London School of Economics and Political Science

Do old habits die hard?

**Change and continuity in the political-media complex
at the outset of the Mexican democracy**

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Declaration

Abstract

This thesis speaks directly to the literature that assess the links between distinctive political regimes and the media. But rather than using normative expectations or current afflictions from the political regime or the emerging media system in new democracies as a entry point into the study, this research builds on the notion of 'political-media complex' (Swanson 1992, 1997) to centre the analysis on three institutional factors: (1) the rules that institutions enforce to give order; (2) the organizational dynamic that institutions impose over individuals' roles, and; (3) the patterns of change and tendencies that institutions take from but also inflict on historical rules and practices.

Drawing on the analysis of interviews with government communicators that served at the outset of the Mexican democracy (2000-2006) and on a supportive document research of official documents, the thesis shows that 'thinking institutionally' about the state-media relation allows a better understanding of how formal rules, bureaucratic structures, managerial strategies and certain professionalization patterns of the political communication mould this interaction.

Less evident but equally relevant is the influence that informal arrangements impose on this interaction. It cannot simply be assumed that proscriptions (statutory regulation, formal rules and written norms) always dictate the behaviour of those involved in the state-media relation. Beliefs, attitudes and common practices are also relevant to disentangle the links between rules and actions. Similarly, budgets, organizational charts and strategic communications blueprints set certain parameters for government communicators. But it cannot be expected that these can be implemented without hesitation.

Past routines, practices and understandings also influence the way in which Mexican governing cadres manage their relationships with the media. But as seen in this thesis, the past marks the present in a variety of ways contesting the broad and traditional conception about the burden that authoritarianism imposes over new democracies.

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The fist one is Mauricio Dussauge. For almost two decades now, he has granted me the 'nearness of him' unconditionally and effortlessly that perhaps I have lost sight of his patience, care and devotion. I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for all these years full of joy and great moments; for his determination, example and love. While 'we'll always have London', I am certain that our story will have much more pages to come.

Sebastián arrived to our lives as a lovely surprise in the middle of this PhD. The way he fought and embraced life even before being born taught me that endurance is not just about strength or resistance, but it is also about hope and love. Plus, his joy and constant willing to learn were the greatest sources of inspiration in this project.

And just when I felt fed up with this thesis and too tired to complete it, the news of a new baby coming gave me the impulse and purpose I needed to get to this point. At the time of writing, she or he has not been born yet. Nevertheless, this baby has brought to our family new plans and the prospect of a future full of new adventures.

List of Acronyms

CEPROPIE	Centro de Producción de Programas Informativos y Especiales Production Centre of Special Information Broadcasting
CSL	Civil Service Law Ley del Servicio Profesional de Carrera en la Administración Pública Federal
DOF	Diario Oficial de la Federación Official Gazzette of the Federation
FCE	Fondo de Cultura Económica
IFAI	Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos
IFE	Instituto Federal Electoral Federal Electoral Institute
IMSS	Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social Mexican Social Security Institute
ISSSTE	Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado Institute for Security and Social Services for State Workers
LIF	Ley de Ingresos de la Federación Federal Revenue Law
LFRTV	Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión Federal Law of Radio and Television
LFTAIPG	Ley Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública Gubernamental Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information and Data
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PEF	Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación Annual Federal Expenditure Budget
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
POC	Presidential Office of Communications Coordinación General de Comunicación Social
PRD	Partido de la Revolucion Democráctica
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
OPOI	Office of Public Opinion and Image Oficina de Opinión Pública e Imagen
UAM	Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

List of Boxes, Figures and Tables

Boxes

Figures

Tables

Table of Contents

PART I

SETTING THE GROUND

1 Introduction

While we have surveyed a number of technological,
economic, and social-structural factors
that influence the impact of the media on political behaviour,
we conclude that the most decisive determinants of media effects are
the strategies and the behaviour of elites, particularly political elites.

Richard Gunther and Anthony Mughan,
The political impact of the media: a reassessment (2000)

We might talk of the media having such and such an effect,
and we are not wrong to do so,
but it needs to be remembered that media technologies emerge
as material and symbolic objects and as catalysts for action,
and are effective as such only through the deeds of individuals and institutions.
It follows, I believe, that those actions are political.
They, of their nature, involve a struggle over meaning and control:
in design, in development, in distribution and in use.

Roger Silverstone, Why study the media? (1999)

Admittedly, waking up every day at 4am made me think about the relationship between the government and the media in the Mexican democracy as an unbreakable dilemma. Apparently it does not matter how much effort or resources (financial or human) high-level bureaucrats invest into nurturing good relations with the media. It also seems irrelevant if these media-management strategies are sincere or perverse. The fact is that more common than not, news coverage tends to privilege the drama about politics: conflict, failure, dissatisfaction with politicians (regardless of their party affiliation or job), untrustworthiness, innumerable challenges and persisting problems.

This has two effects. Firstly, Mexican government officials are endlessly worried about managing the news, rather than simply delivering self-evident (expectantly positive) results. Secondly, citizens' trust, not just in the governing elites or in the media, but in the new political process as a whole diminishes over time, which in turn threatens democracy from taking root. Plus, this occurs in a context of a highly concentrated media market, intense competition among political parties and naturally, a long list of great social and economic challenges: poverty, great disparities on income distribution, violence, economic recession and corruption, for mentioning some.

If democracies require citizens fully informed by their government through an 'unlovable' (Schudson 2008) or adversarial media that serves as a Fourth Estate, and enhances transparency and political accountability, how it is possible for a public official

to promote relations between the government and the media that nourishes (instead of damaging) democracy?

During the little more than four years that I worked for the Presidential Office of Communications (three years and a half under the Fox administration and half a year under Calderon's) a regular day (unsurprisingly Saturdays or Sundays) started before 5am. Newspapers were delivered every day to *Los Pinos* (the residence and office of the Mexican president) around 4am. On weekdays, radio stations in Mexico City started transmitting the first news flashes and programmes at 5am and national TV channels at 5.30am. The Office of Communications at *Los Pinos* kept a permanent media monitoring system. Plus, no later than 6.30am, a team of senior-officials conducted a brief analysis of the news coverage followed (during the Fox administration) by a daily press conference in which the spokesman (the head of the Communications Office) presented the presidents' activities for the day and answered the questions of the journalists of *la fuente*, the presidential press corps.

To some extent, what followed for the president's communication office (at least during the time I worked there) was an unpredictable series of duties that ranged from targeted news analyses to (countless) additional meetings. If everything seemed to be 'under control' (which it seldom was), the office would finish their working day around 10pm with a team meeting in which the communication strategy for the following day was discussed.

The job was dynamic, full of challenges, tensions and erratic outcomes. As such, it was also exhausting. Eventually, my lack of sleep made everything seem as an unbreakable challenge. Not just because I was seriously struggling to drag myself to work every day without, for instance, wearing a mismatched pair of shoes or unexpectedly falling asleep. But perhaps most worrying were my doubts that a professional career linked to a non-stop news cycle had become a constant struggle: keeping track of every printed or electronic newsbyte about the government was just impossible; preventing negative headlines about the president, his cabinet, public policies or even his personal life was merely something undoable; plus, one scandal was not yet solved, when the next one was about to be published with more in the pipeline.

Was my job actually achieving something or was it simply pointless? At certain points it really seemed to be so. Somehow, however, I was convinced that my concerns about the relationship between the government and the media under the new

democratic setting in Mexico were instigated not just by my personal frustration or tiredness.

1.1   'Great Expectations': democracy and media liberalization

How did the process of democratization change the political-media complex in Mexico? There are indeed two dominant but seemingly contradictory narratives about the relation between the state and the media in new democracies. On the one hand, there is the story of a state-media relation transformed with the collapse of authoritarian rules and the rise of democratic regimes all over the world. From this perspective, change from authoritarianism to democracy seems to result in a fundamental new order for the interaction between politics and the media (Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Price *et al.* 2002; Voltmer 2006a). According to the liberal democratic paradigm, new democracies are not only expected to promote and protect a free, diverse and independent media. The media themselves also acquire an active role in the political process (McQuail 1992; Christians *et al.* 2009; Curran 2011).

On the other hand, some literature on democratization draws on concepts such as 'authoritarian legacies' that holds secure to the assumption that past structural conditions and behavioural patterns influence (mostly inhibiting) a more democratic relationship between the state and the media (see for instance: Bermeo 1992; O'Donnell 1996b; Hite and Cesarini 2004; Pion-Berlin 2005). This stance is commonly grounded on the assumption that democratization does not occur on a blank slate. Inherited cultural, social and political traits shape the way in which these new democracies deal with both the challenges and opportunities embedded in the change of political regime.

Similarly, the concept of 'path dependence' becomes useful for establishing a link between past experiences and present choices in state-media relations (see for instance: Roudakova 2008; Humphreys 2011; Canel and Sanders 2012; Voltmer 2012; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013). Diverse actors such as policy makers, journalists or media owners tend to support old structures and reproduce traditional patterns of behaviour not just because the political transition involves uncertainty and imposes high costs at least in the immediate and short terms. Authoritarian traits are also self-perpetuating because politicians and media representatives regard certain practices and structures as the usual and the normal way of doing things (for studies on the Mexican media at the outset of democracy see for instance: Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009; McPherson 2010).

To put simply, 'old habits die hard'. Seen from this angle, the state-media relation in new democracies looks very much like it did during the authoritarian era despite several changes in the political context and in the actors or the procedures involved (see for instance: Gross 2002: Ch1; Ogundimu 2002; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Voltmer 2013: Ch5).

The question arises as to how these two contrasting stories of the state-media relation can be reconciled in new democracies. The answer to this puzzle might come straight away: the state-media relation in new democracies lies somewhere between the two poles of change *and* continuity. That is, from authoritarianism to democracy, the relationship between the state and the media does not change radically; 'path departures' do not occur unexpectedly and significant transformations (if any) are the product of gradual and small changes that take a long time. Moreover, even when the democratization process is expected to radically transform the state-media relation, significant continuities from the authoritarian past are present.

1.1.1 *Limitations in the literature*

This reasoning, however, faces at least three conceptual challenges. First, a prominent strand of research on the state-media relation in new democracies holds secure to the notion that the media mirrors 'the social and political structures within which it operates' (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 1). From this stance, the dichotomy of authoritarianism (control) *vs.* democracy (freedom) serves as the main point of entry into the analysis. In restricting individual freedom and political choice, authoritarian regimes invest considerable amounts of time and resources (financial and human) to manipulate and keep the media confined to the ruling elites' motives.

In sharp contrast, the emerging democratic institutions are expected to put rules and regulations in place that serve as guarantors of the media's independence, freedom of expression, accountability and diversity on the public debate, for mentioning some of the aspirations implied on democratic rules (see for instance: McQuail 1992; Curran 2005; Christians *et al.* 2009: Ch5). There is, however, some research on the different aspects of the state-media relation that shows that the normative distinctions between authoritarianism and democracy serve more as descriptive tools rather than as explanatory concepts. From this stance the empirical reality of political communication does not fit nicely into theories that assume that the media mirrors political structures and processes (see for instance: Scammell and Semetko 2000a or Gunther and Mughan

2000a). Yet, the normative account about the state-media relation in new democracies prevails in the literature: authoritarianism damages the media; democracies shield them against political turmoil and market pressures (see for instance: Hyédn *et al.* 2002; Voltmer 2006a, 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Dobek-Ostroswska *et al.* 2010).

Second, normative approaches to the state-media relation in new democracies tend to assess the role the state plays in according to a set of (frequently hidden) assumptions. While authoritarian rules are implicitly regarded as dangers for a free independent media, democratic regimes are envisioned as offering a vast array of opportunities that steam from principles such as non-intervention, freedom and autonomy (see for instance: Siebert *et al.* 1956; Hachten 1981; Altschull 1984; Picard 1985; Nerone 1995; Servaes and Lie 1997; McQuail 2005; Christians *et al.* 2009).

From this perspective, the role of the state and more specifically of the new governing elites in their interaction with the media, tend to be assumed as an outcome, rather than to provide an entry point for empirical analysis. Therefore, instead of investigating *how* exactly these new political regimes influence the media through a variety of institutional norms and practices, research traditionally aims to diagnose the state's ability to implement new norms and practices or its propensity to maintain older institutionalized means of exerting power and control over the media. The task of the analyst appears to be straightforward: to assess if the state either promotes or undermines media freedom.

Nevertheless, more common than not, researchers on state-media relations in new democracies face great challenges to unpack the notions of state control and media freedom. The actual examination of the concrete practices beyond normative principles such as non-intervention and independence is not a straightforward process. Certain hypotheses may immediately come to mind regarding the ultimate power that post-authoritarian governing elites may have to control the interaction with the media such as ownership, funding, licensing, regulation or even access to public information. However, the connection between state power and media control turns out to be quite problematic. For instance, these new political regimes lack the resources that authoritarian rule used to have (secrecy, manipulation, human and financial means) making the imposition of traditional controls and high levels of coercion against the media simply unfeasible. Other (perhaps subtler and less evident) mechanisms of media control become handy such as media management or public advertising (see for instance: Pfetsch and Voltmer 2012; Waisbord 2012; Bajomi-Lázár 2013). Or it could be the case

6

that the incapacity of the state to enforce regulations or protect the media from other threats (such as market concentration or violence against journalists) turns out to be as dangerous and harmful in the light of democratic aspirations for the media as other traditional powerful and perverse mechanisms of media control like repression, or censorship (Waisbord 2000a; Morris and Waisbord 2001). In addition, diverse conditions within and outside the media may turn them into actors with their own institutionalized sources of power and control (Patterson 2000; Scammell and Semetko 2000b; Herman and Chomsky 2002; Lloyd 2004). This possibility suggests the need to reconceptualise the role (beyond control and repression) of the state and especially of the new governing elites in moulding the structure, functioning and performance of the media in new democracies.

Third, the change in the way governing elites relate with the media in new democracies is understandably approached with a sense of great disappointment (see for instance: Hydén *et al.* 2002; Voltmer 2006a; 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013). Research has shown that new governments have frequently failed on setting the new rules and the conditions to transform this interaction. Those (small) changes found (in the political rule or in the media) have also been shown to be slower than anticipated, uncertain and unsatisfying, especially when matched with the great expectations created by the political transition to democracy.

However, it may be for instance, that the new governing elites have failed to enhance a media system that supports the development of democracy because they lack the resources (political or financial) to do so; they may actually pursue an instrumental and controlling purpose over the media, or; the actual functioning of this interaction may be a by-product or even an unanticipated result of other conditions associated with the political transition (such as increasing political competition and divergence among different actors). In any case, such explanations (or alternative ones) deserve thoughtful interrogation.

In addition, scholars have struggled to come to terms with empirical evidence pointing at the presence of both changes *and* continuities in the state-media relation in new democracies. Transformation (change) is commonly associated with disruptive events leading to changes in institutions and practices, while permanence is generally pictured as a symptom of the 'deadweight of the authoritarian past' over the present. Plus, these legacies are commonly seen as determinants for both the quality and the

sustainability of a democratic future (see for instance: Gross 2002: Ch1; Ogundimu 2002; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Voltmer 2013: Ch5).

From this stance it becomes very difficult to assess if the relationship between the state and the media is actually moving forward or backwards in the continuum from authoritarianism to democracy. A failure (from the governing elites or the media) to achieve the expectations imposed by the democratic transition does not necessarily mean that the state-media relation does not change. Nor does the persistence of certain norms and practices imply that there is nothing new emerging between authoritarianism and democracy.

Does the authoritarian past instil a fear of change on balance or does it foster a greater resolve to transform this interaction among political elites? To what extent does the state-media relation follow the flow of inertial institutionalized authoritarian forces that are beyond the control of individuals or is there evidence of individual agency which also fosters democratic change in the context of political communication?

In short, overly normative conceptions of the state-media relation in new democracies do not seem to address the dilemmas that actors in the political communication sphere face in practice. Furthermore, these approaches do not provide the conceptual and analytical tools to examine the characteristics which give rise to change and those which give rise to stasis. The way in which continuity and stasis interact, give rise to novel institutional norms and practices, particularly in the contexts of emerging democracies remains an underdeveloped area of studies. This is the shortcoming that this study addresses by developing an alternative conceptual framework that provides a basis for investigating both tendencies.

1.2   'Mind the Gap': a research opportunity

The conceptual framework for this thesis is designed thus to enable an investigation of the state-media relation in new democracies which highlights how and the extent to which developments lie somewhere between the two poles of change *and* continuity; between being a product of inertia *and* innovation; between macro institutional structures or specific process *and* human agency or micro-decisions.

Absent from the political communication literature is an analytical perspective that allows for a detailed investigation of these complementary, although at times contradictory aspects of the state-media relation in new democracies. A normative framework provides a check-list about how this interaction *should* look like. That is, as a

role model, democracy renders an idealized conception of appropriate institutions and procedures and desired outcomes. For those in the field, these notions set an example and put some boundaries to their day-to-day practices. For academics, this theoretical abstraction serves as working hypotheses to assess the actual functioning of this interaction. Nevertheless, a normative approach does not allow a better understanding of *why* the state-media relation has been found to fall short of the great expectations associated with democracy. Nor does it explain *how* this relation develops under new political conditions.

To advance a conceptual framework that allows seeing the interplay between change and continuity in the state-media relation in new democracies, this study integrates insights from several theoretical traditions. Specific to the study of the state-media relation in new democracies, this thesis enriches Swanson's 'political-media complex' perspective, a notion that denotes the interaction between politics and the media as a 'supra-institution' (Swanson 1992: 399). Rather than pointing at current afflictions of contemporary political communication by stipulating that it simply 'falls short from the liberal democratic ideal' or 'reflect(s) only loopholes and bad choices made by misguided or unprincipled individuals', the analysis begins with 'the institutional grounding of objectionable practices' (*ibid*).

In this thesis, Swanson's (1992: 398) argument that 'current accounts on state of political communication fail to appreciate the way in which profound social and institutional changes have altered the foundations of our system of political communication' provides a starting point. However, in this study, additional theories are drawn upon to frame an analysis of *what* these institutional changes are and *how* they affect the interaction between state and the media in new democracies.

An institutional analysis of the relationship between politics (or more specifically the state) and the media is, however, a risky enterprise because there are many different conceptions of institutions in the research literature. As key researchers warn us, institutional theory 'comes in many flavours' (March and Olsen 2009: 160; Hall and Taylor 1996; Kato 1996; Reich 2000; Thoening 2003; Peters 2012) and more often than not, 'reviews of the scholarly literature on institutions are an invitation to frustration' (Steinmo *et al.* 1992: 15; Pedersen 1991; Heclo 2008: 43). Furthermore, as Immergut (1998: 5) writes: 'new institutionalists do not propose one generally accepted definition

of an institution, nor [do] they appear to share a common research program or methodology' (see also: Ostrom 1986; Scott 1987).[1]

Rather than engaging on a search of the literature for a precise definition of institution or a single branch of institutional scholarship that corresponds neatly with the purposes of this study, this thesis draws insight from approaches to neo-institutional theory which broadly focuses on 'how political life is organised, functions and changes in contemporary democracies' (Olsen 2007: 2). Neo-institutional theory brings to the conceptual framework three key arguments that help to redirect an empirical analysis away from unfulfilled expectations in relation to prevailing strands of theory in the political communication field to the actual dilemmas the political-media complex faces when transiting from authoritarianism to democracy.

First, neo-institutional theory stresses the *relatively* autonomous role that institutions play in shaping political actions and outcomes (March and Olsen 1984,1996, 2009; Parsons 1990; Scruggs 1999; Heclo 2008; Peters 2012: Ch1;). Institutions give order (for instance symbolic, temporal, endogenous, demographic or historical) to political life (March and Olsen 1984, 1986; Steinmo *et al.* 1992; Weaver and Bert 1993; Lijphart 1994). That is, the way politics is organized does make a difference (March and Olsen 1984: 747) to outcomes in practice.

In a sense, neo-institutional theory is a response to a group of theories in political science (buoyant in the 1950's and 1960's) that place the searchlight on specific characteristics of the individual (such as culture, background, interests or resources) as drivers of social and political action. Instead, neo-institutionalists retake 'old' concerns about how rules, routines and processes internal to the institutions shape individual traits (Apter 1991; Selznick 1996; Remmer 1997; Immergut 1998; Peters 2012: Ch2).

At first glance, individuals might appear as rational actors and agents able to adjust institutional structures and process to self-serving interests. Nevertheless, neo-institutional theory stresses that individual action does not take place in a vacuum. Individual behaviour actually takes place within institutions that set rules, impose certain standard operating procedures and follow trends that are fairly invariant to the turnover of individuals and events (March and Olsen 1984,1989, 1996). As Peters and Pierre (2007: 82) put it: 'calculated behaviour may well exist, but it is framed by and embedded in complex systems of structures and norms'.

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[1] There are, however, authors that do argue for an approach to neo-institutional theory as a coherent and unified research methodology. See for instance: Hall and Taylor 1996; Diermeier and Krehbiel 2003; Heclo 2008.

Second, this focus on the relatively autonomous role that institutions play in organizing political life and in shaping individual behaviour allows to see that institutions 'are more than simple mirrors of social forces' (March and Olsen 1984: 739; Searle 2005). Institutions are involved in translating reality into specific interests and roles to construct a vision of life that gives meaning and direction to individual preferences and choices (Powell and DiMaggio 1991; March and Olsen 2004).

Furthermore, the goals, procedures and resources of institutions may empower or constrain individuals' capabilities. 'Internal institutional processes', write March and Olsen (1984: 744), 'affect things like power distribution, the distribution of preferences, or the management of control'. That is, institutions are not just equilibrium contracts among self-serving rational individuals (North 1990; Denzau and North 1994; Zouboulakis 2005). Nor are political actors that only serve as neutral arenas that allocate resources, contend diverse social forces or solve problems driven by exogenous preferences and expectations (March and Olsen 1984: 742, 1996; Krasner 1984, Pierson 2000). Institutional formation, both formal and informal, require investigation framed by alternative theoretical models for better understanding how endogenous institutional processes affect change or the distribution of power and preferences; influence decision-making processes; generate unanticipated consequences, or; even create the illusion of success and failure (March and Olsen, 1984: 744).

Third, even when institutions are 'relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances' (March and Olsen 2004: 1), institutions do learn from their history and they do adapt to changing demands from individuals and to changing environments (March and Olsen 1996, 2009; Clemens and Cook 1999; Lindner 2003; Boas 2007). Processes of institutional development, adaptation and ultimately change occur, however, at different speeds and directions (Thelen 2003; March and Olsen 2005; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2009; Kickert and van de Meer 2011). Therefore, institutional development and change does not occur in a vacuum (Streeck and Thelen 2005; Pierre *et al.* 2008). Internal dynamics, procedures and certain characteristics of these institutions (such as origin or history) affect the way in which institutions respond to new environmental conditions (Lieberman 2002; Magnusson and Ottosson 2009).

Furthermore, adaptation and learning within institutions result in gradual adjustments that clash with the appropriate (possibly more efficient) or planned

aspirations (Mahoney and Thelen 2010b). Sudden or significant external shocks (the political change from authoritarianism to democracy, for instance) might force institutions to change (Steinmo and Thelen 1992; Mahoney 2000; Pierson 2002). However, institutional change and perhaps more evident, institutional robustness, also occur through more mundane endogenous processes such as repetition, interpretation, reasoning, education, imitation and gradual adaptation (March and Olsen 1996; Kickert and van de Meer 2011).

The outcome of these transformations is thus influenced by the actual capacity of individuals within institutions to encourage or obstruct change. From this stance, 'we have to go beyond a focus on how a specific institution affects change', write March and Olsen (2005: 16), 'and attend to how the dynamics of change can be understood in terms of the organization, interaction, and collisions among competing institutional structures, norms, rules, identities and practices'.

In summary, to assess the relation between the state and the media in new democracies, this thesis draws upon a neo-institutionalism notion about political life that points at the role of institutional norms and practices articulated both through the perceptions and practices of individuals and through formalized rules.

1.2.1   *Conceptual framework*

To develop an institutional approach to state-media relations in new democracies, this thesis starts from March and Olsen's early call for a reappraisal of institutions in political science (1984, 1989) to centre the analysis on three fundamental ways in which institutions influence political life. These are: (1) the rules institutions enforce to give order; (2) the organizational dynamic that institutions impose over individuals' roles, interests and practices, and; (3) the patterns and tendencies that institutions take from history but that also shape historical rules and practices.[2]

This stance departs from normative accounts, which are organized primarily around stories about the gaps between the ideals imposed by the liberal democratic model and the actual functioning of the state-media relation in new democracies. The conceptual framework for this thesis enables an assessment of the influence that rules, organizational dynamics and historical patterns of change have for this interaction.

In some studies alternative sets of institutional factors that shape the state-media relation are examined. For instance, in their influential *Comparing Media Systems*, Hallin

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[2] For a more recent account of how these three aspects of institutions impact political actors and outcomes see: March and Olsen 2009, especially sections 3 and 4.

and Mancini (2004a) advance an analytical framework that distinguishes between variables that are used to assess the political system on the one hand, and specific characteristics of the media on the other. The 'political system variables' (Hallin and Mancini 2004a: 63) address basic 'institutional structures' (p. 297) that resemble traditional approaches to the structure and legal foundations of political institutions (Rhodes 2006). These are, for instance, differences between political systems in terms of regulation (the development of a rational-legal authority) and representation (pluralism, consensus or majoritarian patterns of government).[3]

Hallin and Mancini's (2004a: 45-46) 'clusters of media-system characteristics' also draw on specific institutional aspects of the media such as the structure of media markets (circulation rates, ownership, concentration); 'organizational connections' (p. 28) or 'institutional ties' (p. 29) between politicians (government officials, parties, trade unions) and media personnel (journalists, media owners, editors); partisanship of media outlets or audiences; professionalization patterns or the development of a 'journalistic culture' (beliefs, norms and practices), and; the degree and nature of state intervention in the media (regulation, funding, source of public information).[4]

Without making an explicit reference to neo-institutional theory, Hallin and Mancini (2004a) design a systematic comparative analysis of media systems focusing on diverse indicators that bring to mind, neo-institutionalists' concerns about the role and influence that institutions play in political life. However, this approach does not provide a framework for investigating specifically how these configurations of institutions give rise to both change and stasis which may converge in new institutional formations.

In fact, some frameworks approach the state-media relation beyond the rough categorization of authoritarianism *vs.* democracy. In such cases, there is an assessment of institutional aspects (legal and regulatory procedures; organizational structure and functioning, and; cultural or historical patterns, global trends and processes of

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[3] Drawing on comparative politics and political sociology literature, Hallin and Mancini (2004a: 65) propose five principal political variables relevant to the comparative analysis of media systems. These are: 'the relation of state and society, and particularly the distinction between liberal and welfare-state democracy; the distinction between consensus and majoritarian government; the distinction, related to consensus and majoritarian patterns of government, between organized pluralism or corporatism, and liberal pluralism; the development of rational-legal authority; the distinction between moderate and polarized pluralism'.

[4] The exact 'four major dimensions to which' according to Hallin and Mancini (2004a: 21), 'media systems in Europe and North America can usefully be compared' are: (1) the development of media markets, with particular emphasis on the strong or weak development of a mass circulation press; (2) political parallelism; that is the degree and nature of the links between the media and political parties; (3) the development of journalistic professionalism; and (4) the degree and nature of state intervention in media systems.

homogenization), but in these cases there is little evidence explicitly of drawing insight from specific institutional theories (see for instance: Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Voltmer 2013;).

These approaches then, tend to treat a diverse range of institutional aspects as variables or dimensions similar to quantitative indicators. For instance: high or low rational-legal authority; strong or weak professionalization; public or private funding; statutory or self-regulation; public media ownership or commercial industries, and so on. These kinds of categorizations are indeed useful when trying to classify the state-media relation into typologies or specific models that pre-establish likely patterns of connection between political and media systems (such as the ones offered in Altschull 1984; Picard 1985; Ostini and Fung 2002; Hallin and Mancini 2004a or even Siebert *et al.* 1956). Nevertheless, these schematic representations do not allow to trace *how* these qualifications function in practice or *why* particular connections develop rather than some other sets of characteristics.

For instance, Hallin and Mancini (2004a: 55-59, 135-188; see also Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002) find a relatively steady connection between rational-legal authority and political-clientelism. That is, in countries where the authors found strong legal tradition and functional legal frameworks, including relatively clear and effective broadcasting regulation and media legislation (like in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden or Switzerland), access to funding and public information is a relatively transparent process, making these commodities available to the media regardless their political affiliation or funding source. The reverse also is proposed. In countries where the rational-legal authority is weak (like in Greece, Spain, Italy or Portugal), access to public resources (funding, information, air-waves) is generally granted only to those media outlets that offer deference to the political regime or render other attractive services such as extensive public advertising or positive headlines.

Nevertheless, if the connection between rational-legal authority and political-clientelism is used as a research hypothesis in the study of the state-media relation in new democracies, some key questions arise (Roudakova 2008; Humphreys 2011: 168). These are for instance: how long would these clientelistic loyalties last for? Shall we understand clientelism as submission, coalition-building, repression or control? Are we looking at a deadweight of the authoritarian past over the new political regime? Is

statutory regulation the only way to overcome these kinds of interdependent and cosy relations between politicians and the media?

In this thesis, the primary interest is the institutionalized processes that translate rules, organizational dynamics and general historical patterns of change into influences on the political-media complex. It is expected that these three specific institutional aspects will help to explain the tensions between change and stasis in the field of political communication. This perspective may confirm that the study of institutions does matter and can benefit from an analysis based on the integration of several neo-institutional perspectives. Furthermore, the framework developed in this thesis mirrors the key institutional forces that underpin Swanson's political-media complex. 'Of course', the author (Swanson 1997: 1272) writes, 'institutions do not act; people act. However, […] people act within institutional contexts, and their actions are inevitably shaped by institutional objectives, organization, culture and history'.

This study advances thus a conceptual framework that centres the empirical analysis on three specific institutional aspects of the state-media relations in new democracies: the rules that guide it; the organizational dynamic it generates; and the historical trends of change it follows. Each of these institutional factors is examined through a set of specific analytical tools which are discussed in the theoretical chapter and operationalized in the methodology chapter.

Briefly, to investigate the rules and norms, the thesis centres the analysis on two components: prescriptive rules and appropriate actions. Therefore, by drawing on neo-institutionalists' concerns about formal rules and norms, the framework breaks down the approach to rules into written rulings and less formal patterns of conduct, beliefs, codes and common knowledge.[5] These 'appropriate actions' (a 'logic of appropriateness' in March and Olsen's terms) that arise from following (or not) formal rulings are difficult to identify and measure with conceptual precision (Fearon and Wendt 2002; Sending 2002; March and Olsen 2004; Goldmann 2005).

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[5] 'Observing that political actors sometimes deviate from what rules prescribe', write March and Olsen (2009: 164,165), 'institutional scholars have distinguished between an institutional rule and its behavioural realization in a particular stance. They have sought an improved understanding of the types of humans selected and formed by different types of institutions and processes, how and why different institutions achieve normative reliability, and under what institutional conditions political actors are likely to be motivated and capable of complying with codes of appropriate behaviour [...] In this perspective, institutions and forms of government are assessed partly according [to] their ability to foster the virtue and intelligence of the community. That is, how they impact citizens' identities, character and preferences –the kind of person they are and want to be'.

Nevertheless, this approach moves the analysis beyond a mere description of (current, obsolete or even non-existing) statutory media regulations. It allows for a detailed account about what those involved in the state-media relation in new democracies are *able to do* (a normative approach to what it is prescribed in the rules: rights and duties), but also about what they are *motivated to do* (a cognitive component that points to common beliefs, unwritten codes, internalized prescriptions or an ethos of self-discipline). 'Rules are followed', write March and Olsen (2006: 6), 'because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected and legitimate'. That is, the existence of formal-legal regulations and norms are not assumed to suggest that these regulations are fully accepted, followed and enforced:

> Rules prescribe, more or less precisely, what is appropriate action. They also, more or less precisely, tell actors where to look for precedents, who are the authoritative interpreters of different types of rules, and what the key interpretative traditions are. Still, the unambiguous authority of rules cannot be taken as given –it cannot be assumed that rules always dictate or guide behavior. Rather, it is necessary to understand the processes through which rules are translated into actual behaviour and the factors that may strengthen or weaken the relation between rules and actions (March and Olsen 2004: 7).

From this perspective, the empirical disentanglement of rules into formal rulings and appropriate actions is likely to allow a better understanding of the actual influence that written regulations impose (or not) on those that engage in state-media relations in new democracies. Similarly, the approach to the organizational dynamic that the state-media relation generates (the structure and functioning of government communication offices, for instance) brings into play neo-insititutionalists' concerns about the influence that organizational resources and routines have on individuals' choices and behaviour. As March and Olsen (1989: 162) put it: 'institutions not only respond to their environments but create those environments at the same time' (see also: Powell and DiMaggio 1991; Meyer and Scott 1992: Ch1).

In this thesis, an assessment of the organizational dynamic aims to render a detailed account of the resources (human and financial), organizational roles and strategies that the actors involved in the state-media relation can be shown to follow. This approach goes beyond a mere description of the administrative structures and routines embedded in this interaction. Here the conceptual framework draws on Canel and Sanders' (2010, 2013) emphasis on the importance of the structure and functioning of government communication offices. The authors (Canel and Sanders 2010: 36-37; 2013: 15) centre their analysis on five specific components: (1) organizational charts; (2) the role and influence that the leader imposes; (3) practices and day-to-day routines; (4)

the strategies to measure public responses, and (5) the mechanisms to assess the results and to evaluate the communication process. In the research in hand, this framework is enhanced by including a focus on the role of the leader (spokesman, advisor, agent or manager as proposed by Seymour-Ure 1991) or practices and day-to-day routines through a general 'process of strategic communication' (Pfetsch 2008: 73) that combines activities such as planning, coordination, dissemination, monitoring and feedback.

