the 1982 statute. This marked the beginning of an accelerating process of commercialization that would fundamentally transform the French broadcasting landscape. As described in the introduction, the Socialists authorized the first terrestrial pay-TV service — Canal Plus — that same year, after which they licensed two privately-owned, advertising-funded over-the-air TV channels. Between 1986 and 1988, the Right intensified the deregulatory push by making France the first country in Europe to privatize a public service channel (TF1). In summary, it is hard to deny that the French broadcasting landscape took on an increasingly commercialized character at the end of the twentieth century, something widely acknowledged in both comparative and national literature on the subject.

At the same time, this chapter has highlighted original archival evidence that clearly shows the Socialists never intended to pave the way for unfettered commercial competition. Instead, the overwhelming focus was on promoting the expression of local and minority interests, whose strategic use of new radio technology played a decisive role in liberalizing the broadcasting sector. I am not claiming that deregulation would never have occurred in the absence of these groups, but I do argue that the explosive rise in illegal radio between 1977 and 1981 played an independent role in forcing the government into rapid concessions.

To illustrate this argument about the significance of interest group agency in shaping policy outcomes during critical junctures, we can

leverage the parallels with the Swedish case for a counterfactual thought experiment. In both France and Sweden, the broadcasting sector had been dominated by a centralized public service organization in the postwar period. In both countries, advances in FM radio in the late 1970s made it possible for civil society groups to gain access to independent broadcast outlets for the first time since the interwar period.

The difference was that French grassroots groups accomplished this by breaking the law and demanding the right to broadcast advertising-funded radio, in contrast to their Swedish counterparts, who did not directly oppose the center-right's 1978 neighborhood radio reform, which only allowed voluntary contributions as a funding source. One can only speculate, of course, whether advertising in Swedish broadcasting could have been introduced as early as the 1970s rather than in the 1990s if popular movements had engaged in similar civil disobedience as the French third-sector groups that *demand*ed the right to air commercials.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, we have observed how the broadcasting landscapes in Canada, France, Sweden, and the United States underwent transformative changes between the 1970s and 1990s following decades of relative policy continuity. During this period, none of the examined countries reversed their policy trajectories due to a foreign threat. However, their radio and television systems were disrupted by new communication technologies that advanced so rapidly that public authorities could not have realistically prevented their adoption. This included FM radio, cable television, and direct broadcast satellites, which pushed governments across Western democracies to deregulate their broadcasting sectors by eroding the spectrum scarcity rationale that policymakers had long invoked to justify stricter regulation of broadcast media than print.

The chapter has advanced the argument that the emergence of new communication technologies in the 1970s and 1980s constituted a technological shock, weakening states' ability to regulate the media landscape by rendering existing policy instruments ineffective. In line

with the theoretical expectations, these changes lowered barriers to entry for private media actors, leading to increasingly fragmented and “market-oriented” broadcasting landscapes across Western Europe and North America by the late 1990s.

Although all examined countries deregulated broadcasting in response to transformative new technologies, the changes were neither uniform across nations nor simultaneous. The effects of new technology were *least* pronounced in the United States and Canada, given that private outlets had long been part of the media landscape. By contrast, the changes were far more profound in France and Sweden, where state monopolies had been maintained since the 1950s and 1960s. The chapter has demonstrated how processes of convergence and path dependence in broadcast governance were decisively shaped by power structures among state agents, private businesses, and third-sector groups embedded within *pre-existing* institutions.

To illustrate the role of institutions and interests in mediating the impact of new technology, the chapter leveraged parallels between the French and Swedish cases in a counterfactual analysis, exploring the alternative trajectories these countries might have taken if third-sector agents had acted differently when governments first began loosening restrictions on broadcasting.

In France, the third sector mobilized a backlash against the government’s heavy-handed crackdown on unauthorized community radio stations in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, hundreds of pirate radio stations took to the airwaves, creating chaos that ultimately forced liberalization. According to Agnès Chauveau (1997), the initial reforms swiftly turned France into one of the most market-oriented broadcasting systems in Europe, contradicting the Socialists’ mantra of “controlled deregulation.”

In Sweden, by contrast, deregulation proceeded more gradually. Unlike in France, third-sector organizations were allowed to broadcast community radio from the late 1970s, provided their programs did not include advertising. It was not until the early 1990s that the government relaxed the longstanding ban on advertising in terrestrial broadcasts, following rapid advancements in satellite technology. These developments made it impossible for policymakers to prevent households from accessing commercial TV from foreign media com-

panies, ultimately forcing deregulation.

A similar situation unfolded in Canada, where concerns about radio and television programming being overwhelmed by content from the United States had existed since the interwar period. Policymakers' underlying objective of protecting the national broadcasting system from foreign domination remained unchanged from the 1930s. However, technological advancements forced a search for new policy means to achieve it.

The solution chosen in Canada was to preserve the broadcasting system's national vocation while increasingly seeking to achieve it by enhancing the system's competitiveness and supporting domestic content producers from both the commercial and third-sector. Thus, the Canadian case illustrated the argument that transformative communication technologies often render existing policy instruments ineffective, typically compelling states to adopt more indirect forms of intervention, such as subsidies and content regulations. It also underscored that policymaking on radio and television never occurs in a vacuum but is continuously shaped by institutional arrangements and interest group dynamics rooted in deeper historical contexts.

Because broadcasting in the United States had been predominantly commercial since the interwar period, this was the country where the impact of new technologies on ownership structures within radio and television was least pronounced. The proliferation of FM radio, cable TV, and satellites primarily reinforced the competitiveness of an already market-oriented system.

While new communication technologies did not fundamentally alter the structure of the American broadcasting system, they had significant implications for programming regulation by rendering obsolete the spectrum scarcity rationale for maintaining the so-called Fairness Doctrine. Judicial authorities had long criticized the Doctrine for undermining its own goal of promoting greater pluralism in broadcast viewpoints by discouraging broadcasters from discussing controversial issues altogether. Despite this, the FCC persistently refused to relax the policy, arguing that the natural limit on how many could start a radio or TV station justified the fairness requirement.

The turning point came in the late 1970s when FM radio technology had advanced to the point where, in most major cities, there

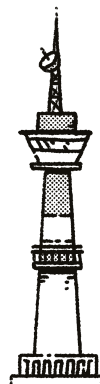
was greater diversity in broadcast media than in print outlets. Only then did a critical mass of policymakers begin to recognize that the spectrum scarcity rationale for restricting radio and TV licensees' First Amendment rights had likely outlived its relevance. Consequently, Congress initiated the process of dismantling the Fairness Doctrine. Taken together, the U.S. case illustrated how new technology can drive institutional change by rendering existing policy instruments obsolete, often empowering and expanding the diversity of media outlets.

