

What is to be done? Options for combating the menace of media capture

MARK M. NELSON¹

Senior Director, Center for International Media Assistance

Media capture is a major strategic challenge for the global community, and efforts to curtail or limit its impact are woefully inadequate. This article looks at some of the potential policy approaches and strategies for combatting media capture, and it examines the roles of government, civil society, and various players within the international community, including media companies and media development practitioners. From the standpoint of governments, it asks whether, and what kind of regulation might play a part in the mix of policies that help limit media concentration and capture at a time of deep-seated uncertainty and flux in the media sector. It examines how civil society and coalitions have been created to deal

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with this problem, and how they have pushed for more transparency of ownership, knowledge sharing among countries, and awareness raising among citizens. It shows the critical role that international organizations can play in collecting data, supporting research, and helping to facilitate strategic policy forums where corrective actions can be debated and agreed. Finally, it argues that the most effective approaches will be those that strengthen public awareness and political will on media capture and its deleterious effects on the overall governance environment.

Introduction

Nearly two decades after the end of the 32-year Suharto dictatorship, Indonesia has managed to remain on an advancing developmental path. It has clocked up steady 5 percent growth for the last few years, reforming critical governance and economic management systems, and maintaining a relatively peaceful order among its diverse populations. Indonesians elected a new president in 2014 who regularly reaffirms his support for media freedom, calling it one of the key democratic achievements of the post-Suharto era.

But a storm is gathering in Indonesia's media space. Like a lot of other countries across the world, Indonesia's media is being coopted by wealthy political actors. While still a long way from the kind of extreme media capture that has overtaken places like Russia, China, Venezuela, and Turkey, Indonesian media ownership has gradually been seized by a dozen large political-industrial groups vying for power. This process is laying the groundwork for systemic capture. "There is still a certain diversity," says Bambang Harymurti, the editor of *Tempo* magazine who has spent much of his career fighting the interference of media moguls. But for a politician who wants to challenge the current leadership in the future, he adds, "it will be a temptation."²

Indonesian President Joko Widodo is all too familiar with the risks. At a recent meeting, his staff came prepared with data about media ownership and a set of recommendations that were drawn up a few years ago by a massive study of the media environment (Nugroho et al. 2012). Yet, even in this country where the leadership is trying to integrate media into a modernizing governance system, resistance to reform is strong. A change in the media environment is seen as challenging the underlying political order, and perhaps the stability, of the entire country.

Without a doubt, media capture has quickly become one of the world's most difficult and intractable problems. In country after country, collusion between governments and wealthy media owners is becoming the preferred method of political

consolidation and maintaining the power of a small, self-serving elite. When the media controllers are in power, they are proficient at staying there. When they are outside the power structure, they are learning from the successful cases how to take over. Exacerbated by the economic weakness of the traditional news business and the growing concentration of ownership of media industries, media capture has become one of the major tools for undermining democratic societies and handing them over to authoritarian rule.

The impact of media capture constitutes a governance and security challenge with major strategic implications for the global community. As media capture spreads, especially in concert with authoritarianism, it is a menace that becomes progressively embedded within the political system, impervious to reform. Practiced and perfected by regimes like Russia and China, it is being copied and adopted all over the world, and may provide a gateway for Russian or Chinese influence in vulnerable democracies. Studies on media capture have shown links to a broad range of negative impacts on society, from global security and stability to income inequality and international aid and development policies (Petrova 2008; Corneo 2006).

The aim of this chapter is to explore the policy implications and approaches to addressing and deterring media capture. It will look at the roles of government, civil society, and the international community, including the media development community, all of which play a critical role in tackling this challenge. It will examine how societies build political will to resist this phenomenon. It will ask whether regulation can thwart it, or whether the media industry itself might be increasingly willing to resist it. It will look at the role of ordinary citizens and news consumers, who increasingly must take responsibility for the media they consume. It will argue that this growing phenomenon of media capture, which is part of a widespread attempt to undermine existing democratic structures across the world and is often intertwined with organized crime and corruption, deserves much more attention from people who are concerned about global stability, democracy, and economic development.

Media manipulation by the powerful is nothing new. And concentration of media ownership, which seems to be a “fellow traveler” of media capture, has been a market response to changes in technology—the Internet and social media platforms such as Facebook—and new kinds of journalistic competition such as blogging, talk radio, and citizen journalism. The expectation that digital media would undo the process of monopolization has proven to be untrue, as Joseph Stiglitz points out earlier in this volume, and in fact only introduced new forms of concentration online. After the 2008 economic crisis, many news organizations, particularly traditional broadcast and print, struggled to survive and became vulnerable to capture.