To investigate the third institutional factor (the general historical patterns of change and trends that the state-media relation follows), the conceptual framework draws on the notion of the 'professionalization of political communication' (Holtz-Bacha 2007: 63; Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007). Institutionalists stress that institutions are not mere reflections of current organizational forces, formal proscriptions, behavioural templates or shared identities. They are also products of past experiences and history. 'Institutions embed historical experience', write March and Olsen (1989: 167-168), 'into rules, routines, and forms that persist beyond the historical moment and condition'.

In the media and communications field, there has been a tendency to try to fit the influence of broad socio-political experiences and technological innovations into unitary concepts to understand the state-media relation in new democracies. For instance, similar to institutionalists' concerns about 'isomorphism' among organizations and the 'homogenization' patterns of institutional change (Meyer and Rowan 1977; DiMaggio and Powell 1982; Zucker 1988; Boxenbaum and Jonsson 2008), arguments about 'the triumph of the liberal model' (Hallin and Mancini 2004a: 251) point at key tendencies that may have encouraged the older democracies to redefine their relations with the media in previous decades. Among the trends that are found to have gradually eroded past national variations are, for instance: globalization (adoption of neoliberal economy; European integration and the growth of global media markets); the contraction of the state (the decline of partisan ties, a 'commercial deluge' that has gradually displaced public service corporations with mix systems in which market forces play a prominent role paired with processes of de-regulation), and; the 'Americanization' of politics, a notion that encapsulates a wide range of transformations in partisanship, political communication and participation (see for instance: Blumler and Gurevitch 1995/1977; Butler and Ranney 1992; Scammell 1995; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995; Swanson and Mancini 1996b).

Nevertheless, empirical evidence on new democracies (see for instance: Hydén *et al.* 2002; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Sen and Lee 2008; Voltmer 2011; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013) suggests that the liberal model cannot travel too far from its European and North American roots (Voltmer 2013). It may be possible to trace some striking similarities between the trends that the political-media complex is following in new democracies and the tendencies that push old democracies closer to 'convergence' or to 'homogenization' and towards a 'single, global media model' (Hallin and Mancinni 2012: 286; 2004a: Ch8; 2004b). This may be evident if the analysis is centred on the commercialization of the media and the decline of traditional partisan forms of political participation and communication in favour of more individualised and media-centred political campaigns that heavily rely on new media platforms and technologies.

In contrast, if these aggregate trends based on selected indicators (high or law partisanship; strong or weak state intervention; new or old media platforms and technologies and so on) are considered as signifying change at a macro-level, it remains important to examine the processes that underpin these trends and the tensions among the institutionalised norms and practices that give rise to them. For instance, 'it does make a difference', writes Voltmer (2012: 228), 'whether there is a high degree of intervention with the objective to ensure the quality of programming, or whether the intervention aims to increase government's control over the media. The means of intervention is equally important; for example, whether regulation uses direct intervention into the production process and its outcomes or primarily indirect incentives such as taxation, prices, and certain privilege'.

Similarly, the extent to which citizens do remain attentive to the political process and even become active participants on the public debate varies according to particular cultural, contextual and specific national adaptation processes (Bennett and Entman 2001b). New information and communication technologies, the secularization of politics and the commercialization of public information in new democracies occur in a context of other socio-political and economic changes that are institutionalised by becoming both propellers and constraints for the new technologies and communication practices to thrive.

To sum up, neo-institutional theory encourages rethinking not only how, but also why the state and the media interact in particular ways under unprecedented conditions. Along with the discussion on the opportunities and challenges introduced by Swanson's proposal to assess the interaction between politics and the media from an

institutional perspective, the conceptual framework developed in this thesis privileges the notion of a 'political-media complex' and augments it by introducing three specific institutional factors and additional analytical tools drawn from several strands of neo-institutional theory to investigate the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

1.3 'Keep Calm and Carry On': research methodologies and empirical evidence

The general research question that guides this study is:

How did the process of democratization change the political-media complex in Mexico?

To answer it, the thesis develops and applies the conceptual framework introduced to investigate the state-media relation through a case study which focuses on the outset of the Mexican democracy. Empirically, it particularly investigates the perceptions of government communicators in their day-to-day relations with the media.

Selecting this particular case study responds, partially, to a self-confessed interest. Nevertheless, it also represents a valuable opportunity for an in-depth analysis of a state-media relation that commonly appears in the media and communications literature as intriguing and long overdue (see for instance: Caletti 1988; Hallin 2000; Hughes 2008; Waisbord 2012; Voltmer 2013: Ch4).

First, the state-media relation in Mexico brings together two very particular entities. On the one side, the Mexican state, that transited from one of the longest single-party rules in world history to an 'electoral democracy' that meets basic standards (political competition, fair elections, public debate and civic participation), but has failed to deliver results in other political and social issues (see for instance: Merino 2003; Loaeza 2008; Aguayo 2010). On the other, the Mexican media characterized by little competition among a handful of powerful commercial industries owned by families traditionally linked to the governing elites. Mexico, for instance, hosts Televisa, one of the strongest broadcasters for Spanish speaking audiences in the world and the biggest media corporation in Latin America. Seen from this angle, key questions arise. For instance, about the kind of state control that authoritarian rule imposed over such a powerful media conglomerate, or about the role that the new PAN governing elites (2000-2006) played in promoting a new relationship with a media expected (although not always committed) to contribute to the development of democracy.

Second, the study of the state-media relation in Mexico, especially one that centres the analysis on the state as a formal and informal institution is long overdue. There is an impressive amount of literature that follows the long period of progressive political, social and economic changes that lead to democracy in Mexico.[6] The process has attracted researchers from very diverse disciplines of the social sciences due to its distinctiveness: the end of one of the longest authoritarian rules in the world; the lack of large armed confrontations, massive civic mobilizations or repressive military elites; the gradual emergence of electoral laws that boosted political competition and paved the road for the opposition to win the presidential elections in 2000 and 2006, and; similarly, the recent puzzling return (2012) of the PRI to the executive.

However, within this ample array of studies, attention to norms and practices informing elites in their relation with the media is rare. As indicative above, much scholarship that investigates the state-media relation takes a normative approach that assumes the authoritarian rule to be a repressive force over the media and democracy to be the impulse that encourages the latter to let the former free (see for instance: Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; McPherson 2010). From this perspective, there is little in-depth clarification about the state and governing elite roles in fostering an emerging state-media relation. Studies on the state-media relation in Mexico have been quick to focus primarily on the media. Commonly, these studies are framed by the premise that through democratic change, the Mexican media gained independence from the control of the state and contributed to opening the public debate to diverse voices and viewpoints. In this light, mass media appear as cornerstones of democracy: mechanisms to countervail the power of the state, and detonators of new forms of participation in terms of freedom of information, mobilization and open public debate. Two strands of research prevail. One investigates the role that the media played in the transition to democracy (see for instance: María *et al.* 2004; Trejo 2004; Aguilar Camín 2009); the other assesses how Mexican media responded to the new political conditions (see for instance: Lawson 2002; Lawson and Hughes 2005; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009, McPherson 2010). But generally, these works tend to conclude, as Lawson (2002: xiii) puts it: 'that neither the process of democratization in Mexico nor Mexican politics today can be understood without reference to the mass media'.

Admittedly, 'media centred' studies on the state-media relation in Mexico bring to light the role that media actors (journalists, editors, anchorpersons or owners) have

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[6] For a snapshot of these works see the collection *Los grandes problemas de México [The great problems of Mexico]* edited by El Colegio de México (2010).

played in the bumpy road to democracy. They show, for instance, that along with other changes (electoral reforms or neo-liberal policies), 'media opening' contributes to the development of democracy by bringing other voices to the public debate, especially other key actors' such as opposition parities and civic organizations. In doing so, Mexican media are expected to enhance plurality and participation, two basic conditions which allow for democracy to put down roots. Furthermore, there are some careful accounts about the challenges the media face in this process. These studies clarify the actual capacity and the struggles these strong commercial conglomerates face in becoming a vigorous Fourth Estate (see for instance: Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009; McPherson 2012).

However, these accounts are often framed by a normative approach to the state-media relation which leads to the neglect of further analysis of the other part of the relationship: the new political system. For instance, Lawson (2002: 183) concludes that:

> The Mexican case also suggests that much of the progress toward a Fourth Estate was made despite the official attempts to restrict press freedom […] A Fourth Estate emerged not because ruling elites encouraged its emergence, but rather because official responses proved inadequate to prevent it […] As a result, it was impossible for Mexico's political elite to rid themselves permanently off a growing cohort of independent-minded journalists.

Seen from this angle, questions arise about the state-media relation in Mexico that are arguably beyond the role that the media plays in this interaction. Even if Lawson's (2002) conclusions are accepted (that at certain points in the democratic transition, Mexican ruling elites were unable or simply unwilling to prevent media liberalization), explanations about why and how these political elites 'lost' control over the media are needed.

One may assume, as the normative approach suggests, that the new ruling elites were just different from the authoritarian rulers in that they were actually committed to enhance a free, independent and vigilant media. Nevertheless, it is precisely this 'media-centred' research that leads to be suspicious that this may not be the case. There is evidence that the Mexican media are facing diverse challenges to fulfil their democratic duties that range from a lack of clear regulatory frameworks to organizational dynamics and journalism practices that seem to be trapped in archaic structures, functioning and out-dated beliefs about the value and role of public information in democracy (see for instance: Hughes 2006, 2008, 2012; Guerrero 2009, 2010b; Guerrero and Nesbitt-Larkin 2010; McPherson 2010, 2012).

Thus, the empirical evidence that is so far available about the role of the media in the Mexican democracy renders a different picture than the one suggested by the normative democratic model. Furthermore, there is little research on the new governing elites in their interaction with the 'hybrid' (Hughes 2006: 10) or 'transitional' (McPherson 2010: 173) media systems emerging at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

In short, a complementary account about the state-media relation in Mexico based on investigating the new governing elites in their relationship with the media is needed. The conceptual framework put forward in this thesis takes account of both formal and informal institutionalized norms and rules, as well as the tensions between historical practices and those favoured in the context of a new democracy. This approach is expected to reveal some divergences between the theoretical proscriptions of the liberal-democratic model of state-media relations and the actual functioning of this interaction. Plus, a closer examination of the tasks the new Mexican governing elites put into practice, as well as those that remained unaccomplished is likely to render a detailed picture of the challenges and restrictions the new political regime faces in enabling a vigorous Fourth Estate.

1.3.1 *Empirical focus*

With this in mind, this thesis centres the analysis on the viewpoints of Mexican government communicators (press secretaries, senior advisors, consultants, communication staff, middle and street level officers) that interacted with the media (journalist, editors, anchorpersons or media owners) on a regular basis at the outset of the Mexican democracy. This particular focus addresses three aims. First, it helps to target the investigation on a single and fairly distinctive group of state actors. The term 'state' in the state-media relation literature actually serves as an 'umbrella' concept that pulls together diverse entities and individuals that range from general governmental offices or departments to specific bureaucrats, congress people or heads of state. Narrowing the study to a single set of public officials allows a close and systemic analysis of specific practices that one particular component of the state (the government) undertakes to relate with the media on a day-to-day basis.

Second, the focus on government communicators counterbalances the attention that research on the state-media relation in Mexico has placed on other individuals such as journalists and media owners. That is, research on the state-media relation in Mexico draws mostly on empirical evidence coming from the perceptions of those directly

engaged or in charge of this interaction. Nevertheless, due to the media-centred perspective assumed in these studies, the common subject of study becomes someone working for a newspaper or a broadcaster. As explained before in this chapter, a complementary account may come from those working for the state. Thus, this thesis approaches government communicators as a representative group of state actors directly engaged or in charge of day-to-day relations with the media. Naturally, there are other state actors that interact with the media on a daily basis such as legislators, ministers or diplomats. Government communicators, however, serve as the regular counterpart of journalists and editors being recurrent sources of official information and common channels of communication with other public officials.

Third, by looking at government communicators, the thesis aims to advance our knowledge in what Canel and Sanders (2012: 85) identify as: 'an under-researched area of political communications studies, finding itself in a kind of theoretical no-man's land between political communication, public relations and organizational communication research'. As an area of study, government communication contributes to a better understanding of the state-media relation in general and in particular, about the goals and tactics used in political communication. Scholarship in this topic, however, remains trapped in a paradox (Rivers *et al.* 1975): there are a large amount of studies on the government -public administration, elections, public institutions and characteristics of government officials and their performance-, while media studies has developed mainly as an interdisciplinary field (see for instance: Couldry 2006, 2013; Bräuchler and Postill 2010; Corner 2013; Gray and D. Lotz 2013). Nevertheless, there is relatively little research on government communication.

In an effort to offer a better understanding of public officials that bring together the government and the media on a day-to-day basis, this thesis centres the analysis on the accounts of government communicators that served during the first government of an opposition party in Mexico (this is the first PAN administration during 2000-2006). Although academics struggle to set a clear starting point for the Mexican democracy, the research in hand approaches the Fox administration as a turning point at least in terms of the executive elites governing the country. The analysis will show that a great part of government communication officials that were formed and gained experience during the authoritarian era remained active during the first PAN administration. Nevertheless, changes at managerial levels did represent a turnover in political communication and media relation strategies that are directly linked with the change of party in government.

From this perspective, the two empirical research questions for this study are:

How did government communicators manage their relationship with the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy?

Which formal and informal institutional norms, rules and practices influenced the way they managed this relationship?

1.3.2   Sources of empirical information and methodologies for data analysis

To answer these more specific questions, the analysis in this thesis streams from empirical evidence collected through two primary sources of information: interviewing and supportive document research. Conducting interviews is considered essential for two reasons. First,' thinking institutionally' about the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy imposes very specific data requirements about three particular aspects of the state-media relation: the rules that guide it, the bureaucratic structures and organizational dynamics that shape government communication, and the patterns of change that influence political communication.

The conceptual framework used in this thesis points to specific information needed to explain how these three institutional aspects shape the state-media relation in a new democratic setting. Other research methodologies (quantitative methods or alternative qualitative methodologies such as questionnaires, content analysis on artefacts or discourse analysis on text) seemed unfeasible to address the refinements imposed by this thesis' conceptual framework through a rigid evaluation of general empirical materials such as newspapers articles, speeches or general public opinion surveys. It just seemed more appropriate and natural to ask public officers that have been involved in a day-to-day interaction with the media specifically about their perceptions on the three specific institutional aspects proposed in this study.

Second, as previously stated, current studies on the state-media relation pay little attention to the interaction of the new governing elites and the media, especially in terms of government communication (Canel and Sanders 2012; 2010; Pfetsch and Voltmer 2012). In the Mexican case, recent publications are limited (see for instance: Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a, 2007b; Meyember and Aguilar Valenzuela 2013). Moreover, this literature has not explored the influence of the three institutional aspects proposed in the conceptual framework used in this thesis. These conditions not just set additional limitations on the sources of data that were actually available to achieve the aims set in

this thesis. They also made interviewing an attractive research methodology which was able to advance the study of government communication in the new democratic setting.

Research on the interaction between the state and the media has indeed been found in the accounts of public officials to be a valuable resource to test specific concepts and analytical frameworks (see for example: Tunstall 1970; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Scammell 1995; Tumber 2000; Davis 2002; Lawson 2002; Kernell 2007; Matos 2008). Interviewing has brought key viewpoints to be analysed in arenas where, as in government or politics, the light shed by theories and concepts does not trespass the irrationality, constant change and permanent struggle between actors, diverse forces of influence and unexpected consequences. For this thesis, 'semi-formal guided conversations and free-flowing informational exchanges' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997: 113) with public officials represent valuable source information which is able to give appearance and texture to the shadows currently seen in the political-media complex in new democracies.

This thesis thus uses as a primary source of empirical data, the information emerging from 37 semi-structured interviews with senior, middle and street-level government communicators that worked for the Fox administration, mainly for *la Coordinación General de Comunicación Social*, the Presidential Office of Communications (POC). The sampling of interviewees followed a positional approach in that it targeted both public officials in high decision-making positions and special media advisors, as well as middle and street-level officers that put public communication strategies into practice and maintained daily contact with the media. The participants in this study are heads and directors of the POC and special advisors, as well as government communicators that maintained regular contact with la *fuente presidencial*, the presidential corps of journalists.

These interviewees were selected for two main reasons: for the role they played in the communicating of politics during the Fox administration (they were active participants in the relation with the media) or through a 'snowball effect' (Richards 1996: 2000) that refers to a handful of occasions when an interviewee put forward some additional names or even offered to contact other public officers that could render additional information to the study. This was especially the case for special advisors and media consultants that had a relevant role in designing the government's communications strategy.

The interviews were conducted face to face in two rounds between August 2009 and December 2010 in Mexico City. The length of these conversations varied between one hour and hour and a half. With the exception of one interviewee, all participants were willing to 'go on the record' even when it was clearly explained that this thesis uses an anonymous referencing system to protect the participant's identity and to avoid potential negative effects on their professional careers. The oral records were transcribed in its original language (Spanish) and a pertinent translation was conducted only to the materials and extracts that are quoted in this thesis.

An interview guide was prepared in advance to the interviews. It was structured on the basis of the conceptual framework used in this thesis. That is, it included specific questions about how the interviews perceive the effect of formal and informal rules, organizational dynamics and trends of professionalization of political communication in their interaction with the media. It also covered general topics about these government communicators' interpretations of their own role and that of their media counterparts in reconfiguring a state-media relation modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm; possible legacies from the past, and; potential ways of achieving a more fluent and transparent interaction with the media.

Document research served as a complementary primary source of information. That is, the analysis in this thesis also uses information from official documents such as media statutory laws, regulations, rules of procedure, budgets and white papers on *comunicación social,* which are official publications dealing with government communication and political communication strategies. These documents were a necessary additional source of information for three reasons. First, the analysis of relevant statutory legislation, media policies and written procedures for the state-media relation were naturally needed to investigate the first institutional aspect (rules) put forth in the conceptual framework used in this thesis. Second, official documents were needed for an understanding of the administrative structure, functions, human and financial resources, and programmatic particularities of government communication offices with an especial focus on the POC.

Third, official documents were useful to corroborate some specific data gathered through the interviewees. Documents become a powerful tool of research when assessing their function and interaction with the subject under investigation (Prior 2008). The mere fact that there are media laws, presidential decrees and secondary regulations, rules of procedures and official budgets for government communication do

not say much, for instance, about how government communicators perceive the relevance of these statutory regulations or about the real utility of these written proscriptions on the day-to-day interaction with the media. By looking at just these official documents, it is difficult to grasp the political tensions and conditions that surround these texts. For this thesis, the 'interactional' (Prior 2008: 833) function of documents, rather than a mere content or thematic analysis, was crucial for a better understanding of how formal statutory rules and written proscriptions shape the way in which the interviewees described their interaction with the media.

In terms of data analysis, thematic analysis is used as a methodology to identify, examine and report patterns within the data collected through interviewing and document research (Boyatzis 1998; Tuckett 2005; Braun and Clarke 2006; Gibbs 2007: Ch4). Therefore, the analysis of the empirical information collected through interviewing and document research is focused and deals selectively with specific themes across the data corpus: patterns that at a minimum describe and organize empirical observations and at a maximum interpret aspects of the phenomenon under study (Boyatzis 1998: 4). From this perspective and in contrast to the other analytical methodologies such as content or narrative analyses that look for systemic descriptions of the manifest content, a thematic analysis in this thesis aims to provide a careful explanation of the three institutional factors advanced in the conceptual framework.

1.4 'Let it Be': thesis outline

In so doing, this thesis is divided into three parts. The first part, *Setting the Ground*, includes this Introduction and Chapter Two. Together, these first two chapters challenge the general notion that the state-media relation in new democracies is a mere reflection of the social and political forcers in which it is embedded. As seen in the previous pages, the study of the interaction between the state and the media in new democracies demands sharper analytical tools for a better understanding of the discrepancies between the great expectations embedded on theoretical models and the actual functioning of this interaction. Nevertheless, research on the state-media relation has traditionally held secure to the assumption that authoritarian rules impose a tight control over the media, while democracies promote independence and freedom. This first part of the thesis shows thus that approaching the state-media relation with normative categorizations makes it difficult to capture the complexity of this interaction in new democracies.

Chapter Two, *Contextualizing the state-media relation in Mexico*, presents the historical background to the relation that the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) established with media moguls. It illustrates that clear cuts between authoritarianism and democracy are problematic. These pages show that not just authoritarian rule in Mexico nurtured a close, interdependent and mutually beneficial relation allowing the media, especially broadcasters, to grow into the big conglomerates they are today. The transition to democracy also proved to have serious limitations in transforming the media into a vigorous Fourth Estate.

Understanding the way in which the Mexican authoritarian rule related with the media helps to break down broad notions of state power and control implied in normative approaches to the state-media relation into specific analytical components (such as: ownership, regulation and media structure, access to information or public advertising). Furthermore, Chapter Two shows that the expected capacity of the political change to transform the media into a propeller of democracy also requires further scrutiny. In the end, different political regimes do enhance different media systems, just as Siebert *et al.* (1956) suggested several decades ago. The divergences, however, are not just between democratic and non-democratic regimes, but also within democracies and are commonly overlooked within authoritarian regimes.

Part II, *Arts and Craft*, introduces the way in which this thesis explores an alternative conceptual approach to the state-media relation in new democracies. It contains Chapters Three and Four, which set the theoretical perspective and analytical tools used in this thesis to investigate the perceptions of government communicators towards the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

Drawing on Swanson's notion of political-media complex, Chapter Three, *The state-media relation: thinking institutionally*, introduces an alternative approach to study this interaction under a new democratic setting. This conceptual framework draws on diverse neo-institutional strands to divert attention from the ideals imposed by role models of state-media relations to place it on three institutional forces that shape this interaction: (1) the rules that give order and transcend individuals; (2) the particular organizational roles and dynamics imposed through specific administrative structures, resources, goals and practices; (3) the patterns and tendencies institutions take from but also inflict on history. The chapter explains further the different analytical tools used to investigate each of these factors.

From this theoretical stance, Chapter Four, *Research design and methodology*, presents the sources of information and the methodology used to analyze the empirical findings that support this thesis. The chapter focuses on explaining the opportunities and challenges of investigating a single-case in an area of studies that has traditionally benefited from comparative research designs. In so doing, the chapter reflects on the choices made to investigate the perceptions of government communicators at the outset of the Mexican democracy. It brings to light some of the key concerns about interviewees' accounts which are potentially inclined to render very optimistic stories that emphasize agency and positive contributions to setting the ground for a new relationship with the media on a day-to-day basis. Overall, these pages touch upon the procedural and analytical tasks that are made to ensure that the qualitative methodologies are followed to collect empirical data and the findings emerging are endorsed by a rigorous research protocol.

Part III, *Field Notes*, puts together the empirical chapters of this thesis. Respectively, each chapter covers one of the institutional factors advanced in the conceptual framework used in this thesis. Chapter Five, *Media regulation: new rules and (in)appropriateness*, shows that government communicators' changing perceptions on the goals and the ultimate need of new media regulations clashed with archaic legal frameworks. The chapter focuses on the analysis of the four legal reforms endorsed by the Fox administration to redefine the state-media relation. These initiatives addressed key aspects of this interaction such as media structure and functioning (ownership, competition, funding), access to governmental information and public advertising. Mexican researchers and practitioners have approached these reforms quite critically as hard evidence of the new democratic regime's lack of commitment to definitely end an era of cosy relations with media moguls (see for instance: Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Bravo *et al.* 2011; Trejo Delarbre and Vega Montiel 2011). The accounts offered by the interviewees and the document research conducted for this thesis present a detailed picture about the constraints but also the opportunities these regulatory processes imposed on the day-to-day interactions with the media.

Chapter Six, *Inside the black box: the organizational dynamic of the government's machinery of communications*, looks at the bureaucratic structure and functioning of the communication apparatus of the Mexican government. After a brief description of the different administrative units and tasks involved, the analysis focuses on the day-to-day functioning of president Fox's office of communications. According to the interviews,

the organization dynamic brought by the new government confronted rigid structures and budgets inherited by the authoritarian regime. In addition, novel communication strategies not always brought the results expected. At times, old strategies proved to be more effective. Thus changes within the POC do show a gradual breakdown with past practices such as strict control over the news agenda or corruption. Nevertheless, the empirical evidence also points to the return to some day-to-day routines that proved to be useful during authoritarian rule such as the centralization of government communication in the office of the president, a key role played by the president in communicating politics, strict planning and coordination and a relation of mutual benefits with the media.

Chapter Seven, *Communicating politics: the limits of professionalization*, explores further to what extent the political communication strategies imposed by the new cadres of government communicators followed trends that are common among democracies (old or new), especially the highly contested but frequently used notion of 'the professionalization of political communication'. The chapter shows that Mexican public communication officers, like almost any other government communicator in the world, tend to make an extensive use of media management techniques, paid public advertising or polling to steer political communication strategies. Nevertheless, according to the interviewees, these practices do not fully replace, for example, the influence that strong political leaders retained in designing and directing the government's communications strategy.

Overall, the third part of the thesis shows that interaction between government communicators and the media at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico moved farther away from the authoritarian era, but it also proceeded according to certain continuities from that past. Seen in this light, concepts such as 'path dependencies' and 'authoritarian legacies' seem useful for explaining why certain past rulings, government communication practices, administrative structures and public officials' attitudes endured the democratic transition.

However, at the same time, the change of political regime did imprint its opportunities and challenges on the way public officials related with the media at the outset of the new political regime. It is not that Mexican government communicators kept on the same traditional authoritarian path. In a way, democracy made the interaction with the media more complex and the changes these officials put into practice not always rendered the results they were expecting. Sometimes the continuities

seen are also the result of democracy: increasing political competition and more actors in the public debate; constant struggles to coordinate and implement new government communication strategies or transformations within the media outlets. The outcome might not look as the substantial change expected from the democratic transition. Nevertheless, the small and gradual changes seen in the analysis of empirical evidence do represent a 'path departure'.

The concluding chapter (Chapter Eight) thus reflects on these empirical findings and on the theoretical contributions of this thesis. The chapter shows that the most intriguing empirical finding of the research in hand is the role that informality between government communicators and the media (shared unwritten norms, common knowledge, beliefs or day-to-day practices) has played in the political-media complex. Yet the effects of these informal arrangements may not be considered either inevitably negative or uniformly positive. In this study, old practices and traditional conceptions about the state-media relation sometimes obstructed more fluent relations with the media, supporting the notion that 'old habits die hard'. The aspirations and beliefs of new public officials became an impulse to find alternative mechanisms to break with the past, contesting broad notions of 'path dependency' and 'authoritarian legacy'. It is, however, the influence that these informal arrangements have in altering the way in which Mexican governing elites conceive the interaction with the media and are actually willing to transform it. This is what matters for further research on the state-media relation in new democracies.

Nevertheless, the proposal to pay more attention to the role that informal arrangements play in the state-media relation in new democracies does not come without difficulties. It actually opens the debate to a new set of conceptual challenges and research tasks. The final pages of the thesis reflects thus on the difficulties of defining and measuring these informal arrangements with certain conceptual precision. It is necessary to explore further their causes and consequences. For instance, seeing the state-media relation from this light requires a better understanding about how (if at all) or why politicians or journalists replace these informal arrangements with formal rules and procedures that strengthen the development of democracy. Are these informal procedures typical of an early phase of the political change in new democracies? Are we looking at cases where democracy has not yet put down strong roots? Or are informal settings alternative routes to evoke a stronger commitment with the new political regime when more formal procedures are blocked?

This thesis does not offer detailed and straightforward answers to these issues. It shows, however, that it is perhaps time to recognize that the extensive attention paid to the gaps between the expectations imposed by the liberal-democratic model and the actual functioning of the political-media complex in new democracies might have distorted the current research agenda. The literature has invested considerable time on condemning both sets of actors' failures in fulfilling the great expectations imposed by the change of political regime. This stance may prevent a better understanding of the actual dilemmas this interaction faces when transiting from authoritarianism to democracy. This thesis shows that it is by exploring alternative theoretical routes that new empirical evidence is found in need of sharper analytical and conceptual tools.

2 Contextualizing the state-media relationship in Mexico: the struggles between theoretical models and empirical evidence

Of course, it needs to be kept in mind that
we are talking here about perceptions of the purpose of the press.
As with all institutions, the practice is quite different from the theory
[… The] taxonomy outlined here it is itself fictional,
a suspension in space of that which is always in motion.
It is a static representation of the dynamic and hence itself illusory.
Still, insofar as it contributes to understanding of the system as a whole,
it serves a distinctly useful end.

Herbert Altschull, Agents of Power (1984)

Foreigners have long believed that the Mexican government controls the press
through the sale of newsprint by a company the government owns.
Are they right? Wrong.
Foreigners have long believed that the Mexican government exercises
an overwhelming power to suppress or publicize any news or opinion it wants.
Are they right? Again wrong.
Conclusion: There is a free press and freedom of expression in Mexico.
Right? Once more, wrong.

Raymundo Riva Palacio, A Culture of Collusion (1997)

How do political regimes influence media systems and vice versa? For decades, the relationship between political regimes (conformed by different elements such as governing elites, political parties, public organizations, regulatory frameworks) and media systems (involving not just media outlets and media ownership, but also programming, content, audience structure and viewership) has intrigued academics from diverse research fields, especially in media studies (see for instance: Blumler and Gurevitch 1977/1995; Swanson 1992, 1997; Swanson and Mancini 1996a; Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Park and Curran 2000; Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 2012).

The traditional view among media scholars and thus a common point of departure of the research on the topic is that different political regimes yield different media systems: while democracies facilitate and enhance free and open media outlets, authoritarian and totalitarian regimes impose strict controls over mass communication. Indeed, these sharp divergences about the media's form and role in different political regimes are rooted in differing normative paradigms about government accountability and scrutiny, political liberty, civic participation and public choice (see: Siebert *et al.* 1956). Democracies foster political pluralism and freedom of expression; non-democratic regimes restrict them.

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Despite this widespread acknowledgement of the relationship between political regimes and media systems, such straightforward assumptions and normative paradigms are problematic. This chapter shows the challenges embedded on fitting the Mexican experience into the models developed by the traditional literature on state-media relations. The first section briefly describes the theoretical abstractions that have guided this area of study for more than fifty years now. Siebert *et al.*'s groundbreaking approach to the different media systems emerging from opposing political regimes (totalitarian or authoritarian rules *vs.* democracies) has inspired a great diversity of works on this interaction. Yet, as some researchers point out, this starting point poses some challenges (see for instance: Mughan and Gunther 2000; Scammell and Semetko 2000b; Christians *et al.* 2009). It not only blurs crucial distinctions within dictatorships or democracies, but also imprints a normative stance inspired by the classical liberal model of democracy: the state and the media *should* be two independent entities. On the one hand, governing elites *should* guarantee the media's freedom, autonomy and diversity. On the other, media *should* play a key role in democracy by keeping the citizens informed about political affairs; by critically scrutinizing the exercise of power by the state or other political actors, and by opening the public debate to a diversity of voices. Nevertheless, the more academic research explores the relation between the state and the media in both authoritarian rules and democracies, the more difficult it is to take these conditions for granted.

In this regard, the second section of the chapter points at the difficulties of applying these models to the study of the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy. These pages show, for instance, the need to reconsider some general assumptions about the type of control the authoritarian regime imposed over the media, as well as to recognize some limits on the expectations generated by the change of political regime. Traditional models of the state-media relation may serve as working hypotheses on this case study. Nevertheless, the divergences between theoretical models and the actual functioning of this relationship demand a closer examination guided by sharper analytical tools.

For example, the third section of the chapter demonstrates that contrary to what the authoritarian model of state-media relations traditionally suggests, it was throughout those long decades of authoritarian rule that the Mexican media (especially TV broadcasters) became the powerful conglomerates they are nowadays. The PRI (the single ruling party for more that seventy years) constrained itself from imposing

complete or repressive control over the press (as other Latin American dictatorships did), let alone commercial broadcasting that grew as a powerful industry, thanks to a lax media policy and to the support it received from authoritarian rule.

As seen in the fourth section of the chapter, something similar happens when trying to match the libertarian model of state-media relations with the gradual process of opening that characterises media liberalization in Mexico (Lawson 2002). The question of whether the government or the media fulfils the communication duties imposed by the liberal democratic model is by no means confined to the Mexican case in particular or to new democracies in general. However, as the this section of the chapter shows, thinking on the relationship between the first PAN administration and the media as independent, free and able to strengthen public debate and citizens' participation in politics, clashes with the inappropriate degree of collaboration between the new governing elites and the media that prevailed the change of political regime. That is, political liberalization did not dissolve the links that for decades held political elites and the media at close complicity. In fact, both actors seemed reluctant to lose the privileges they gained from long decades of collusion and mutual vast profits.

Nevertheless, the existing literature on the Mexican case does not provide thoughtful explanations about why or how this happened. The fifth part of the chapter addresses some blind spots in the research on state-media relationships that constrain a better understanding about the role that new governing elites in the Mexican democracy have played (or not) in enhancing a vigorous Fourth Estate. Overall, the following pages help to put in context the relationship between the government and the media at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico. The models commonly used in the literature of state-media relationships serve as guidance to assess the particularities of this case study. At the same time, however, this stance stresses the need to tune up the theoretical tools available to explain the shortcomings and potential dangers of this interaction in a new democratic setting.