While commercial outlets undeniably gained significant momentum across Western democracies in the late twentieth century, the chapter has demonstrated that the impact of new technology on power relations among state actors, private businesses, and third-sector groups varied considerably across countries. This reinforces the study's argument that shifts in the broader policy environment are always mediated by pre-existing institutions and interest group dynamics at the national level.

A key finding is that technological advancements empowered third-sector groups. Indeed, policymakers repeatedly justified the deregulation of broadcasting by arguing that loosening restrictions on new communication technologies would enhance regional communities' ability to share information on local affairs while enabling minorities to communicate more effectively with one another. Overall, this underscores the importance of distinguishing between different elements of the "private" sector to better understand how interests shape institutional stability and change in the media sector.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions



The aim of this dissertation has been to gain a better understanding of the policymaking dynamics shaping the field of radio and television in Western democracies. In the introductory chapter, I asked what factors drive shifts in broadcasting policy *within* countries over time and how enduring differences *across* nations can be explained. These questions have been explored through a historical institutionalist lens, analyzing how interest group struggles have influenced radio and television policies across Western Europe and North America.

Rather than framing political conflicts over broadcasting as a binary dynamic between “state” and “market,” I have argued that radio and television policies are shaped by a *tripartite* power struggle featuring state agencies, commercial enterprises, and groups from the third-sector. Furthermore, I have highlighted the need to analyze whether these interests are involved in the production of broadcast program content, or the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution. In other words, the key conceptual argument is that a single type of medium can encompass distinct spheres of intervention requiring varying regulatory approaches, and that policymaking in the broadcasting sector, specifically, cannot be reduced to a binary conflict between “public” and “private” interests.

To explain enduring differences in broadcast regulation *across* countries, the study has considered the role of institutions in constraining stakeholders’ ability to advance their interests during crit-

ical moments of policymaking. I defined “national institutions” as the power asymmetries among the state, private businesses, and the third sector that are embedded in institutional arrangements from deeper historical contexts.

This definition formed the basis of the approach to tracing policy paths and strategic interactions among actors “forward” from nations’ foundational decisions on radio in the early twentieth century. As scholars in historical institutionalism have pointed out, processes of institutional creation typically involve a clash of power among political agents with deep stakes in the adoption of new policies (Hall and Taylor 1996, 954). Hence, I expected cross-national variation to stem from contingent decisions and strategic interactions during such phases of brief institutional fluidity, when willful actors are likely to steer outcomes in a more voluntaristic fashion than under “normal” conditions (Gourevitch 1986, 239).

Following this logic, I highlighted how pre-existing power asymmetries and interactions among influential stakeholders shaped the institutions that were created for radio in Canada, France, Sweden and the United States during the interwar period. I emphasized that these initial decisions triggered a path-dependent process, cementing the interests embedded in the original broadcasting institutions and shielding them from later reform attempts. As pointed out by scholars in new institutionalism, “insiders” typically gain opportunities to accumulate expertise, experience, and connections, creating self-reinforcing advantages that outsiders challenging the status quo may struggle to match (Mahoney 2001; Weir and Skocpol 1985, 143–144; Weir 1992, 191–192). For these reasons, I expected radio and television institutions to remain in a stable equilibrium as long as they continued to serve the vested interests embedded within them.

In explaining processes of institutional change *within* countries over time, I stressed that deep-seated power asymmetries within institutions can be disrupted if the broadcasting system is exposed to an exogenous shock. As pointed out by Capoccia and Kelemen (2007, 341–343), such shocks can destabilize entrenched interests and create openings for institutional realignment. I identified two types of critical junctures in broadcasting — technology-driven shocks and acute international shocks — both of which can drive policy change

by reshaping the broader decision-making context and shifting power among competing interests. At the same time, I expected technological and international shocks to reshape the policymaking environment in varying ways and empower different types of interests.

The primary effect of new communication technologies that fundamentally reshape the technological environment is to undermine the effectiveness of existing policy instruments, typically weakening states' ability to regulate radio and television. This compels policymakers to adopt alternative intervention strategies, often shifting away from direct government ownership of program-producing companies and distribution infrastructure toward more indirect forms of control, like subsidies or content regulations. At the same time, new technology tends to favor commercial interests, which can capitalize on emerging market opportunities in both content and carriage, as well as third-sector groups, which benefit from lower technological and economic barriers to program production.

By contrast, acute international shocks often marginalize third-sector groups, as sudden intensifications of international competition in telecommunications or other threats to national autonomy typically favor centralized, state-led efforts to counter external challenges. Commercial firms may benefit from such crises if state strategies require collaboration with private affiliates. Occasionally, international shocks can even trigger a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting the state, domestic private corporations, and the third sector against a common foreign adversary.

Finally, the study has emphasized that the impact of revolutionary technology and international shocks will never be uniform across countries, even if they occur simultaneously and under similar conditions. Political struggles over the control of broadcasting during critical junctures never unfold in a vacuum. Instead, the effects of these junctures will always be mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies at the national level. This means that, although nations' media systems face similar homogenizing pressures from new technology and international integration, differences in radio and television governance across Western democracies will endure.

KEY CONTRIBUTIONS TO PREVIOUS RESEARCH

By tracing interest group struggles over broadcasting in Europe and North America “forward” from the foundational decisions on radio in the early 1900s, the aim of the dissertation has been to gain a better understanding of the policymaking dynamics shaping the field of radio and television in Western democracies. In doing so, it had made three principal contributions to previous research.

First, the study advances existing efforts in comparative political communication to *describe* and classify national media systems. Additionally, it engages with research in political science and comparative political economy on how individual agents shape differences in media policy *across* nations and whether their interests are endogenous or exogenous to the institutional environment in which they operate. Finally, the dissertation informs debates within new institutionalism and comparative media studies on the origins of broadcasting institutions and the mechanisms driving policy change *within* countries over time.

The thesis’ main contribution to describing and classifying media systems builds on Pippa Norris’ (2009, 328) critique that the mass media encompasses such a wide array of outlets that one can question whether it is meaningful to define a “media system” across such disparate phenomena. I have introduced a perspective further complicating this conceptual challenge — namely, that even a *single* medium can encompass disparate spheres of intervention that require varied regulatory approaches. This builds on Orren and Skowronek’s argument about multiple institutional orders and intercurrency.

Applied specifically to the field of broadcasting, I have emphasized the importance of making an analytical distinction between content production and the operation of the technical infrastructure required for program distribution. By highlighting the interplay between these distinct spheres of intervention and the interest groups involved in their operation, I have provided a more nuanced account of the structure of radio and television systems in Western democracies compared to existing classifications. I have also contributed to political science research on how distinct institutional realms within a polity can evolve largely independently while still exerting significant influence on one another (see Orren and Skowronek 2004).