What *is* new is the systematic and deliberate nature of media capture, which we have defined in this volume as institutionalized complicity between governments and private media to bolster a specific, often kleptocratic power structure. Media

capture takes advantage of the weakened business position of traditional news media to consolidate its ownership into regime-friendly hands. The result is a new system of public manipulation—not the Soviet-style censorship and propaganda of “Uncle Joe”—that typically uses the language of tabloid journalism: screaming headlines, sordid scandals, and fake news. The goal is to confuse rational debate, smother dissenting voices, promote consensus around policy changes that favor the ruling regime, and reduce democratic checks on the accumulation of power and wealth by members of the elite.

“Their model is capitalism without democracy,” proclaims an essay launching a new series of studies of media ownership by the information freedom organization Reporters Without Borders. “For journalism, this means the emergence of media empires run by oligarchs who have pledged allegiance to the political establishment and who simply appear to be obeying capitalist laws of supply and demand and responding to the need for technological development. In fact, they are the ones exercising strict control over news coverage” (Reporters Without Borders 2106, 13).

Measuring the spread and extent of capture is only beginning, but understanding both ownership and concentration patterns in global media markets yields many clues. Scholars already have established an increased likelihood of media capture in countries with high levels of media concentration and income inequality (Corneo 2006; Petrova 2008). The largest study on media concentration at the global level—led by Eli M. Noam at Columbia University—shows that media ownership concentration is a worldwide phenomenon and suggests that it may be an even more daunting problem for struggling democracies and developing countries. As seen in the accompanying table, “News Media Concentration in Emerging Markets,” high-income countries show greater media diversity as measured by “news attention,” which is one of several ways along with market share that Noam calculates concentration, and which reveals the extent to which people’s attention to news is dominated by a limited number of providers. In China, Egypt, India, and South Africa, the data show the overwhelming control of content by a small number of news providers as compared to the high-income country average.

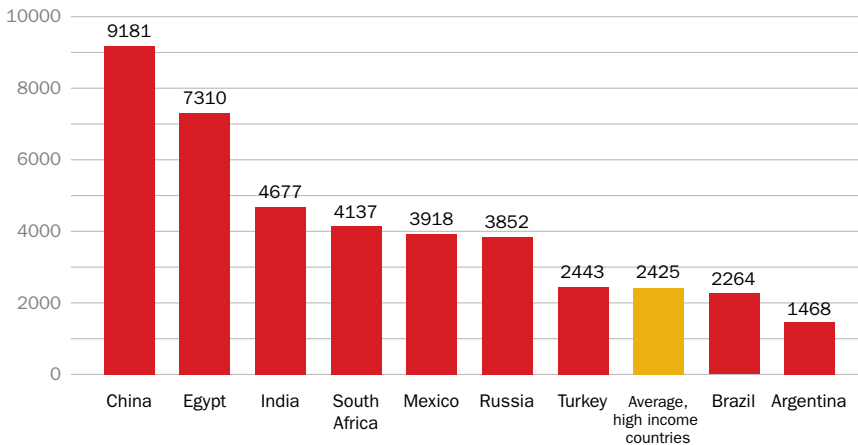
Yet the study covers only 30 mainly upper-middle- and high-income countries, and much work remains to be done to understand the situation in the dozens of lower-income developing countries where political instability, rising autocracy, and problems in financing high-quality, independent media are undoubtedly much greater.

Oligarchs in collusion with governments

How did we get to this place where the news media, institutions that were supposed to contribute to economic and democratic development, are instead helping

to ensconce autocrats and dictators? It wasn't supposed to be like this. For most of the past century, Western media experts have argued that media would contribute to the advancement of societies by increasing information available to decision makers and citizens alike. Competitive, private ownership of the media would be self-regulating, and provide a diversity of views and natural barrier against unchecked political power. Media that got their revenue from a variety of sources—diverse advertisers and subscription revenues—would be able to maintain both economic and political independence and provide a systemic check on corruption. This was the famous Fourth Estate.