2.1   Models of state-press relationships: *Four theories of the press* and its legacy

'The press [and by press we mean all the media of mass communication] always takes on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates' (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 1). As obvious and simple this statement may seem nowadays, it has been the guiding hypothesis of academic research on the relationships between political

regimes and media systems for more than half a century.[7] Siebert *et al.*'s groundbreaking *Four theories of the press: the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do* (1956) introduced the notion that different political regimes (their ideology, historical period, regulatory framework and chief purpose, for instance) shape (or constrain) the media's goals. These characteristics of the political regime impose a great influence in media function and more critically restrain their contributions to civic participation and public debate. From this stance, as Siebert and his colleagues put it (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 1-2), the media 'reflect the system of social control whereby the relations of individuals and institutions are adjusted […] An understanding of these aspects of the society is basic to any systematic understanding of the press'.

As with any other research, *Four theories of the press* was a product of its time and of its authors' beliefs. It was a joint enterprise between scholars (the writers) and conservative businessmen (the sponsors) who aimed to counterbalance general thinking about the media's goals and growing influence (especially the rise of television as a social force supplanting other agencies of socialization, as well as the concentration of media ownership, threatening diversity and independence of viewpoints) in a bipolar world.[8]

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[7] Deeply influenced by (and also as a critique of) the Hutchins Commission --officially known as the US Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947) through which a group of prominent scholars introduced the notion of 'social responsibility of the media' in the aftermath of WWII-- the National Council of Churches (NCC) sponsored a project on the media's ethics and responsibility. The NCC aimed to introduce an alternative view of the role of the media in society by reverting (or at least criticizing) to some influential liberal and secular views about the role of the media as part of big corporations and powerful business groups. The outcome of *Four theories of the press*, as Nerone (1995: 8) puts it: (1995: 8) 'has had a tremendous impact on teaching and thinking about freedom of the press'.

[8] *Four theories of the press* mirrors its authors' previous works and perspectives about the media in different political settings. Siebert's *Freedom of the press in England* (1952) presented an analysis of British history to explain changes on the relationship between mass communication outlets (mainly the press) and governing elites under different political and social conditions. The author identified three different periods (although he called them 'theories'): the Tudor-Stuart, the Blackstone-Mansfield and the Camden-Ersike-Jefferson theory. One year later (1953), he related these periods with three additional 'theories' to describe the modern functioning and purpose of the media: the Supreme Court freedom theory; the Hutchins Commission (or the Social Responsibility) theory; and the Soviet Communist theory. The main argument behind this reasoning was that different regulations and social settings shape in very different ways media's contribution and influence in society. In the following years, Siebert changed his six-theory schema to the four theories that became the outline for the 1956 collective volume. Through the years, however, Siebert's work transformed from its original historical and descriptive purpose to a prescribing list of normative tasks that give form to media's contributions to society. From its part, Schramm's research was deeply influenced by his working experiences at the different US government departments (Navy, War, Defence and State Departments, for instance) and agencies (the US Information Agency, the US Air Force or the Army Operations Research Office) during the post-war period. From this perspective, he allowed himself a sharp criticism

The outcome, however, was not a regular academic description in a collaborative volume, but a very particular account about the role and normative function of media in different political systems. The book, for instance, describes a world divided into two poles: the oppressed (ruled by authoritarian or communist regimes) and the free societies (enhanced by liberal democracies). The analysis thus offers a clear and brief explanation as why these two different political and social settings produce different communication systems. The state control and the restrictions the ruling elites in authoritarian or communist regimes imposes over the media produce a communication system that serves as a tool of the political regime: as part of the political process, mass media *should* support and promote the regime's social and political objectives. A self-selected, unaccountable government, therefore, aims to have control over information, public opinion and certainly the most useful, over citizens' political attitudes and social behaviour.

A population aware and convinced of the power and the legitimacy of its rulers will fully support the authoritarian regime and its policies or ultimate goals. A controlled media plays a crucial role in this process. 'An authoritarian theory', write Siebert and his colleagues (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 10), 'is a system under which the press [the media in general], as an institution, is controlled in its functions and operation by organized society by organized society through another institution, government'. This is how authoritarian regimes control the social, political and economic structures through different means, including, of course, the media. Under this model of state-media relations, unaccountable and unconstrained political elites use mass media to pursue their own political objectives. It is the uncontested power of the state (or the government) that ensures its dominance over public communication by carefully organizing and disseminating highly selective information through a 'puppet media' (Gunther *et al.* 1995: 4).

In sharp contrast, Siebert *et al.*'s 'libertarian' and 'social responsibility' models of state-media relations describe a looser impact of the political regime over the media. In these models the latter are depicted as key guarantors of accountability and as effective

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of the Soviet system, especially regarding the role of the media in terms of propaganda and controlling social effects. However, his work lacked a similar critical approach to the economic function or potential dangers of media conglomerates in the US –a perspective set forth by the Hutchins Commission (1947) pointing at the media's responsibilities and moral obligations as a counterbalance to their increasingly social, economic and political influence (Nerone 1995: 11-15).

surveillance mechanisms over the former. Even when democratic theory does not directly address the role of the media in these societies (see for instance: Scammell and Semetko 2000b), mass media are expected to keep citizens informed, ensure the free flow of political information, and enhance freedom of speech and assembly by giving voice to a wide range of actors and by opening the public debate to diverse viewpoints.

Additionally, constitutional rights or social conventions protect the media from potential arbitrary powers of governing elites, the state or the market. Specific legal frameworks shield the media against political controls ensuring a free access to information and ownership of media outlets. The essential function of these regulations is to guarantee that mass media remain free from unrestricted governmental controls or state domination, so that they are able to pose strict checks and balances over the political regime.

For the 'libertarian' model of state-media relations, a healthy and independent economy becomes essential in being able to support the media as an industry of information and entertainment. Advertising and other commercial revenues thus become key sources of economic support that ensure the media's well-functioning and independence from government influence or even domination. The principal function of the political regime under this model is then to provide the bases for stable economy and strong legal frameworks that protect and promote the free development of the media as a commercial entity.

For the 'social responsibility' model, however, the media also have the moral responsibility of ensuring the right to information: the media *should* be 'accurate; it must not lie … [and it] must identify fact as fact and opinion as opinion' (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 87). Hence, the state 'must not merely allow freedom; it must also actively promote it […] it may enact legislation to forbid flagrant abuses of the press which poison the wells of public opinion, for example, or it may enter the field of communication to supplement existing media' (p. 95). Thus in a socially responsible media system, the state *should* intervene, albeit cautiously, in the functioning of the media to ensure that they fulfill their tasks and duties. State intervention over the media may exist, but it would not be as heavy and perverse as it is under authoritarian or communist regimes and would be restricted to protect freedom of expression –even from the media themselves— as a cornerstone of political liberty.

The long lasting influence of *Four theories of the press* can then be summarized into four key aspects: (1) its capacity to reflect the division of the Cold War (democracy *vs.*

authoritarianism/communism) in explaining differences about the media's functioning around the world; (2) its normative approach to 'what media should be and do' stressing that freedom of expression (or press) as one of the fundamental functions of the media is a natural right that comes with certain responsibilities for the media; (3) its brevity and simplicity to set different models through the analysis of a manageable number of variables (such as historical time, philosophy, chief purpose, ownership and use of media, controls and regulations), and; last but not least (4) its tempting invitation to challenge its core assumptions. As Nerone (1995: 6-7) puts it:

> Hence the success of *Four theories*. It portrays the impasse of liberalism in the postwar world; it captures the urgency of the moment, the sense of optimism associated with the defeat of fascism, as well as the dread of resurgent autocracy. It tells the story of liberalism's triumph over authoritarianism at the same time as it confesses that we no longer have a clear idea of what liberalism means for the press. It gives us historical and theoretical reasons to doubt the liberal worldview but does not offer an alternative. In this way, it stands at the end of the road. People have parked their cars here and wandered off into the bush but no one has returned with a map.

And it is the map which is still missing from analyses on the relationship between the political regime and the media. For more than fifty years *Four theories of the press* has been both enormously influential (Hachten 1981; McQuail 1983; Altschull 1984; Picard 1985 or Hallin and Mancini 2004 for mentioning some works grounded on Siebert *et al.*'s work) and widely attacked (for summaries see: Nerone 1995; Servaes and Lie 1997 or Christians *et al.* 2009). When academics, for instance, have turned from its underlying normative assumptions to more detailed records of experience, the theoretical frameworks and normative approaches proposed dramatically clash with the actual functioning, structure and performance of both political regimes and media systems. The great pitfall of Siebert *et al.*'s legacy –the construction of role models or theoretical frameworks without testing them outside classrooms or libraries; an academic practice that could hardly be called 'theory'— becomes clearer when comparative research applies these frameworks to the study of diverse political systems and national cases, especially those beyond the well-known battery of Western democracies.

Indeed, in the last two decades, quite a few media scholars have engaged in grounding the theory of media systems with data in diverse national or political settings (see for instance: Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Hallin and Mancini 2004a, 2012; Voltmer 2006, 2013). Whether such an 'authoritarian' or a 'libertarian' model exists, have existed or can exist --especially when thinking about the social responsibility or libertarian normative approaches to state–media relationships-- is something that has increasingly

concerned current research on the interaction of political regimes and media systems. To some extent, the view that the media in non-democratic regimes is an instrument of the political regime, while in democracies the political regime becomes a healthy contributor of media's structure, functioning and performance has not only seemed simplistic to academics, but is also inaccurate.

2.1.1 Proliferation of models

Since *Four theories of the press,* academics have tirelessly tried to modify these models. Table 2.1 below depicts diverse approaches that researchers have put forward over the years to explain the relationships between political regimes and media systems. As can be seen, moderate changes have included for instance, re-naming Sierbet *et al.*'s original concepts so that the new labels better describe (or highlight) political and economic developments of the time (Williams 1966; Merrill and Lowenstein 1979; Martin and Chaudhary 1983). More radical approaches have added new categories (McQuail 1983; Altschull 1984; Picard 1985), variables (Servaes and Lie 1997) or diverse levels of analysis (Hallin and Mancini 2004a). Others have engaged in a whole different enterprise, rejecting the original pigeonhole categorizations by proposing more dynamic models to study the state-media relationship (Nerone 1995; Nordenstreng 1997; Christians *et al.* 2009) or putting forth alternative approaches to depict different political and social realities around the world (Nordenstreng 1999; Ostini and Ostini 2002; Gunaratne 2005; Chengju 2006; Sparks 2008; Hallin and Mancini 2012; Voltmer 2013).

More than fifty years of research on the relationship between political regimes and media systems has rendered a large and diverse (and sometimes overwhelming and confusing) series of 'typologies that serve the purpose of analytical distinctions and not of totalizing labels' (Nordenstreng 1997: 108). As a matter of fact, no single political regime or media system fits easily into the different categories or normative models developed to build upon Siebert *et al.*'s work. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to debate the accuracy or flaws of these proposals. What remains useful for this study is to highlight the fact that most of the work done in the last few decades has focused on adapting or adding new concepts to explain the relationship between the state and the media in democracies (old, new or developing). Building upon libertarian and social responsibility paradigms, researchers have tried to develop new normative

Table 2.1   Different models of the state-media relation based on *Four theories of the press*

Siebert *et al.*	1956	*Four theories of the press*	Authoritarian	Soviet Communism	Social Responsibility	Libertarian	**Additional Concepts**	
Author(s)	**Year**	**Title**	Concepts based on the four original categories					
			Authoritarian tending		Libertarian tending		Indeterminate tendencies	
Williams	1967	*Communications*	Authoritarian	Paternal	Commercial	Democratic		
Merrill and Lowenstein	1979	*Media, messages, and men*	Social authoritarian		Social centralist	Libertarian		
Hachten	1981	*The World News Prism*	Soviet communism		Western		Revolutionary	
Martin and Chaudhary	1983	*Comparative Mass Media Systems*	Communist	Third World	Western			
McQuail	1983	*Mass Communication Theory*	Soviet communism		Social responsibility	Libertarian	Democratic participatory	Development communication
Altschull	1984	*Agents of Power*	Marxists or communitarian		Market or Western		Advancing or developing	
Picard	1985	*The Press and the decline of Democracy*	Authoritarian	Soviet communism	Social responsibility	Libertarian	Democratic socialists	Revolutionary
Nerone	1995	*Last Rights*	When the communist world collapsed, the corresponding media models were no longer functional and therefore replaced by different attempts to fit new democracies into traditional pigeonhole categorizations. Researchers, however, tend to conclude that the analysis of media systems emerging from authoritarianism require alternative theoretical lenses*		Alternative approaches to study media systems in democracies			
					Questions *Four Theories'* actual capacity to explain the press-media relation due to its reliance on the classical liberal paradigm which has shown serious limitations to assess the role of the media even in old democracies			
Servaes and Lie	1997	*Media and Politics in Transition*			Proposes a 'hermeneutic-interpretative' approach to the study of communication and socio-cultural change that takes into consideration aspects of power, ideology and culture			
Hallin and Mancini	2004	*Comparing Media Systems*			Liberal model	Democratic corporatist model	Polarized pluralistic model	
Christians *et al.*	2009	*Normative Theories of the Media*			Puts forward four roles to analyse the role of the media in democracy: (1) monitorial; (2) facilitative; (3) radical, and; (4) collaborative			

* See for instance: de Smaele 1999; Nordenstreng 1999; Ostini and Ostini 2002; McKenzie 2005; Huang 2006; Sparks 2008; Gunaratne 2010; Hallin and Mancini 2012; Voltmer 2013.

media theories that are able to depict differences of structure and functioning among liberal democracies (see for instance: Servaes and Lie 1997; Scammell and Semetko 2000a; Hallin and Mancini 2004a; Christians *et al.* 2009).

Naturally, this is an understandable research development since the breakdown of communist rule made the corresponding model(s) –named for instance: soviet communism, paternal or social authoritarian— obsolete or outdated categorizations (see for example: Hachten 1981). Nevertheless, the 'third wave of democratization'[9] (Huntington 1991) did not have the same effect on the conceptualization of the authoritarian model (Nordenstreng 1999: 150; Becker 2004: 143). The fall of authoritarianism around the world made clear that these regimes were different from each other and posed dissimilar challenges (and opportunities) to democratic transitions (Linz and Stepan 1996; Geddes 1999; Linz 2000; Diamond 2002; Levitsky and Way 2002; Hadenius and Teorell 2006).

Researchers on the relationships between political regimes and media systems, however, tend to keep the 'authoritarian' model as a single concept to describe systems where the state (or its governing elites) controls the media's structure or functioning. Despite more than a half century of academic debate about how different political regimes enhance different media systems, nowadays academic research really depicts only two major approaches to this relationship. As Mughan and Gunther (2000: 3-4) put it

> The traditional view has been that the media are schizophrenic in character and play contrasting roles in the establishment and maintenance of political order in authoritarian/totalitarian regimes and in democracies: the media have been depicted as manipulative and subversive of individual freedom and political choice in the former and as guarantors of political liberties and government accountability in the latter.

In other words, it does not matter which state-press relationships model or normative tradition is chosen, all political regimes (and it seems that in consequence media systems also) are inclined to authoritarianism (control) or democracy (freedom).

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[9] As Huntington (1997: 3) puts it: 'the first, long wave of democratization that began in the early nineteenth century led to the triumph of democracy in some 30 countries by 1920. Renewed authoritarianism and the rise of fascism in the 1920s and 1930s reduced the number of democracies in the world to about a dozen by 1942. The second short wave of democratization after the WWII again increased the number of democracies in the world to somewhat over 30, but this too was followed by the collapse of democracy in many of these countries. The third wave of democratization that began in Portugal has seen democratization occur much faster and on a scale far surpassing that of the previous two waves […] This dramatic growth of democracy in such a short time is, without doubt, one of the most spectacular and important political changes in human history'.

2.2 Beyond the authoritarian vs. libertarian state of mind: the Mexican case

The usual normative and conceptual divergence between authoritarian and libertarian models of state-press relationships poses at least three challenges in the study of state-media relations in Mexico. First, it hinders the differences between media outlets and crucial distinctions among the kind of controls authoritarian rule imposed over the media beyond the broad conceptualization of the strict and perverse control of the state. Every discussion about state-media relations faces challenges imposed by the false image of uniformity that 'the media' as a collective noun creates. The Mexican case for instance, requires an analysis that is able to differentiate between the press and broadcasting since authoritarianism used diverse mechanisms to keep a heterogeneous group of media actors and interests at close complicity.

Second, the traditional authoritarian paradigm undermines the capacity of the media to define (and reach) their own goals and functioning mechanisms. Mexican media, however, did have ample room for maneuver during the authoritarian period so they became the buoyant commercial enterprises they are today. Political control and repression over Mexican media was neither unlimited nor a guarantee of permanency for authoritarian rule. Actually, media played a key role in breaking down authoritarian rule serving as a promoter of new ideas, a forum for public debate and dissidence, as well as a powerful industry (Swanson 2002).

Third, the progressive trend from authoritarianism (control) to democracy (freedom) depicted in theoretical models of state-media relations inflicts particular duties and rights upon both the state and the media. Focusing on key normative principles --such as independence, freedom of expression, participation and association- mass communication in transitions to democracy have automatically been linked to the role of media as the main channel to promote civic engagement and public debate. Thus, media are regarded as key providers of the information that fosters participation and decision-making; as fundamental critics of interference of the state into individual freedom; or as key promoters of public debate and civic participation. Thus, the conceptual underpinning consensus is that the media *should* have a central role in new democracies by keeping people informed about political affairs, by closely examining the exercise of power by the state or other political actors, and by opening the public debate to a diversity of voices (Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Scammell and Semetko 2000a; Bennett and Entman 2001a; Street 2001; Graber 2003b; Gans 2003; Curran 2005).

When focusing on the study of the media as determinants (positive or negative) of new democracies' healthy consolidation and development, normative models of state-media relations tend however, to downplay the role that other actors have in the change of political regime. Drawing on the past dangers imposed by authoritarian and totalitarian rule, the role that the state has in transforming media and communications constrains the analysis to a normative account in which the state-media relation in new democracies *should* be free from the intervention of the state and *should* remain open to different forms of expression, association and political participation.

Nevertheless, this standpoint overlooks the potential influence that the state (particularly the governing elites) imposes over the structure, functioning and performance of the media in new democracies (Randall 1998b; Gunther and Mughan 2000b, Voltmer 2006: Ch14). In these countries, the media is unable to enhance their democratic functions without the explicit support of the state in terms of public security or legislation (Waisbord 2007). For instance, the media's capacity to act as 'watchdog' or 'Fourth Estate' greatly depends on the degree to which other political actors –the governing elites, political parties or civic organizations— have fully abandoned authoritarian behaviours and attitudes Moreover, the media's capacity to act as 'watchdog' or 'Fourth Estate' greatly depends on the degree to which other political actors –the governing elites, political parties or civic organizations— have fully abandoned behaviours and attitudes (O'Donnell *et al.* 1986; Dahl 1989; Gunther *et al.* 1995; Linz and Stepan 1996).

2.3 Mexican authoritarianism and the media: subtle links, permanent chains

An approach to the relationship between the state and the media (the state-press relationship as it is commonly referred in the literature) in new democracies requires then a detailed analysis that is able to depict a long lasting interdependence between governing elites and the media. More common than not, these links subsisted authoritarianism by restraining the capacity of both the new political regime and the media in constructing a relationship into the one depicted by the libertarian model.

In this thesis, Siebert *et al.*'s legacy in the construction of models for state-press relations is useful for highlighting the discrepancies between theoretical abstractions and empirical evidence. Acknowledging these inconsistencies in the study of the Mexican case helps first, to expose the difficulties on applying fix categories to an historical and structural context that greatly differs from the well-known battery of Western cases used

in the construction of these theoretical models. Second, the clash between theory and practice sheds some light on the enduring deficits of the Mexican state-press relationships in terms of democratic performance and also regarding the legacies from the authoritarian past.

Authoritarianism in Mexico has been an intriguing case study for researchers (see for instance: Meyer 1995; Krauze 1997; Escobedo 2000; Reyna 2009; Ugalde 2012). It not only differed from the traditional characteristics of authoritarian rules in the region, such as long military dictatorships, suppressed civil society, controlled media, censorship or highly repressive media regulation. It also lasted longer than other dictatorships around the world. From the late 1920's until the early 1980's, a single political party (the PNR, *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* and its predecessor the PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) was able to dominate the political landscape. It won every presidential election; retained the majority on both chambers of the Congress for almost six decades[10] by allowing certain but limited political pluralism; ruled in most of the federal states at both regional and municipal level[11], and; lead diverse corporate, professional and civic organizations.

Key to the durability of this particular authoritarian rule were the subtle links the authoritarian regime established with the media. 'Mexico's system of media control', writes Lawson (2002: 26), 'was skewed toward less vicious forms of censorship; physical repression, direct government ownership, and official punishment for receiving banned information were all rare'. Mexican authoritarianism was cautious in trying to craft a relationship of intertwined incentives and mutual benefits that were flexible enough to adapt to diverse political conditions and for responding differently to each medium's particular interests and capacity of influence (Fernández Christlieb 1982; Lawson 2002; Trejo Delarbre 2004a, 2004b; Guerrero 2009, 2010a).

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[10] In the 1988 general election the PRI won 265 deputies, the lowest number of representatives in the Lower Chamber for the party ever and just above the 251 required seats to reach an absolute majority in that chamber. In that election the PRI also lost four seats on the Upper Chamber, breaking the monopoly it historically had had over the Senate.

[11] The first electoral victories of an opposition party occurred in 1983 when the PAN won five state capitals: Chihuahua (recovered by the PRI in 1986), Durango, San Luis Potosí, Hermosillo, Guanajuato and a major city, Ciudad Juárez. These defeats were followed by the loss of major cities like Mérida in 1988 and in 1989 the first defeat at the federal level when the PAN won the state government of Baja California.

2.3.1   The press: self-censorship and subordination

Control over the press in the authoritarian Mexico was grounded on structural arrangements and journalistic practices that allowed governing elites to keep close surveillance over the information published. Direct government censorship and repressive measures were very rare since a complex network of mechanisms of collusion with the political regime, rather than strict control, proved to be efficient in nurturing a pro-government and relatively docile press (Grandos Chapa 1986; Riva Palacio 1997; Lawson 2002: Ch3 and 4; Sánchez Ruíz 2005).

Six characteristics of the Mexican press during authoritarian rule nourished the confluence of interest between the regime and the press (Lawson 2002: Ch3 and Ch4; Guerrero 2010a: 237). First, some newspaper owners or editors were close or even part of the political elite. This happened, for instance in the cases of *El Universal, Excelsior* or *Novedades*, three of the oldest newspapers of national circulation that were owned by relatives of government officials or by militants of the ruling party. The close links between pro-government press entrepreneurs and ruling elites not just refrained journalist and editors from criticising the regime. Close ties between the press and the authoritarian regime also ensured unconditional good press for the PRI at least until the late 1960's, when crucial changes within the newsrooms of some establishment newspapers[12], along with the rise of new publications, allowed moderate diversity of viewpoints[13] and started showing the limits of the coalition between press owners and authoritarian rule (Fernández Christlieb 1982; Lawson 2002: Ch5; Sánchez Ruíz 2005; Hughes 2006: Ch4).

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[12] In 1963, Rodrigo de Llano, the director of *Excelsior* since the early 1930's, died. He was replaced by Manuel Becerra, who died few years later (1968). Julio Scherer, a younger and more critical journalist, replaced him. Scherer invited journalists of different academic and political circles to publish in the newspaper. Under this new editorial line, certain criticism to the government was tolerated along with some diversity of viewpoints. As Riva Palacio (1995: 20 quoted by Lawson 2002: 66-67) puts it: 'Scherer introduced a social dimension to coverage of political and economic affairs […] This new coverage significantly changed the parameters of reporting. It began to assign responsibility, [which] led to the identification of those among the authorities who were guilty of fraud, negligence and abuse'. However, *Excelsior*'s mild opening to diversity and regime criticism was brief. In 1976, Scherer was forced to leave the newspaper by a government-orchestrated coup led by the newspaper worker's cooperative.

[13] In the 1960's and 1970's few alternative (but always moderate) left and right wing publications appeared. This is the case of the journal *Política* where famous Mexican academics and writers like Carlos Fuentes, Victor Flores Oléa, Enrique González Pedrero among others, were able to show certain disagreement with the political regime. The journal however survived for less than a decade. Nevertheless, other publications followed its lead such as moderate left-wing publications such as the cultural supplement of *Siempre!*, the newspaper *El Dia*, the journal *¿Por Qué?* or some right-wing oriented newspapers such as the *El Sol de México* and *El Heraldo de México* (Sánchez Ruíz 2005: 407).

Second, for Mexican journalists under authoritarian rule, information was more of a privilege than a right. The government restrained journalist access to government and public information on a selective basis according to the authoritarian regime's needs in terms of news agenda and willingness to tolerate moderate criticism. Information about government policies, presidential announcements or even basic financial data (interest rates, national reserve, foreign debt and so on) were carefully scripted by government communicators (Lawson 2002: Ch3).

For instance, in the mid 1930's the government established a special ministry in charge of media management and government advertising (Mejía Barquera 1988). The main responsibility of this ministry was to distribute government press-releases, official data and figures among different media outlets, according to highly crafted agenda setting and news management strategies. In the 1940's, communication offices within the different ministries replaced this centralized administrative unit (Hernández Lomelí 1996). By the 1970's, these offices were the main channel of contact between newsrooms and the government since there were no clear guidelines or legislation about the access to government information (Guerrero 2009: 239). Over the decades, the guiding principle of these offices remained the same: to use access to official information as a discriminatory tool that praised sympathetic media and penalised criticism and diversity. As a consequence for journalists, a risk-free way to keep their jobs and for newsrooms to keep functioning was to practice what Lawson (2002: 38) calls 'press-release journalism': to simply print government announcements and activities without any changes or attempts to editorialise, follow-up or discuss them.

Third, the press heavily depended on out-sourced mechanisms of distribution and sales that were under the control of the authoritarian regime. For instance, the street vendor's guild through *la unión de vocedores*, the only organization authorized to sale newspapers, tabloids, magazines, comics and other printed materials on the streets and corner posts in the major cities in Mexico, was affiliated to the ruling party, the PRI. Hence, it is suspected that during the authoritarian years the union controlled more than 90% of newsprint circulation and distribution all over the country, while supermarkets and other small retail stores were allowed to sell the rest (Aguilar and Terrazas 1996: Ch1). In fact, academic research distinguishes the Mexican authoritarian rule as a 'corporatist form of authoritarianism' (Reyna and Weinert 1977: xiii). It was a system of political representation that at the same time coordinated different social sectors (peasants, workers, military and a general middle-class sector) and strengthened the

control of state over these groups. In contrast to other dictatorships on the continent grounded on military power and massive repression, Mexican political elites relied on elections and popular support. Far from being democratic, these electoral processes were crafted mechanisms that ensured continuity. Popular support was thus negotiated and ultimately achieved by a complex system intertwined with political interests and benefits that linked together different unions (such as peasants, teachers, general practitioners, electricians, communications technicians) to the political regime through party membership and pro-government vote (Reyna and Weinert 1977; Loaeza 2008). Newspapers salesmen were part of this complex partisan strategy (Aguilar and Terrazas 1996; Guerrero 2010a: 240).

Fourth, the import and national production of newsprint was also under the control of the PRI. In 1935, in response to a disproportionate increase of prices at the national market, president Cardenas created PIPSA (the Spanish acronym for *Provedora Industrial Panamericana S.A.*) as a temporal measure for importing, producing and distributing paper to national publications at subsidised prices. Over the decades the outcome of this arrangement was twofold. On the one hand, the regime retained the capacity to withdraw the supply of newsprint as a potential, but common mechanism to penalise criticism or bad press coverage[14]. On the other, Mexican newspapers and magazines traditionally have had reduced circulation due to low literacy rates in the country. These publications actually benefited from subsidised newsprint prices, favourable long-run credits or even bills that were never issued. Not surprisingly, in the late 1960's, when PIPSA's legal mandate expired, it was in these publications' interests to plea for its persistence (Lawson 2002: 33-34; Guerrero 2009: 239-240).

Fifth, advertising was the main source of revenue for the Mexican press. Even when it is very difficult to get accurate figures, academics suspect that government advertising prevailed over commercial inserts.[15] For authoritarian rule, advertising was a

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[14] This is not to say that the regime prevented itself from using PIPSA as a repressive mechanism of control. The monopoly of newsprint was used, but in combination with other mechanisms of control and only in very specific cases such as the weekly *Presente* in the early 1950s; *Política* a Cuban-subsidized publication in the early 1960's; *Order* an anarchist publication in 1969; *El Norte* in the late 1970's and *Impacto* for a couple of months in 1976 (Lawson 2002: 33).

[15] Guerrero (2009: 240) stresses that it is difficult to calculate government expenditure in public advertising before the 1980's since the government did not keep (or disclose) these records. However, some authors like Cole (1975) and Bohamann (1986) show that official publicity cost three times the rate of commercial advertising. In the light of this data it is suspected that some publications with very low circulation rates (or even without readers) survived thanks to this governmental support.

common and an effective way to ensure positive news coverage. It came in two kinds: *gacetillas* and paid advertising. The latter refers to government advertisements that were sold at disproportionate high rates, while the former implies the publication of official editorials and press releases as headlines or columns without a clear notice to the reader that this information was a paid insertion (Keenan 1997). Both mechanisms were commonly used to promote a positive image of the regime and to selectively channelled government resources to favourable publications. Official publicity became then the mainstay of the majority of newspapers, weekly publications and magazines during the authoritarian years since it represented more than half of their advertising revenues, given that the PRI was one of the top advertisers in the country (Lawson 2002: 31). In the end, the press high dependence of the Mexican press on this income rendered it extremely vulnerable to the government's manipulation.

Sixth, over the decades, Mexican journalists got used to traditional corrupt practices. Bribes, special rewards, subsides on utilities[16] or public appointments for media owners, as well as economic gratifications (commonly known as *el sobre* or *el chayo*) and the appointment of journalists as government communicators functioned as key mechanisms to keep Mexican press tied to the authoritarian regime. It was actually the combination of these corruptive practices that proved to be more effective. When, for instance, subsidies on utilities were not a sufficient incentive for media owners to enhance pro-government journalism, buying off journalists and editors was a direct and more effective way to encourage positive coverage.' Corruption of the rank and the file', writes Lawson (2002: 37), 'thus helped to ensure official influence over the news media'.

In sum, the incentives that Mexican authoritarian rule endowed to media owners and journalists in exchange of positive news coverage touched every aspect of the press' structure and functioning: its finances, sales, distribution, means of production, personnel and sources of information. During those years, authoritarian surveillance over the press, as the authoritarian or totalitarian theoretical model of state-media

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[16] The Authoritarian regime made available to newspapers owners preferential electricity, phone and water rates --all state owned services-- as well as considerable discounts over income or county taxes. Press circulation in Mexico has traditionally been restricted by low rates of literacy and a political culture that privileges the television over the press when gathering information about politics (Puente 1962; Argudín 1987; Orme 1997). During the authoritarian regime, an effective way to increase revenues was to accept these utilities 'discounts' that had a direct diminishing effect on the fixed costs of production. Contrasting to the informal subsidy that was placed on paper, taking advantage of these 'grants' was optional since media owners could choose to pay their bills. Nevertheless, they were equally difficult to refuse. Not only did they represent great economic advantages, but also it was practically impossible to subsist only by relying on readers' commitment or circulation rates.

relation suggests, was indeed tight and strict. However, throughout the decades these mechanisms of control became essential traits of the newspapers and journalism in Mexico. It thus became difficult to recognise the state's influence and manipulation in what at first glance appeared as relatively autonomous newsrooms and profitable publications. Collusion instead of control benefited both the political regime and the press. The former ensured the support and positive news coverage it needed to legitimize its rule, while the latter was able to subsist throughout long decades of economic turmoil and low circulation rates.

2.3.2   *Broadcasting: strategic licensing and lax statutory regulations*

The Mexican authoritarian rule applied a slightly different set of collusion mechanisms to keep broadcasters at close complicity. As in the case of the press, the main goal remained to keep close links with the industry (owners and workers) so that it was possible to restrain broadcasters' influence in communicating politics. Nevertheless, since it is the state that has ultimate control over the spectrum and technology that make broadcasting possible, the authoritarian regime felt it was unnecessary to craft a very complex strategy of incentives similar to the one it had been using towards the press.

In the case of broadcasting, the authoritarian regime applied a quite simple strategy: concessions would be only granted to loyal supporters. Over the years, however, this practice turned quite complicated since broadcasters grew into powerful moguls determined to defend their own political and commercial interests (Guerrero 2009: Ch2). The regime had therefore to carefully craft a mutual beneficial relationship flexible enough for adapting to both the broadcasters' demands and the governing elites' needs in terms of legitimacy and political support. This implied at least three strategic actions.

Firstly, the authoritarian regime carefully planned a media system that kept broadcasters at close complicity. This implied, for instance, the granting of the new industry with the technical and economic support they needed for developing as profitable private firms. From the beginning of the 1920's, Mexican radio adopted a private commercial model following the American example. Generally speaking, this model promoted healthy private media industries financed by private capital or strong business owned by wealthy families that in the Mexican case were traditionally linked to the regime through family or friendship bonds. The first radio frequencies in the

country were then commissioned to industrial groups such as the Mexican branches of General Electric, RCA/NBC, CBS and Ford Co. --through national entrepreneurs since by law the use of the electromagnetic spectrum, was reserved for Mexicans or Mexican firms--; to la *Cigarrera el Buen Tono*, funded by French capital; or to wealthy families such as the Milmos that owned shares in diverse business like banks, railways, mines and soap (Fernández Christlieb 1982: Ch2; García 2008: 184-186).