By analyzing the role of interest groups in shaping the governance of “content” and “carriage” in various national contexts, the study has further contributed to debates in comparative media studies on the causes of enduring differences in broadcasting policy *across* countries (Bannerman and Haggart 2015; Hallin and Mancini 2004b; Syvertsen et al. 2014). Congruent with a rationalist view of institutional development, the study’s starting point has been that radio and television policy is driven by political agents seeking to advance their interests in competition with other influential actors (see Hall and Soskice 2001; North 1990; Williamson 1975). However, contrary to the prevailing view in comparative political communications, I have emphasized that the main conflict in radio and television policy cannot be reduced to a binary struggle between public and private interests. Drawing on Lewis and Booth (1989), I have instead argued that policy in this field is driven by a *tripartite* conflict featuring state agents, private corporations, and groups from the third sector.

By distinguishing between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector, the dissertation provides a more nuanced understanding of the interest group dynamics shaping radio and television policy. This actor-centered analysis of media policy in Western democracies also contributes to broader debates in political economy and new institutionalism regarding the role of individual agents in shaping political outcomes and the extent to which their interests are endogenous or exogenous to the institutional settings in which they operate (see Pierson 1994; Hall and Taylor 1996).

The dissertation’s third major contribution lies in its theory of how exogenous systemic shocks can reshape this very environment in ways that can pave the way for comprehensive institutional change. When it comes to explaining variation in media policy *within* countries over time, existing communications scholarship has emphasized new technology and international integration as major forces of change, purportedly driving cross-national convergence toward increased commercialization (see, for instance, Dyson and Humphreys 1988; Hallin and Mancini 2004b, Chapter 8; Kuhn and Perry 1999). The literature review nevertheless revealed that previous research has only to a limited extent theorized how such sweeping economic and technological macro-level changes are mediated by institutions and interest

group dynamics at the national level (but see Thatcher 2004).

The dissertation has addressed this gap by identifying two critical junctures that drive policy change in broadcasting and detailing how they transform national institutions and power relations among competing interests. Systemic shocks from revolutionary communication technology render existing policy instruments obsolete, weakening the state's position relative to commercial and third-sector actors. International shocks, by contrast, shift policymakers' priorities toward a more state-led approach to broadcasting, marginalizing the third sector but potentially empowering private businesses if the state depends on them. If the threat is sufficiently overwhelming, it can even trigger a rally-around-the-flag effect, uniting the state, domestic private corporations, and the third sector against a common foreign adversary.

This historical institutionalist argument about the effects of exogenous systemic shocks on media systems contributes to longstanding debates in political science on the sources of institutional change. Specifically, it draws on previous work on how shifts in the broader policymaking environment can redistribute power within domestic politics, prompting politicians to prioritize entirely new goals (see, for instance Gourevitch 1978; Katzenstein 1978). For instance, the idea that policymaking on radio and television under crisis conditions differs fundamentally from policymaking in more "normal" circumstances builds on Pepper D. Culpepper's (2010) argument that the state's responsiveness to business interests varies between periods of "quiet" politics — when policy issues are technical and attract little public attention — and "noisy" politics, when issues become politically charged and highly salient (see also Culpepper 2016). The argument also resonates with Peter A. Hall's (1993) ideas on how institutional change can be triggered by adjustments to policy instruments and, in some cases, by fundamental paradigmatic shifts in the broader policy framework.

Finally, the study has emphasized that the impact of revolutionary technology and international shocks on interest group dynamics will never be uniform across countries, even if they occur simultaneously and under similar conditions. Instead, the effects of these junctures will always be mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies from deeper historical contexts.

This means that, although nations' media systems face similar homogenizing pressures from new technology and internationalization, differences in the governance of radio and television across Western democracies are likely to persist. Existing communications research has acknowledged the significance of national cultural and political traditions at the “meso” level in shaping enduring patterns of media policy (see Humphreys 1996, 177; Pavani 2018, 11–12; Syvertsen et al. 2014). However, prior studies have under-specified which types of policy legacies are relevant in the media sector and what variation in outcomes they are expected to generate.

I have addressed this gap by defining “the national institutional context” as the power asymmetries among state agents, private corporations, and third-sector groups embedded within countries' policy frameworks for radio and television. This definition has guided my analysis of institutional pathways and strategic interactions, tracing them “forward” from the foundational decisions on radio in the early twentieth century to the present day (see Møller 2021). Taken together, the thesis' historical institutionalist analysis of media policy in Western democracies contributes to broader debates in political science, comparative political economy, and historical institutionalism regarding the sources of enduring policy differences across nations and the mechanisms driving institutional change over time.

SUMMARY OF CASES AND OUTCOMES

The Birth of Radio

The first empirical chapter on the origins of broadcasting policies revealed much greater variation in the early organization of radio in Western Europe and North America than suggested by the conventional distinction between “private enterprise” and “public service” systems. Here, the tripartite actor conceptualization and the analytical distinction between “content” and “carriage” helped clarify that the public service monopoly established in Sweden in 1924 actually incorporated both governmental and commercial elements. The state-run Telegraph Board managed the technical infrastructure, while the press-owned broadcasting company Radiotjänst was responsible for programming. We saw that this peculiar public-private arrangement

stemmed from newspaper owners' strong interest in protecting their business from competition over advertising revenue and from the fact that the Telegraph Board — as the undisputed expert authority in telecommunications — was the only viable candidate to manage the distribution infrastructure.

At the same time, the Swedish case study explored a viable *counterfactual* scenario in which groups from the third sector could have played a greater role in programming alongside the commercial press. While the Minister of Communication in Hjalmar Branting's Social Democratic government recognized the importance of involving the newspapers, he also envisioned another societal sector as a key user of the new medium — namely, the popular movements. The backdrop was that the very first experimental broadcasts to a broader audience had been pioneered by the temperance movement, in close collaboration with amateur radio clubs across the country.

However, we will never know whether the third sector could have been given a greater role in producing radio programs, as the Social Democratic ministry was forced to resign in the spring of 1923. Instead, Ernst Trygger's conservative government implemented the public-commercial monopoly that sidelined the amateur radio clubs, allowing the newspaper industry and the Telegraph Administration to take the lead in the development of Swedish broadcasting.

In the case study on France, we saw that the corresponding Ministry of Posts and Telegraphs established a network of state-owned broadcasting stations during the 1920s and 1930s. However, unlike its Swedish counterpart, the French Telegraph Agency did not enforce its legally mandated monopoly. As a result, two parallel radio networks emerged haphazardly in the final decades of the Third Republic — one state-run and one private — alongside a multitude of unauthorized amateur stations. We observed that both state-run and private stations shared the characteristic of having their programs produced by independent groups from the third sector, including local artists, voluntary associations, and amateurs. Once again, this illustrated the importance of analytically distinguishing between “content” and “carriage,” as well as between different elements within the “private” broadcasting sector.