News Media Concentration in Emerging Markets



Source: (Noam 2016, 1317-18)

But this private ownership model has run into an existential crisis. The challenge comes not only from the oligarchs, but from changes in technology and the advertising industry. Even in fast growing middle-income countries, where advertising revenues have been rising more rapidly than in the rest of the world, and where traditional media continue to outstrip digital media, media incomes have been insufficient to give media the economic clout they need to resist the onslaught of the oligarchs.³ Especially after the 2008 economic crisis, many traditional news organizations—both print and broadcasting—were driven toward mergers and acquisitions as a way of reducing costs and increasing economies of scale. At the same time, many countries, particularly in Central Europe, reported a marked decrease in foreign investment in the media. These often-inevitable business developments had side effects: they helped set up the restructuring of the industry that now facilitates media capture. The owners in this new media ecosystem do not even care whether they are making money on the media operations, argues Romanian political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2014), because they know the benefits—economic and political—will be realized elsewhere.

The media oligarchs are part of a vast global network of multimillionaires and billionaires who have built their fortunes from natural resources such as oil and gas, the explosive growth of mobile phones, and, for some, through tax evasion and collusion with corrupt governments. While a small number use their wealth for philanthropic purposes, many others are hidden behind secretive offshore accounts and anonymous corporate screens, part of the estimated \$32 trillion concealed in offshore accounts and which pays allegiance to no governing authority (Duffy and Sibley 2017).⁴ In the Organized Crime and Corruption Reporting Project's study of the owners of 533 media houses in 11 countries of Central and Eastern Europe, fully 41 percent were hidden behind secretive offshore accounts and anonymous corporate screens, 27 percent were owned by politicians, and 10 percent were controlled by people with links to crime (reportingproject.net).

One of the lessons of the last decade is that preserving an independent, diverse, and quality news media is a challenge even for the most committed democratic societies. Media concentration and power is "increasingly understood as a threat to our way of life, to something fundamental about the way we humans have organized our societies," Noam writes. And the intensifying pace of regime change that is taking place in the world's media is generating calls for a more vigorous response. "The debate has become the information-age version of the industrial-age struggle over the control of the means of production. That earlier conflict led, in some countries to revolution, and in other countries to the socialization of key industries" (Noam 2016, 3).

What is to be done?

For media activists, civil society, and international donors who are trying to help countries improve their media environment, media capture is a baffling policy conundrum with no simple answers. Political leaders and governments trying to prevent media capture also face a difficult battle against a foe that is all too ready to use disinformation, propaganda, and conspiracy theories to mobilize the population against reform efforts. To make it worse, the policy solutions for captured media are themselves often trapped in the ideological divide between right and left, free markets and government regulation, sober public service media and conspiracy-laden talk shows and websites that reinforce suspicions against the establishment. As the essays in this volume show, countries are finding many different routes to media capture, and precious few away from it.

The effort to stem media capture is woefully inadequate. Despite widespread recognition of the problem, few countries in the developing world have active debates about the governance of the media environment—the laws, institutions, financing models, and societal norms and practices—that is giving rise to media capture. The World Bank, the main global institution that supports country reforms of the public

sector, rarely gives specific advice on media regulation and reform in its country programs. And despite ample evidence that media coverage can make or break overall development reform efforts, few countries request support and advice on how to create a high-quality, well-governed media system (González-Cauhapé-Cazaux and Kalathil 2015; Hoff and Stiglitz 2016). International donors spend less than 0.5 percent of overseas development assistance on media development efforts, most of this spent training journalists. A more vigorous, policy-oriented effort has been called for in numerous studies and reports, but progress has been slow (González-Cauhapé-Cazaux and Kalathil 2015; Nelson with Susman-Pena 2012).⁵

The contested role of government

Governments around the world are not only complicit in creating the problem of media capture, they are essential to preventing it. Mounting a successful effort to confront this growing menace will require a determined, multifaceted effort in which political leaders and governments are convinced to address it. National governments set both the formal legal and regulatory frameworks as well as helping to establish informal norms and behaviors that can discourage media capture at the country level. They also play an important role at the global level, engaging in policy discussions and decisions about Internet governance and global communications systems that cross borders.

In autocratic regimes, political leaders are sustained by captured media and unlikely to curtail it without strong, sustained public pressure. For many other governments—and this group represents the majority around the world—a hybrid system is taking hold. For those countries, the media are not yet fully captured but increasingly at risk. While the effort to build political will for reform will also meet many roadblocks in such countries, sympathetic allies in parliament, law enforcement, regulatory bodies, and judicial agencies may be drawn into the effort to stem the tide. A discussion of the problem of building political will and the role of civil society in this process is discussed in more detail below.