By the early 1950's, when the first television emissions were launched, Mexican radio was a strong private, business-oriented and a well-organized industry able to stand by its commercial interests (Guerrero 2009: Ch2). In the absence of a public media project (see below) the authoritarian regime was hence clear that it would follow a similar private and commercial model for the emerging media outlet. Therefore, the Mexican broadcasting system was grounded on two key notions: (1) the commercial exploitation of mass communication; (2) an intertwined relationship between media entrepreneurs and the governing elites.

Secondly, a series of legal and regulatory frameworks served as control mechanisms (Guerrero 2009: Ch1). For instance, one of the first regulations on broadcasting (the 1926 Law on Electric Communications) prohibited 'the broadcast of news or messages whose content challenge the security of the state, the public peace and order, the good manners, the laws of the country, the proper use of language, or may cause scandal or attack in any form the constituted government' (Law on Electric Communications 1926: Article 12; translated in Guerrero 2009: 42). Subsequent media policy initiatives (like the 1931, 1932 or 1939 Laws on General Communication Ways) and statutory regulations (such as the 1937 Ruling on Commercial, Cultural, Scientific or Amateur Broadcasting, or the 1942 Ruling on General Communication Ways) included legal restrictions on political information or mechanisms for governmental 'technical supervisions' as key resources for both banning criticism against authoritarian rule and for reminding broadcasters that the government reserved the prerogative to cancel their concessions (Fernández Christlieb 1982: Ch2; Guerrero 2009: Ch1). The 1950's regulations that ruled the first television concessions mirrored these legal restrictions on political information and laid the groundwork for the 1960 Federal Law on Radio and TV that ruled the relationship between the state and broadcasters without major changes for more that half a century (Osorio 1996; Biebrich and Spíndola 2008: 198-214).

Thirdly, the regime was cautious to select the businessmen that in the early 1920's would own the radio and in the early 1950's the TV. As mentioned, the first radio emissions were granted to wealthy entrepreneurial members of traditionally pro-government families.[17] Following this scheme and as seen in Figure 2.1 below, in the early 1950's the first three television frequencies were commissioned to Rómulo O'Farrill, a press tycoon and a close friend of president Miguel Alemán (1946-1952); to Emilio Azcárraga Vidaurreta, a well-experienced radio entrepreneur, and to Guillermo González Camarena who in the 1940's had invented the tri-chromatic system that made colour television possible. These TV entrepreneurs were close enough to the political elite for guaranteeing unconditional support. In exchange, the regime buttressed the industry through technical support, tax exemptions and preferential utility rates that promoted TV as a buoyant entertainment industry. Judging by its experience with radio, the authoritarian regime was thus confident that a commercial and highly concentrated television industry would be a strong ally.[18]

This was actually the case of Televisa. As shown in the figure below (Figure 2.1), this powerful company was the product of the merger between the three original TV concessionaries. By 1973, it became the most important TV enterprise in the country, virtually without competition until the mid-1990s, when the government sold its TV assets to TV Azteca that became the second commercial TV network in the country and

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[17] This was the case of Luis and Raul Azcárraga Viduarreta who in 1922 received one of the first radio concessions in Mexico City and of his brother Emilio, who by the 1930's owned XEW, one of the most important commercial radio stations in the capital city. By the 1940's the dominance of the Azcárragas in radio spread all over the country and by the 1970's they became the only owners of Televisa, one of the biggest broadcasting corporations in Latin America. The Azcárragas belonged to the entrepreneurial groups located mainly in the central part of Mexico. In the coming decades, the family nourished a close relationship with the authoritarian regime. In return, writes Guerrero (2009: 85), the family 'obtained enormous benefits for developing their business'.

[18] Thorough out the authoritarian decades, Mexican broadcasting, especially TV, grew as a strong, powerful and highly concentrated industry. In 1955, a few years after their first transmissions, O'Farrill and González Camarena decided to joint the Azcárraga's company in what it would become *Telesistemas Mexicianos* (TM, operating three channels at national level: 2, 4, and 5). In the late 1960's, two additional concessions were granted to counterbalance TM's dominance: *Televisión Independiente de México* (TI) was granted channel 8; the *Corporación Mexicana de Radio y Televisión* received channel 13, and *Telecadena* received a couple of concessions to operate some regional and local channels. Nevertheless, TM was compensated. In 1969, the Azcárrga's group received the only concession that was granted to transmit cable television in the country. In 1972, TM merged with TI into the powerful consortium *Televisión Via Satelite*, Televisa. In the following years, Televisa became the most important television corporation in the country, strengthening the Azcárragas' dominance in radio and experimenting with some editorial products that eventually became successful publications (Fernández Christlieb 1982; Trejo Delarbre 1985; Miller and Darling 1997; Sánchez Ruíz 2005; Gutiérrez Rentería 2007).

also a very powerful media conglomerate (Gutiérrez Rentería 2007; Vidal 2008: Ch3 and Ch6).

Figure 2.1   **TV original concessions and further mergers**
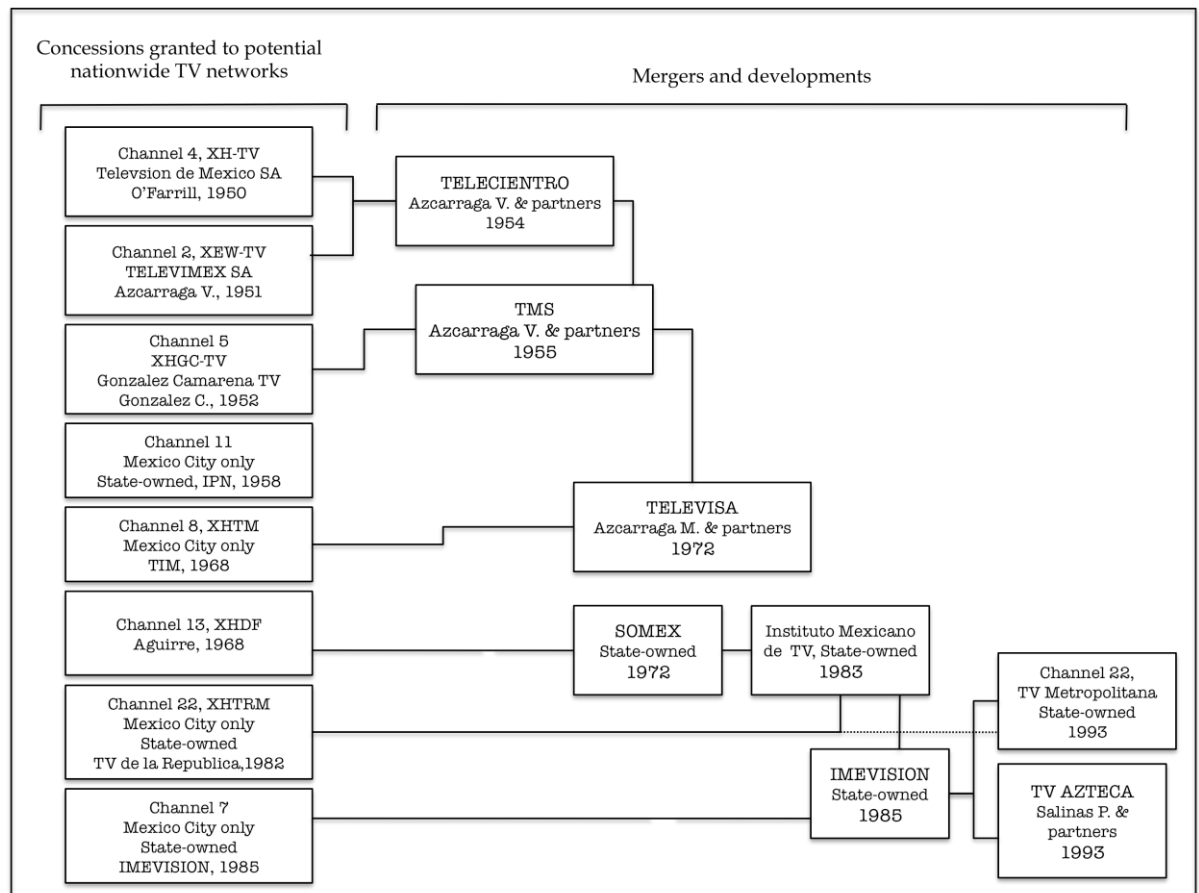
Elaborated with information from: Fernández Christlieb 1982; Trejo Delarbre 1985; Miller and Darling 1997; Sánchez Ruíz 2005; Gutiérrez Rentería 2007.

To recapitulate, the authoritarian regime in Mexico nourished a close relationship with broadcasters which was guided by its experience with the press. Over the coming decades the different PRI administrations strengthened these bonds through a confluence of interests between broadcasting magnates and governing elites. The regime offered the industry juicy incentives such as quasi-permanent concessions, market concentration, tax exemptions, technical support and lax regulatory measures. In exchange, broadcasters granted the legitimacy and political support the regime requested through positive and self-censored news coverage. This 'mutual exchange of support' (Guerrero 2009: 46) greatly diverts from the one-sided statutory mechanisms of control traditionally pictured in the authoritarian model of state-media relationships (see for instance: Siebert *et al.* 1956; Mughan and Gunther 2000). In addition, it also highlights

the need to reconsider the possibilities of achieving the free, civic-oriented and mutually vigilant interaction pictured by the libertarian model. Both models downplay the interest that both the Mexican governing elites and the Mexican media have had on preserving the benefits they have long received from each other.

2.3.3   The weakest link: public service media

The indifference of Mexican authoritarianism regarding a public service media system greatly contrasts with all the effort and strategic mechanisms of collusion the political regime set up to keep commercial media as a close ally. Two intrinsic aspects of the relationship between the authoritarian rule and the media account for the lack of a public media broadcast system in Mexico.

First, based on its experience with the press and then with broadcasters, the PRI assumed that it was not necessary to own media outlets to ensure political support throughout positive news coverage. The authoritarian regime had owned a newspaper of national circulation for several decades. However, nourishing a close relationship with journalists, editors and owners had proved to be more effective both financially and politically. It not only ensured that the government had the control over the news agenda, since more common than not newspapers published what the regime asked them to. It also gave the impression of plurality. In the end, the regime received support from diverse privately owned publications and not just from partisan or officially government-funded press.

From the early years of broadcasting, the approach to radio and TV was then very similar to the one applied towards the press. Government-owned broadcasting was dispensable since commercial radio stations and TV channels remained supportive of the regime and promoted a positive image of it. Over the decades the regime took some attempts to strengthen public radio broadcasting or even to launch public TV channels. However, these public broadcasting experiments failed mainly because they were conceived as convenient mechanisms to pressure media moguls rather than as a consistent and long-term project for a public service media system.

Second, media owners (especially broadcasters) continually reinforced the indifference of the authoritarian regime for a public service media system. Since the PRI intermittently used public media projects as mechanisms of pressure, broadcasters were

openly and systematically against these initiatives.[19] For media moguls such as Emilio Azcárraga (owner of Televisa), the possibility of a public service broadcasting opened the risk of a more active role for the government in the industry, especially in terms of regulation, competition or even regarding programme content. Broadcasters were then clear about the need to keep the government's involvement in the industry to a minimum. This resolution, however, came with certain compromises. The industry had to constantly endorse its loyalty and support to the regime through positive news coverage. In addition, broadcasters had to find subtle ways to protect their economic interests from a potential direct intervention of the state, especially in terms of tighter controls over taxation or advertising (Guerrero 2009: 83). In the long-term, mechanisms of pressure such as the National Chamber of the Radio and Television Industry had proved to be effective since the authoritarian regime had declined on different public media projects and restrained major changes to the incipient media policy of the 1960's or the lax fiscal obligations for the industry imposed in the 1970's (Guerrero 2009: Ch2).

Put simply, the authoritarian regime in Mexico considered a public service media system unnecessary. From time to time, different PRI administrations revived the idea of a public service broadcasting. These initiatives (often failed or unfinished attempts) were more a product of particular political contexts rather than a deliberate effort to promote state-media relationships closed to the one envisioned by Siebert *et al.* (1956) in their social responsibility model. On the contrary, the random possibility of a regime's direct participation in broadcasting or a government's more active role in media policy served as a warning for media moguls. The state had ultimate control over the

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[19] A good example of the struggle between the authoritarian regime and broadcasters over the possibility of a public service media system are the attempts in the early 1970's to launch a public TV channel. After the 1968 repressed students' mobilization (that for some analysts represented one of the first ruptures of the 'perfect dictatorship'), the regime tried to recover certain control over broadcasting. In 1971, the state acquired a TV channel (Channel 13) and in 1972, it announced the launch of *Televisión Rural* (Rural Television, shortly afterwards renamed *Televisión de la República Mexicana*, this is the Television of the Mexican Republic to emphasize the authoritarian regime's attempt to impulse a nationwide public television project). In response, private broadcasters launched an advertising campaign to emphasize the benefits of commercial media for both economic and political reasons. As Guerrero (2009: 79) puts it: 'the position of broadcasters was one of reinforcing their loyalties to the regime and renewing, in closer terms, their compromise with the government's political interests, but at the same time they made clear that any attempt to alter the private commercial model would encounter serious resistance'. The result was the 1973 Ruling of the Federal Law of Radio and Television, which renewed a private broadcast model yet gave the regime certain control mechanisms over commercial programming such as Article 9 that authorised the Ministry of Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*) to supervise radio and TV content; or Article 36 that forbid all contents that attempted to go against national security, public pace and order, but without being clear about what these exclusions meant in practical terms.

electromagnetic spectrum that made broadcasting possible. Authoritarian rule could always choose to nationalize media assets, just as other Latin American dictatorships did to ensure complete control over mass communication. Aware of this latent risk, throughout the long decades of the authoritarian regime Mexican broadcasters had to constantly convince the governing elites about the benefits of a commercial media system such as loyalty, political support through extensive positive news coverage and a buoyant industry.

2.4   Democracy and media liberalization: failed aspirations

In contrast to other dictatorships in Latin America, the authoritarian regime in Mexico did not end abruptly. It was rather a slow process of political liberalization: erosion of the regime's legitimacy; the breakdown of an authoritarian political culture; the growth of opposition parties; a gradual mobilization of civil society, and; electoral reforms driven by progressive changes in the economy and the society (see for instance: Silva-Herzong 1999: Part II; Merino 2003; Loaeza 2008).

Malleable, as it was traditionally understood and managed during the long years of PRI rule, the state-media relationship steadily adapted to these changing conditions. In 2000, when for the first time in Mexican history an opposition party won a presidential election, Mexican media had, as Lawson (2002: 3) puts it: 'escaped, evaded, or resisted official control […] and Mexico's Fourth Estate was firmly established' (p. 91). This transformation, however, was not just a by-product of democratization, as traditional research on state-media relationships would have expected. Aside from a broader political transformation, media liberalization in Mexico was driven by changes on editorial lines, economic conditions, market competition, and to a lesser extent, the opening of the political process to opposition parties (Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009; McPherson 2010).

Firstly, by the early 1970's, unconditional positive news coverage for the political regime and media self-censorship started showing its limits. For the Mexican media, it was simply non-possible to carry on with 'selective silence' (Lawson 2002: 50) about critical moments such as the 1968 students' mobilization, the early 1980's economic crisis and the subsequent recession, the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City and the contested presidential election in 1988, let alone the killing of the PRI presidential candidate or the irruption of the Zapatista movement in the mid 1990's.

The magnitude of these events required some sort of acknowledgement in the public debate. Moderate critical journalism was also necessary to legitimize both the media and authoritarian rule. For instance, negative connotations about Mexican journalism such as *prensa vendida* (bribed press) clashed with the editorial ideals of some publications such as *Proceso, La Jornada, El Financiero* or *El Economista*. Within this new print media a small cohort of journalists, editors and press owners started experimenting with new journalistic practices and market strategies to gain reputation, attract readership and be financially viable (Lawson 2002: Part 2; Hughes 2006: Part II). These alternative editorial lines included niche advertising, targeted readership, controversial headlines or exposure of competing factions within the ruling party. Slowly, independent journalism became a comparative advantage over the establishment of print media. To a certain extent, these publications were also necessary for the regime to maintain the illusion of plurality and free-press (Alder 1993; Guerrero 2010a: 251-256). In the end, traditional pro-government press continued to dominate both circulation and revenue figures. For instance, it was not until the late 1990's when newspapers like *Reforma* or *Milenio* represented serious competition for publications of long tradition like *Excelsior* or *El Universal.*

Secondly, the economic crisis of the early 1980's and the long-term neo-liberal policies of the 1990's (free market, privatization, shrinking of the public sector) forced both the political regime and the media to adjust their relationship to budget cuts, new market conditions or unsustainable subsides and protectionist practices. For instance, the Salinas administration (1988-1994) cut off certain privileges for media owners such as subsidised utilities, tax exemptions (like council tax or social security) or even cheap newsprint. In the same spirit, this government mandated a minimum wage for journalists and restricted some of the benefits they were used to such as free accommodation and stipends on presidential trips, gifts or salary compensations (Lawson 2002: 76).

Furthermore, in the absence of a serious commitment with a public service media system, the authoritarian regime sold IMEVISIÓN, one of the last state-owned broadcasting bastions (see Figure 2.1 above). What followed was fierce competition between Televisa, the incumbent broadcasting conglomerate and the new commercial network, TV Azteca. Although the latter was not in a position to challenge the decades-old commercial TV quasi-monopoly, the main asset in dispute was rating figures. These numbers were closely linked to advertising revenues. Thus, TV Azteca introduced new

formats and content to programmes and slots of greater audience such as the world famous Mexican *telenovelas* (soap-operas) and mid-day or late-night news editions. This strategy proved to be effective. By the late 1990's, TV Azteca had quadrupled its market value and represented itself as a serious competitor for Televisa (Vidal 2008: Ch3; Guerrero 2010a: 262-273).

Competition had actually proved to be a powerful incentive for the liberalization of print media and radio. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, new publications fiercely competed for a restricted number of readers and advertisers. Specialized articles, targeted readership, controversial headlines and especially financial independence from public advertising made it possible to contest traditional pro-government editorial lines (Lawson 2002: Ch5; Hughes 2006: Ch4; McPherson 2011: 74-95 and Ch4).

Something similar happened within radio. Different networks started experimenting with new programming, especially editorialized news programs and talk-radio hosts that clashed with traditional recorded music broadcasting. These innovations proved to be highly popular and thus an attractive incentive for advertisers. Certain talk-shows and anchormen became magnets of new journalism practices (like interviewing, live debates, critical news coverage and reportage featuring investigation and analysis), high ratings and advertising revenues (Guerrero 2009: Ch4, 2010a: 256-262).

Thirdly, political liberalization also forced the media to redefine their approach to opposition parties, electoral processes and an increasing number of voices in the public debate. Not only did opposition parties win more seats in Congress, municipalities and governments at the state level, but also the different electoral reforms mandated equal and eventually fair access to broadcasting for all political parties.

All in all, the liberalization of the Mexican media has been more a function of market competition incentives and continuous political reforms rather than the result of civic struggles for participation (Guerrero 2009). In addition, the commitment to a vigorous Fourth State has been encouraged more by the financial benefits it delivers rather than by a strong conviction with the existence of free, robust and accurate news coverage.

In print media, new editorial lines, market competition and gradual changes in journalistic norms that started in the late 1960's resulted in what Hughes (2006: 10) calls a 'hybrid media system'. This is a complex combination of civic (assertive, independent and politically diverse), market-driven (stirred by ratings and advertising figures) and

adaptive (struggling between past out-dated mindsets and new beliefs) publications that represent the prospect of a vibrant and fully free press in the country (Hughes 2006: 14).

In broadcasting, pluralism in news coverage took longer. In the 1980's, radio entrepreneurs started experimenting with new programme formats and contents that attracted listeners and with them advertisers. By the 1990's, these practices have resulted in both a more competitive advertising market and the consolidation of more open spaces for public debate and government scrutiny. As a result of this trend, TV generally lagged behind. It was not until the late 1990's, when market competition forced TV broadcasters to redefine their business strategies, including the news coverage of the government and most importantly of opposition parties. Democracy turned out to be, as Televisas's chairman once defined it: 'a great costumer' (*La Jornada*, November 25th 1998).

Facing these new conditions, a state-media relationship that was once characterized by collusion and mutual benefits gave way to a complex interaction of market incentives and legal prerogatives meant to ensure access of all political parties to mass communication.

2.4.1   *The limits to media liberalization*

Documenting the role of the media in democratizing Mexico is, however, a daunting task. Some academics see the opening of Mexican media (especially the press) as a detonator of crucial changes on public debate and civic participation (see for instance: Lawson 2002: Ch8; Wallis 2004; Woldenberg 2004). From this perspective, greater public awareness about government abuses (corruption, electoral fraud, repression, human right violations, involvement in drug-trafficking) and radically different styles of reporting contributed to slowly erode the legitimacy of authoritarian rule, propelled public scrutiny and forced the governing elites to respond to new demands in terms of public information and accountability.

However, a second strand of research stresses the internal and contextual challenges the Mexican media faces in consolidating as a Fourth Estate (Hughes 2006, 2008; Guerrero 2009, 2010a; McPherson 2010, 2012). Along with other economic and social contextual factors (such as constant economic hazards, low literacy rates and a political culture that still privileges corporatist and paternalistic practices), market concentration and high entry costs for new competitors inhibit media pluralism and

perpetuate authoritarian practices such as an inappropriate degree of collaboration between politicians and the media.

This chapter has shown that Mexican broadcasting, especially television, functions under a strict concentration of the market through two commercial groups: Televisa and TV Azteca. These two networks control close to 95% of the television market in Mexico, making it the most concentrated media system in Latin America (Hughes 2006; Vidal 2008: Ch3). Moreover, both companies extend their influence to other commercial activities and financial conglomerates. To some extent, the cross-ownership and intricate financial networks shield the market from competition; an ingredient that as seen in this chapter, proved to be crucial in breaking down the old establishment broadcasting system. In print media something similar happens. Judging by the number and the diversity of publications at first glance, the Mexican press might appear open and competitive. Nevertheless, when it comes to newspapers of national circulation and consistent readership, the numbers of media owners come down again to few commercial groups of long lasting tradition and strong presence in other commercial markets (Vidal 2008: Ch5).

Additional constraints for a vibrant Fourth Estate come from inside the media. More common than not, Mexican newsrooms struggle to overcome past authoritarian journalistic practices, archaic organisational structures and management strategies (Hughes 2006: Ch9; McPherson 2010: Ch4, 2012). As part of the long lasting tradition of media conglomerates of, some media owners, editors and journalists are still trapped in authoritarian assumptions or out-off date mindsets. For instance, press and television newsrooms still fight against inertial corruptive practices such as compromising relationships with governing elites in exchange for information or even juicy advertising contracts. While some media owners and editors support more autonomous, assertive, and politically diverse forms of journalism, others are still more concerned with high circulation rates and economic security (Trejo Delarbre 2004b; Bravo *et al.* 2011).

In face of these conditions, a third tract of literature critically assesses the actual capacity of Mexican media to translate the change of political regime into more accurate, professionalised and assertive journalism (Trejo Delarbre 2001; Sánchez Ruíz 2005; Guerrero 2010a; McPherson 2012). This approach sees media as an increasingly sophisticated mechanism of control that is capable of both enhancing civic participation and restraining it through political bias and market-oriented practices (Trejo Delarbre 2004a). From this stance, broadcasters for instance, appear more open to plural and

balanced news coverage, but are keen to use the prominent role of mass communication in politics to satisfy their own market goals and political agendas (García 2008: Part I, Ch3; Juárez 2009; Guerrero 2010a: 262-272). Mexican media moguls still prioritize their own particular interests such as financial and economic stability over their public or social commitment (Guerrero 2010b). Their watchdog activities, promotion of political competition or even the inclusion of other voices into the public debate are more appealing today than they were during the authoritarian regime not purely because democracy demands it, but because these practices also render high ratings and revenue figures (Guerrero 2009).

On balance, the media's form and functioning in the new political regime falls short of the expected performance in democracies. As growing comparative research proves, however, Mexico is not an exceptional case (see for instance: Randall 1998a; Hydén *et al.* 2002; Romano and Bromley 2005; Voltmer 2006, 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Dyczok and Gaman-Golutvina 2009; Trappel and Meier 2011). Media all around the world, in old and new democracies, struggle to fulfil normative paradigms that the more research enquires about their theoretical origins and practical viability, the more academics hesitate to regard them as a list of requirements or guarantees for democracy and free media (Mughan and Gunther 2000; Curran 2002: Ch8; Hallin and Mancini 2012).

Contrary to what traditional models on state-media relationships anticipate (for instance, that media transformation is a by-product of broader liberalization in the political system), the Mexican case shows first, that the opening in the media was not solely the result of political pluralism, and second, that democratization did not guarantee media diversity. Media liberalization in the country was a result of changes on the market rather than a particular struggle for civic participation or pluralism in the public debate (Guerrero 2009, 2010b). This transformation has led to the concentration of media ownership, especially TV, on the few commercial groups that do not hesitate to use the prominent role of mass communication in politics to advance their own economic or political agendas (Trejo Delarbre and Vega 2011).

2.5 The other side of the coin: the role of governing elites in building a new relation with the media

How do the governing elites respond to these changes on both the structure and functioning of the media? What theoretical tools are available to shed some light on how the new political regime conducts its relations with the media? Comparing to what

is known about media transformation in Mexico, academic research has rendered little evidence about how authoritarian rule and most significantly, how the new governing elites faced these changes. For some researchers like Lawson (2002: 178), it seems that the liberalization of media 'occurred despite harassment and resistance from the old regime at all levels of government and in all spheres of political life'. Somehow the authoritarian regime was unable to restrain the gradual changes on media markets and journalistic norms described in the previous section of this chapter. From this stance, media transformation escaped the controls of authoritarian rule. By the late 1990's, media freedom and autonomy had gone far beyond what the regime considered acceptable (see also: Wallis 2004; Woldernberg 2004).

For others, like Guerrero (2010a: 274), the old mechanisms of media control crumbled without being replaced by alternative rules of the game. In the author's words: 'an authentic *laissez faire*, *laissez passer* prevailed, this benefited the media, especially the press, but at the same time resulted in a state unable to redefine the public interest in terms of broadcasting'. The uncertainty about the grounds for a new state-media relationship allowed media owners, especially broadcasting moguls to advance their own commercial interests to serious detriment of a pluralist and independent Fourth Estate (for a similar argument see: Trejo Delarbre 2004b: Ch7; Merino 2010; Bravo *et al.* 2011).

These divergent approaches to analysing the state-media relationship at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico point at the fact that at first sight, the Fox government (the first PAN administration after the PRI rule) was not clear about the kind of media it was going to endorse to strengthen democracy. It obstructed comprehensive media reform (see chapter Five) and gave some hints of an inappropriate degree of collaboration between politicians and the media (Gutiérrez López 2008; Esteinou and Alva 2009). The overall scenario might be different from the authoritarian era since president Fox definitively faced political pluralism and media autonomy. Yet, the outcome greatly differs from the one envisioned by Siebert *et al.* in their libertarian or social responsibility models. Opacity in the renewal of broadcasting concessions; market concentration on few media conglomerates and unresistant governing elites to media's commercial interests point at a relation of complicity, interdependence and mutual benefits similar to the one that characterized Mexican authoritarianism (Guerrero 2010a, 2010b).

This predominant stance, however, does not explain why or how exactly the new political regime in Mexico enhanced a relationship with the media that at first

glance, resembles the one perpetuated by authoritarian rule. Two main reasons stand for the lack of academic research about the role that the new governing elites in Mexico have played (or not) in building a new relationship with the media. First, as seen in this chapter, traditional models and assumptions about the state-media relationships in old and new democracies assume these entities as independent actors. Research, therefore, has held very securely to a normative and ideal type of democracy that links the government to public opinion via the mass media. The searchlight is thus, placed on the media as the Fourth Estate that counterbalances the power of the governing elites, as the vigilant 'watchdog' of the healthy functioning of democracy, or as the 'public sphere' that enhances political participation and civic engagement. The role that political actors have in these processes is relegated to the shadows.

Democratization studies, however, have thoroughly documented for instance, the role governing elites play in consolidating democracy 'as the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan 1996: 6). Before considering themselves consolidated democracies, these new political regimes are expected to allow mechanisms for promoting civic participation, enforcing the rule of law and guaranteeing open contestation over the control of government (O'Donnell *et al.* 1986; Dahl 1989; Gunther *et al.* 1995). From this perspective, democratic transitions cannot be completed unless rulers are committed to strengthening democratic institutions, practices and values. Thus functioning democracies imply the emergence of behavioural, attitudinal and constitutional dimensions that ensure the development of a free and lively civil society (Linz and Stepan 1996).

Nevertheless, what precisely is missing from media studies on new democracies is some clarification about for instance, the structural or regulatory aspects that shape rulers' (governing elites) behaviour towards the media. The omission is even more puzzling when research on media and new democracies more common than not concludes that, as Voltmer (2006: 254) puts it: 'the extent to which the media are able to actively shape the political process or, on the contrary, remain in the subordinate position of being subjected to the interests of the political elites depends on the effectiveness of the new political institutions' (see also: Randall 1998b; Gunther and Mughan 2000b; Hallin and Mancini 2004a: Ch9; Lugo-Ocando 2008b).

Second, it seems that beyond the broad categorization of political regimes and media systems discussed in this chapter (authoritarianism *vs.* democracy), research that

links together politics, governing elites and the media lies in a theoretical vacuum. As Rivers and his colleagues (1975: 217) argued decades ago:

> The study of government and the media is a paradox. When a teacher attempts to summarize the research, he or she finds large amounts: many studies of government –elections, characteristics of officials and their performance- and many studies on media content or of the characteristics of media practitioners. It may seem that one is surrounded by research. But when a person tries to bring together studies of the government with the studies of the media, one finds great gaps.

At present, this argument remains valid (Canel and Sanders 2010). Academics do look at the government and its relationship with the media from very diverse analytical perspectives (especially from political communication research). These studies render relevant accounts on its different components such as actors, goals, practices or outcomes (Canel and Sanders 2012; Sanders and Canel 2013a). However, they do not offer a holist approach to this interaction.[20]

Perhaps the problem begins with merging two concepts that in the literature acquire several connotations. The generic term 'the government' receives several conceptions. It might refer to a sole governing entity at a specific level of government, such as the executive branch for example; or it could lead to a set of public institutions focusing on their administrative functions, such as the government machinery of communications. Moreover, it could also be used to point out specific public offices like the Prime Minister's or the president's. When dealing with different kinds of political systems it could also refer to certain governing practices of the ruling party or administration, for example the authoritarian or the democratic regime. Hence, the diversity of uses and meanings of 'the government' makes it harder to identify what exactly research on the government and the media is addressing. Similarly, communication and media studies, as Lasswell (1948) famously pictured them, involves a range of diverse aspects about 'who, says what, in which channel, to whom, with what

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[20] According to Garnett (1997b: 14) this seems to be a consequence of merging two areas of studies (public administration and communication theory) that have long struggled to find their own theoretical grounds. While public administration studies share blurred boundaries with political science or economics, communication studies in the public sector commonly focus on government communication as a managerial or electoral tool. Garnett (1997b: 14) develops this argument as follows: 'Because public administration and communication are highly interdisciplinary and a relatively new field of inquiry, both have undergone intense soul searching about their status and identity […] Both have wrestled with the issue of professionalization and professional identity and have sought to demonstrate their intellectual rigor and practical value. It is understandable that public administrative communication has suffered this double identity crisis'.

effect'. This area of studies renders thus several connotations, meanings and academic approaches that focus on diverse aspects of the communication process: the sender, the message, the channel, audiences or the effects of communication.

As a consequence, researchers approach the study of the government and its relationship with the media variously and indistinctively as a management function (of personnel, information or the media), as range of different strategic tools (news management, advertising or public relations) or as a style of leadership (see for instance studies on how the US government relates to the media to communicate with citizens: Han 2001; Kumar 2007; Kernell 2007; or how the British prime minister does it: Bartle and Griffiths 2001; Seymour-Ure 2003; Ingham 2003: Jones 2004).

When trying, for instance, to describe why and how governments relate with the media, leading scholars and practitioners offer rather wide and complex definitions on government communication (see for instance: Graber 1992, 2003a; Garnett 1997; Phillis 2004; Gregory 2006; Fairbanks *et al.* 2007: 23; Vos and Westerhoudt 2008: 18; Fisher *et al.* 2010).

Sanders and her colleagues' work (Canel and Sanders 2010; Sanders *et al.* 2011) exemplify this point. The authors (Canel and Sanders 2010: 2) argue that government communication is about: 'the *role, practice, aims* and *achievements* of communication as it takes place in and by *public* institution(s) whose primary end is *executive* in the service of a *political* rationale' (emphasis from the original). Here, government communication is clearly a vast topic. It involves matters of agency (role), performance (practice), purpose (aims) and planning (achievements), but also aspects of behaviour (executive) and impact ('in service of political rationale'). On their own, each of these characteristics of government communication and how they involve the media require a particular conceptual and methodological approach. Plus, it is difficult to find conceptual frameworks from a single academic perspective addressing all these topics.

In a nutshell, research linking governing elites and the media is not easily recognisable as a distinct field of studies. In the study of the Mexican case, there is a good amount of information about the causes and consequences of media liberalization, especially in terms of the changes in the access to, and the diversity in the public debate. However, theoretical and empirical approaches explaining how the new governing elites embraced (or not) these changes are missing. It is mostly likely that something is not quite right since the state-media relationship emerging from the Mexican political transformation resembles more the dangerous complicity and inappropriate degree of

collaboration between politicians and the media that characterized the authoritarian era. Nevertheless, thoughtful explanations about why or how this has happened are also absent. Also, it is most probable that the outcome of this kind of interaction between the new political regime and the media will harm the potential of a vigorous Fourth Estate. Yet, how it is possible to prescribe a remedy without a proper diagnosis?