However, it was far from certain that “private” actors would be

allowed to participate in French broadcasting at all, as radio communications were considered a state prerogative before 1920. We recall that this doctrine was put to the test in the wake of the First World War, as the race among the major powers to dominate international wireless telegraphy entered a critical phase. We saw that policymakers' resistance to relaxing the monopoly only began to wane when they realized that France would inevitably fall behind other nations unless the radio field was opened up to private exploitation.

Consequently, the state reached an agreement with the electrical manufacturer CSF, granting it the right to establish wireless facilities on French soil for communication with foreign stations. This laid the foundation for the mixed public-private structure that would define French radio broadcasting in the 1920s and 1930s. Taken together, the case study on France illustrated how exogenous systemic shocks from international competition can trigger institutional change by prompting policymakers to reassess previous policy goals, potentially empowering commercial actors if essential to the state's strategy for countering foreign threats.

An almost identical point about how international shocks influence interest group dynamics was made in the case study on the United States. In the fall of 1919, the government supported the establishment of a patent trust composed of domestic electrical manufacturers to prevent the nation's radio traffic from being monopolized by the British-controlled Marconi Company in peacetime. We observed that the manufacturers within the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) ultimately outmaneuvered amateurs and other non-profit organizations in the early struggle over broadcasting. The Radio Act of 1927 marked a significant victory for these commercial interests, which successfully persuaded policymakers that the best public service could be achieved by restricting non-professional operators and promoting the development of advertising-funded national broadcast networks.

At the same time, the counterfactual analysis revealed that it was far from certain that American radio would be managed by private interests in the first place. Contrary to the conventional view of a market-oriented model as the "natural" choice for the United States, we observed that government ownership of wireless long ap-

peared to be the most plausible solution for maintaining national control over radio communications. However, the Navy's case for a state monopoly ultimately slipped out of its hands following the 1919 congressional elections, when majorities in both the House of Representatives and the Senate shifted in favor of the more business-friendly Republicans. This set the stage for the corporations within RCA to shape American broadcasting into a predominantly commercial enterprise, dominated by a handful of national networks and their affiliate stations.

The expansion of these very networks into Canada in the late 1920s was the key reason why Canadian politicians decided to introduce a public broadcasting monopoly. Prior to this, the country had had an entirely private radio system. However, given the growing presence of U.S. networks in the Canadian market, third-sector groups were concerned that continuing the *laissez-faire* policy would result in a broadcasting landscape dominated by American productions, threatening the nation's cultural sovereignty.

As this threat to Canada's national identity dawned on an increasing number of societal actors, there was a rally-around-the-flag effect that culminated in the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation in 1932. This legislation led to a more unified, state-led approach to broadcast governance while also strengthening the position of domestic commercial radio stations. In other words, the Canadian case once again illustrated the argument about the effects of international shocks, albeit in a somewhat different technological context than the American and French cases.

The Advent of Television

In the subsequent empirical chapter on the emergence of terrestrial television, we saw how France experienced yet another international shock, steering the country toward a radically different broadcasting policy than the one that had defined much of the interwar period. This time, the shock came not from a surge in international competition in telecommunications but from the threat posed by Nazi Germany. According to the standard account, French politicians' awareness of radio's propaganda potential during the Second World War prompted them to implement one of the most centralized pub-

lic broadcasting organizations in all of Western Europe following the Liberation. *Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française* (RTF, later ORTF) was nominally founded as a “public service” broadcaster, but in practice, the Gaullist party blatantly exploited it to serve its own political ends throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

While agreeing with the conventional view that the philosophical and infrastructural basis of this centralized broadcasting system was laid during the Second World War, I argued that its *institutional* foundations were largely established already in the final years of the Third Republic. I traced the critical shift to the Munich Agreement in September 1938, after which Nazi Germany escalated its psychological warfare by broadcasting propaganda from border radio stations targeting French listeners. This critical juncture prompted the Daladier government to sideline the Post and Telegraph Authority and the local program councils that had dominated French radio in the 1920s and 1930s, aiming to create a more unified broadcasting service to counter foreign propaganda. Overall, the French case study reaffirmed the study’s argument that international threats heighten elected officials’ interest in broadcasting and drive them to reconsider previous policy choices, typically in a more *dirigiste* direction.

By contrast, countries that did not experience a comparable shock largely followed a path of continuity, carrying over policies from the interwar period into the 1950s and 1960s. Sweden, for instance, kept the same system for television as for radio, both in terms of funding and the interests embedded in the institutional framework. The state Telecommunications Agency upheld its monopoly over the distribution network, while Radiotjänst (later Sveriges Radio) extended its exclusive rights in radio programming to encompass television. Furthermore, programs within the public broadcasting monopoly remained entirely free from advertising, as the television service, like the earlier radio service, was funded exclusively through license fees.

A similar trajectory of continuity was observed in Canada, where both liberal and conservative postwar governments helped maintain the “single” broadcasting system that had been established in the 1930s. In other words, public and private stations continued to cooperate in delivering a national television service in the same way they had with radio during the latter part of the interwar period.

Then, as now, the basic rationale behind this unified broadcasting policy was to ensure that programming was not flooded with content from stations in the United States. The difference was that the encroachment of American networks into Canada had constituted an exogenous shock during the interwar period, while by the postwar era, it had transformed into a latent threat, influencing virtually all policymaking in the field.

While both the Canadian and Swedish case studies testified to a high degree of policy continuity since the foundational decisions on radio in the interwar period, they also demonstrated that this continuity did not necessarily arise from institutional inertia. Rather, both cases revealed more or less intense power struggles among different interests over whether the existing order should be maintained or reformed as television made its debut. In this context, the tripartite actor conceptualization and the content-carriage distinction helped shed light on the interest group dynamics that kept both Canadian and Swedish broadcasting policy on a stable path throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

For instance, in both Canada and Sweden, we observed that commercial interests gained significant momentum in the postwar period, largely because television was much more expensive than radio. Against this backdrop, there was broader support among different stakeholders for financing the new medium through advertising. By the mid-1950s, both countries were therefore at a crossroads, weighing whether to adopt a more “market-oriented” policy for television or maintain the status quo with a dominant national public broadcasting service. The kingmakers in this struggle were groups from the third sector, who sided with the advocates for the continued primacy of the CBC and Radiotjänst/Sveriges Radio, believing their interests would be best served within the framework of public service broadcasting.

