Chapter 5
Protests, Social Movements and Media Legislation in Mexico 2012–2014

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this chapter is to describe and analyze the use of ICTs by social movements in Mexico in their attempt to keep proposed legislation from concentrating, or at least failing to dilute, the already concentrated power of the Mexican media. These technologies not only have been a means of organization and synchronization for protests and mobilization, but also, before restrictions in Mexican law, served as alternative media for citizens to obtain more truthful information and make use of their right to communicate.

INTRODUCTION

In today’s world, due to digital convergence, the technological possibilities for the optimization of the radioelectric spectrum have expanded. Frequencies have multiplied increasing opportunities for participation and quantity of content. Ideally, given a greater supply of information, participating citizens should have opportunities to make better decisions and, ultimately, have a positive impact on democracy. However, the conditions to achieve this end in Mexico have never been granted as
rights for citizens. On the contrary, communication and information have remained in the hands of private companies almost since the birth of radio and, subsequently, television. Through mechanisms of influence (manipulation) on citizenship, these groups, above all Televisa, the largest Spanish-speaking broadcasting company, have been able to accumulate power.

The combination of such manipulation with the authoritarian exercise of State power and limitations in sources of information have for many years inhibited the development of groups of civil society, a concept that will also be defined later. However, Internet and social media have allowed these groups to begin to act with greater freedom.

The development, use and appropriation of ICTs has strengthened the organization and, in some cases, the mobilization, of different groups and social movements. In particular, groups interested in media and telecommunication legislation were attentive to the need to reform the regulatory framework and demand the rights and participation in the spaces that could be created due to digital convergence.

The objective of this chapter is to describe and analyze the use and appropriation of ICT by groups and social movements in the context of discussions on broadcasting and telecommunications legislation in Mexico. The chapter is constructed in three sections. The first addresses the concepts of civil society and de facto powers, which are critical to understanding the struggle over media power. The second section provides some background on the state of Internet use and ICT infrastructure in Mexico. The third section describes how the broadcasters in Mexico have made an alliance with government entities to achieve legislation that is favorable to their interests to the detriment of other actors and competitors and, significantly, to democracy itself. This section is divided into a section on the background of the so-called “Televisa Law”, followed by the description and analysis of the radio and telecommunications policy of the current government of Enrique Peña Nieto, as well as the reactions and actions of the groups that seek a democratization of the media.

We describe here a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood in the romantic sense of the traditional Western media’s depiction of the “Arab Spring”. The Arab Spring was portrayed as a situation where virtual social networking platforms allowed people to organize and overthrow their governments. Actually, the local context and the social organization of the citizens of those North African countries were such that virtual networks played an important, but not exclusive, role in their success.
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