Conclusions

The labels system (authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, developmental, Western) that academic research has used to describe different kinds of relationships between political regimes and media systems remain useful to study the Mexican case. Nevertheless, these categorizations (named models or theories) serve more as descriptive tools than as totalizing concepts. Neither Mexican authoritarianism nor the new democratic regime fit perfectly in a single category. This chapter has shown that the assumption of Mexican authoritarianism as a repressive and almighty controlling force over a submissive and powerless commercial media system is problematic. As seen, this stance not only creates a false image about the actual functioning and goals of mass communication during the authoritarian era, but also hides more complex and interdependent relationships between the authoritarian rule and the media.

Something similar happens in regard to the aspirations set by the libertarian model of state-media relations in democracies. From this theoretical stance, the Mexican media are expected to be a reliable means of relevant information; to function as guarantors of freedom of speech; to denounce potential abuses from political elites; to give voice to different social and political groups and enhance civic and political participation, to mention some of the stereotypes that media studies usually take for granted but that are simply unrealistic (see for instance: Keane 1991; Scammell and Semetko 2000; Graber 2003b; Gans 2003; Schudson 2003).

Mexican media actually face internal and contextual challenges that restrain their potential to thrive as a vigorous Fourth Estate. The myth is not just about the form and functioning of state-media relations during authoritarian rule. The capacity of the political change to transform media into a propeller of democracy also requires further scrutiny. As seen in this chapter, the state-media relationship in Mexico is better described as a mixture of practices, aspirations and overlapping elements of different theoretical models of state-media relations. This approach prevents 'zero sum game' analyses that overemphasize the control that the state lost and the power that media

acquired with the democratic transition. Plus, it encourages a revision of the role (beyond control and repression) that state actors, especially the new governing elites have played in moulding the structure, functioning and performance of the media in the Mexican democracy.

The next chapter of this thesis takes then a closer look at Swanson's 'political-media complex' (1992, 1997). This theoretical stance offers an institutional approach to state-media relations being useful to bring out of the shadows key aspects of governing elites in their interaction with the media. These include for instance, the rules and norms that keep balanced (or not) the power and influence of politics over the media; the structures and procedures that shape the functioning of government communication offices, as well as particular patterns of change and continuity that impose certain influence in the way the governing elites respond to new media conditions. Swanson's 'political-media complex' shows that academic literature offers sound tools for the analysis of how governing elites relate with the media at the outset of a new political setting. Nevertheless, this alternative theoretical toolkit needs to be honed further.

PART II

ARTS AND CRAFTS

3 The state-media relation: thinking institutionally

An alternative story emphasizes the role of institutions.
The exchange vision of human nature as static and universal
and unaffected by politics is replaced by a view of the political actor
as flexible, varied, malleable, culture-dependent and socially constructed [...]
The core notion is that life is organized by sets of shared meanings
and practices that come to be taken as given for a long time.
Political actors act and organize themselves in accordance
with rules and practices which are socially constructed,
publicly known, anticipated and accepted.

James March and Johan Olsen, Institutional perspectives
on political institutions (1996)

Traditional thinking about the relationship between political regimes and media systems imposes certain challenges to explain this interaction at the outset of the Mexican democracy. As seen in Chapter Two, the usual dichotomy between authoritarian rules that repress the media and democracies that enhance plurality in the public debate greatly differs from the Mexican experience. It was not only the state and the media that became close allies during the authoritarian era. The process of democratization also hit certain limits in terms of breaking down these cosy links and in enhancing a vigorous Fourth Estate.

Key works on the Mexican media, for instance, render some explanations about how and why this set of actors are seriously struggling to fulfil the duties imposed by the political change (Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009, 2010a; McPherson 2010, 2012). The role of the new governing elites in this process, however, remains in the shadows. Tentative conclusions are put forward arguing that media liberalization in Mexico occurred against the will of the ancient regime (Lawson 2002) or that the old mechanism of control over the media crumbled without being replaced by the new rules of the game (Trejo Delarbre 2004a; Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Guerrero 2010a).

From this stance, alternative explanations about the role of the new governing elites in promoting a new interaction with the media face certain challenges. Firstly, academic research on the relationship between new democracies and the media holds securely to a normative approach modelled by the liberal-democratic paradigm. The political regime and the media are approached as two independent actors. The former *should* promote individual freedom and political choice, whereas the latter *should*

guarantee civic participation and government accountability. The collusion of interests and interdependence between the state and the media appear thus as obscure and recurrent flaws of new democracies.

Second, research on how democratic governments relate with the media is dispersed among diverse areas of media studies (Canel and Sanders 2010). This makes it difficult to apply a holistic theoretical approach addressing different aspects of this interaction. In addition, this dispersed set of analytical tools have been created and tuned-up for the study of old democracies. New democracies, however, do not fit neatly with what Park and Curran (2000: 3) denounce as 'the self-absorption and parochialism of much Western media theory'.

This chapter presents an alternative theoretical angle to assess the role that governing elites play in building a new relationship with the media in new democracies. Building on Swanson's notion of 'political-media complex' (1992, 1997), this conceptual framework directs the searchlight to the institutional forces that shape the interaction between the state and the media. The following pages briefly explore Swanson's proposal (section one of this chapter), highlighting the challenges embedded on what Heclo (2008) calls 'thinking institutionally' (section two). Neo-institutionalists fiercely debate about why and how institutions matter in the study of political life. Rather than privileging one school over the other, this thesis focuses on three common assumptions that at their root unify diverse proponents of neo-institutional theory: (1) that institutions are collections of rules and norms that shape individual behaviour and determine the outcomes of political processes; (2) that institutions are structures of resources and meaning that empower or constrain actors' capabilities of action; and (3) that institutions are markers of history, change and stability.

After examining how the existing literature on the state-media relation has deployed these institutional factors (section three), this chapter sets forth the conceptual framework (section four) used in this thesis to study the perceptions of government communicators about their interaction with the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

3.1   The political-media complex: a supra institution

In the last few decades, Swanson (1992, 1997) stresses, that academic research on the relationship between politics (for instance politicians, political parties, candidates, government officials) and the media (journalists, media owners, editors) has been

exceedingly worried by the shortcomings of contemporary political communication. More often than not, this literature leads many to suspect that neither politicians, nor the media are fulfilling their democratic duties. Mass media are obsessed with the trivia of endless political campaigning, while politicians hide their flaws and ultimate political goals behind highly crafted political advertising campaigns and media management strategies.

From this stance, it will not be entirely wrong to conclude that a key aspect contributing to the poor health of democracy all over the world is the current state of the interaction between politics and the media. That is, political communication from whatever source is regularly oversimplified, personalized, trivialized and dramatized as an entertainment show for popular consumption (Entman 1989; Jamieson 1992; Swanson 1992: 397; Patterson 1994).

However, this perspective warns Swanson (1992: 397), 'suggest[s] that present afflictions reflect only loopholes and bad choices made by misguided or unprincipled individuals, not systemic problems in the institutions that create political communication'. By placing the relationship between politics and the media in an institutional and historical context, the author argues (Swanson 1992: 398) that a different picture emerges about 'the way in which profound social and institutional changes have altered the foundations of our system of political communication and have led to current complaints'.

Swanson then introduces an alternative approach to assess the relationship between politics and the media. His 'political-media complex' (Swanson 1992, 1997) defines an interaction that is not just constrained by individual choices, but also by institutional forces. 'Politics, government and news media', he (Swanson 1992: 399) writes:

> are linked in a complicated relationship and combine to create a kind of supra-institution, the political-media complex. Within this complex, particular institutional interests often conflict with each other in the battle of the public's perceptions, but mutual cooperation is required for each institution to achieve its aims […] politicians cannot succeed without access to the media, just as reporters cannot succeed without access to political leaders.

For this thesis, Swanson's notion of 'political-media complex' represents a significant departure from research grounded on a normative approach to the relationship between politics and the media (like *Four theories of the press* and its legacy, see Chapter Two). First, it advances an institutional approach to the relationship between politics and the media. This is instead of just focusing on the normative function and on the kind of

relationship these two institutions *should* engage with, the political-media complex perspective favours an institutional analysis of political actors (such as political parties or governmental offices) and the media. What determines the nature and actual form of the relationship between the political regime and the media are not just prescriptive duties and norms, but are also a complex interaction of other institutional factors.

This leads to a second key point: the relationship between the institutions of politics (the government for instance) and the media cannot be assumed as a set of fixed normative preconditions. This is not to undermine the value of normative approaches like Siebert's *et al.* (1956) and subsequent theoretical models describing the relationship between the political regime and the media (see Chapter Two, section 2.1.1). These approaches set forth an idealized conception of appropriate procedures and desired outcomes. For those in the field, these models set an example and some boundaries to their day-to-day practices. For academics, such theoretical abstractions serve as working hypotheses to assess the actual functioning and consequences of this interaction. For Swanson (1997: 1265), the interaction between politics and the media is a combination of both a 'constantly evolving' interaction between the normative ideal and the particular needs of the two institutions (political institutions and media institutions) and their respective professionals. The political-media complex is thus 'a product of a particular history' (Swanson 1997: 1266), and in this sense, both the history of each institution and the history of the interaction between politics and the media set the context to understand the actual nature of this relationship.

Third, even when both kinds of institutions have their own history, institutional needs, structure and culture that make them two independent actors, they are also, writes Swanson (1997: 1266), 'interdependent, and thus, their respective agendas and institutional needs provide incentives for cooperation, as well as conflict'. Admittedly, interdependence between the political regime and the media is not exclusive to Swanson's notion of the political-media complex. Other analytical approaches assessing the relationship between politics and the media in general, or politicians and journalists in particular have also stressed the links that tie together the media and politics (see for instance: Blumler and Gurevitch 1975, 1977/1995; Gunther and Mughan 2000a; Hallin and Mancini 2004a; Ross 2010).

From this stance, research on the state-media relation tends to conclude that the media do 'take on the form and coloration of the social and political structures within which it operates' (Siebert *et al.* 1956: 1) since both institutions relay on each other. For

Swanson however, the interdependence between politics and the media is not just about a mutual need of information resources and outlets, or even exclusively a matter of power. Swanson's (1997: 1270) political-media complex points to:

> an unending spiral of manipulation and resistance within a struggle for dominance, where politicians court the favorable attention of journalists while manipulating them and seeking ways to circumvent their mediation and reach the public directly, and where journalists seek access and cooperation from politicians while attempting to assert their independence and imperium ever more aggressively. And this occurs within the framework of institutions that have been weakened and challenged by a host of changes to which they constantly struggle to adapt.

Fourth, Swanson's notion of political-media complex warns (as Eisenhower's mention of a 'military-industrial complex' did in the 1960's) of the dangers of this interaction. The relationship between politics and the media influences every aspect of political life: the way in which citizens make sense of their political context and their capacity to influence it; the way in which politicians communicate with citizens; and the way in which mass media present the news about politics to citizens. Research on politics and the media shows that the risks embedded in this process are many: from citizens transformed into armchair consumers of news about politics (Sartori 1987; Entman 1989; Jamieson 1992; Patterson 1994) to 'media-driven republics' (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999). In this overwhelmingly feared scenario, the presentation of politics as 'show-biz' elevates political campaigns, personality and performance above the substantial issues of political life (Franklin 1994). Plus, this kind of political communication undermines traditional democratic institutions and creates a 'spiral of cynicism' (Cappella and Jamieson 1997) that legitimizes the 'mediatization of politics' (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Mazzoleni and Shulz 1999) and prevents citizens to participate in the political process (Bennett 1988; Zaller 1998).

Last but not least, Swanson (1992: 399) emphasises that 'what it is not represented in the political-media complex is the public interest *per se;* instead, voters' attention and approval are commodities to be reproduced by the most efficient means possible and bartered for advantage'. Therefore, citizens' civic engagement in politics is treated as a valuable commodity that is able of shifting the balance of power between politicians and the media. Participation, public debate and civic engagement are, however, not necessarily the ultimate goals of this interaction. Rather, political and media institutions are caught in endless tensions between cooperation and struggle. In this constant battle, the final goal becomes the need to keep the state-media relation at

float, while both sets of institutions relegate citizens (voters or consumers) to mere passive spectators, and citizens themselves seem to passively assume this role.

In a nutshell, for this thesis the notion of a 'political-media complex' represents a useful theoretical alternative to assess this interaction at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico. Instead of looking at the state-media relation as a set of normative guidelines, Swanson's notion of a political-media complex opens the analysis to diverse institutional aspects such as organizational structures and procedures, culture, history, power, conflict, interdependence and mutual risks that shape this interaction (Swanson 1997: 1272).

3.2   Neo-Institutionalism: three basic assumptions

Arguing for an institutional analysis of the relationship between politics (or more specifically the government) and the media, as Swanson (1992, 1997) suggests in his political-media complex, is a risky enterprise. Institutionalism, as leading researchers stress, is a contested field that 'comes in many flavours' (March and Olsen 2009: 160). More often than not, writes Heclo (2008: 43): 'reviews of the scholarly literature on institutions are an invitation to frustration'. Similarly, Peters (2012: 1) acknowledges that: 'there are a number of alternative conceptions of the approach that may weaken its capacity to serve as an alternative to more individualistic approaches to politics'.

Work on the influence of institutions in the actual functioning of political life nourishes a thriving academic industry. This thesis however, evades as much as possible, particular debates among or within distinctive neo-institutionalism scholarly traditions.[21] Rather than focusing on a single school of thought, this chapter aims to show that the study of the interaction between politics and the media benefits more from a comprehensive and general institutional approach. The bet is, borrowing Hall's (2010: 220) words, 'that [the] greatest advances will be made by those willing to borrow concepts and formulations from multiple schools of thought'.

However, this is not to say that this thesis ignores the crucial divergences between the different disciplines of political science that study institutions from very diverse angles. Nor to disregard that each of these schools of thought bring key insights to Swanson's political-media complex (see below). When arguing for an institutional approach, rather than privileging one neo-institutionalism school of thought over the

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[21] For reviews about divergences and similarities among different schools of thought see for instance: Hall and Taylor 1996; Kato 1996; Reich 2000; Pierre *et al.* 2008; Peters 2012.

other, this thesis is more concerned with key institutional factors that are common ground for different academic perspectives. 'Blended thinking', as Heclo (2008: 58) puts it:

> is not the same thing as sloppy eclecticism. It is not saying that anything goes. It is saying that there is probably more to be gained by combining and exploiting the various schools' insights than by adhering slavishly to their scripts.

Institutionalism, as the term is used in this thesis, suggests thus a general approach to the endogenous nature and social construction of political institutions. As Olsen (2007: 2) puts it:

> The 'new institutionalism' offers a perspective on how political life is organised, functions and changes in contemporary democracies. The term includes a set of theoretical ideas, assumptions and hypothesis concerning the relations among institutional characteristics, political agency, performance, and institutional change, and the wider social context of politics.

With this in mind, to sketch an institutional perspective this study focuses on three core assumptions that, at their root, unify different neo-institutionalism schools of thought. These are: (1) institutions are collections of rules and norms that shape individual behaviour and determine the outcomes of political processes; (2) institutions are structures of resources and meaning that empower or constrain actors' capabilities of action, and; (3) institutions are markers of history, change and stability.[22]

Naturally, there is the possibility of alternative institutional factors that could be considered as similarities between different schools of thought that make neo-institutionalism a unified theoretical perspective.[23] However, these three particular aspects point at both the endogenous and exogenous factors that Swanson identifies as

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[22] In their early calls for a reappraisal of institutions in political science, March and Olsen (1989: 160) make the most clear description in this respect: 'as a preface of political institutions', these authors stress 'we have identified three broad clusters of ideas. The first emphasises the way in which political life is ordered by rules and organizational forms that transcend individuals and buffer or transform social forces. The second emphasizes the endogenous nature of reality, interests and roles, and so a constructive vision of political actors, meanings and preferences. The third emphasizes the history-dependent intertwining of stability and change'. For similar analyses on the fundamental analytic points that bring together distinctive neo-institutionalism perspectives see: Kato 1996; Pierre *et al.* 2008; Peters 2012: Ch10.

[23] For instance, Peters (2005: 156-159) identifies three alternative common features that at their root unify the distinctive proponents of institutional theory: (1) the emphasis that the different approaches place on institutional factors rather than on individual aspects of social analysis; (2) the attention put on the role that institutional structure plays in determining individual behaviour, and (3) the role that institutions play in reducing uncertainty and in creating greater regularities in human behaviour. In contrast, for Hall and Taylor (1996: 937) any insitutional analysis seeks a better understanding of: (1) the interaction between structure and individual behaviour, and (2) the processes whereby institutions change. This thesis builds upon these fundamental points of similarity for institutional analyses rather than on the differences that prevent an approach to neo-institutionalism theory as a unified body of thought.

key institutional forces in his political-media complex. 'Of course', the author (Swanson 1997: 1272) writes that 'institutions do not act; people act. However, […] people act within institutional contexts, and their actions are inevitably shaped by institutional objectives, organization, culture and history'.

3.2.1   *Prescriptive rules and appropriate actions*

An analysis of statutory rules and formal norms is certainly a traditional starting point of institutional theory in understanding political phenomena (Eckstein 1979; Hall 1986: 19-23; Peters 2012: Ch1). In political science, institutions are commonly although not exclusively,[24] analysed as the diverse administrative, legal and political formal regulatory frameworks that provide procedural advantages and impediments for individual action (Rhodes 1995; Goodin 1996: 1-53; Rothstein 1996; Thoening 2003; Peters 2012). For instance, Rhodes (2009: 142) writes: 'the distinctive contribution of political science to the study of institutions is the analysis of *the historical evolution of formal-legal institutions and the ideas embedded in them*' (emphasis from original).

Neo-institutionalists, however, question the usefulness of an approach to rules and norms that render mere descriptions about statutory regulations or prescriptions for formal structures or organizational functioning. Alternative ideas and hypotheses about the role of rules and legal norms in organizing political life arise for instance, from clarifications about how the formal structures and rules embedded in different forms of government (presidential or parliamentary, for instance) impose distinctive influences on the performance of governmental institutions and also intriguingly shape the way in which individuals behave within these institutions (Hall 1986; Peters 2005: 2). From this perspective, as Brunsson and Olsen (1997: 20) argue, statutory rules and legal norms appear more as 'institutions rather than as instruments'.

Broadly speaking, when referring to 'rules', neo-institutionalism theory puts forth a behavioural approach to statutory regulations and formal legal conventions

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[24] For instance, Rhodes (2009) distinguishes four examples of different traditions in the study of political institutions. These are: (1) the formal-legal approach that focuses on the study of public laws as shapers of governmental organizations; (2) an approach to the influence that the ideas about public authority impose over the relations between citizens and government; (3) the modernist-empiricism tradition that has grounded current neo-instutionalists approaches to politics, and (4) a socialist perspective that points to class struggle, social engineering and discourse as practices and meanings that also shape social actors' beliefs and performance. Peters (2005: Ch1 and 10), however, stresses that there are more than a dozen schools of thought dealing with public institutions. More often than not, these disciplines diverge from common definitions about what an institution is, about how institutions are created, how they change or how they shape individual behaviour.

(Olsen 2007: 2). Statutory regulations and other formal rules (for instance, secondary legislations, organizational norms or codes) constitute symbols, scripts and templates for individual behaviour that are beyond rational calculation or self-interests, and persist over time but are neither stable nor exogenous to individuals' preferences or choice (Swilder 1986; March and Olsen 1989: Ch3; Hall and Taylor 1996: 948). In other words, from a neo-institutional perspective, rulings and formal norms provide codes of meaning that shape individuals' action, facilitate interpretation and reduce ambiguity. In so doing, rules coordinate many simultaneous activities in a way that make individual actions mutually consistent and predictable (North 1981: Ch1).

Different theoretical variations of neo-institutionalism, however, offer diverse explanations about why and how formal rules impose such constraints to individual behaviour. For instance, what Peters (2007: 19) refers as 'normative neo-institutionalism' put emphasis on rules and norms as a way to understanding how individual behaviour becomes a ruled-governed 'routine way in which people do what they are supposed to do' (March and Olsen 1989: 21). From this perspective, the relevance of rules in an institutional analysis rests on the 'beliefs, paradigms, codes, cultures, and knowledge that surround, support, elaborate, and contradict those roles and routines' (March and Olsen 1989: 22). Thus, rules are followed because they are seen as natural, rightful, expected and legitimate. In so doing, individuals' actions respond to a 'logic of appropriateness' rather than a logic of consequence embedded on explanations based on pure rational action (March and Olsen 1989, 1996: 252, 2004). But here 'appropriateness' refers not just to what is right to do according to formal regulations. It also points to a specific culture in which members of an institution are expected to obey and be the guardians of the institution's constitutive principles and standards (March and Olsen 2009: 163).

Alternatively, an approach to institutions from an economist position, which in the literature is often referred as 'rational choice institutionalism', stresses that formal rules are relevant for the analysis of institutions because they represent patterns in which individuals make rational choices. Therefore, from this perspective, the role of institutions in political life are not just restricted to the connection between rules and behaviour. Statutory laws along with other formal norms also influence the way in which individuals define their preferences and select the range of strategies (behaviours) they will follow to maximize their personal utility (North 1991; Hall and Taylor 1996: 942-946). Rules and norms reduce uncertainty and shape the way in which individuals

make decisions in order to maximize the benefits they receive from observing these formal rulings (North 1991; Posner 1993). Therefore, legislations, organizational norms and codes of conduct are both indicators of common acceptable behaviour and predictors of regular outcomes that bring benefits to individuals within and outside a particular institution.

Historical institutionalism, on the other hand, approaches institutions as both formal organizations and informal rules that structure conduct. From this stance political actors are not purely rational 'maximizers', but rather 'rule-following satisfiers' (Hall and Taylor 1996: 939). Political life is not a mere reflection of individuals looking to maximize self-interests. Individual behaviour is also deeply influenced by experience and 'societally defined rules' (Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 8). Plus, individual strategies and goals are also constrained by an institutional context and history. Past events and previous individual choices also impose certain influence in the course of action at both individual and institutional levels.

Neo-institutional sociologists (sociological institutionalism), in contrast, are more concerned with rules and formal norms as propellers of organizational efficiency and legitimacy. From this stance, regulations and norms become 'socially legitimated rationalized elements' that influence not just the way in which individuals behave, but also how organizations justify their form and functioning within and outside the organization. In so doing, rules also become resources and capabilities for the survival of the organizations in a constantly changing environment (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus from this standpoint, institutions appear not just as a product of shared rules, norms or common routines and practices, but they also reflect individual actions and culture. Rules and formal norms are also symbols of systems, cognitive scripts and moral templates that provide, as quoted by Hall and Taylor (1996: 947), 'frames of meaning' which guide human actions (original from Campbell 1995).

To recapitulate, for neo-institutionalism theory, the analysis of statutory rules and formal regulations render sound explanations about individual behaviour as a combination of rule-following, indoctrination, experience (history) and choice. However, different schools of thought place the searchlight on distinctive aspects about how and why the analysis of formal rules matters in understanding political phenomena. As Peters (2005: 156) puts it, these differences 'address a classic problem in social analysis –the relatively importance of structure and agency' in explaining political life. Approaches like the normative or the historical neo-institutionalisms regard statutory

regulations and formal norms as prime determinants of individual behaviour (see Steinmo 1993: Ch1; March and Olsen 1996). For rational choice and sociological neo-institutionalists however, individuals are the ones who legitimize and endure these rules by transforming them into particular choices, unwritten codes of conduct or even organizational cultures that persist over time. From this perspective, individuals appear to have more room for maneuver in shaping institutional performance and choices (see for instance: Kreps 1990; Garrett and Weingast 1993).

Rather than privileging one school of thought over the other, this thesis benefits from a more general institutional approach to rules and formal norms. This stance allows an investigation of the formal rulings that shape the relation between the new Mexican government (the first PAN term 2000-2006) and the media. It also enhances an assessment on how these rules influence (or not) the values and norms that shape individual behaviour. Plus, this approach leaves room to assess the role that individuals (government officers in the Fox administration) played in shaping or even changing these formal rulings. These points will be explained further later in this chapter to introduce the conceptual framework that operationalizes this particular institutional approach to statutory rules and formal norms in the case study evaluated in this thesis.

3.2.2 *Organizational dynamic: the endogenous nature of reality*

Another key cluster of speculations about the influence of institutions in political science is the connection between institutional forms and organizational routines. As Heclo (2008: 62) puts it: 'to study institutions is essentially equivalent to studying formal organizations'.[25] Institutions are meant to mobilize human and material resources by organising these means into effective actions. From this stance, institutions appear not just as mere prescriptive regulatory instruments and exogenous forces. They are also endogenous organizational structures and functions that influence behaviour, construct meaning and shape interests at both organizational and individual levels. As March and Olsen (1989: 162) puts it: 'institutions not only respond to their environments but create those environments at the same time'.

In this regard, neo-institutionalism theory suggests a number of ways in which internal organizational forces influence individual preferences and vice versa. For instance, drawing on organizational theory, sociological institutionalists are particularly interested in culturally-specific practices that affect organizational forms and individual

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[25] Institutional theory, however, has also been criticized by using the terms 'institutions' and 'organizations' interchangeably.

behaviour (Hall and Taylor 1996: 946). Rather than taking individual choices within organizations as highly strategic, intentional and predictable (as rational choice institutionalists tend to do), this approach looks at behaviour in cultural terms. This perspective assumes behaviour as tightly bound up with values and norms, but also as shared interpretations of symbols and common moral temples that affect the way in which individuals make choices (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Meyer and Scott 1992: Ch1).

Against a 'calculus approach' (Hall and Taylor 1996: 939) whereby individuals seek to maximize personal utility, 'a cultural approach' (*ibid*) offers a comprehensive explanation about the attitudes of political actors and common values that influence rational choices. Culture is thus approached not just as individual beliefs and norms, but also as a network of routines, symbols and scripts providing templates for social action (Almond and Verba 1989; Elster 1989). From this stance, the internal processes of institutions and their relationships with other institutions in the same organizational field become key in understanding how individuals internalize their role within organizations like public offices (Peters 2012: 128). The general picture provided by this line of work is one in which, as Powell and DiMaggio (1991: 8) put it: 'while institutions are certainly the result of human activity, they are not necessarily the products of conscious design'. Formal rules give form to organizations, but their functioning and the culture in which they are embedded also determine their shape and the role that individuals play within these organizations.

This is not to say that other neo-institutional approaches, like historical or rational choice institutionalism, deny that organizations or institutions provide structure and behavioural temples for individual or collective action. Nevertheless, the interest of these approaches on organizational structures, skills and learning processes as endogenous institutional forces is primarily as agents of institutionalization and institutional change. Organizations, North (1990: 5) reminds us: 'are created with purposive intent in consequence of the opportunity set resulting from the existing set of constraints (institutional ones as well as the traditional ones of economic theory) and in the course of attempts to accomplish their objectives are a major agent of institutional change'.[26]

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[26] For rational choice institutionalists, however, there is a crucial distinction between institutions and organizations. Organizations, as North puts it (1990: 5) are the players of the game; groups of individuals bound by shared goals. Institutions, on the other hand, are the 'underlying rules of the game' that shape these teams' strategies and skills. In trying to reach their goals according to what seems instrumentally viable (or culturally viable from a sociological point of view), the

Similarly, from an historical perspective, endogenous formal structures and organised practices play a key role in how organizations function and persist over time. Institutions are embedded in a broader environment in which both endogenous organizational and contextual characteristics influence, for example, how power is distributed within and across different social and political groups (Weir 1992). Power and other factors such as leading ideas or past experiences thus become key variables in explaining not just the functioning, but also the origins and persistence of organizations.

For this thesis, an approach to the organizational dynamic of government communication offices at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico is then useful to complement the analysis of the statutory rules and formal norms that regulate the interaction between these new governing elites and the media. This stance makes it possible to shed light on the resources (human or financial), routines, attitudes and strategies that also influence the way in which the Fox administration approached the media. Plus, this perspective allows a closer look of the roles and tensions that government communicators faced on adapting (or not) the functioning of these communication offices to new values and understandings about the role of political communication and the media in democracy.

3.2.3   History, change and stability

Another shared assumption among the distinctive proponents of neo-institutional theory is that institutions persist over time.[27] As Mahoney and Thelen (2010a: 5) put it: 'the idea of persistence of some kind is virtually built into the very definition of an institution. This is true for sociological, rational-choice, and historical-institutional approaches'. Institutions are thus not mere reflections of current organizational forces, formal proscriptions, behavioural templates or shared identities. They are also products of past experiences and history. In the end, as March and Olsen (1989: 167-168) write: 'institutions embed historical experience into rules, routines, and forms that persist beyond the historical moment and condition'.

Nonetheless, different schools of thought offer quite diverse (and complex) explanations about how institutions emerge, endure or change. Rational choice institutionalists for instance, explain the persistence of an institution looking at the

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members of these teams make individual choices constrained by an institutional framework. In turn, these players of the game influence how the institutional framework evolves.

[27] Actually, neo-institutionalism theory has been highly criticized for the difficulties that the assumption of institutional persistence possess in explaining institutional change and innovation (see for instance: Streeck 2005; Mahoney and Thelen 2010).

benefits it delivers. From this approach, institutions endure partly because they are efficient or cost-effective and partly because individuals make choices according to the information (frequently incomplete) they receive. These choices might not be always optimal and may have unintended consequences that prevent organizations from incremental efficiency. Institutions keep on such a path, writes North (1990: 9), 'because the transaction cost of the political and economic markets of those economies together with the subjective models of the actors do not lead them to move incrementally toward more efficient outcomes'. Institutions do change and new institutions do add to the existing institutional world. However, these changes are seldom discontinuous but rather are incremental and a product of exogenous forces of change. Past choices and imperfect information, for instance, commonly influence the way in which individuals interpret their environment, making existing institutions stable and durable (North 1990: Ch1).

Similarly, historical neo-institutionalists put forward the notion of 'path dependence' to explain how policies introduced at one time affect political outcomes at a latter moment (for literature reviews on this concept see: Mahoney 2000; Alexander 2001; Thelen 2004; Pierson 2004). Weir (1992: 192) surmises this process that 'decisions at one point in time can restrict future possibilities by sending policy off onto particular tracks, along which ideas and interest develop and institutions and strategies adapt'. From this stance, understanding how institutions change requires assessing the direct precedent form or related institutional forms that may affect their current state. A historical approach to institutions accounts for the legacies of past struggles of power, along with particular current environmental contexts (Mahoney and Thelen 2010a: 6-7). However, similar operative forces of change rarely generate the same results everywhere (in different countries for instance) mainly because diverse contextual factors, commonly inherited from the past, mediate these forces producing different institutional outcomes (Hall and Taylor 1996: 941).

Sociological institutionalists, in contrast, use concepts such as 'isomorphism' to explain both change and continuity within and among organizations. The argument is, in and Powell and DiMaggio's (1991: 64) words, that:

> in the initial stages of their life cycle, organizational fields [this is, organizations that in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life] display considerable diversity in approach and form. Once a field becomes well established, however, there is an inexorable push toward homogenization.

Thus, organizations face similar constraints (such as contextual, economic or normative) that force them to resemble other organizations that face similar environmental contexts (Hawley 1968 as summarised by Powell and DiMaggio 1991: 66). Several factors account for this isomorphism among organizations such as norms, learning processes or professionalization, environmental conditions, market competition, niche measures, economic fitness, other organizations, power, legitimacy and uncertainty, among others. Overall, these factors help to explain, for instance, why inefficient organizations persist over time, how new organizations enter the field or which organizations are predestined to substantive failure. New institutions or institutional change 'borrow' ideas and strategies from the existing world of institutional templates. Why certain institutional templates are chosen over others go beyond considerations of efficiency to incorporate 'an appreciation of the role that collective processes of interpretation and concerns for social legitimacy play in the process' (Hall and Taylor 1996: 953).

This stance, however, tends to lose sight of the contention and clash of power that other neo-institutional approaches have traced in the course of institutional reforms and change. For instance, rational-choice institutionalists argue that processes of institutional creation or change are more about power and competing interests rather than about collective frames of meaning, scripts and symbols (see for instance: Knight 1992: Ch1; Moe 2005). Alternatively, historical institutionalists look at particular moments or events where agents were able to modify past practices and trajectories (Rokkan and Lipset 1967: 37; Katznelson 2003; Capoccia and Kelemen 2007).

In this thesis, a historical overview is certainly a starting point in the study of how the new governing elites at the outset of the Mexican democracy related with the media. As seen in Chapter Two, decades of authoritarian rule perpetuated a very particular interaction between the political regime and the media. In addition, the process of democratization was unable to vanish traditional assumptions such as the role of political news coverage as a valuable commodity for both politicians and the media. An institutional approach to history, change and stability is thus useful to trace the influence that past authoritarian practices imposed over the strategies that the first PAN administration used to relate with the media. Plus, this analytical stance opens the possibility to evaluate the democratization process along with additional patterns of change that other democracies are witnessing in the political-media complex.