The analytical distinction between commercial and non-commercial elements within the “private” media sector also helped illuminate the policy dynamics that steered television in the United States toward a slightly more “public” orientation in the postwar period. The American case study revealed that the passage of the Public Broadcasting Act of 1967 was rooted in a counterreaction to the dominance of com-

mercial radio and TV networks, spearheaded by labor unions and educational institutions. In the 1940s, these third-sector groups joined forces with officials within the Federal Communications Commission to push through the so-called Fairness Doctrine, designed to prevent large networks from shaping a biased public agenda. Subsequently, educational organizations secured dedicated channels for nonprofit television, providing these third sector interests with an institutional foundation that they later leveraged to advocate for the introduction of public broadcasting.

It should be acknowledged that these reforms did not fundamentally alter the predominantly private ownership structure of U.S. broadcasting, as public television remained a relatively marginal service compared to the commercial networks. In this sense, the evolution of American broadcasting in the early postwar decades largely followed the policy trajectory set by the foundational decisions on radio during the interwar period. That said, the alliance between federal authorities and nonprofit interests helped push through minor shifts that, while not directly affecting the ownership of radio and television facilities, slightly rebalanced power away from large commercial enterprises in favor of the state and the third sector.

A Fragmented Media Landscape

If the initial decades following the Second World War were marked by significant continuity in broadcast governance from the interwar radio era, the decades after 1970 saw transformative changes. During this period, none of the examined countries reversed their policy trajectories due to a foreign threat. However, their radio and television systems were severely disrupted by new communication technologies that advanced so rapidly that public authorities could not have realistically prevented their adoption. This included FM radio, cable television, and direct broadcast satellites, which pushed governments across Western democracies to deregulate their broadcasting sectors by eroding the spectrum scarcity rationale that had long justified stricter regulation of radio and television than print media.

Although all examined countries deregulated broadcasting in response to transformative new technologies, the changes were neither uniform across nations nor simultaneous. The effects of new technol-

ogy were *least* pronounced in the United States and Canada, given that private outlets had long been part of the media landscape. By contrast, the changes were far more profound in France and Sweden, where state monopolies had been maintained since the 1950s and 1960s. The chapter demonstrated how processes of convergence and path dependence in broadcast governance were decisively shaped by power structures among state agents, private businesses, and third-sector groups embedded within *pre-existing* institutions.

To illustrate the role of institutions and interests in mediating the impact of new technology, the chapter leveraged parallels between the French and Swedish cases in a counterfactual analysis, exploring the alternative trajectories these countries might have taken if third-sector agents had acted differently when governments first began loosening restrictions on broadcasting.

In France, the third sector mobilized a backlash against the government's heavy-handed crackdown on unauthorized community radio stations in the late 1970s. By the early 1980s, hundreds of pirate radio stations took to the airwaves, creating chaos that ultimately forced liberalization. The initial reforms swiftly turned France into one of the most market-oriented broadcasting systems in Europe, contradicting the Socialists' mantra of "controlled deregulation."

In Sweden, by contrast, deregulation proceeded more gradually. Unlike in France, third-sector organizations were allowed to broadcast community radio from the late 1970s, provided their programs did not include advertising. It was not until the early 1990s that the government relaxed the longstanding ban on advertising in terrestrial broadcasts, following rapid advancements in satellite technology. These developments made it impossible for policymakers to prevent households from accessing commercial TV from foreign media companies, ultimately forcing deregulation.

A similar situation unfolded in Canada, where policymakers had long been concerned about radio and television being overwhelmed by U.S. content. Policymakers' objective of protecting the national broadcasting system from foreign domination remained unchanged in the 1970s and 1980s. However, technological advancements forced a search for new policy means to achieve it.

The solution chosen in Canada was to preserve the broadcasting

system's national vocation while increasingly seeking to achieve it by enhancing the system's competitiveness and supporting domestic content producers from both the commercial and third-sector. Thus, the Canadian case illustrated the argument that transformative communication technologies often render existing policy instruments ineffective, compelling states to adopt more indirect forms of intervention, such as subsidies and content regulations. It further underscored that policymaking on radio and television never occurs in a vacuum but is continuously shaped by institutional arrangements and interest group dynamics rooted in deeper historical contexts.

Because broadcasting in the United States had been predominantly commercial since the interwar period, this was the country where the impact of new technologies on ownership structures within radio and television was least pronounced. The proliferation of FM radio, cable TV, and satellites primarily reinforced the competitiveness of an already market-oriented system.

While new communication technologies did not fundamentally alter the structure of the American broadcasting system, they had significant implications for programming regulation by rendering obsolete the spectrum scarcity rationale for maintaining the so-called Fairness Doctrine. Judicial authorities had long criticized the Doctrine for undermining its own goal of promoting greater pluralism in broadcast viewpoints by discouraging broadcasters from discussing controversial issues altogether. Despite this, the FCC persistently refused to relax the policy, arguing that the natural limit on how many could start a radio or TV station justified the fairness requirement.

The turning point came in the late 1970s when FM radio technology had advanced to the point where, in most major cities, there was greater diversity in broadcast media than in print outlets. Only then did a critical mass of policymakers recognize that the spectrum scarcity rationale for restricting radio and TV licensees' First Amendment rights had likely outlived its relevance. Consequently, Congress initiated the process of dismantling the Fairness Doctrine. Taken together, the U.S. case illustrated how new technology can drive institutional change by making existing policy instruments ineffective, typically empowering and diversifying private media outlets.

IMPLICATIONS FOR DEBATES ON CURRENT MEDIA DEVELOPMENTS

In the third and final empirical chapter, we saw that the kinds of “private” media actors empowered by technological advancements in the 1970s and 1980s extended beyond large commercial outlets, since FM radio and cable television significantly lowered costs and technical barriers for non-professionals to produce and distribute programs. Policymakers repeatedly justified the deregulation of broadcasting by arguing that loosening restrictions on these new communication technologies would enhance regional communities’ ability to share information on local affairs while enabling minorities to communicate more effectively with one another. In other words, an important objective seemed to be to allow third-sector groups to gain greater autonomy in operating radio and TV stations.

Much of the scholarly debate on the development of radio and television around the turn of the millennium revolved around whether the deregulations of the 1980s and 1990s had the intended effects on the media landscapes’ pluralism and competitiveness.

In the case study on Sweden, we observed how the centre-right government introduced a neighborhood radio reform in the late 1970s, allowing third-sector groups to conduct independent broadcasts outside the public monopoly for the first time since the interwar period. The aim was to enhance the diversity of voices in the media landscape. Similarly, Carl Bildt’s centre-right government justified the 1993 relaxation of the ban on advertising in private local radio as a way to support the financial stability of third-sector broadcasters (Hadenius 1998, 299).