“Breaking the autocratic monopoly of power over the media in politics implies fragmentation and polarization that is difficult to contain,” writes Jan Zielonka in *Media and Politics in New Democracies*. “It also implies instability caused by the fall of the old system and the effort to construct a new one. Changes to deep-seated attitudes and behaviour are necessary for new laws and institutions to function” (Zielonka 2015, 10-11).

Yet while the main problem is a political one, the technical details about what to do about media capture are also controversial. Unlike health, education, or other policy areas confronting developing countries, media reform and its broader role within overall governance is an area fraught with uncertainty, a lack of data, and, most importantly, a fundamental ambiguity about how best to regulate and govern the industry at a time of massive, disruptive change.

Is regulation the answer?

Media environments are made up of complex systems of interlocking institutions, policies, laws, regulations, and behaviors—not only at the country level, but increasingly at the global level. Regulation has generally been an important component of media governance, to both protect freedom of expression and to ensure a level playing field for all participants in the media ecosystem.

Particularly in this period of technological disruption and failing business models for commercial media, many experts wonder if regulation is even possible. While media regulations in developed societies worked reasonably well during the era of traditional media, the Internet and social media platforms have thrown a wrench into the works. Do developing societies need rules for the print and broadcast industries at a time when everything is moving to digital? How can a small developing country in, for example, Africa or Latin America have an impact on what is happening on the global Internet? Such questions, along with a well-founded concern about governments getting involved in regulating the media, have led many media experts to throw up their hands in exasperation.

But nurturing a country-level vision for the media sector is just as important as ever in this era of digital disruption. The decisions about the structure of the news ecosystem—the institutions to protect local media freedoms, privacy, and fair competition—are critical public policy issues that affect many other aspects of the overall governance environment and the definition of the public sphere. While questions about the role and behavior of Facebook, Google, and Apple may grab the headlines, most of the world, particularly the developing world, still is getting its news from plain old radio and television, and it is largely on the battleground of traditional media that the media capture battle is being fought in those parts of the world.⁶

And for governance of global technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices, defining country-level norms and standards for the media sector can help countries make valuable contributions to global forums where these issues are discussed.

Thus, most detailed country studies of media capture conclude that government action and carefully constructed regulation are important components of the needed response. Countries around the world have developed different regulatory approaches to media concentration and ownership, and some of these, when implemented by independent regulatory authorities, have been effective in slowing media capture or at least exposing it to public scrutiny.

In the case of Indonesia, several major reviews of the evolving media space, while recognizing the overwhelming incentives for political interference in media content, concluded that transparent government action is required for reform. Those studies called for measures to ensure fair competition and transparency in the operations of broadcast and electronic media, reforms in anti-monopoly regulation,

and restructuring of regulatory institutions to make them independent and accessible to the public (Nugroho et al. 2012, 125-131; Lim 2012; Dhyatmika 2014).

Reforming Romania's media space likewise will require government intervention. Among the measures recommended include reforming the National Audio-Visual Council to make it independent of political meddling, passing a law forbidding members of parliament from owning shares in media companies, and strengthening anti-trust laws to prevent domination of media markets (Oprea 2014; Mungiu-Pippidi 2014).

Mungiu-Pippidi suggests that the role of government could extend even further, from regulation to financing independent media. "Government could in turn decide to finance the media that presents pure information. I would be fully on board with this idea, as long as funding is universal, transparent and follows clear rules, not shady ones like we have in place today. This is the Scandinavian model; the media is financed by subscriptions (everybody is subscribed to a newspaper), commercials and state subsidies. Funding would not distinguish between public and private media as long as the objectives and performance specifications would be met" (Mungiu-Pippidi 2014).

Like the media itself, approaches to regulation are evolving quickly. Indeed, public attention to the issue of media capture, and ongoing public vigilance, may be more important than the specifics of the regulations themselves. For example, some media experts argue that the globalization of media and need for economies of scale at the country level may require a higher tolerance for media ownership concentration than in the past, and that countries should be prepared to adjust legal regimes to make it possible for more consolidated independent media firms to survive in a highly competitive environment (Noam 2016, 14).