To sum up, as March and Olsen (2004: 1) argue, institutions in this thesis are understood as:

> not simply equilibrium contracts among self-seeking, calculating individuals actors or arenas for contending social forces. They are collections of rules and organized practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances. There are constructive rules and practices prescribing appropriate behaviour for specific actors in specific situations. There are structures of meaning, embedded in identities and belongings: common purposes and accounts that give direction and meaning to behaviour, and explain, justify and legitimate behavioural codes. They are structures of resources that create capabilities for actors. Institutions empower and constrain actors differently and make them more or less capable of acting according to prescriptive rules of appropriateness. Institutions are also reinforced by third parties in enforcing rules and sanctioning non-compliance.

3.3 Rules, organizational dynamic and change: findings dispersed among different perspectives to study the state-media relation

Literature that approaches the political-media complex from an institutional perspective similar to the one proposed in this thesis is however, dispersed among different areas of study that seldom interact with each other. For instance, more common than not, works on media regulation start by describing how, all over the world, two opposing conceptions about the regulatory legitimacy of the state on the one hand, and of the market on the other, affect the relations between the government, the media, the market and the citizens (see for instance: Feintuck and Varney 2006; Lunt and Livingstone 2011: 2-4).

Public service broadcast systems (more relevant in Europe) impose particular normative assumptions and rationales for both the state as a regulatory agent and the media as an entertainment industry. These systems also approach the media as guarantors of public accountability and propellers of citizens' engagement and participatory debate. A healthy media system is one where the state supports the media in fulfilling these tasks. Statutory regulation is then seen as both necessary and desirable to sustain the conditions for a vibrant Fourth Estate to thrive. Media regulation helps to shield media markets from concentration, and at the time guarantees the access of all to a broad diversity of (preferably high-quality) media contents. Regulation becomes then a useful measure to ensure that citizens are protected from being treated as mere consumers of media products.

In contrast, commercial media systems (more relevant in the USA and in Latin America) assume the market of being capable to regulate the media. Broadly speaking, mass communication (media contents or platforms) is seen as a commodity available only to those willing to pay for it. Thus, state regulation can be limited to mere technical matters such as wavelength scarcity or network architecture. The forces of the market (open competition, diversity of platforms or changing preferences on the demand of services) serve as self-regulatory measures. By itself, the market is able to face other challenges such as the ones imposed by developments in the industry, changes in the characteristics of audiences (age or preferences, for instance), the emergence of new media platforms and new communication technologies.

In addition, diverse cultural and behavioural aspects broaden these distinctive conceptions about media regulation (Hallin and Mancini 2004a: 55-56). For instance, the degree to which citizens, business and other actors are willing to follow formal rules and serve the 'public interest', instead of evading regulations in the pursuit of self-interest appears as a key determinant of the media's functioning. As Hallin and Mancini (2004a: 56) put it:

> Where rational-legal authority is strongly developed, [public broadcasting systems], similar to other public agencies, are likely to be relatively autonomous from control by government, parties, and particular politicians, and to be governed by clear rules and procedures […] In countries where rational-legal authority is less strongly developed, party control and penetration of public broadcasting and regulatory institutions tends to be stronger and deeper.

Thus, regulation (be it by the state or by the market) shapes the way in which the media functions not only by proscribing certain duties and rights, but also by imposing a set of beliefs, unwritten norms and patterns of behaviour to the political-media complex.

This thesis argues that an approach to media regulation that takes into consideration not only the formal and written statutory rulings and proscriptions, but also considers the influence of diverse cultural and behavioural aspects, is particularly relevant for the study of media regulation in new democracies. More common than not, in these countries statutory regulation (or the lack of it) perpetuates mechanisms of government manipulation and constrains the Fourth Estate to market demands and economic designs that favour the development of powerful entertainment industries (see for instance: Waisbord 2000a; de Smaele 2006; Wasserman and de Beer 2006; Lugo-Ocando 2008a).

For instance, in Latin America, writes Waisbord (2010: 309): 'the fact that the press has been largely organized around commercial principles, however, did not result

in the complete separation of the press from the state […] So the problem was not state ownership of the press, but rather, the excessive power of governments and private interests'. In these countries, both the political and commercial logics of media regulation and functioning are present and closely linked. This interdependence sets both certain needs for and limits to media regulation. For the media to thrive as a democratic political institution, a strong presence of the state is necessary to regulate market concentration or to protect journalists from threats and pressures emerging from both political actors and media moguls (Waisbord 2007).

On the other hand, antiquated and hostile legislations (such as criminal defamation laws; the lack of effective access to government information laws or weak legal measures to protect journalist confidential sources) inhibit media's capacity to enhance public scrutiny, strengthen political accountability and promote assertive reporting (Lawson and Hughes 2005a; Matos 2008; McPherson 2012).

In addition, 'political clientelism' still tends to define the relationship between new democracies and the media (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). This points to the persistence of past practices and mind sets about the rule of law and the political use of the media. 'A culture in which evasion of the law is relatively common', write Hallin and Papathanassopoulos (2002: 187), 'means that opportunities for particularistic pressures also are common: governments can exercise pressure by enforcing the law selectively, and news media can do so by threatening selectively to expose wrongdoing'.

The study of the state-media relation in old and new democracies has rendered key insights about the role that regulation plays in this interaction. The scope and form of statutory regulation define the form and functioning of distinctive media systems around the world. But common understandings and beliefs about the rule of law (about compliance or enforcement, for instance) impose additional challenges and limitations to the state-media relation.

From another starting point, media studies have also rendered key findings about how certain organizational dynamics affect the interaction between politics and the media. These analyses tend to focus on how particular characteristics of journalism, especially the structure and functioning of newsrooms, influence the way in which the news media relate with politicians.

From this perspective political journalism as a professional practice appears as indelibly marked by the norms and the course of politics (see for instance: Cook 1998; Sparrow 1999; Schudson 2002; Davis 2009). For instance, analyses on the relationship

between journalists and their sources, picture intimate and complex interactions of power, control and most of all interdependent interests and routines between politicians and newsrooms. Rather than a strong and unrestricted control of the state over the media, the picture emerging from these studies is one that resembles more a 'bargaining interplay' (Sigal 1973: 5), 'exchange of information for publicity' (Tunstall 1970: 44), 'negotiated control over the signs and means' (Ericson *et al.* 1989: 376) or even a 'symbiotic relationship' (Mazzoleni and Shultz 1999: 252) or 'danse macabre' (Ross 2010) between journalists and politicians.

In general, these studies serve as a reminder of the potential power (cultural, political or economic) that each entity has to control the political-media complex. Politicians may generally appear as almighty forces capable of influencing or even setting the news agenda (see for instance: Schiller 1973; Murdock and Golding 1977; McAnany *et al.* 1981). Powerful sources appear as the only ones capable of offering 'information subsidies' (Gandy 1982: 8), that is, privileged, manageable or prompt information that reduces the costs embedded in news coverage. Journalists tend to rely on these information subsidies to report the news about politics in what critics have denounced as a 'structured set of preferences by the media to the opinions of the powerful' (Hall *et al.* 1978: 58).

From this stance, news media become the voice of 'primary definers' who enjoy special status and granted access to the public debate.[28] Government communicators actually benefit from the strategic advantages of primary definition by setting the terms of the debate, commanding the discourse, and becoming 'the dominant and consensual connotations' on the public debate (Hall *et al.* 1978: 61).

Indeed, by granting government officials routine access to media coverage, mainstream news media generally appear as mere followers of the 'sphere consensus' (Hallin 1986) that drives the decision-making processes. Journalists might 'calibrate' (Bennett 2007: 49) their news coverage by including alternative sources of information. But these voices are brought into the public debate 'according to the range of views

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[28] In general, the literature that builds on the notion of 'primary definition' for powerful or official sources advances the notion that an unequal distribution of resources (economic or in terms of access to information) seriously affects the role that other actors play in the public debate. This is to say that 'resource poor' sources (Goldenberg 1975) are unable to undertake the information subsidies offered by powerful sources and as a consequence, official voices remain as unchallenged sources of information. Hence, an inequality of access to media coverage is also closely linked to alternative sources' lack of political and economic resources capable of rendering some benefits or attractive information to the news media.

expressed in mainstream government debate about the topic' (Bennett 1990: 106). Alternative sources thus face great challenges on accessing media coverage that come from both the power that official sources have to control the news agenda and the practices that journalists follow in news coverage.

For others, however, the interaction between media and government communicators appears more as an 'instrumental-utilitarian calculus' (Schlesinger 1990: 79), than a fixed condition of guaranteed access to positive news coverage for official sources. That is, a closer look to the organizational structure and functioning of the newsrooms shows that the privileged access of official sources to news coverage is more as an ascertainable outcome of day-to-day practices and routines rather than as an a priori effect of power and control.

For instance, as alternative sources offer additional valuable information to journalists, official sources gradually lose their granted access to the news agenda. Other sources acquire relevance as they offer additional information, have certain influence on the agenda setting or are simply close (geographically or socially) to journalists (Gans 1980: 117). Newsrooms are in fact willing to cover non-official sources mainly because they offer key additional information or expert knowledge; mobilize relatively large groups and audiences; are strategically located, or; prove to have efficient news management skills (see for instance: Goldenberg 1975). In so doing, journalists partially lose their 'secondary role in reproducing the definitions of those who have privileged access' (Hall *et al.* 1978: 59) and become primary definers (Sigal 1986). Assuming guaranteed access to ever powerful and monolithic official sources obscure the information flows, contention for media access and the strategic communication practices put forward by non-dominant sources (see for instance, Schlesinger and Tumber 1994).[29]

In sum, institutional analyses on the structure and functioning of the media have rendered key insights on the routines, values and beliefs of journalists and their newsrooms especially when approaching official sources. 'The central point is that the concept of institutions', writes Kaplan (2006: 174), 'introduces culture and power into

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[29] The 'political-contest model' (Wolfsfeld 2003) for instance, addresses the competition over news coverage among 'authorities' and 'challengers' during political conflicts. In this particular scenario, the struggle of power among and within media sources is not only over access to media, but also over meaning. Antagonist sources compete amongst each other to get access to media coverage. Moreover, non-official sources also compete against existing media frames, against what Gamson calls (1989: 35) 'a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue'.

the analysis of journalism, overcoming merely technical, naturalistic understandings'. That is, the day-to-day routine of the news media as well as journalists' stance (professional background, ideas and predilections) influence the way in which the media approach their sources and structure news coverage. From this stance, sources' capacity of definition (primary or secondary) appears less as an exclusive prerogative for dominant sources, and more as a handy opportunity for journalists to organize and present the news. In fact, news coverage is turned into proactive journalism through agenda setting (Shaw and McCombs 1977), framing (Gamson 1992) and the inclusion of alternative voices in the public debate (Harrison 1985; Schudson 2002).

Drawing on these findings, research that focuses on the organizational dynamic of the newsrooms in new democracies show how these offices struggle between old reporting practices (such as the mere reproduction of official press releases) and new ideas and journalism practices brought by a younger generation of editors, media owners and journalists (see for instance: Hughes 2007; Matos 2008; McPherson 2012).

In the Mexican case, research has shown that journalists struggle to adapt their reporting practices to a series of changing conditions (see for instance: Hughes 2006 or McPherson 2010). These include, for instance, the increasing relevance of other sources of information to counter balance official accounts (from government sources for example), the competition among different media platforms (radio, TV, the internet, press), the prevalence of hierarchical organizational charts; low audience rates (mainly for the press) and a very politicized business environment (Hughes 2006; McPherson 2010). In this scenario, it becomes very difficult to link the democratization process together with a vigorous Fourth Estate. 'Identifying how the market influences on democratic journalism are mediated by newsrooms' social organization', stresses McPherson (2012: 2315), 'get us one level deeper into understanding how the market can instigate simultaneous opposing effects on democratic journalism'.

Knowledge about the organizational dynamic within government communication offices is, however, very limited (Canel and Sanders 2010, 2012; Sanders *et al.* 2011). For instance, political communication literature on news management, public relations and advertising (see for instance: Davis 2002; Strömbäck 2011) tends to focus on how these practices shape electoral campaigning, rather than on how the regular course of government communication evolves once politicians arrive to public offices (for a few examples see: Scammell 1995; Kurtz 1998). The picture emerging from these studies is one in which political communication appears as a constantly

evolving practice that reflects the needs and interests of politicians, adapts to changes in the media (new platforms or journalistic practices, for instance) and responds to other trends of change that occur simultaneously all over the world such as the secularization of politics (see Chapter Seven, section 7.1) the modernization of communication platforms or the professionalization of political communication[30] and the commercialization of political news coverage.[31]

Therefore, by looking at different trends of change in political communication (mainly during electoral campaigning), researchers aim to explain the striking similarities of the political-media complex all over the world. For instance, as a working hypothesis, the concept of 'Americanisation' summarizes different trends of change that seem to originate or emanate from the United States, and are then followed by other countries. Whereas scholars keep struggling with the idea of using the United States as an archetype to analyze other media or political systems, they keep referring to 'Americanization' as an umbrella concept that puts together a broad spectrum of transformations in political communication that occur globally, and apparently

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[30] 'Modernization' implies a progressive transformation of political communication caused primarily by the use of new technologies and greater functional specialization (Swanson and Mancini 1996). Similarly, 'professionalization', in general terms, traces an increasing tendency to rely on specialists or experts under the idea that 'new technologies require new sets of consultants and new batteries of technocrats' (Scammell 1997: 4). In both approaches, there is a sense of convergence toward increasingly complex and specialized functions of political communication. Critics, however, contest the idea of modernity and professionalism as superior models that put forward new professional norms and techniques (see for instance: Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 1996; Lilleker and Negrine 2002; Swanson 2004). Unilinear progressive approaches that assume the media and politics as being different and independent sets of actors ignore, for instance, the power that each entity retains to control their relationship or the interdependence between both professions, politics and journalism (Hallin and Mancini 2004a: Ch4).

[31] In this context, the term 'commercialization' refers to a trend of change in the political-media complex whereby mass media and political actors adapt their communication strategies to maximize economic benefits and personal utility. The results of this trend are, for instance, the proliferation of mass media driven by commercial values (Blumler 1997; Hallin and Mancini 2004b; Livingstone *et al.* 2007) or politicians excessively worried by 'stagecraft' instead of statecraft (Schmuhl 1990; Scammell 1995; Schill 2009). These transformations account for the ongoing 'commercial deluge' of public television all around Europe (Murdock and Golding 1999; Hallin and Mancini 2004b: 40; Croteau and Hoynes 2006: Ch5) or the increasing spiral of cynicism from citizens as a consequence of the proliferation of news coverage that transforms politics into 'sound bites' (Hallin 1992); 'horse races' (Patterson 1994; Cappella and Jamieson 1997) or 'infotainment' (Blumler 1992; Brants 1998; Norris 2001; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Thussu 2007). Commercialization approaches nourish an intense debate among those academics that see the value and thus the future for public service media (see for instance: Steemers 2003 or Bardoel and d'Haenens 2008) and those that stress the need for alternative regulatory mechanisms to prevent the media from treating citizens as mere consumers (like Bardoel and D'Haenens 2008; Puppis 2010; Lunt and Livingstone 2011).

regardless of distinctive national political regimes or media systems (Blumler and Gurevitch 1977/1995; Butler and Ranney 1992; Scammell 1995; Kaid and Holtz-Bacha 1995; Swanson and Mancini 1996a). Critics to this approach stress that comparative research does point at crucial differences among countries that force the reconsideration of the idea of a final, superior stage towards which all processes of political communication are targeting (see for instance: Negrine and Papathanassopoulos 1996; Scammell 1997; Lilleker and Negrine 2000; Swanson 2004).

Alternatively, the concept of 'homogenization' also addresses common trends in political communication that occur simultaneously, but have diverse consequences or scope across nations. What at first glance appears as similar political communication practices that follow the American lead or the same technological patterns (Tunstall 1977; Boyd-Barret *et al.* 1977; Tomlinson 1991), under the scrutiny of comparative research, some useful explanations arise about the diversity of practices and trends of change that are shaped by each national context. From this perspective, an increasingly homogeneous global communication system may resemble structures and routines initially tested in the United States. Nevertheless, it also recognizes, for instance, that diverse countries adapt American political communication practices to their own economic and political processes, often modifying them in significant ways (Hallin and Mancinni 2004b: 27).

In sum, current research on political communication and media systems around the world points towards convergence and homogenization patterns of change in the political-media complex. To better understand these global trends, academics have assessed diverse causes that range from new political and social conditions to the reproduction of political communication models (especially American models) apparently without standing national particularities. It remains difficult however, to predict how far this process of convergence may go, especially when looking at new democracies where strong authoritarian legacies and path dependencies combined with broad processes of social and political change, impose great influence on the political-media complex. Plus, findings on homogenization patterns of political communication arise from a well-known battery of Western case studies. Research on the political-media complex in new democracies does not often look at how the convergence paths that older democracies follow influence the way in which institutions (the government and the media) adapt (or not) to new political conditions, especially on a day-to-day basis and not just during electoral campaigning.

3.4   The political-media complex in new democracies: an analytical framework

The lens provided by Swanson's political-media complex (an institutional approach to the interaction between politics and the media) is useful to integrate the separate lines of research described above into a comprehensive conceptual framework to study the state-media relation in a new democracy. Table 3.1 below shows how the institutional factors identified in this chapter are operationalized to assess, on the basis of descriptive data, the relationship between governing elites and the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy. As discussed in this chapter these are: (1) the rules institutions enforce to give order; (2) the organizational dynamic institutions impose over individuals' roles, and (3) the patterns and tendencies that institutions take from but also use to shape historical rules and practices.

Rules are approached as formal rules and what neo-institutionalists call 'appropriate behaviour'. As seen in Table 3.1, in this study, prescriptive rules are investigated through constitutional rights and duties, specific statutory legislation, particular policies, organizational norms, internal rules of procedures or codes of conduct. This normative perspective is complemented with the analysis of informal templates for individual behaviour such as culture, common understandings or knowledge. Admittedly, 'appropriateness' as described by neo-institutionalists is an abstraction and as such, it is unfeasible to precisely measure it with empirical data. Nevertheless, descriptions about the orientations and beliefs of key actors in communicating politics serve to confront what is written in formal rules with what it is actually happening in the field.

For its part, drawing on Canel and Sanders' (2010) work on the influence that certain structures and practices impose over government communication, the organizational dynamic of the communication offices in the Mexican democracy is studied through different analytical components. These are: (1) organizational charts; (2) the role and influence that the leader imposes; (3) practices and day-to-day routines;[32] (4) the strategies to measure public responses; and (5) the mechanisms to assess the results and to evaluate the communication process.

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[32] Canel and Sanders (2010) is published in Spanish. What here refers to as 'practices or day-to-day routines', the authors actually use the Spanish word 'tareas' (p. 36) which is literally translated into English as 'duties'. It seems, however, that the term in Spanish and especially the way Canel and Sanders use it refers more to activities that are performed on a regular basis (routines and practices) rather than to a specific set of responsibilities and obligations (duties) that are commonly dictated by internal rulings, norms or particular set of guidance.

Table 3.1 **Thinking institutionally about the state-media relation in new democracies: an alternative conceptual framework**

Institutional Factors	Components	Analytical tools		
Rules	Prescriptive Rules	Constitutional rulings Particular legislation Organizational norms, internal rulings or particular codes of conduct		
	Appropriate actions	Beliefs, paradigms, codes Culture and knowledge		
Organizational dynamic	Organizational charts	Human Resources	Recruitment processes Professional profiles: background and skills Training	
		Financial Resources	Budget Contracts Disclosure mechanisms	
	Role of the leader	Spokesman Adviser on media relations Agent Manager	Channel of communication with the media and the public Strategist: guidance and support Facilitator and mediator between the administration and the media Head of the office and coordinator with other ministries and branches of government	
	Practices and day-to-day routines	Strategic Communication Political logic	Communication objectives: planning and coordination Information gathering: evaluation processes of media and political environments Information dissemination: communication channels	
	Measures of public response and evaluation mechanisms	Media logic	Role of the public in the design and functioning of government communication Feedback and public opinion surveys	
Patterns of change and continuity	The professionalization of political communication	Alternative homogenization patterns: modernization, Americanization, globalization Interrelated changes in politics, the news media and in communicating politics Authoritarian legacies, path dependences and continuities		

To a great extent these analytical components summarize the main findings of previous research on the functioning and structure of government communication offices.[33] For instance, Canel and Sanders (2010: 36-37) suggestion to include an analysis of organizational charts or the role of the leader responds to the well-recognized influence that different structural arrangements have over the functioning of organizations (see for instance key studies on organizational structures and configurations as: Mintzberg 1979; 1983; McPhee 1985, 1989; Perrow 1986; Poole 1999).

Something similar happens with the quite distinctive results that different styles of management impose over the organization.[34] In line with this perspective are the research findings on the role that charismatic politicians (like Obama or Clinton; Thatcher or Blair) have had in designing and conducting their communication strategies. Presidents, Prime Ministers and press secretaries that easily receive media attention or have a clear idea of their communication strategy impose great influence (although not always positive) on the functioning of their communication teams and ultimately on the relationship between the executive and the media (Seymour-Ure 1991; Scammell 1995; Sanders *et al.* 1999; Kumar 2001; Davis 2002; Ingham 2003).

Having said that, in order to operationalize the study of government communication offices throughout these analytical components and according to this thesis' aims, Canel and Sanders' (2010: 36-37) proposal required a clearer conceptualization. In the case, for instance, of practices and routines, the authors briefly mention the difference between highly strategic communication and more administrative and procedural communication practices.[35] The same happens to the

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[33] Canel and Sanders (2010) argue that research on government communication offices (centred mainly on the US and the UK) addresses diverse aspects of these offices rendering key, yet isolated facts about their structural and managerial arrangements. For instance, studies on executive government communication tend to focus on the structure and functioning of the White House Press Office (see: Denton and Hahn 1986; Kurtz 1998; Han 2001; Kumar 2003) or on the communications strategy of Downing Street (Scammell 1995; Moloney 2000; Jones 2001; Davis 2002; Ingham 2003). Research on government communication of other national case studies is dispersed among different areas of study (for few examples see: De Masi 2003; Young 2007; Fisher and Horsley 2008) and as such it becomes difficult to track.

[34] Management excellence, reinvention and quality studies have traced this trend thoroughly. See for instance: Peters and Waterman 1982; Osborne and Gaebler 1992; Cohen and Brand 1993.

[35] 'A less strategic communication (and thus less professional)', Canel and Sanders (2010: 36) write, 'limits these practices and routines to a simple relation with the media (calls, press releases, press conferences, interviews, web contents, etc.). A more strategic communication includes other practices such as the design of communication plans for the legislative (along with a plan that links together the political strategy with the communication strategy); a map of the audiences that will receive the message (with its respective differentiation among segments); a coordination strategy among different units; a creative discourse and event

components referring to public responses or to evaluation processes. Including these two analytical tools into the analysis of government communication offices recognizes current evidence on the use of public opinion and evaluation processes as common, but dangerous tools in communicating politics (see for instance: Scammell 1995; Kurtz 1998; Davis 2002; Strömbäck 2011). Yet, Canel and Sanders omit precise descriptions about what a researcher aiming to apply these analytical components has to look at when assessing empirical data.

To complement Canel and Sanders' (2010: 36-73) proposal in a way to make it suitable for this thesis, three adjustments have been considered. The first one is the inclusion of a more precise analytical tool for the study of the organizational charts. The distinction between human and financial resources showed in Table 3.1 allows a closer look of the communication workforce (professional profiles and background, recruitment strategies and training programs) and the budget allocated to these offices.[36]

As seen in Chapter Two, transparency about the financial resources invested in government communication remains an unfulfilled task of the Mexican democracy. Not just data on public advertising (when available) seems simply unreliable, since the quantity of ads circulating (in TV, radio, press, public spaces and the internet) does not correspond to the advertising expenditure reported (de la Mora 2009). Also, for political actors, advertising has traditionally been, as Guerrero (2010c: 27) warns, a 'frontline mechanism to establish clientelistic relations with the media'. For this thesis, an approach to organizational charts that expands the analysis to human and financial resources allows a comprehensive assessment of those particular organizational settings that influenced the capacity of the Fox administration to modify (or not) the machinery of government communication at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico.

A second adjustment to Canel and Sanders' proposal addresses the need to setting clear parameters to assess the role of the leader in communicating to the government. In his comparative study about 'what is important and distinctive about the

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design; establishing channels and messages for internal communication, and; an evaluation of the process'.

[36] This distinction draws on Canel and Sanders' later study about the professionalization of government communication in Spain, UK and Germany (Sanders *et al.* 2011). In this work the authors advance an analytical framework that differentiates between human and financial resources. 'Financial resources', they (Sanders 2011 *et al.*: 528) write, 'include budgets and reward systems. Human resources are regarded as a separate structural element that include the skills, knowledge, and values of the communication workforce as detailed in professional profiles, training and recruitment programs, together with the number of those employed in communication'.

job', Seymour-Ure (1991: 383) distinguishes four particular roles: (1) spokesman, (2) adviser on media relations, (3) agent and (4) manager. These different roles, argues Seymour-Ure (1991: 385) respond to a permanent, yet circular trend of change in communicating politics from the office of the executive:

> Starting from a historical position where the president or prime minister was historically his own press secretary, each stage represents a new development on the use of surrogates. The path returns to the chief executive, rather than being linear, because the logical conclusion of the development is to place the chief executive personally at the centre of public communication again, as a performer, media strategist, and manager.

This particular approach to the role of the leader includes into the analysis, both the chief executive and other relevant communications positions such as press secretaries, spokespersons or communications directors. Nevertheless, it stresses the key influence that the chief executive retains over the communications office. For instance, both roles as an adviser on media relations or as an agent require from the government communications manager certain credibility with the press, as well as a commitment with the administration (s)he is serving. This credibility or close relationship with both the media and the administration may come, as Seymour-Ure (1991: 394) stresses, from diverse previous work experience such as electoral campaigning, partisan media positions or civil service appointments. The position, however tends to have its limitations. Few press secretaries serve more than one term, while few chief executives have had only one press secretary. Several conditions define this continuous trend of change. Yet what remains useful for this study about Seymour-Ure's approach to the role of the leader in government communication offices is his appraisal about these administrative units being constantly adapted to different managerial and leadership styles. Bureaucracies however, tend to slowly respond to change and are commonly constrained by rigid procedures or particular attitudes toward efficiency, motivation and improvement (Lanchman 1985; Emmert and Crow 1988; Coursey and Bozeman 1990; Knott 1993). These conditions impose extra challenges on the leader (the chief executive and/or the communications manager) making her or him a key asset (or limitation) on the communications strategy (Grossman and Kumar 1981; Han 2001; Kumar 2007).

Third, Canel and Sanders' mention of 'strategic communication' remains useful to approach government communicators' practices and routines. Nevertheless, the term requires a precise conceptualization that allows its operationilisation in this thesis. Pfetsch (2008: 73) for instance, defines strategic communication more precisely as 'an

interactive process in which messages are shaped, tested, evaluated, and revisited until they encourage the desired effect'. From this perspective, government communication is a careful and strategically designed process that includes four specific tasks: (1) establishing clear communication objectives; (2) evaluating the media and political environments; (3) selecting specific communication channels, and (4) assessing the effectiveness of this process (Pfetsch 2008: 73).

In this process, Pfestch distinguishes between 'media-centred' and 'political or party centred' news management 'as two general types of strategic communication' (*ibid*). The 'political-logic' or 'party-centred' communication strategy aims to mobilize political support and legitimize public decisions or policies through political communication. The main goal of government communication becomes then to retain political power through official information and public trust. In this process, mass media are 'the means, but not the ends of the action' (Pfetsch 2008: 73). Political discourse and communication techniques are tailored to gain presence or control over potential electoral competition. Government messages are aimed to attract popular support while the media's involvement in the process is restricted to their role as broadcasters.

By contrast, the 'media logic' or 'media-centred' news management is concerned with adapting political messages, communication techniques and political actors' image (be they bureaucrats, political parties, politicians or candidates running for office) to media formats, news values and commercial patterns. Media become both the means and the targets of government communication. Mass news media are the main channels of communication to keep citizens informed about public policies and political objectives. Media, moreover, are regarded as key tools in the struggle for political power by attracting audiences, framing the political debate and creating or mobilizing popular consent. Government communication, in consequence, gradually moves away from traditional formats such as the press release or the press conference to more strategic, professionalized and technologically-mediated practices that aim to control the flow of news. This strategic approach to government communication greatly influences the day-to-day practices and routines that government communicators use to relate with the media and communicate to citizens (Mazzoleni 1987; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999).

Admittedly, crafted government communication and information management are nothing new. The mere fact that modern democracies invest significant human and financial resources in information services and press-offices is in line with a long and well-known practice of professional and crafted political communication (see for

example: Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Rubin 1958; Wise 1973; Rogers 1983; Bennett 1988; Johnson-Cartee and Copeland 2004). However, what worries political communication scholars and practitioners is the sudden growth and wide-scale adoption of these practices. Governments retain the goal to communicate politics to citizens, but the practices regularly used nowadays aim to manage, tailor and selectively disseminate public information.

Hence, researchers' suspicions are not only about increasing budgets and personnel involved in public sector communication, but also about its consequences. Widely spread among scholars is the notion that designing political communication campaigns (electoral and non-electoral) as if politicians were soap, or reporting them as if they were in a horse race (Sigelman and Bullock 1991) is increasingly becoming an empty (but common) practice (Gitlin 1991). The risks of 'packaging politics' (Franklin 1994) are not just about bringing to the public sector advertising and marketing techniques widely used in the private sector. 'Infotainment' (Blumler 1992; Brants 1998; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001) highlights the drama about a political life in which personality, strategy and performance receive more attention than substantive issues such as policy-making, representation or participation. Media restrict other actors' access to mass communication, selectively privileging certain kinds of information and treating politics as show business (see for example: Bennett and Entman 2001a; Price *et al.* 2002; Graber 2003b; Habermas 2006; Voltmer 2006; Gaber 2007). Reducing politics to sound bites (Hallin 1992) increases citizens' cynicism about politics: its participants, processes and key functions in society (Cappella and Jamieson 1997).

For this thesis, Pfetsch's (1998: 72) conceptualization of strategic communication includes into the analysis, precise tasks to assess the day-to day government communication in Mexico. This complements Canel and Sander's (2010: 36-37) analytical components to study the functioning of government communication offices with Pfetsch's conceptualization of strategic communication, and allows both a functional and a constructive approach to the tasks, orientations and key actors' beliefs in communicating politics.[37] In addition, it stresses the difference between party and

[37] In a later work, Pfetsch develops the concept of 'political communication culture'. Drawing from Almond and Verba (1963), the author (Pfetsch 2004: 347-348) argues that 'if the concern of political culture research is transferred to the subarea of political communication, the political communication system is to be explained not only through indicators of the institutional structure of the political and media systems. It is rather the subjective orientations of actors in politics and the media that lend meaning to the system […] In analogy of political culture, political communication culture can be defined as *the empirically observable orientations of actors in the system of production of political messages toward specific objects of political communication, which determine the*

98

media logic in communicating politics. For Pfetsch, both are highly crafted communication tactics. However, the distinction points to the role that media play as a means or as an end in the political-media complex.

As seen in Table 3.1 above, the third institutional factor investigated in this thesis is addressed throughout patterns of change and continuity. This approach denotes an analysis of diverse trends that give rise to a combination of disruptive change coupled with continuities from the past. Transitions to democracy are historical events that, according to the liberal-democratic paradigm, drastically modify the state-media relation (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, this transformation takes place along with other changes (in politics, in the news media and in communicating politics, for instance) and along with other trends such as the modernization, Americanization or globalization of political communication that occur simultaneously all over the world. Drawing on the notion of 'professionalization' that encompasses these transformations, this thesis assesses how particular national contexts (in this study the Mexican context) and the persistence of past practices shape the state-media relation in new democracies.

In sum, Table 3.1 encapsulates the conceptual framework used in this thesis to study the state of the political-media complex at the outset of the Mexican democracy. As shown, the analysis focuses on three institutional aspects: rules, organizational dynamic and patterns of change and continuity. These particular institutional factors are justified by theoretical considerations that at their root unify distinctive neo-institutional traditions into a general theoretical approach. Similarly, previous research on the state-media relation informs the additional components and analytical tools included in this framework.

Conclusions

This chapter presents the theoretical backbone of this thesis, making the research in hand a unique work in the study of the state-media relation in new democracies. 'Thinking institutionally' about the relationship between political regimes and media systems contests broad assumptions about this interaction merely mirroring fixed normative prescriptions or misguided individual choices (Swanson 1992, 1997). Directing the searchlight to institutional factors renders additional evidence on how, and most intriguing why, both media and politicians in new and old democracies are (apparently) predestined to unfulfilling their duties in communicating politics proscribed

manner in which political actors and media actors communicate in relation to their common political public' (emphasis from the original).

by the liberal-democratic paradigm. That is, this stance offers a better understanding of the endogenous and exogenous forces that shape the way in which politicians and journalists interact with each other. If the goal is to sort out the shortcomings of the interaction between politics and the media, it is necessary to understand the institutional forces that better explain its current flaws and potential dangers (Swanson 1992, 1997).

An institutional approach to the political-media complex, however, opens the theoretical debate to distinctive schools of thought that define and investigate political institutions from very diverse perspectives. Neo-institutional studies, write Thelen and Steinmo (1992: 15), 'explain everything until they explain nothing'. Instead of debating about the constraints or benefits of one neo-institutional school over the other, this thesis draws on a holistic theoretical approach to the study of institutions in political science. It focuses on the study of three institutional factors that at their root give neo-institutionalism a unified theoretical stance: the rules, organizational dynamics and patterns of change that shape individual behaviour and determine the outcomes of political processes.