By 2007, however, acquisitions and mergers had led to a Swedish private radio market dominated by two nationwide commercial networks. One was controlled by Modern Times Group (MTG), and the other by the international media conglomerate SBS Broadcasting. These corporations also owned TV3 and Kanal 5. Alongside TV4 and Sveriges Television, they collectively captured nearly 90 percent of the television audience by the early 2000s (Engblom and Wormbs 2007, 9–10). Around the turn of the millennium, Sweden’s media landscape had thus evolved in a way that appears to corroborate the prevailing theory of convergence toward commercialization.

At the same time, it is worth noting that Swedish public television, despite a decline between 1998 and 2008, retained a stable market share of around one-third well into the 2010s (Asp 2017, 139–141). Additionally, public service media have consistently out-competed other broadcast media outlets in the annual trust surveys conducted by the SOM Institute (Martinsson and Andersson 2022). This reinforces Syvertsen et al.’s (2014, 76–77) argument that public broadcasting in Scandinavia has maintained a prominent position despite pressures toward greater market orientation and that the Nordic countries have remained committed to their longstanding view of the media as social institutions.

From the case study on France, we recall that the Socialists’ argument for relaxing the monopoly in the early 1980s centered on strengthening communication opportunities for local communities and alternative groups. However, what was initially intended as a non-commercial private radio underwent a similar development as in Sweden, namely that the market eventually became dominated by large commercial networks (Kuhn and Perry 1999, 301–305).

Within French television, commercial companies also made significant gains. Notably, Europe’s first pay-TV channel, Canal Plus, launched in 1984 (Buob and Mérieau 2001). Two years later, the right-wing government authorized two private TV channels and privatized the state broadcaster TF1. As Kuhn (1995, 231) notes, the rise of commercial television created major challenges for public-sector broadcasters after the mid-1980s, further exacerbated by poor management of the remaining channels. Overall, the prevailing view is that the deregulation of French broadcasting was relatively chaotic, ultimately enabling the expansion of commercial outlets beyond what the Socialist Party reformers had initially envisioned. The development of French broadcasting in the 1990s and 2000s thus reinforces the case for convergence toward commercialization even more strongly than the Swedish experience.

From the section on Canada, we recall that the 1991 Broadcasting Act was widely regarded as a victory for community groups, ethnic minorities, and other independent producers of radio and television programs (Raboy 1989, 1990). However, by the turn of the millennium, five major conglomerates had seized control of most of

the country's assets for producing and distributing radio and television programs. In 2003, CanWest Global controlled two film and video production services as well as a private TV network, while Bell Globemedia owned the other network and managed satellite delivery. Québecor Inc., Shaw Communications, and Rogers Communications all operated TV channels, cable systems, and specialty services.

In light of the advances made by these commercial actors, the publicly funded CBC and program producers from the third sector were overshadowed. Against this backdrop, Jackson and Vipond (2003, 76–77) argue that the development of Canadian broadcasting at the end of the twentieth century provides evidence of a robust convergence in the corporate sector, consistent with prevailing theories in comparative communications research.

The question of convergence has also been debated in the United States, though under somewhat different premises than elsewhere, since the predominantly private American media model is the one that other countries have been predicted to converge *toward* (see Butler and Ranney 1992; Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 1996; Swanson and Mancini 1996). Although public broadcasting remains a viable service in the United States, we know from the American case studies that private ownership has been the norm since the birth of radio. Against this backdrop, the scholarly debate on U.S. broadcasting around the turn of the millennium largely centered on whether the deregulations of the 1980s and 1990s truly had expanded the diversity of audiovisual media outlets *within* the framework of the private system, as policymakers had envisioned.

In 1989, Douglas Gomery warned that deregulation would grant corporations unchecked control over the production, distribution, and presentation of programs (1989, 92–93). However, a decade later, when Gomery and Benjamin M. Compaine revisited the issue in *Who Owns the Media?* (2000, xvi), they argued that concerns over media ownership concentration had been overstated. Instead, they contended that the U.S. media landscape was more diverse and competitive than critics claimed, attributing this to technological advancements and increasingly globalized media markets, which seemed to foster a wider range of voices and outlets.

Fast-forwarding to the present situation, both scholarly and pub-

lic debates on the implications of new communication technologies have continued to revolve around the competitiveness of the audiovisual media landscape and which actors have been empowered or sidelined by the rise of online media.

In *Social Media and Democracy*, Francis Fukuyama and Andrew Grotto (2020, 213–215) observe that when the internet first became a public platform in the 1990s, it was expected to be just as diverse and competitive as traditional media — if not more so. Since then, however, a small number of very large platforms have come to dominate the online landscape, serving as the primary channels of communication for hundreds of millions of people worldwide. Fukuyama and Grotto argue that the near-monopoly position secured by major internet platforms like Google and Meta places them in a role similar to that of the U.S. broadcast networks in the early days of television. What unites them is their extraordinary influence over what millions of people see and hear through their choices to prioritize certain content over others.

While large corporations have undeniably gained a dominant role in controlling which content gets visibility, digitalization has simultaneously driven a far-reaching decentralization of who gets to produce it. Strömbäck et al. (2022) note that new communication technologies have dramatically lowered technical barriers to sharing content via digital media, driving a broader shift from a low-choice to a high-choice information environment. According to Strömbäck et al. (2022, 50–52), this shift has not only empowered individual citizens, who now have greater control than ever over the information they consume, but also a wide range of political and “strategic actors,” who can now communicate with the public more independently than ever before (see also Bennett 2018).

To reconnect with the discussion in the literature review, the increased fragmentation of the media landscape has been seen as posing a serious challenge to “traditional” public broadcasting, whose provision of content that is not directly commercially viable has long been one of its primary *raison d’être*. According to Arriaza Ibarra, Nowak, and Kuhn (2015, 4–5), public broadcasters face a tricky dilemma: if they merely emulate commercial providers, they risk losing their distinctive role. However, if they differentiate themselves too much

and their audience share declines, they risk losing both public and political support (see also Mancini 2020, 5751–5755).

This development appears to corroborate the thesis’ argument that revolutionary communication technologies often weaken the role of public media by rendering existing policy instruments obsolete. A parallel can be drawn to the breakthrough of cable television in the 1980s, which undermined the longstanding spectrum scarcity rationale for regulating broadcast media more strictly than print by creating an abundance of available channels. Similarly, the rise of digital communication technologies has weakened the case for public intervention in the media — not by expanding channel space, but by creating an abundance of content. In line with the theoretical expectations, both technological paradigm shifts have ultimately worked to the advantage of “private” actors.

At the same time, the analytical distinction between different elements within the “private” media sector help us recognize that not only large commercial actors have benefited from digitalization. While a few big tech companies have secured a near-monopoly over the technical infrastructure enabling the *distribution* of online media content, among those most notably empowered in the *production* of that content are groups that would fall under this study’s definition of the third sector. Overall, this shows that this dissertation’s tripartite actor conceptualization and the distinction between “content” and “carriage” remain useful for understanding how new technology reshapes interest group dynamics in the audiovisual media sector, even amid increasing digitalization.