The European Commission, for example, held public consultations last year entitled "Media Pluralism and Democracy" that highlighted several important principles for regulation that could prevent or stem the influence of capture (ec.europa.eu 2016). The Office of the Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Expression, part of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, has also led a discussion on this topic among Latin American countries, and media concentration emerged as one of the three top concerns of a 2016 multi-sector meeting on the media environment in Latin America (Podesta 2016). Key policy objectives emerging in recent discussions about how to discourage media capture are outlined below in "Policy Measures to Impede Media Capture."

Principle 12 in the OSR's "Declaration of Principles" document says the following: "Monopolies or oligopolies in the ownership and control of the communication media must be subject to anti-trust laws, as they conspire against democracy by limiting the plurality and diversity which ensure the full exercise of people's right to information. In no case should such laws apply exclusively to the media. The concession of radio and television broadcast frequencies should take into account

democratic criteria that provide equal opportunity of access for all individuals” (Principle 12 from “Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression” 2011).

Policy Measures to Impede Media Capture

- **Diversity of media ownership:** Using anti-trust and fair competition rules, and perhaps public interest tests, to ensure media diversity. Sector-specific media concentration rules that are sensitive to the economic pressures faced by the media industry and the global nature of much of the competition are needed.
- **Transparency of ownership:** Requiring full disclosure of owners and their other economic and political interests, not only to discourage capture but to prevent media from becoming part of corruption and organized crime syndicates.
- **Independence of media regulatory authorities:** Governance arrangements that ensure that regulatory decisions are based on objective criteria rather than political pressures.
- **Rules on government advertising:** Ensuring that government advertising budgets are allocated in an open and competitive way independent of political influence.
- **Promotion of transparently funded public service media:** As part of a diverse media sector, setting a standard for public interest news as defined by independent journalists and editors. Governance should be independent and funding should be adequate to ensure high-quality journalism but not undermine sustainability of commercial media.
- **Defending a level playing field on the Internet and social media platforms:** Ensuring access to small news producers and information providers in a way that allows them to build audiences and reap advertising revenues. These principles should be defended by governments and civil society in global Internet governance forums.
- **Political support for independent media and freedom of expression:** High-level political advocacy for media freedom is an important component of the enabling conditions for a media sector that contributes to effective democratic governance.

Promoting public service media

Many experts argue that governments that promote public service media and engage in active attempts to transform state broadcasters into independent public service entities do a better overall job of regulating the media sector. The reason for this is that public service media and broadcasting require the establishment of

independent bodies to act as a buffer between government and news production, and which set up open and transparent processes to allocate broadcast spectra. Developing these government capacities may increase the likelihood of an overall better management of the entire media sector.⁷

Yet, few developing countries have been successful in converting state broadcasters into independently governed public service entities, and international donors have grown weary of the long, tedious and costly reform process. Complicating the picture is China's high-profile financing, particularly in Africa, of the Chinese model of government-driven communications, which instead of fostering independence, openly advocates government domination of the news and information space ("China, Africa media pledge to enhance cooperation" 2015).

Building knowledge, vision, and political will: the role of civil society

Despite the indisputable role of government, a growing body of evidence suggests that successful media reform—whether in developed, democratic societies or transitioning developing countries—is heavily dependent on the energies of civil society coalitions and non-governmental players. Given government and media industry complicity in media capture, the task of building political will for reform and knowledge about what needs to be done falls heavily on groups that can mobilize allies, broker compromise, and inform the public about needed media reforms. Broad social movements not only help push national politics in the direction of reform but expose shortcomings in media governance, help build local knowledge needed to win the fight for effective policies, and encourage media owners to act as socially responsible corporate citizens that contribute to the public good.

Media professionals from Indonesia, Nigeria, Ukraine, and several Latin American countries, interviewed over the last year for this article, say that even when governments recognize the problem of media capture, they often are unwilling to tackle the difficult politics of media reform. Civil society organizations, they say, help raise these issues and also draw attention to the threat of media capture in hybrid situations in the early stages of media capture. While journalists can write stories about the issue and try to raise public awareness about it, the media still rely on civil society organizations and associations to carry out the hard work of building political support for the cause of reform.