Media studies have actually rendered key insights about these three institutional aspects of the political-media complex. Looking at its norms and regulations, different regulatory frameworks (grounded on public service or market oriented premises) emerge as key determinants of different media systems. When the searchlight is placed on the organizational structures and professional routines, scholarship shows that culture and power are at the core of the political-media complex overcoming merely technical or naturalistic understandings about this interaction. For their part, studies that focus on diverse trends of change and continuity suggest that all over the world, political communication and media systems are becoming increasingly similar. These global homogenization patterns diminish the differences between nationally distinctive political regimes even when endogenous political and social factors are most likely the motors of these changes.

The analytical framework put forward in this chapter draws on these findings to assess empirical data emerging from the study of national cases beyond the well-known battery of old Western democracies. The following chapter thus explains the research design and methodologies that transformed these theoretical abstractions into the guiding map used to conduct the fieldwork for this thesis.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

> *I have lived among people of letters, who have written history*
> *without being involved in practical affairs,*
> *and among politicians, who have spent all their time making things happen,*
> *without thinking about to describe them.*
> *I have always noticed that the former see general causes everywhere,*
> *while the latter, living among the unconnected facts of everyday life,*
> *believe that everything must be attributed to specific incidents and that little forces*
> *that they play in their hands must be the same as those that move the world.*
> *It is to be believed that both are mistaken.*
>
> *Alexis de Tocqueville*, Souvenirs (circa 1850).

In terms of research design, this thesis begins, as Schmitter (2008: 267) puts it: 'with the assumption that something is deficient in the way that the topic has been previously handled and that the units or time periods to be examined will demonstrate the existence of anomalies'. As seen in Chapter Two, traditional understandings about the interaction between political regimes and media systems (authoritarian repression of the media, democratic empowerment of them) pose some analytical challenges in the study of the Mexican case. Firstly, this starting point obstructs the possibility to disentangle cosy and interdependent relationships that linked together two emblematic institutions during the authoritarian era: the PRI, one of the longest single-party rules in the world, and Televisa, one of the strongest media conglomerates in Latin America. Secondly, this usual dichotomy of authoritarianism versus democracy does not help to explain the shortcomings of Mexican democratization in terms of a vigorous Fourth Estate fully independent from the political regime.

This thesis takes a closer look at the governing elite in their interaction with the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy. In so doing, the study addresses the following main research question:

How did the process of democratization change the political-media complex in Mexico?

The previous chapter (Chapter Three) introduced and explained the usefulness of Swanson's 'political-media complex' as an alternative theoretical perspective to study the state-media relation in a new democracy. Drawing on the author's call for an institutional approach to this interaction (Swanson 1992, 1997), the chapter advanced an alternative conceptual framework that focuses the analysis on the rules, organizational dynamics and patterns of change that shape the way in which the new political regime in Mexico interacted with the media.

The following pages explain then the research design or 'logical plan' (Yin 2009: 26) to operationalize the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis. By looking at the benefits of a 'single unit of analysis' (Della Porta and Keating 2008), the first section of the chapter justifies the selection of a single-case study as a research method for a better understanding of an interaction that has traditionally benefited from the study of multiple cases, especially from a comparative research design. This section thus explains why this thesis centers the analysis on just one case study. In so doing, it describes the parameters of the case study and unpacks this thesis' main research questions into additional empirical questions that drive the analysis in this study.

The second section of the chapter offers a closer look at the qualitative methodologies used in this thesis. It serves as a reflexive account of the challenges embedded and the scope of elite interviewing as a primary source of empirical information, as well as of document research as a supportive methodology. This section thus investigates the challenges of drawing general conclusions from the stories of a selective group of public officers and from official documents that are difficult to track and consult.

Following a brief recap about the planning and execution of the fieldwork conducted for this thesis, the third section of the chapter explains the procedures followed to organize and analyze empirical data, as well as to present the main empirical findings emerging from this study. These pages describe a process of translation from the analytical tools that arose from previous works on the political-media complex into a useful empirical research strategy to study the Mexican case. The understanding of how new governing cadres impose (or not) a distinctive interaction with the media in new democracies might be restricted by insights coming from a single-case study. Plus, as seen, the political-media in Mexico has traditionally been quite peculiar. This poses great challenges in terms of generalizations and theory building that are explored further in this chapter.

Overall, the research design explained in the following pages represents a new starting point in the study of the state-media relation in Mexico and potentially in other new democracies. After all, 'attempts to reform political communication', writes Swanson (1992: 399), 'are unlikely to add up to anything more that rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic unless they recognize the institutional grounding of objectionable practices'. In an effort to develop alternative instruments able to (promptly) detect the tip of the iceberg, the following pages offer a reflexive approach to the main decisions,

opportunities and challenges this thesis faced when moving from the theoretical paradigms and the conceptual framework that encourage it, to the facts and evidence that sustain it.

4.1   Research design: a single-case study and its research questions

In terms of theory building, critics argue that little can be expected and learned from single-case studies (Ragin 1987; Locke and Thelen 1998; Rueschemeyer 2003). This stance has indeed, sound reasons. In contrast to other methods (such as experiments, surveys or pure quantitative statistical or formal modeling studies), single-case studies represent specific compromises and limitations in at least two aspects.[38]

The first one is about the process that researchers follow to select and delimit their cases (Collier and Mohoney 1996; George and Bennett 2005; Gerring 2007; Yin 2009). Drawing on the cautions that quantitative researchers put against 'selection biases', academics doing qualitative research are aware of (and quite often concerned about) the potential pitfalls of case studies selected under specific bases and with predetermined goals. Under statistical considerations, these selecting criteria (or biases) seriously damage the validity of the study. In fact, methodologists worry about privileging case selection according to expected outcomes (intuitive regression); specific variables (such as a potential truncation on the dependent variable); pre-constituted populations, or about privileging deviant cases or outliers (discordant observations) (see for instance: Gerring 2007: 71-76).

Surely, as stated in the introductory chapter to this thesis, this study represents an invaluable opportunity to make some sense of nearly three years (2005-2007) of employment, where I was part of president Fox's office of communications and the months after where I worked in the same position for the Calderon administration. During that time, I had the feeling —as de Tocqueville in the opening quote to this chapter— that even when academics and practitioners are to some extent dependent on each other, their totally divergent perspectives of the same phenomena set them apart, apparently living in two completely different worlds. This thesis was originally conceived as an exploratory journey into the potential paths that link together these divergent standpoints.

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[38] For a further discussion on the theoretical limitations embedded in single-case studies see: Ragin and Becker 1992; Becker and Bryman 2005; Bryman 2008; Alasuutari *et al.* 2008; Johnson *et al.* 2008; Della Porta and Keating 2008.

To overcome the potential biases arising from this kind of self-confessed 'deliberative choice' (George and Bennett 2005: 83), the selection of Mexico as a single-case case study also responds to a targeted research design that pursues three interrelated goals: (1) to test old theoretical assumptions about the relationship between political regimes and media systems (Chapter Two); (2) to propose an alternative conceptual framework to catch up with additional findings and changing political settings of the political-media complex in new democracies (Chapter Three), and (3) to advance preliminary knowledge about Mexico (Chapters Five to Seven) and about what this experience tells regarding other recent transitions to democracy (Chapter Eight).

This being said, it could also be argued that Mexico is more a 'deviant' than a 'representative' case study (Gerring 2007: 89-90). Compared to other transitions to democracy in the region, the Mexican political transition actually diverts from the common path that most Latin American countries followed from military rules to democracy (Merino 2003; Campuzano 2007; Loaeza 2008; Smith 2009; Heras and Booth 2009; Bizberg 2010; Gómez Talge and Sonnleitner 2010; Woldenberg 2012). In addition, outside the region, Mexico also appears as a unique case. The length of its authoritarian rule combined with other particular characteristics of the political regime such as a non-military presidential system based on regular electoral processes contrast sharply to other authoritarian regimes around the world (Ortega 2008; Labastida *et al.* 2008; Bizberg 2013).

This thesis, however, agrees with the reasoning that relevance, rather than representativeness, is also a valid criteria in the selection of qualitative empirical studies. As George and Bennet (2005: 30-31) put it:

> Case researchers do not aspire to select cases that are directly 'representative' of diverse populations and they usually do not and should not make claims that their findings are applicable to such populations except in contingent ways […] Instead, they are more interested in finding the conditions under which specified outcomes occur, and the mechanisms through which their occur, rather than uncovering the frequency with which those conditions and their outcomes arise.

From this stance, the study of the Mexican case opens a valuable opportunity for an in-depth analysis of the constraints (or opportunities) that the new governing elites (mainly the executive) impose over the emergence of a vigorous Fourth Estate that is fully independent from the political regime. That is, changes in the social and the political settings in the country have not been automatically translated into a more democratic, open or healthy relationship between the governing elites and the media. In fact, recent scholarship traces certain path-dependant authoritarian traits coming from both sets of

actors (Lawson and Hughes 2005a; Waisbord 2007; Guerrero 2010a). Nevertheless, there is a lack of careful explanation about why, and also intriguingly, how, this has happened.

There are valuable insights about the struggles Mexican newsrooms are facing in democracy (Lawson and Hughes 2005b; Hughes 2007, 2008; McPherson 2010, 2012). But there is still the need of similar analyses emerging from a comprehensive study of the new governing elites in their interaction with these 'hybrid' (Hughes 2006: 10) or 'transitional' (McPherson 2010: 173) media systems. An approach to this intertwined and complex process allows, for instance, a closer examination of the tasks new Mexican governing elites advanced, as well as those that remain unaccomplished. Plus, such an analysis sheds some light on what Linz and Stepan (1996: 5) describe as the 'conditions that must be established, and attitudes and habits that must be cultivated before democracy could be considered consolidated'.

This perspective, however, does not ignore a second key challenge embedded in single-case studies. This refers to the limitations this research method poses in terms of valuable theoretical generalizations (see for instance: Ragin 1987; King *et al.* 1994; Brady and Collier 2004; Bennett and Elman 2006). Single-case studies are grounded on a restricted number of observations conditioning the analysis to very particular characteristics that may not be present in other cases. The validity of these kinds of findings is therefore highly compromised by potential rejections of hypotheses evaluated under different contexts (Goldthorpe 2000: Ch3).

As mentioned, this thesis aims to strengthen the understanding about the political-media complex in new democracies. Yet, its function is more modest than of stating generalizations or grounded theories. The reach of this thesis is thus strictly delimited by its capacity to test some hypotheses about old paradigms and to advance an alternative starting point to assess this interaction. In addition, this study is aware that the particularities of any transition to democracy make comparative research and theoretical generalization especially difficult. This thesis' final aim is by no means to generalize its findings to other transitions to democracy by arguing similarities in context, political regime or media systems. The capacity of this study to shed some light on other transitions to democracy rests in the possibility to replicate this study by applying the conceptual framework proposed to additional case studies. Plus, this is an obligatory step to highlight the strengths and the scope of this work.

4.1.1 Data requirements

'Much of the scepticism about the theoretical value of single case studies', writes Rueschemeyer (2003: 332) 'derives from the mistaken equation of a single case with a single observation'. Single case studies are targeted analyses of a reduced number of factors presumably relevant to offer causal explanations and a holistic understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. However, this does not mean that the findings emerging from this particular approach to the interaction between theoretical claims and the best empirical evidence are confined to the particular case under analysis. The explanatory gains of single case studies actually come from testing theoretical assumptions against multiple data points offered by a precise description or reconstruction of a particular process (Feagin *et al.* 1991; Ragin and Becker 1992). That is, the validity of the inferences arising from a single case study rest on the adequacy of the observations (pieces of data) collected and on a systemic process of analysis that aims to test certain theoretical assumptions (Hall 2003; Rueschemeyer 2003).

'Although every researcher should remain open to serendipitous discovery', insists Hall (2003: 395), 'this enterprise is not an inductive one; it is focused on the testing of propositions derived from a deductive process of theory formation'. From this ontological perspective, the conceptual framework proposed in this thesis serves as a pointer in terms of the empirical data required. It, for instance, dictates a careful analysis of how 'thinking institutionally' about the state-media relation in a new democratic setting relates to causal processes and multiple observations on the field. Therefore, this kind of analysis demands a cautious assessment on how rules, bureaucratic structures and organizational dynamics, and patterns of change shape the state-media relation. Mere descriptions and correlations between outcomes and few causal variables may not render explanations about the three very specific aspects of the state-media relation purposed in this thesis.

From this ontological perspective and as a contemporary history project, the obligatory point of reference for this study is first hand descriptions and evaluations from those that have had an active role in the process under investigation. These narratives are thus approached as valuable sources of empirical data that facilitate the process of tracing and reconstructing recent transformations or subtle changes on the state-media relation. Methodologists point out that qualitative interviewing renders valuable information about the process under investigation by disentangling key players' beliefs, attitudes, values and goals (see for instance: Holstein 1997; Rubin and Rubin

2005; Kvale 2008; King and Horrocks 2010). Moreover, this methodology allows the mapping of the role that each participant has had in this process through 'interpretative frameworks that the researcher introduces to understand their accounts in more conceptual or abstract terms, often in relation to other observations' (Gaskell 2000: 39). From this stance, interviewing emerges then as a useful methodology that is compatible with the use of a specific analytical perspective as the one used in this thesis.

Other research methodologies (quantitative methods or even other qualitative methodologies such as content analysis on artifacts, discourse analysis on text and questionnaires) do not seem adequate to render detailed accounts about the three specific institutional aspects of the state-media relation that this thesis investigates. That is, it appears unfeasible to address the conceptual refinements imposed by the framework proposed in this study through a fixed or narrow evaluation of general empirical materials such as newspapers articles, speeches or general public opinion surveys.

Moreover, the role of new governing elites in their relationship with the media, as previously stated, is narrowly documented by current academic research on new democracies. In the Mexican case, recent publications or public governmental records are dispersed or difficult to access when they are not very recent. These conditions set additional limitations on the kind of data that is actually available to achieve this thesis' aims. They also point at interviewing as a research methodology able to offer valuable insights about the process under investigation.

Research on the interaction between politicians and the media has indeed found interviewing to be a valuable resource to test specific analytical concepts and theories from the practitioners' point of view (see for example: Tunstall 1970; Schlesinger and Tumber 1994; Scammell 1995; Tumber 2000; Davis 2002; Lawson 2002; Kernell 2007; Matos 2008). In this area of studies, interviewing has brought to the analysis key viewpoints in arenas where, as in government or in politics, the light shed by theories and concepts does not trespass the irrationality, constant change and permanent struggle between actors, diverse forces of influence and unexpected consequences. Thus, for this thesis 'semi-formal guided conversations and free-flowing informational exchanges' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997: 113) with government communicators came forward as a key research strategy to capture specific descriptions and particular points of view able to give appearance and texture to the shadows we currently see through the interaction between the government and the media in Mexico.

For their part, official documents dealing with government communication are seen as a necessary additional source of information for three reasons. Firstly, the analysis of relevant statutory legislation, media policies and written procedures for the state-media relation is naturally needed to investigate the first institutional aspect (rules) put forth in the conceptual framework used in this thesis. Secondly, official documents are needed for an understanding of the administrative structure, functions, human and financial resources, and programmatic particularities of government communication offices with an especial focus on the POC. Thirdly, official documents are useful to corroborate some specific data gathered through interviewing. Documents become a powerful tool of research when assessing their function and interaction with the subject under investigation (Prior 2008).

As a result, document research in this thesis serves various purposes. Official document sources are approached as supportive sources of evidence (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Hodder 2000; Krippendorf 2004; Lewis 2005). Nevertheless, the mere fact that there are media laws, presidential decrees and secondary regulations, rules of procedure and official budgets for government communication does not tell much, for instance, about how government communicators perceive the relevance of these statutory regulations or about the real utility of these written proscriptions on the day-to-day interaction with the media. By looking just at these official documents, it is difficult to grasp the political tensions and conditions that surround these texts. For this thesis, the 'interactional' (Prior 2008: 833) function of documents, rather than a mere content or thematic analysis, is crucial for a better understanding of how formal statutory rules and written proscriptions shape the way in which the interviewees described their interaction with the media.

From this perspective, official document research is approached as a supplementary source of empirical data, while interviewing is the main source of information for this thesis.

4.1.2   *Empirical research questions*

'Data collection designs', writes Diekmann (1999: 274, quoted by Flick 2005: 146), 'are means to the end of collecting meaningful data'. With this in mind, Table 4.1 below shows how the main research question that guide this thesis was translated into supplementary empirical questions that served as a guidance tool about specific information needed from fieldwork.

Table 4.1   **Main and empirical research questions and their relation with the conceptual framework used in this thesis**

Central research question:		
How did the process of democratization change the political-media complex in Mexico?		

Empirical research questions		
How did government communicators manage their relationship with the media at the outset of the Mexican democracy? Which formal and informal institutional norms, rules and practices influenced the way they managed this relationship?		

Chapter	Sub- research questions	
		Conceptual Framework
5	What are the statutory regulations influencing the relationship between government communicators and the media on a daily basis? How do these formal rules and norms impose (or not) certain limits to this interaction? Do these statutory regulations and norms, as neo-institutionalism theory suggests, trigger an appropriate behaviour for governing elites? If so, what, from the perspective of these government officers constitutes this 'logic of appropriateness'?	Rules
6	How did the government machinery of communication function at the outset of the Mexican democracy? What was its administrative structure? How did it work on a day-to-day basis? What does this organizational structure and functioning tell us about the relationship between the new governing elites and the media?	Organizational Dynamic
7	Does political communication in Mexico show signs of the professionalization trends that research has traced around the world? How does the development of this process shape the political-media complex in the country?	Patterns of Change
8	Is an institutional approach to the state-media relationships a valuable analytical perspective? To what extent does the Mexican case add insight to the study of the political-media complex? What do the empirical findings emerging from this case study tell about the state-media relation in other new democracies?	

As explained in the introductory chapter to this thesis and as seen in the table above (Table 4.1), each empirical chapter respectively covers one of the institutional factors advanced in the conceptual framework used in this thesis. Chapter Five, *Media regulation: new rules and (in)appropriateness*, looks at both the statutory regulations and informal arrangements that shape (constrain and enable) the interaction between the state and the media. The chapter draws on the notion of 'appropriateness' put forth by neo-institutional theory to assess how government communicators' attitudes towards the media deviate from what formal rules prescribe (March and Olsen 1989; 2004). In terms of empirical data, the chapter gathers information about the perceptions of Mexican government communicators about how formal regulations were transformed (or not) into certain limits and opportunities to relate with the media under new political conditions. That is, the existence of formal-legal regulations and norms are not assumed to suggest that these regulations are fully accepted, followed or enforced. The analysis in this chapter aims to present a detailed account of what government communicators are able to do (a normative approach to what it is prescribed in formal rules), but also what the interviewees express they are motivated to do (an approach to common beliefs, unwritten codes, internalized prescriptions or even an ethos of self-discipline).

Chapter Six, *Inside the black box: the organizational dynamic of the government's machinery of communications*, looks at the bureaucratic structure and functioning of government communication. It puts together information about the financial and human resources involved in communicating the government in the new democratic setting. The chapter focuses on data about how, according to the interviewees, diverse administrative and managerial resources create a specific environment for the relationship between the government and the media on day-to-day bases.

Chapter Seven, *Communicating politics: the limits of professionalization*, explores further to what extent the political communication strategies imposed by the new cadres of government communicators followed trends that are common among democracies (old or new). The chapter draws on the notion of the 'professionalization' of political communication to assess if Mexican government communicators, like almost any other public communicator in the world, tend to make extensive use of media management techniques, paid public advertising or polling to steer government communication strategies.

By responding to the empirical questions shown in Table 4.1, each empirical chapter informs the conclusions to this thesis, Chapter Eight. The chapter summarises

the insights emerging from this thesis to address inquires about the benefits (and constraints) of approaching the state-media relation from an institutional theoretical perspective. It also addresses the gains and limitations of a study on a single national case that is grounded on the particular perceptions of public officers that played an active role in the process under investigation.

4.2 Searching for evidence in the field: interviewing and document research

One of the most exciting moments in academic research is when the researcher 'hits the road' looking for those illuminating facts and hard evidence that will validate (or destroy) their entire research strategy. At this stage of the study, fieldwork becomes an exciting, but mysterious and puzzling enterprise. 'Out there', in the 'real world' (Foddy 1993: 12), subjects or objects of study tend to behave in a less orderly, rational manner or simply differently from expectations set by conceptual frameworks tailored in research rooms. As Yin (2009: 66) points out:

> In fact, case study research is among the hardest types of research to do because of the absence of routine procedures. Case study investigators therefore need to be comfortable in addressing procedural uncertainties during the course of a study. Other desirable traits include the ability to ask good questions, 'listen', be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issues being studied, and know how to avoid bias.

The fieldwork for this thesis proved to be quite an adventure, indeed. As explained, the ontological perspective assumed in this thesis and the data requirements for this study pointed at interviewing and document research as pertinent and useful qualitative methodologies. Similarly, specific sub-research questions set particular aims and delimited the scope of the empirical work. Nevertheless, certain concerns about how to start and how to conduct empirical research remained.

As stated earlier, I had a relatively recent professional experience in communications in the Mexican government. Plus, I am Mexican and Spanish is my mother tongue. In certain aspects this should have eased the empirical work for this thesis. I was naturally in a better position than fellow colleagues conducting research in unfamiliar contexts (like foreign countries) that required them to learn a new language, history and culture. Doing empirical research in my own country, with people I shared a professional background with and in a topic where I claimed to have both a certain theoretical grounding and intense professional experience proved, however, not to be a guaranteed advantage. In a way, these particular conditions made fieldwork appear to be

more frightening. From the very beginning I was, for instance, aware of how difficult it was to get access to government communicators. Most importantly, I was familiar with the vast battery of techniques (ranging from busy schedules to 'spinning' controversial issues into potential benefits) these public officials are tempted to use when trying to avoid certain topics or even people.

4.2.1   Initial access: pilot interviews and exploratory archive research

To ease these fears, I designed a preparatory empirical research schedule that took place in December 2008. The goal of this exercise was twofold. First, to get a clearer picture about the challenges and opportunities involved in interviewing as the primary methodology to collect empirical data, and document research as a complementary source of information. Second, this pilot exercise was also seen as an opportunity to sharpen this study's theoretical approach with some preliminary empirical data about the interaction between the new governing elites and the media in Mexico.

This exercise included 21 pilot interviews with government communicators, media workers and Mexican researchers and exploratory archive research. A couple of months before my research trip to Mexico, I established contact via email with a small group of former colleagues at president Fox's office of communications. Among them there was a former director of the office,[39] a couple of high-level bureaucrats with planning and directing functions and some operative officers in charge of routine contacts and day-to-day interactions with the media. Through these (some of them former) public officers I was also able to contact a few journalists and a couple of editors of *Reforma*, a national newspaper with high circulation rates in Mexico. For this exercise I also got in touch with a small number of academics from diverse Mexican institutions such as UNAM, UIA, ITESM and CIDE.[40]

Rather than being considered formal fieldwork or a source of empirical data, these pilot interviews were conceived as a planning exercise and as a way to learn good tips about doing fieldwork in Mexico. That is, throughout this process the final goal was

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[39] During the Fox administration, the director of the POC (*Director General de Comunicación Social*) served similar functions to that of the US Press Secretary (spokesperson, permanent liaison with the media, communication strategist and manager) or the UK Director of Communications or the Chief Press Secretary (coordinator for government communication strategies and main voice of the government). In Mexico, however, this position does not have an official rank of secretary or minister and she or he is not part of the cabinet or has an active role in policy decision-making.

[40] Since this exploratory fieldwork took place during an initial stage of this study, the goal was to get in touch with a diversity of actors. Later in the project it became clearer that the thesis would focus on the accounts of government officials.

to learn more about the challenges and opportunities embedded in interviewing rather than to collect raw empirical data. As such, these conversations took place in diverse places that ranged from coffee shops and university libraries, to a living room full of seasonal decorations and small children playing around. Moreover, these conversations often diverted away from the interview guide that was prepared in advance.

Nevertheless, this preparatory exercise proved to be useful in three aspects. First, it served to renew contact with former colleagues and start what methodologists refer to in the literature on research methodology as a 'snow-ball' effect (Richards 1996: 200; Davies 2001). That is, once I got in touch with the small group of government communicators that participated in these pilot interviews (some were still in post at the time of this pilot exercise), they suggested (along with the contact information they had available) some other people that either they considered relevant points of reference for the role played in the Fox administration, or they thought were able to participate in the study. Mexican scholars also pinpointed some names of colleagues that had actively contributed to the current debate about the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy. Thus, I ended up with a fair amount of names of potential interviewees that did eventually contribute to this thesis.

Second, throughout this pilot exercise, it became evident that interviewing, as the literature warns, is a methodology highly dependent upon the cooperation and viewpoints of the participants, as well as upon the researcher's ability to sort out all kinds of challenges (Holstein 1997; Odendahl and Shaw 2002; Rubin 2005; Kvale 2008). These matters extend beyond the initial stages of contact, access or the actual agreement of the interviewees to participate in the study. From the researcher's side, choosing an adequate place to conduct the interview (preferably without too much background noise or potential distractions) was crucial. Being flexible and open to sudden changes of schedule also turned out to be a key asset. For instance, more than two interviewees per day was something practically impossible for logistical issues (such as distance, scheduling, punctuality or length of the interviews). It was also difficult due to the intense focus and energy involved in qualitative interviewing. Other details emerged as key determinants for a successful interview, such as a functioning recording device (preferably fully charged); a permanent means of communication (such as a smart phone); or even a proper field notebook to keep interview guides, consent forms and other field notes in order.

Additional challenges arose from the interviewees. These were, for instance, their typically busy agendas or time constraints that forced them to cancel appointments at the very last minute; their very particular viewpoints about the topic under investigation or even their potential skills to evade questions or to avoid straightforward answers (Williams 1989). Compared to academics or even journalists, government communicators proved to be prone to managing conversations and to controlling the flows of information thorough careful accounts and selective descriptions. Direct answers to questions (if at all obtained) were rarely spontaneous. In an effort to control adverse or negative accounts about their job including accounts about the organizational structure, operation or even personal actions and day-to-day struggles, government communicators, especially high-level bureaucrats, were likely to over-dimension their actions and personal contributions. It was thus necessary to remain alert to these potential biases and to be ready to disentangle these very personal perceptions with follow-up questions that were not part of the original interviewing topic guide.

Similarly, document research proved to be a less straightforward research methodology than expected. Firstly, Mexican governmental archives are not regularly open to the general public. It was actually very difficult to get access to specific documents such as budgets or organizational charts of government communication offices. Each communications office (the presidency or the diverse ministries of the executive) stores its official documents and data without a particular cataloguing or referencing strategy. In addition, getting access to these archives was practically impossible. The National Historic Archive (*Archivo General de la Nación*) is the only governmental archive open to the general public and it only holds information that is considered 'historic'. That is, once a presidential term is over, all the federal government files are transferred to this general archive. In the case of the Fox administration, December 2008, however, seemed to be too early for these kinds of documents to have been transferred, classified and ready for public viewing. When available, data about government communication offices (organizational charts, budgets, functions or specific rulings) of previous PRI administration was dispersed and difficult to trace. Plus, the National Archive happens to be closed for a seasonal break for a large part of December and January; a period that overlapped with this pilot fieldwork. In a few words, this exploratory archive experience was rather disappointing, yet quite useful to redefine the scope of document research as a source of information for this thesis.

Thirdly, even with the restrictions described, this pilot fieldwork was also useful to test the strategies and materials involved in interviewing and document research. For instance, the interviewing guides prepared for this pilot proved to be too long and restrictive. That is, in the spirit of gaining the most from each interview, I was initially more concerned with covering all the topics in the guide, rather than with letting the interview follow a natural flow. After a couple of very frustrating interviews, I tuned-up this interviewing guide (made it shorter and targeted, see below) and used it more as a reminder of the topics under discussion. This allowed both the researcher and the interviewees to feel more comfortable and speak naturally about topics that appeared more as interesting matters than forced enquires. In so doing, interviewing showed its benefits in conducting interpretative research aiming to collect first-hand knowledge from those that actively participate in the phenomenon under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln 2008; Charmaz 2008). On the other hand, as anticipated and also due to the limitations of archival sources access, research on official documents proved to be useful as a supplementary source of information as it showed serious limitations as a primary source of empirical data.

4.2.2   Inside fieldwork: the process and its pitfalls

Drawing on the insights gained by the pilot fieldwork described above, the arguments developed throughout this thesis rest on the analysis of empirical data collected from 37 semi-structured interviews with government communication offices (for an anonymous reference of participants see Appendix A). In contrast to the pilot exercise described above, these interviews were exclusively with government officers. Media representatives (editors, journalists, presidential press corps, anchorpersons and so on) were deliberately excluded since this study investigates the political-media complex in the Mexican democracy through the role that the new governing elites play in this interaction. Analyses on the perceptions of media workers have rendered key insights about the struggles the Mexican media face in democracy (see for instance: Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; Guerrero 2009; McPherson 2010). There is, however, a lack of similar accounts from the perspective of those who, within the new political regime, have been in charge of the design and functioning of a new relationship with the media.

These interviews were carried out in two stages. The first one included 23 interviews which were conducted between August and September 2009 (referred to as stage A in Appendix A). This first stage of fieldwork included different levels of

government communicators. The sampling of interviewees followed a positional approach in that it targeted both public officials in high decision-making positions and special media advisors, as well as middle and street-level officers that put public communication strategies into practice and maintained daily contact with the media. That is, the participants in this study are heads and directors of the POC, special advisers, as well as government communicators that maintained regular contact with *la fuente presidencial*, the presidential corps of journalists.

Nevertheless, this first stage of empirical research put special emphasis on getting access to most of the political appointees and senior level officers that participated in this study. This was mainly because, as Odendahl and Shaw (2002: 299) point out: 'social scientists commonly acknowledge elites but less frequently study them because the obstacles to reach them are not only logistical, but also ideological'. In this study, this stance was unsurprisingly accurate. The interviewing of high-level officers (spokespersons, directors, ministers or advisers) who had an active role in communicating politics at the outset of the Mexican democracy, posed serious challenges in terms of access, schedule constraints, power and confidentiality.

For instance, these kinds of participants were difficult to contact, their agendas were typically full, they travel often and they tend to have certain restrictions (as well as successful tactics) to openly talk to people, especially to someone that is looking for an in-depth understanding about their job. For more than six months (from the pilot exercise to this first stage of fieldwork) I worked on strengthening the network of contacts I had to ease the access to these elites. I, for instance, contacted some former heads of offices and directors of communications a few months in advance to actually conducting fieldwork to maintain regular contact with potential participants. In addition, during this period I worked on the interview topic guide. I included some precisions and alternative mechanisms to deal with potentially elusive tactics from this kind of highly experienced and skillful interviewees.

The length of these conversations with government communicators varied between 60 and 90 minutes. With the exception of one interviewee, all participants were willing to 'go on the record' even when it was clearly explained that this thesis uses an anonymous referencing system to protect a participant's identity and avoid potential negative effects on their professional careers (see below section 1.2.5). The oral records were transcribed in their original language (Spanish) and a pertinent translation was conducted only to the materials and extracts that were quoted in this thesis.

Due to time constraints and certainly some flaws on planning and scheduling during this first stage of fieldwork, it was not possible to cover more interviews with key participants already indentified and contacted. A second round of interviews (referred as stage B in Appendix A) was thus necessary. This second stage of fieldwork included 14 interviews and was conducted between November and December 2010.

Here it is worth emphasizing that even though interviewing was conducted in two different stages, this thesis, however, is conceived as a one-time interviewing process rather than as a longitudinal project.

Indeed, the second round of interviews targeted a different set of government communicators. During this stage, interviewing focused on mid and street-level bureaucrats. This was due to the fact that from the first round of interviews it became clearer that there were these government communicators who carry out a great part of their routine interactions with the media. This kind of data was needed, for instance, to address the empirical research questions dealing with the organizational dynamic or the professionalization of political communication put forth in the conceptual framework.

After a set of interviews with this kind of public officers, the data collected and the insights emerging from the analysis of the interviews conducted during the first stage of fieldwork reached what methodologists (Bryman 2008: 416) call 'theoretical saturation'. That is, the last interviews were not bringing any new facts to the empirical work. From this perspective, this thesis agrees with Gerring (2007: 59, 180) in that 'when discussing the question of evidence, one must consider the quality and quantity of evidence that could be gathered on a given question, given sufficient time and resources […] it is the quality of the observations and how they are analyzed, not the quantity of observations, that is the relevant'.

For its part, document research was conducted progressively during both stages of fieldwork. As mentioned, this method of empirical research served as a complementary source of information. Along with the interviews, the analysis in this thesis uses information from official documents such as media statutory laws, regulations, rules of procedure, budgets and white papers on *comunicación social,* that is, official publications dealing with government communication and political communication strategies.

These documents were collected or consulted through different means via the consultation of archives (such as the National Archive or archives in the office of the presidency, for example) or through secondary sources of information such as official

publications, like the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* (the Official Journal of the Federation) that publishes secondary laws, presidential decrees and other official statements. Nevertheless, as mentioned, more common than not, these documents were difficult to track or to get access to. In this study, every effort has been made to trace and consult relevant documents on government communication, especially those mentioned by the interviewees.

4.2.3   *The blurred line between empirical data and personal opinions*

To conduct the interviews with government communicators, I prepared an interview guide (see Appendix B for a full reproduction) informed by the institutional approach to the political-media complex proposed in Chapter Three of this thesis. That is, in general, participants were asked about three aspects of their job related to the interaction with the media: (1) how they understood and perceived the regulatory mechanisms of this interaction; (2) how they conceived their workplace in terms of organizational structure and daily functioning; and (3) what they considered to have been the main patterns of change and continuities in communicating the government under the new political setting.