As pointed out by Strömbäck et al. (2022), one striking aspect of the digital media age is how third-sector groups and non-institutional actors can now challenge legacy players in print, radio, and television more directly and independently than ever before.

As the case studies in this dissertation have demonstrated, third-sector broadcasters have historically struggled to seriously assert themselves *vis-à-vis* “mainstream” radio and television due to their small scale and nonprofit nature. For instance, we recall how radio stations run by American educational organizations were marginalized by commercial radio networks during the interwar period and continued to face financial challenges after many of them became part of

the public broadcasting system after the 1960s. In Sweden, the government shut down the pioneering radio clubs of the 1920s, in much the same way that it cracked down on the Free Church movement's shortwave broadcasts from foreign stations in the 1950s.

Today, by contrast, legacy media — whether publicly or commercially funded — face growing competition from an expanding array of alternative digital outlets whose messages reach the public sphere independently of traditional gatekeepers (Vos 2015, 16). Notably, some of the new actors that broadcast audio and video through platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Spotify carry on the work of similar third-sector groups that historically have struggled for recognition.

For example, the Christian magazine *Världen Idag*'s current affairs program ranks among the 100 most-listened-to podcasts across all categories in Sweden (Karlman 2024). Similarly, American music educator Rick Beato reaches a million-strong audience on YouTube, which made history in July 2024 as the first individual video-sharing platform to surpass 10% of total TV viewing (Nielsen 2024). According to Beato (2024), the main reason YouTube outperforms the other streaming platforms is that it allows for the exploration of subjects in far greater depth, making it a highly effective platform for education:

When I do an interview with someone [...] it can be as long as it needs to be [...] I don't have anyone telling me what to do do, what to say, how long for it to be, how it should be edited.

Digital communication technologies have thus empowered individual educators and nonprofit organizations to broadcast niche audiovisual content to like-minded listeners and viewers on a national or even international scale. This is a notable contrast to the vast majority of third-sector broadcasters examined in this dissertation, considering that educational and religious groups in “traditional” radio and television have typically been confined to smaller, geographically limited audiences — to the extent they were allowed to operate at all.

While the definition of “alternative media” remains contested, the term has rarely been used to describe online outlets run by nonprofits and educational groups. Instead, it has been associated with political and partisan media that present news in a way designed to promote

a particular point of view (Levendusky 2013, 8). This perspective is echoed by Holt (2019, 862), who argues that alternative media define themselves in opposition to mainstream media, portraying their content as a necessary corrective to dominant public discourse. As pointed out by Egelhofer (2019), it also includes media that create and spread disinformation and misinformation, such as “fake news sites,” with the intent to actively mislead and deceive (see also Tandoc, Lim, and Ling 2018).

Such alternative outlets have undeniably gained ground in recent years, as new technology has significantly lowered the barriers for virtually anyone to create their own platform and audience via the internet. But as pointed out by Strömbäck et al. (2022, 51–52), the distinction between mainstream and alternative, partisan media is not clear-cut. Some outlets are highly biased, while others produce content with strong journalistic integrity. Against this backdrop, Strömbäck et al. argue that the mainstream-alternative media distinction is less relevant than the extent to which an outlet adheres to established journalistic norms.

Journalists, writers, and opinion leaders are indeed among the most clearly empowered by new digital technology, enabling them to communicate more autonomously with their audiences through text, audio, and video. In the pre-social media era, these groups depended on access to established media platforms to reach a larger, otherwise unreachable audience. Today, by contrast, the rapid decline in the cost of broadcasting equipment has enabled TV anchors and radio presenters to launch their own YouTube channels or podcasts, while journalists can now publish newspaper columns for free through newsletter services like Substack (Kisin 2024).

The trend of individual writers and opinion-leaders harnessing new technological opportunities to “go independent” is evident in several of the countries examined in this study. In 2021, former *New York Times* op-ed editor Bari Weiss launched *Common Sense* (later renamed *The Free Press*) — a newsletter that eventually grew into a larger publication combining text and audio content. Just as music educator Rick Beato highlights YouTube’s ability to explore topics in depth, Weiss argues that podcasts stand out for fostering deeper, more searching conversations. According to Weiss (2022), this is an

important reason why new media challenge legacy media institutions, within which she argues that the band of what one is allowed to be curious about has shrunk in recent years.

A similar critique of established media has been put forward by Jörgen Huitfeldt, editor-in-chief of the Swedish digital publication *Kvartal*, an outlet specializing in written and audio journalism that positions itself as a private alternative to public service media. Along the lines of Bari Weiss, Huitfeldt (2022) explains in an interview that he left his long-standing position as a current affairs anchor at *Sveriges Radio* for an upstart outlet, partly because he felt that public service had become too narrow in its range of perspectives. Furthermore, Huitfeldt believed that public service media, as publicly funded institutions, did not take their position of power seriously enough and at times displayed a slightly instructive attitude toward their audience.

It is worth noting that Huitfeldt's critique of public service not only echoes alternative media's self-proclaimed role as a counterbalance to dominant narratives, as defined by Holt (2019, 862), but also aligns with Lewis and Booth's (1989) description of community broadcasting, which forms the basis for this study's conceptualization of "the third sector."

From the literature review, we recall that Lewis and Booth (1989, 10) define community broadcasting as a challenger service with a non-commercial identity that simultaneously rejects the allegedly prescriptive and paternalistic attitude of public service broadcasting. In other words, it positions itself between publicly and commercially funded forms of mainstream broadcasting, arguing that both tend have a tendency to marginalize certain alternative viewpoints. Regarding funding sources, community broadcasters take an eclectic approach, as their primary goal in remaining financially viable is to engage closely with their audiences, which they address as peers rather than passive recipients. They typically rely on a mix of advertising revenue and subscription fees from listeners or viewers.

Similar business models have been adopted by alternative publications like *Kvartal* and *The Free Press*, which also have in common to emphasize their journalistic identity over political or partisan affiliations. This underscores Strömbäck et al.'s (2022) point that

a distinction must be made between alternative media that spread false and misleading information and those that strive to adhere to journalistic norms. I believe that this presents an interesting avenue for future research to refine conceptual frameworks and typologies of various media types within the same broader category, based on variables such as journalistic integrity, funding sources, and relationships with the audience.