The World Bank's World Development Report 2017, "Governance and the Law," looks at the empirical evidence that helps explain how civil society organizations can push governments and tip the power balance in the direction of effective reforms. Overcoming vested interests or political gridlock requires not only changes in the incentives of actors to pursue reforms, but a shift in power, or a

shift in the preferences and beliefs of those with power, the report argues. Open, multistakeholder debates about laws and reforms often produce changes in both incentives and beliefs, and empower actors outside elite circles, which helps them to shape the policy arena. “Citizen agency can help translate favorable conditions into effective reforms that drive positive change,” the report argues (World Bank 2017, 226).

Recent work on media reforms in Latin America adds to this evidence and suggests how and why coalitions and media movements arise, organize themselves, and pressure government. Civil society has often been slow to engage on the question of media policies, and the process of getting organizations to focus on the media sector often comes only after media abuses become widespread. Foreign donors and other outside agents can also play a role in stimulating such activism (World Bank 2017, 266-67). One study that compared four cases of Latin American reform found that an open, highly focused network that emphasized freedom of expression and other universal human rights was the characteristic that most predicted success in media reforms, especially when the opposition, usually allied around the private media companies and defending the status quo, was fragmented (Mauersberger 2016, 264).

Two key attributes have given Latin America an advantage in its quest for media reforms:

- The development of Pan-American institutions like the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression, the American Convention on Human Rights, and other multi-country legal instruments and professional associations that help set overall norms and standards;
- The rise of effective civil society movements that have both helped design reforms and pushed governments to enact them.

In Argentina, for example, the 2009 passage of a well-structured broadcast law showed the power and influence of civil society organizations: a coalition of civil society groups was instrumental both in influencing the content of the law and in building political support for it. Similar laws in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Uruguay also were influenced by non-governmental coalitions. Between 2002 and 2014, 17 Latin American countries passed access to information laws, and several countries have improved protections for freedom of expression. All of these outcomes required a push from civil society.

The approval of an important media law in Uruguay in late 2014 is perhaps the most important recent example of civil society’s transformative role. That law was the result of many years of coalition building among more than two dozen organizations that pushed a series of far-reaching reforms, ranging from freedom of expression and libel to community radio and media concentration. While each of these steps has met stiff resistance and ongoing court challenges, Freedom House

calls Uruguay's media environment "one of the freest in Latin America" (Freedom House 2015).⁸

Media movements in Latin America have helped push the region "from a historical pattern of elite-capture policies to more participatory policy-making," a new book on media movements maintains. That work also details examples of civil society impact on policy debates, formulation, and implementation, adding that these movements contribute to improving the institutional capacities of governments' media policy-making (Segura and Waisbord 2016, 172-74).

While the successes of these movements in the region will require continued vigilance and activism, the book concludes that Latin American activism has revealed "remarkable changes" in media policy and growing optimism that these gains can be built upon. "By bringing in crucial and deliberative politics, citizen activism has been a counterpoint to power hierarchies and spearheaded important innovations in contemporary media governance" (Segura and Waisbord 2016, 185).

Indeed, the Latin America experience is increasingly seen as instructive for other regions of the world where civil society has been less organized and effective. At a meeting on Southeast Asia media problems in 2016, participants said Latin America's experience should be more widely known in their region and adapted to the local circumstances.⁹

Demanding corporate social responsibility among media firms

Media system activism by civil society also plays a role in moderating the behavior of the media industry and helping to articulate a more constructive, socially responsible role for media owners. While activists have often been accused of having unrealistic attitudes about what the industry can do, for example, by demanding more than the business climate will support, constructive cooperation and advocacy by civil society has been critical to defining a workable vision for the media environment.

For example, one of the main arguments for government censorship is complaints that journalists are failing to perform in a fair and professional manner. By advocating freedom of expression and access to information, civil society organizations help head off such censorship, and in so doing provide support to the idea of an open and competitive media market place. This not only helps define a constructive role for government—which is to provide a level playing field for all players—but also creates space for private companies, which benefit by disseminating information and building audiences through subscriptions, advertising, and other revenue-producing activities. Associations of owners and publishers, which have been established in most countries, also can help create collective resistance to media capture by establishing higher standards of professionalism among the owners as well as more effective lobbying against government interference.

Media reform advocates have been pushing Facebook, Google, and other platforms to do their part to help deter media capture by recognizing the need for more equitable sharing of advertising revenues. With up to 85 percent of ad revenues going to either Google or Facebook, news content producers are arguing that their survival is at stake, and this could, in turn, hurt the growth of the two Internet giants, since local news content continues to be an important component of what draws audiences (Herrman 2016). Facebook announced in 2016 that it was exploring revenue-sharing models with producers of news, sports, human interest, and other content (Bloomberg News 2016), but many content producers, particularly in developing countries, continue to complain that these efforts are too little, too late.

Finally, civil society can put pressure on media companies to improve the quality of their journalism, by checking facts, training investigative journalists, and pointing out abuses of media ethics. Through such activities, civil society organizations help build broader media literacy in society. A more demanding public is ultimately the most effective barrier against media capture, since such media are successful only when people use and trust them. Facebook's recent decision to take steps to limit false information disseminated on its platform is an example of how big companies respond to such public pressure (Isaac 2016).

International actors and media capture

International organizations also are starting to recognize the capture phenomenon, and a growing host of global policy-coordination bodies are debating how global policy makers might respond. Because media capture is most commonly a result of domestic political competition, global players have found that their most effective approaches center not on direct intervention in the politics of countries, but rather on raising awareness, collecting data, and engaging media development actors to share their knowledge and strategies.

One of the most effective ways that international groups can support country-level activists is through convening multistakeholder processes where problems are discussed and solutions debated. World Bank experience in supporting governance reforms suggests that such approaches are more likely to yield results than training or other types of supply-driven capacity building activities. These processes usually involve finding a way to develop an agreed diagnosis of the problem, often using independent professional firms or consultants to carry out surveys or other studies. This is followed by consensus building around a joint diagnosis and way forward that includes not only government, but relevant civil society and private sector actors. To be effective, such processes must be open and transparent, creating opportunities to engage with the public and disseminate findings.¹⁰

An example of such an approach is a series of regional consultations on media reform facilitated by the Center for International Media Assistance, Germany's Deutsche Welle Akademie, and a large group of developing country media reform organizations. The consultations, which aim to articulate a set of priorities for

media reform, have been completed in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Africa. These consultations are helping local actors identify areas for global, regional and country-level action, and will be used as a way to build stronger global awareness of the media reform agenda (Lublinski 2016, 1).

International organizations also are making important contributions to knowledge about media capture. Reporters Without Borders, the French media freedom organization known by its initials RSF, embarked in 2016 on a major new program focused on media ownership and media pluralism and is undertaking country studies to expose the strengths and weaknesses of country-level defenses against media capture. As of early 2017, RSF had completed analysis of eight countries—Cambodia, Colombia, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, Philippines, Peru, and Mongolia—and is working on expanding the list in coming months.

A key component of that work is the development of “Indicators of Risk to Media Pluralism,” which break the media capture problem down into 10 dimensions that can be measured on a scale from low to high. The indicators, below, look at the laws in place to deal with media pluralism issues, as well as the existing conditions; that is, how well those laws are applied and function in practice. It is hoped that by dissecting the problem and tracking it over time, local actors will push for effective strategies to combat it.

Indicators of Risk to Media Pluralism

1. Audience concentration
2. Ownership concentration
3. Regulatory safeguards against ownership concentration
4. Cross-media ownership concentration
5. Regulatory safeguards against cross-ownership concentration
6. Ownership transparency
7. Regulatory safeguards for ownership transparency
8. Political control over media outlets and distribution networks
9. Political control over media funding
10. Political control over news agencies

The work of the OCCRP described earlier in this volume is another example of how civil society organizations can work across borders to illuminate the growing percentage of the media that is owned by politicians, organized crime figures, and

people who hide their identities behind complex layers of corporate secrecy, using international banking havens.

Finally, the International Panel on Social Progress is making a major effort to draw scholarly and political attention to the need to reform the media sector, with attention to the issues that emerge from media capture. This group of academic experts recently released for comment a major solutions-based chapter on media and communications as part of their massive research report, “Rethinking Society for the 21st Century.” The chapter outlines the daunting challenges in the media space, including control of media resources by the rich and powerful, and the deeply entrenched political issues that plague media and Internet governance. It highlights the problems created by media that are used to influence the public rather than to serve the public’s interests or afford access and rights to the poor and other marginalized populations. Its action plan calls for far-reaching changes in the media environment, particularly in expanding the use of “multistakeholder, transparent and open bodies” to set international and national media policies. “A renewed and more inclusive debate on media reform must be launched,” the report declares (International Panel on Social Progress 2016).