Viewed through the tripartite actor conceptualization applied in this dissertation, I find it far from clear-cut whether non-mainstream audiovisual online publications with a “serious” journalistic outlook should be classified as third-sector media or grouped with professional commercial outlets. In their startup phase, new media like *Kvartal* and *The Free Press* primarily relied on subscription fees and voluntary donations — characteristic of third-sector funding — but have since transitioned to mixed revenue models with a greater share of advertising and sponsored content. Greater reliance on commercial revenue has allowed many of these publications to diversify their journalistic offerings and increasingly resemble established media houses, while still retaining an alternative profile.

The trend of mainstream media facing increasingly stiff competition from online influencers, creators, and alternative news outlets on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok is discussed in The Reuters Institute’s 2024 Digital News Report. It states that the rise of alternative voices and news influencers on social and video networks has profoundly reshaped the conditions of political communication (Newman 2024). According to Nielsen and Fletcher (2020), one of the biggest challenges for legacy news media lies in the fact that the lowered barriers to entry into the public sphere have eroded their longstanding role as gatekeepers.

Nielsen and Fletcher’s view is shared by British comedian and podcast host Konstantin Kisin (2024), who goes so far as to claim that technological advances over the past twenty years have rendered the traditional media model obsolete. In the pre-social media era, the consumer had access to a managed selection of content curated by a trusted authority. Writers and content creators relied on established publications to reach a large, otherwise inaccessible audience. Meanwhile, publications benefited from both the influence and financial

gains conferred by the sum total of its audience and contributors.

According to Kisin, these advantages no longer hold, as consumers now live in an era of mass customization. For writers and content creators, platforms like YouTube, Spotify, and Substack have reduced the need for intermediaries, enabling them to reach audiences directly. Meanwhile, algorithms seamlessly extract content from a vast pool of human creativity and deliver it to those most eager to engage with it. As a result, writers and content creators are increasingly free from the constraints of legacy media gatekeepers. Unable to keep up with the level of customization audiences now expect in nearly every aspect of their lives, traditional outlets increasingly struggle to maintain their influence and profitability.

However, within communications research, the extent to which new technology has reshaped power dynamics between new and established media actors remains subject to debate. Mancini (2020) argues that despite the rapid and dramatic rise of digital outlets, legacy media still play a central role in shaping public debate and the core dynamics of media policy (see also Flew and Waisbord 2015, 620). According to Thorson (2015), the key difference from earlier periods is that legacy media are no longer the *sole* curators of information reaching the public. Instead, journalistic curation now competes with social media feeds, personalized recommendations, and algorithm-driven rankings, all influencing what information people see and engage with.

Given the unprecedented opportunities to target specific audiences with customized ads and information, some argue that independent media outlets with established processes to ensure accuracy and relevance are more essential than ever. For instance, in a joint opinion piece from 2017, the CEOs of Sweden's public service broadcasters argued that publicly funded and commercial media should collaborate to uphold public trust in serious journalism, emphasizing the importance of maintaining rigorous editorial standards and impartiality. This appeal stemmed from shared concerns that online disinformation, polarization, and eroding trust in the media could threaten democracy (Benkö, Stjärne, and Tholse Willars 2017).

The risk of hostile actors exploiting social media to undermine democracy has also been a central topic in communications research,

fueling a substantial body of studies over the past decade. In *Social Media and Democracy*, Persily and Tucker (2020, 1–2), identify two main perspectives. One school downplays the independent impact of technological shifts in facilitating the misuse of social media for nefarious purposes, instead attributing it to deeper sociological factors. The other highlights that digital developments have fueled the spread of echo chambers, fake news and hate speech, while enabling foreign and authoritarian actors to manipulate elections and suppress political opposition (see, for instance, Benkler 2018; Egelhofer 2019; Tandoc, Lim, and Ling 2018).

This naturally brings us back to the case used as a leitmotif in the introductory chapter — namely, ongoing concerns among U.S. policymakers that the video-sharing app TikTok is being exploited to advance Chinese government interests on American soil.

The dissertation has demonstrated that these concerns fit into a broader historical pattern. International threats in telecommunications have consistently alarmed policymakers when perceived as undermining national autonomy. Such exogenous shocks typically prompt elected officials to rethink their approach to regulating audiovisual media — often shifting in a more *dirigiste* direction to counter a foreign threat. Simultaneously, the study has shown that when governments prioritize control, one category of agents tends to suffer: the third sector. This includes actors bound together by geographical proximity, nonprofit organizations that are passionate about a specific issue, and individuals — all of whom have long sought to leverage broadcast media to advocate for their causes, shape public discourse, and engage in peer-to-peer communication.

At the same time, the study has highlighted that third-sector actors can regain their role in audiovisual communication. This was evident in the first empirical chapter on the early development of radio, where we saw that both France and the United States radically reversed their radio policies in response to the intensifying international competition in long-distance communication following the First World War. However, just months later, both countries faced a new upheaval with the birth of broadcasting. In other words, an international shock was followed by a technological shock, which empowered commercial and third-sector actors. Overall, the Franco-American

comparison highlights the importance of adopting a comparative and historical perspective to analyze the interplay between periods of path-dependent stability and institutional change in the broadcasting sector, and the role of interests in shaping these processes.

Looking ahead, all signs suggest that artificial intelligence will be the next major innovation with the potential to profoundly transform interest group dynamics in the media sector.

I hesitate to speculate on how these technological advancements will shape media ecosystems in the long run. In the short term, however, my guess is that AI will lower the technical barriers for the average person to manage and run digital platforms for content distribution. Seen through the conceptual framework applied in this dissertation, this would represent another step in third-sector actors bypassing legacy gatekeepers from the challenger position they have established in content production since the rise of social media in the early 2000s. With AI's continued advancement, they might also expand their role in "carriage," challenging the near-monopolistic position of major commercial internet platforms. If so, non-mainstream actors could gain even greater autonomy in delivering audiovisual content directly to their audiences — for better or worse.



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The Politics of Radio and Television in Western Democracies

Drawing on original archival evidence, this doctoral dissertation describes and explains differences in how Western democracies have governed radio and television over the past century. Rather than framing political conflicts over broadcasting as a binary dynamic between “state” and “market,” the thesis argues that policy outcomes emerge from a tripartite power struggle featuring state agencies, commercial enterprises, and groups from the third sector. It also differentiates between whether these interests are engaged in program production or the operation of the technical infrastructure required for distributing programs. The study contends that revolutionary communication technologies and international threats can reshape the governance of broadcasting by transforming the overarching policymaking environment and shifting the balance of power among competing interests. At the same time, it argues that the impact of such exogenous shocks is always mediated by preexisting power relations and institutional legacies at the national level. This means that, despite shared technological pressures, Western democracies continue to govern radio and television in distinct ways. Overall, the dissertation contributes to debates in communication studies, political science and comparative political economy regarding the sources of institutional stability and change in the media sector and the role of interests in shaping these dynamics.