Official intergovernmental organizations and policy bodies are drawing on this growing knowledge base to try to improve donor action and policy coordination. The Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development has in recent years added a media policy component to its discussions about how to improve overall governance in developing countries. Such policy dialogues are important because they help define priorities for funding among the 29 major donors who annually give about \$132 billion in overseas development assistance. Including media as part of the governance agenda could lead to more funding for media policy reforms as part of donor-financed development plans.

Media capture: Not inevitable

Media capture is a complex problem, but it is not inevitable. As the essays in this volume have demonstrated, media capture is the result not just of technological and market forces, but of political choices being made by political and business leaders. Some of these choices are happening because of a lack of attention being paid to the problem. Others are made deliberately, in a non-democratic way, away from the scrutiny of the public, in a blatant attempt to establish stronger controls over society.

Finding a way to deter media capture is a growing priority across the world, especially for civil society organizations and the international media development community, but also for a few far-sighted governments. The effort so far has been miserably inadequate. Too many countries are finding themselves trapped between rising authoritarianism and a sycophantic media failing to play the critical role of providing oversight and accountability. Stronger efforts are needed at the country,

regional and global levels, and media capture should be recognized as a major strategic risk that can derail the political development of countries and undermine international security.

Countries need to include media policy as part of their ongoing debates about effective governance, and as a critical element of their overall vision for their societies. This would include a deeper understanding of the kinds of laws, norms, regulations, and practices that create a sustainable democratic media environment. They might examine how countries in other parts of the world, such as the recent cases in Latin America, have confronted this problem. They may need to build new independent institutions that can implement and carry out an effective media policy. And they need to engage at the global level to ensure that global Internet and mobile phone governance takes into account the needs of developing countries.

Civil society activism and oversight will be needed to bring better governance into this arena and help the national media systems to evolve over time, along with technology and new developments in the global media. Better governance should be coupled with a broader strategy to understand the business and competitive challenges that news media organizations are facing, particularly in developing countries. More complete data is needed to track the spread of media concentration and capture, particularly in developing countries. Innovation and new thinking is needed about how to finance independent media, and how to create economic and political incentives for corporate social responsibility among media owners and the broader media industry. Media literacy needs to be included in schools and made available to a much wider range of people. Everyone needs to understand how to recognize high-quality information, and how to produce and share it on social media.

International players should integrate media reforms into the overall development agenda. Organizations like the World Bank should expand policy work on the media sector, following the recent World Development Report with concrete action, the most important of which is comprehensive policy advice to countries struggling to improve media sector governance. The OECD and other international organizations should continue to build policy knowledge and coordination, fund media policy reform processes, and facilitate multistakeholder diagnostics and coalition-building.

Ultimately, establishing effective governance and the rule of law will require that news media companies operate within a legal framework that not only defends freedom of expression, but also establishes a level playing field to promote a diversity of views. Getting to this result will take enormous political will, civic activism, and international cooperation. It will require an unprecedented effort by the media world—from news and information media to entertainment, advertising, and the media platforms—to prevent the continued deterioration of news and information infrastructures across the world. And it will require stronger demands by citizens for high-quality news and information systems that serve the public interest.

While such a media ecosystem may not prevent a billionaire from buying a television station, it may help create a group of citizens who know when to turn to a different channel.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The author would like to thank Kate Musgrave for her assistance in researching and gathering data for this article.
- ² Interview, Washington, DC, September 30, 2016.
- ³ For five-year projections on overall industry growth rates and global distribution, see (McKinsey & Co. 2016).
- ⁴ In Forbes' 2016 ranking of the world's billionaires, 18 of the 72 billionaires in the Media/Entertainment industry are from the Global South (Forbes 2016).
- ⁵ For a review of the inadequacy of global efforts on media development, see (Nelson with Susman-Pena 2012).
- ⁶ For a discussion about the role of broadcast regulation in the digital age, see (Mauersberger 2016, 26-27).
- ⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the public sphere in media regulation, see (Mauersberger 2016, 16-26).
- ⁸ For a quick overview of civil society's role see (Rothman 2014). For more recent developments in the legal battle over media reform, see (Franco 2016).
- ⁹ For an account of the knowledge exchange with Latin America, see (Lublinski 2016).
- ¹⁰ For a discussion of a tested methodology of change facilitation and links to other scholarly discussions on the topic, see (Gonzalez de Asis 2012).

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