The interviews covered these particular aspects of the political-media complex throughout diverse general topics. For instance, government communicators' perceptions about the legal mechanisms that regulate the interaction between the state and the media were explored by asking diverse questions about the motivations these public officers had to comply (or not) with what is proscribed in formal rules. From this perspective, rules and norms (formal and informal) were assessed according to the reported ability of these rulings to shape participants' interests and behaviour in their relationship with the media.

For their part, descriptions about the workplace focused on the role participants played within the organizational structure, as well as on the day-to day functioning of government communication offices. In this process, special attention was given to the opportunities and challenges that these public officers perceived that a specific organizational dynamic imposed upon the government-media relation. Similarly, the impact of trends of professionalization of political communication was explored through participants' accounts about the main changes in the interaction between the government and the media, especially about the expectations these transformations set in their day-to-day job.

Admittedly, in most of the interviews, this 'shopping list' proved to be quite ambitious for conversations that on average lasted an hour and a half. Plus, each interview had its own flow and evolved at its own pace. More common than not, interviewees spent quite a lot of time and effort on their own narratives and experiences, than on answering specific questions. Some participants, for instance, spent a large part of the interview on personal stories and anecdotal aspects of the political-media complex in Mexico. Others, however, offered such structured and clear explanations that it was difficult to believe that these accounts had not been thought through or planned in advance.

Interviewing did not exclude thus the possibility of exploring additional aspects of the state-media relation or when relevant, follow particular participants' stories. That is, the interview protocol served more as a reminder for the researcher of the main areas and aspects to be covered, rather than a strict research agenda. For instance, the researcher was particular interested in taking into consideration each participant's attitudes and resistances during these conversations. Each conversation was considered valued for the themes covered and for the information emerging from what Kvale and Brinkmann (2008: 2) call 'an *inter view*; an exchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest' (emphasis from original).

4.2.4   *Data collection vs. 'data making'*

While obvious, Kvale and Brinkmann's (2008: 2) point stresses the blurry and commonly underestimated role that the researcher plays in constructing and co-producing empirical data. Indeed, one of the key challenges of interviewing as a research methodology is to explicitly recognize the difficult position the researcher assumes when taking an active part in the conversations that constitute the main source of the empirical data (Hertz 1997; Josselson *et al.* 2003 and 2006). Thus, a 'continual self-analysis' (Holstein and Gubrium 1997: 120) of the interviewer's role –usually the researcher— becomes crucial to identify potential bias or other defense mechanisms that work against mutual disclosure and better understanding. A constant reflexive attitude during the interview and through the analysis stage was required to set clear boundaries between the researcher as an informed, independent and professional interviewer and the interviewee as a source of information and participant of both a particular conversation and a general process of knowledge construction (Kezar 2003; Kvale and Brinkmann 2008).

At this point, it is worth stressing that the researcher made every possible effort to keep track of this thesis' objectives and to lead the conversations with government communicators towards a clear end. As mentioned before, not only did I happen to know or worked with at least half of the participants, but I was also familiar with the dynamics (complaints and struggles) that these public officers traditionally face when relating with the media. This previous professional experience on the field demanded constant reflexive attention and self-consciousness (Mishler 1986; Ellis and Berger 2003; Gillham 2005: 6-9). In so doing, three measures served as additional cautions throughout the empirical work for this thesis. First, I maintained a careful position when conducting and evaluating the conversations with government officials, especially with former colleagues. That is, I tried not to take anything for granted. I constantly confronted my understanding of the processes under investigation with the evidence emerging from the empirical data. I, for instance, kept a research journal to have a record of ideas, assumptions or additional questions about the topic and about the research process. In addition, when necessary, I emphasized to participants the need to develop their accounts beyond presumed common understandings or shared points of view.

Second, I frequently cross-referenced the accounts and facts rendered by the interviewees. Different standpoints render different accounts of the same process (see for instance: Dunbar *et al.* 2005). While it was unfeasible to standardize everyone's points of views (including the researcher's), it was possible to remain keenly aware about this diversity on perspectives and understandings. Thus, during the field work every effort was made to address uncertainties and ambiguities in the information received by asking additional questions, confronting the information received with other available sources (other participants' accounts or documentary sources) and when necessary, making explicit potential conflicts within the data set (among interviews or against official documents). Admittedly, unanimity within the data set was seldom the case. Consistency and detailed explanations about potential discrepancies served as pointers during both fieldwork and data analysis.

Third, the narratives of the interviewees were not uncritically assumed as transparent and free of secrecy or bias. Reliability and the validity of oral recollections and diverse versions of events has been noticeably an area of concern among researchers (see for instance: Merton and Kendall 1946; Richards 1996; Davies 2001; Silverman 2006). As Berry (2002: 680) suggests: 'interviewers must always keep in mind

that it is not the obligation of a subject to be objective and tell us the truth'. Special attention was thus placed on corroborating the evidence emerging from the conversations with government communicators. This was done by, for instance, asking additional questions to participants, consulting official documents (when available) and learning from both consistency and discrepancy within the data set.

Plus, 'while we cannot actually observe the underlying mental process that gives rise to their responses', writes Chong (1993: 868), 'we can witness many of its outward manifestations; the way subjects ramble, hesitate, stumble, and meander as they formulate their answers tips us off to how they are thinking and reasoning through political issues'. Therefore, taking notice of participants' attitudes or variations on tone of voice or even pauses served as indications of the need to proceed with extra caution to lead these conversations to a good end.

4.2.5   *Conducting research vs. running a government: the politics and ethics of empirical research*

In turning to the ethical aspects regarding the use and disclosure of the information collected during fieldwork especially throughout the interviews, this thesis recognizes that by recording these conversations, transforming these oral records into texts and from there into evidence under scrutiny, this study may have imposed certain risks upon the interviewees.

To lessen these risks, this thesis is subject to the general ethical guidelines applied in qualitative research that aim to prevent harm to interviewees that might rise from empirical research and that promote equality among participants and respect for their opinions (Bauer and Gaskell 2000; Mauthner 2002; Kvale and Brinkmann 2008). From this perspective and to take into consideration each respondent's needs in terms of confidentiality and anonymity, at the beginning of each interview participants were asked to sign a consent form that served two key purposes (see Appendix C for a copy of this document).

Firstly, the form was useful to explain to each participant the purposes and scope of this doctoral research, especially in that the information gathered and the analysis offered in these pages serve purely academic purposes. Nevertheless, doctoral theses are public documents of open access, especially now that LSE PhD theses are available online to the general public without major restrictions.

Secondly, this consent form required the interviewees to tick two different sets of boxes. One set that indicates the interviewee choice about recording (recorded or not

recorded), and the other set about her or his willing to be quoted by name or to remain anonymous. All interviewees, except one, agreed to the recording of their interviews. The consent about being quoted by name (not anonymous) was, however, less preeminent. Actually, more than half of the interviewees chose to remain anonymous. This discrepancy among participants may respond to the challenges (as well as the responsibilities) government officials face to freely express their own points of view about controversial matters.

Appendix A offers a succinct referencing system without compromising the identity of participants. It uses an alphanumeric strategy to quote or refer to relevant information coming from a particular interview. A letter (A or B) followed by number (1 to 37) serves as a reference to the source of this information. The letter A indicates an interview conducted during the first stage of fieldwork, whereas the letter B refers to the second stage. The numbers following the letters A or B are given randomly to participants as a mere numeric reference. This appendix serves then as a general point of reference that allows the reader to identify the context, relevance and particularities of the information presented. Though this scheme of source referencing seems quite radical (as if this study was dealing with spreadsheets rather than with individuals) and thus bears more of a resemblance to referencing techniques used in quantitative research, this measure has been useful first, to protect the identity of all of the interviewees (even the ones that chose 'not anonymous') and second, to set a standard on how to indicate the context of the information presented. In any case, every effort has been made to give the reader a complete picture of the arguments presented in this thesis through pertinent descriptions and analyses, rather than by justifying the value of this information according to hierarchy held by its source.

4.3   Data analysis and writing-up: challenges and further steps

Methodologists stress that interviewing comprises more stages and requires additional abilities to the ones used during the precise moment of asking questions and listening to the answers given (Kvale 1996; Warren 2002; Gaskell 2000). Actually, designing and conducting interviews are just the first steps on a process of several stages that include transcription, analysis, confirmation and the reporting of the findings (Kvale 1996).

Something similar happens with document research. Once the relevant documents are identified and the challenges involved in getting access to them have been (partially) sorted out, the process of analyzing the raw data poses additional tasks.

'Neglecting the challenges embedded in dealing with such quantities of text', writes Kelle (2005: 278), 'will have serious methodological consequences: the very existence of such quantities of badly organized textual data increases the risk that theoretical conclusions will be supported by a very small number (perhaps hastily selected) [of] citations and that counter-evidence in the data will be overlooked'. This section of the chapter goes briefly through the additional stages embedded in fieldwork and data analysis. It focuses on the measures that have been taken to prevent potential flaws in organizing and analyzing the empirical data collected.

4.3.1   Mechanical tasks: organization, transcription and translation

Additional tasks once the interviews were conducted and the document research completed included matters such as organizing the interviews recordings into electronic files that were safely stored, as well as designing a strategy to easily retrieve and analyze these empirical data. In this process, two tactical measures helped to make the raw data collected from the interviews functional and manageable. First, the audio records of the interviews were transformed into text in order to have a hard record of each conversation. That is, every interview was transcribed in its original language (Spanish) including, when possible, references to the pauses, silences and hesitations from the interviewees. Therefore, a pertinent translation was conducted only to the materials or extracts that were used in this thesis as quotes or extracts of a particular interview.

This process of transcription was entirely carried out by the researcher. Despite the amount of work this represented, it was better to do it myself. This was, however, not purely due to language and budget restrictions, but also because it allowed a closer relationship with the data, as well as with the diverse themes emerging within and across the conversations with government communicators. Moreover, during this process of transcription, it was possible to get familiar not just with the words, but also with the pauses, slang and particular language connotations used by the interviewees. As anticipated, this approach to the data rendered additional information into the analysis regarding each participant's attitudes and perceptions about the topics under investigation.

The second action that helped to make the raw empirical data manageable and accessible was the use of specialized computer software. 'Computer-supported qualitative data analysis is not', Kelle (2005: 279) stresses, 'an independent qualitative method, but rather includes a number of data organization techniques whose utilization

will depend on the particular research issue, the research goals and the methodological orientation of the investigator'. With this in mind, the use of *NVivo* responded to the particular needs of this study. First, once transcribed, the interviews conducted for this thesis produced more than 500 pages. *NVivo* was thus a necessary tool to organize, make this information manageable and keep it safe in a single compressed electronic file.

Second, the data analysis software *NVivo* was helpful to identify, signpost, retrieve and organize relevant segments of text (interviews transcripts) from different parts of the text corpus and refer to a common topic (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2011; Bazeley and Jackson 2013: Ch4 and Ch5). As mentioned, by applying the analytical framework proposed in Chapter Three, this thesis assumes a deductive approach to the empirical data.[41] That is, the data analysis in this study relies on pre-established conceptions about specific themes and patterns within the dataset. *NVivo* was thus useful to identify differences, similarities and relationships within and among interview transcripts. Using a simple search engine, the software locates specific words (potential themes in a code) that repeat in and across texts making it possible to conduct a comparative analysis (Gibbs 2007; Bazeley and Jackson 2013: Ch6). Once certain patterns are established, the software allows the texts to be coded and to keep track of different tags or labels ('nodes' as *NVivo* calls them) given to the different segments within and across interviews. Codes, write Strauss and Corbin (1990: 61) are useful for 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data'.

Third, in this thesis, coding is implied as the assignment of one or more keywords to a text segment in order to allow and ease a later identification of a specific extract of the interviews that better represented or described specific concepts or categories (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: Ch2). With the help of *NVivo*, codes were thus operationalized as significant, precise and concise words that labeled and related the actions or experiences addressed by the interviewees to the particular aspects of the political-media complex. The aim was to use these labels to develop certain categories able to capture the actions and experiences under evaluation (Charmaz 2005).

Nonetheless, in *NVivo*, like in any other computer software for data administration and management, coding remains a task that is conducted entirely by the researcher according to particular perspectives (Becker and Geer 1960) or goals assigned to each study (Strauss and Corbin 1990). *NVivo*, emphasizes Bazeley (2007: 3): 'cannot make good work that is sloppy, nor compensate for limited interpretative capacity'. The

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[41] This approach contrasts then, to inductive analyses whereby identified themes emerge from the dataset (see for instance: Patton 2002).

use of a computer-assisted program in this thesis eased some of the mechanical tasks involved in storing, coding, reviewing and comparing texts. It allowed a careful process of coding, as well as a systematic study of the categories and relationships within and across diverse interviews. It was also possible to test alternative categories within the data that eventually matured into the hypothesis and findings presented in this thesis. Nevertheless, data analysis was conducted entirely by the researcher by getting familiar with the raw empirical data; setting some initial codes; searching for common themes within and across interview transcripts; relating these themes with the conceptual framework purposed, and; drawing some conclusions from these findings (Braun and Clarke 2006: 87-93).

4.3.2   *Thematic analysis: transforming viewpoints and descriptions into findings*

Thematic analysis, write Braun and Clarke (2006: 78), 'is a method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within data' by providing a detailed analysis of certain aspects of the process under investigation rather than by describing it as a whole (Vennesson 2008: 235). From this stance, the analysis conducted in this thesis differs from pure narrative in two ways.

First, data analysis is focused (Boyatzis 1998; Tuckett 2005; Braun and Clarke 2006; Gibbs 2007: Ch4). That is, data analysis in this study deals selectively with only certain aspects (themes across the data corpus) of the political-media complex at the outset of the Mexican democracy. From this perspective and in contrast to other analytical methodologies such as content or narrative analyses that look for a systemic quantitative description of the manifest content, this thesis draws on thematic analysis to look for 'a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observation and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon' (Boyatzis 1998: 4). Themes, therefore, were not quantified. Instead, these categories within and across the interview transcriptions were part of a qualitative analysis of the descriptions rendered by the interviewees.

Second, this approach aims to develop an explanation based on the analytical framework identified in the theoretical chapter (Chapter Three). The overall intention behind this analytical strategy is to target the empirical findings of this research on the three general themes about the interaction of the new governing elites with the media at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico: (1) its rules; (2) its organizational dynamic (structure and daily functioning); (3) the patterns of change and continuity

political communication has followed. Clearly, these themes draw on the three dimensions of those purposed in the conceptual framework used in this thesis to study the political-media complex in a new democracy from an institutional perspective. Thus, as mentioned, these themes were also the main topics covered during the interviews with government communicators. Nevertheless, in terms of thematic analysis, these themes diverge from the institutional aspects addressed in the conceptual framework in the sense that during the process of data analysis they were not conceived as fixed categories or topics to be strictly covered through the analysis of every interview transcript. They were instead, regarded as flexible themes described by patterned responses or meanings within the data corpus. Their 'keyness' (Braun and Clarke 2006: 82) was thus not necessarily linked to quantifiable measures since these themes actually differed in incidence and relevance among interviews.

4.3.3   *This thesis' scope and limitations*

Case studies are 'a phenomenon or an event, chosen, conceptualized and analyzed empirically as a manifestation of a broader class of phenomenon or events' (Vennesson 2008: 226). From this stance, for this thesis the study of the Mexican case represents a valuable method for collecting data about the political-media complex in a new democracy. In so doing, this thesis aims to render structured explanations about this interaction that can be tested and adapted to other transitions to democracy. As Gerring (2007: 29) remind us: 'what distinguishes the case study method from all the other methods is its reliance on evidence drawn from a single case and its attempt, at the same time, to illuminate features of a broader set of cases'.

Nevertheless, theory development, methodologists argue, is based on explanations about certain hypotheses that have to be structured, developed and tested before they can claim credibility and superiority against previous and competing theoretical approaches (Bryman 1989; Becker and Bryman 2005; Bennett and Elman 2006; Yin 2009). From this perspective, a single-case study seems to eliminate the possibility to test research hypotheses in completely different conditions. As thoroughly explained earlier in this chapter (section 1.1), this thesis aims to strengthen our understanding about the political-media complex in the Mexican democracy but also in other democracies. Yet the findings and the analysis presented here do not claim universality. The potential capacity of this study to render some insights about other

transitions to democracy is restricted to the possibility to test the conceptual framework here proposed to other case studies.

Conclusions

'Contrary to what you might have heard', Miles and Huberman insist (1994: 16) 'qualitative research designs do exit'. This chapter has gone through the research design and qualitative methodologies selected to conduct and organize this thesis' empirical work. Special attention was placed on both the challenges and the advantages that a single-case study method represents for empirical research in general, and for this thesis in particular. In regards to the case selection, these pages highlighted the advantages and the limitations of focusing the study on the case of Mexico: a very particular country of a long lasting non-military authoritarian regime followed by a troubled democracy.

Due to the particularities of the Mexican case and regarding the data requirements for a single-case study, interviewing and official documents research were indentified respectively as primary and supportive qualitative methodologies that are useful to collect information about the particular aspects of the political-media complex put forward in the conceptual framework used in this thesis: the rules, organizational structures and day-to-day practices that shape the interaction between the new governing elites and the media in Mexico.

Yet, as seen, further challenges in conducting this thesis' empirical research arose. Planning, scheduling and conducting the interviews, as well as tracking and consulting the official documents that were used in this thesis were both experiences full of challenges and also satisfactory rewards. The research design and methodology presented in this chapter proved to be helpful in translating the theoretical paradigms used in this study into guiding maps that pointed to relevant empirical data. Naturally, some key adjustments had to be done in the field to make from a single-case study, functional interviewing and document research effective choices.

Once the empirical information was collected, an in-depth thematic analysis on this data corpus was conducted with the help of specialized computer software. As fully explained in the following empirical chapters of this thesis, the data collected during fieldwork rendered useful insights about key aspects of the political-media complex at the outset of the Mexican democracy: its actors (especially the new governing elites that are the focus of this study); its constraints and regulations; its organizational structure

and day-to-day functioning, and its changes and continuities from one political regime to the other.

Trying to match two standing points that usually do not coincide is a rewarding, yet challenging task. On the one hand, there are academics and their research that invest valuable resources on cautious explanations about the causes, variables and consequences of social, political and economic phenomena. On the other, there are politicians and practitioners who also invest incalculable human and financial resources on trying to control these phenomena. However, both stances (researchers one side, politicians on the other) very rarely speak or read to each other. This thesis brings both perspectives together in a contemporary history study of the complex dynamic between the state and the media in Mexico. In so doing, every effort has been made to keep a balance of academics and researchers' viewpoints to render a useful analysis able to depict both the challenges embedded in theoretical paradigms and the practitioner's flaws that are at stake.

Part III

Field Notes

5 Media regulation: formal rules and a logic of inappropriateness

To some extent, success of regulatory activities
may be assessed by reference to the degree to which
the regulatory regime achieves identified objectives or outcomes.
Where clear objectives have not been set,
perhaps as a consequence of failure to argue and articulate
adequately the underlying raison d'être *of the regulatory regime,*
success or failure becomes difficult to measure.

Mike Feintuck and Mike Varney,
Media Regulation, Public Interest and the Law (2006)

In practice, however, things are seldom as clear-cut.
Problems associated with inherited authoritarian institutions of the formal kind are,
in fact, often created and/or compounded by authoritarian
cultural or traditional actors, forces, and patterns in society […]
The persistence of authoritarian legacies in postauthoritarian democracies
may be explained in terms of a combination of socially, culturally
and institutionally inducted set of attitudes, perceptions, motivations, and constraints
−that is, from traditions or institutions of the past
as well as from present political struggles within formally democratic arrangements.

Paola Cesarini and Katherine Hite, Introducing the Concept
of Authoritarian Legacies (2004)

'Media regulation is in the air' said one interviewee (A9) ironically, almost sniggering at the questions posed during the interview about regulation and media policy at the outset of the Mexican democracy. It was argued that president Fox endorsed four regulations in an effort to redefine the state-media relation according to the new political settings. These initiatives were reforms to past media legislation or new laws that were meant to address key aspects of the interaction between the government and the media such as the role of the state as media regulator; access to public information; media platforms and spaces for publicizing the government; public funding for political advertising; as well as the regime for licensing and the renewal of concessions for broadcasters.

Not surprisingly, this new regulatory framework was received with great suspicion. At first glance, far from embracing a state-media relation modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm, these rulings responded more to the reluctance of both the new governing elites and the media to end an era of cosy relations, interdependence and mutual benefits (Esteinou and Alma de la Selva 2009; Sánchez *et al.* 2010). Moreover, throughout this regulatory process, Mexican media (especially broadcasters) gained visibility as influential political actors determined to shield their economic interests to

the serious detriment of the emergence of the vigorous Fourth State (Guerrero 2010a, 2010c). The new political regime appeared unwilling to confront the industry (just as the authoritarian rule avoided in doing so for decades) in the duty to protect citizens from highly concentrated media markets and purely commercial contents. Instead, the Fox administration chose to keep media at close complicity through a lax and ineffective regulatory framework (Trejo Delarbre 2004; Guerrero 2010a; Bravo 2011).

This chapter assesses the perceptions of government communicators about the influence this legal framework imposed on the state-media relation. As explained in Chapter Three (section 3.4), 'thinking institutionally' (a dialogue across distinct neo-institutional traditions) about the role of rules in the political-media complex brings together diverse assumptions of institutional theory about how rules shape (constrain or enable) individual behaviour. The aim of this holistic institutional approach is to move the analysis from mere descriptions about statutory media regulations to a detailed account about government communicators' perceptions about both what they were *able* and *motivated* to do according to the proscriptions in place.

As such, the analysis in this chapter takes into consideration a normative approach to what it is prescribed in statutory laws, and a cognitive component that points to informal patterns of conduct, beliefs, codes and common knowledge emerging from written rules (March and Olsen 1989, 2004 2006). The mere fact that there are laws and regulations that govern the relationship between Mexican government communicators and the media is not assumed to suggest that these regulations are fully accepted, followed and enforced. The chapter focuses on the process through which these rules were (or not) translated into actual behaviour. From this stance, special attention is given to informal traits that, according to the government communicators that participated in this study, may have strengthened or weakened the relation between rules and the way they conducted their day-to-day interaction with the media.

With this particular perspective in mind about the role that rules (formal and informal) play in the political-media complex, this chapter addresses four empirical research questions:

- What are the statutory regulations influencing the relationship between government communicators and the media on a daily basis?

- How do these formal rules and norms impose (or not) certain limits to this interaction?

- Do these statutory regulations and norms, as neo-institutionalism theory suggests, trigger an appropriate behaviour for government communicators?

- If so, what, from the perspective of these office-holders, constitutes this 'logic of appropriateness'?

The chapter argues that transforming media policy into new beliefs, practices and enforcement mechanisms became a critical point of the state-media relation under the new democratic setting. As shown in the interviews, rather than referring to this regulatory framework as a set of rulings that imposed a 'code of appropriate behaviour', participants tended to express concern about the limits of these regulations to respond to the new political and communication environment. Using the term 'inappropriateness', the following pages report the interviewees' perceptions about three key informal factors emerging from the analysis that are seen as weakening the links between rules and actions: a lack of a clear rationale about the purpose and ultimate beneficiaries of media regulation; a shared notion about an almighty and incontrollable media, and a persistent belief that government information can be traded for positive coverage.

Arguably, the period analyzed in this thesis (2000-2006) is too short to see the emergence of alternative processes and formal mechanisms by which this mutual and often tacit understanding among participants (and more general among government communicators) of what is wrong and unreasonable (as opposed to March and Olsen's 'logic of appropriateness' that points at what it is true, reasonable, natural, right and good) evolve into new formal rules, values and identities, moves the state-media relation closer to the liberal-democratic paradigm. Nevertheless, this chapter shows the challenges in strengthening the links between rules and actions in a context where what is written in the legislation, the rationale of media regulation and the beliefs about a strong rational-legal authority (understood as the adherence to and enforcement of formal rules of procedure) do not correspond to the demands imposed by democracy.

In developing these arguments, the chapter is divided into three sections. The first one outlines traditional media policy concerns and the main mechanisms the Fox administration had at hand to regulate the media. At the outset of the Mexican democracy, media regulation was (and at the time of this publication still is) a rather complex set of statutory rulings, ranging from internal rules of procedure for government communication offices, general laws on relevant broadcasting and communication regulations to specific rights and principles imprinted in the Mexican Constitution (see below Table 6.1 for a list of these formal rulings). To a great extent, this legal framework was out of date, poorly framed and too responsive to media's commercial and private interests. Plus, according to the interviewees, these rulings

imposed additional challenges to redefine the state-media relation according to the new communication and political settings.

The second section of the chapter centres the analysis on the media policy initiatives put forth by the Fox administration. The first democratic government in Mexico did endorse an ambiguous and lax media regulation framework meant to protect the industry's interests, just as the authoritarian regime ruled its relationship with the media for several decades. Nevertheless, this media policymaking process did trigger an influential public debate among different actors. This made other voices and interests visible, and at the time it also pointed at the need of having new statutory regulations that responded to the public interest rather than only being used to the advantage of particular politicians and media moguls.

The third section of the chapter draws on neo-institutional theorists' approaches to rules as appropriate behaviour 'based on mutual and often tacit understandings of what is true, reasonable, natural, right and good […] but it does not guarantee technical efficiency or moral acceptability' (March and Olsen 2004: 4). In sharp contrast to this logic and to put emphasis on the perceptions of the interviewees about 'what is wrong, unreasonable, not natural, wrong and bad' in their relationship with the media, this section of the chapter introduces to what this thesis refers to as a 'logic of 'inappropriateness'. Drawing on neo-institutionalists' concept of 'appropriateness', the opposite term is used in this study to make allusion to a rather high level of self-reflection among the interviewees about the impossibility of carrying on with past and unlawful practices in their relationship with the media. It also points at participants' reported willingness to partially shift the overwhelming weight Mexican government communication places on the media to accommodate alternative practices that give voice to other actors and interests in communicating the government to citizens. As shown in these pages the challenge, however, remained to try and transform these perceptions into formal statutory rulings and 'mutual, tacit understandings and acceptability' about the need to drive the state-media relation closer to the liberal-democratic paradigm.

The chapter concludes by discussing how the findings presented speak directly to the conceptual framework used in this study. The persistent interdependence between the new governing elites and media conglomerates (especially TV broadcasters) is difficult to account for from the liberal or the critical political economy approaches to the state-media relation. Nevertheless, the institutional lenses used here to investigate

the role of formal rules and informal responses in the interaction between government communicators and the media are helpful to disentangle intertwined interests that drove the media policymaking process far away from the expectations imposed by the liberal-democratic paradigm. From this stance, the ambiguous authority of formal rules becomes evident, while informality emerges as both an obstacle and impulse to enhance a new regulatory framework. An interaction that could have been transformed through the enactment of new statutory regulations for the media and about political communication remains constrained by both the key role that the Mexican media keep in policymaking and divergent understandings about the beneficiaries, the purpose and the scope of media regulation.

5.1   The state and the media in Mexico: the rules of the game

The regulatory role of the state is a key question for democracies, old or new. Modern political theory has constantly struggled to find equilibrium between two extreme positions. One that argues for a strong regulatory state that protects the public interest from the dangers of capitalism (such as market concentration and even market failure) or from global modernization trends (such as free-trade, modernization or liberalization, to mention a few); the other that sees the market capable by itself of following certain auto-regulatory mechanisms in response to specific characteristics of the market and of consumers (for more general explanations on both perspectives see for instance: Mitnick 1980; Spulber 1989; Black 2002; Lodge and Wegrich 2012: Ch1 and Ch5).

The Mexican state has traditionally struggled to find a balance between both perspectives about the functions and gains of regulation. When it comes to the media, especially broadcasting, the unsolved dilemma stretches back to the early years of the radio. On the one hand, the post-revolutionary state (from the 1920's onwards) approached media regulation as a measure to protect the industry from the challenges imposed by the market such as high entry and fixed costs, inelastic demand, few competitors, uncertainty, and the need of constant investments on new technologies (Guerrero 2009: Ch2; 2010a: 233). Thus, authoritarian rule assumed the radio as an emerging private enterprise in need of some protectionist measures. Broadcasters were approached as businessmen; part of an entrepreneurial class traditionally linked to political elites through a real capacity of influence on politics (Fernández Christlieb 1982: 108-118). Statutory regulation thus aimed to ensure that Mexican media grew as a strong commercial industry and in so doing, remained close to the ruling elites.

On the other hand, however, the state did have a certain capacity of control over the emerging broadcasting industry through a strict regime of licenses and concessions. Different aspects of the market (such as supply and demand and to a certain extent competition) may have served as directives for broadcasters to consolidate this business. Nevertheless, the political regime had the capacity to regulate many aspects of this market and most importantly retained the power to impose certain controls over the industry. As Guerrero (2009: 61) puts it:

> A basic condition in the relationship between the regime and the broadcast media was the duality between property and operation [… that] was crucial for the regime to maintain the political control over broadcasting, but it also became an incentive for private broadcasters to organize and defend their interests, since the rules by which concessions were awarded, suspended or cancelled were highly ambiguous and, therefore, subjected to circumstantial and discretionary political interpretations.

In short, the authoritarian regime endorsed a lax regulatory framework that allowed broadcasters to grow as powerful conglomerates. The regime, however, was cautious enough to maintain a series of controlling mechanisms that ranged from unclear regulation about broadcasting concessions to protectionist policies aimed to keep media owners tied to the ruling elites. Media regulation, or more precisely the ambiguity about or lack of it, was the backbone of these controlling practices. A lax and out-of-date media policy proved to be an effective way to keep the burgeoning broadcasting industry at close complicity. This trend contributed to strengthen media conglomerates; led to an almost non-existent public service media, and; sentenced subsequent media regulatory processes to failure.

The Fox administration thus inherited an intricate set of obsolete statutory media regulations. For instance, when questioned about the regulatory framework to rule the state-media relation available at the outset of the Mexican democracy, an interviewee exclaimed annoyed (B19) 'do not ask me that!' The argument continued as follows:

> With all that has been said in the media and done in politics about media regulation, it seems that we [government communicators] were just responding to particular interests! That we did not know how to behave, how to handle public information, how to do our job! Of course we have rules, there are plenty of them! The problem is not if we know or need more rules, it is about how we make sense of the regulatory framework we have and put those rules to work!

This interviewee pointed to the fact that the formal laws regulating the relationship between the government (more generally the state) and the mass media during the first years of a new political regime in Mexico indeed came in more than one form. Table 6.1

below summarises this intricate legal framework. It shows these regulations included, among many, constitutional rights and duties as well as specific laws about public information and freedom of expression; specific legislations about broadcasting platforms and times for official announcements and public advertising; special (recent) rulings for government communication (especially advertising) during electoral times; guidelines for public service practice; particular directives for those involved in political communication, *comunicación social* (literally translated as 'social communication', that as explained later in this thesis –see Chapter Six, section 6.4.1-- is a quite imprecise term that in practice refers more to government communication and public advertising than to a fluent communication process between office-holders and citizens), and last but not least, some budgetary regulations about human and financial resources involved in government communication.

The analysis of the interviews pointed to two key challenges participants faced regarding the media regulation in place at the outset of the Mexican democracy. Firstly, according to the interviewees these regulations were out of date and did not respond to the current communications environment characterized, for instance, by 24/7 news services; online and instant news briefs; a great diversity of political actors setting the news agenda, and; highly crafted public relations and media management techniques. The following extract from an interview (A4) serves to illustrate this point:

> In practical terms, these laws pictured a national reality that was arguably accurate a long, very long time ago. There was an eminent need to change these regulations. The media we have now, the presidency, legislators, political parties, none of these actors are what they were decades ago, when most of these rulings were put in place. We [government communicators] could not pretend, and most importantly could not conduct our relationship with the media hoping that these out-of- date regulations were going to solve the dilemmas we faced under new political conditions.

Second, these laws simply did not mirror the rights and duties imposed by democracy on both the government and the media. As shown in the interviews, in the initial years of democracy in Mexico, government communicators did not underestimate the need of new and more effective statutory regulations for the government-media relation. As another interviewee (B6) put it: 'this is not a lawless job, on the contrary, we have to be very cautious; we are dealing with public information. I expect my colleagues from within the government and from the media to behave accordingly'.

Table 5.1 **Statutory rulings for the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy**

LEGAL PROVISIONS	Date published in the DOF
Laws	
Mexican Constitution *Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*	February 5th, 1917
Federal Law of Radio and TV *Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*	January 19th, 1960
Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information *Ley Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información*	June 11th, 2002
Federal Law of Telecommunications *Ley Federal de Telecomunicaciones*	February 19th, 1940
Federal Law of Cinema *Ley Federal de Cinematografía*	December 29th, 1992
General Communications Law *Ley de Vías Generales de Comunicación*	February 19th, 1940
Federal Law of Copyright *Ley Federal de Derechos de Autor*	December 24th, 1996
Civil Service Law *Ley del Servicio Profesional*	August 4th, 1994
Federal Law of Administrative Procedures *Ley Federal de Procedimiento Administrativo*	June 7th, 1995
Federal Law of Protection to the Consumer *Ley General de Protección al Consumidor*	December 24th, 1992
Federal Antitrust Law *Ley Federal de Competencia Económica*	December 24th, 1992
General Law of National Assets *Ley General de Bienes Nacionales*	May 20th, 2004
Federal Public Administration Organizational Law *Ley Orgánica de la Administración Pública Federal*	December 29th, 1976
Law of Crimes Related to Print *Ley sobre Delitos de Imprenta*	April 12th, 1917
Federal Law on the Prevention and Elimination of Discrimination *Ley Federal para Prevenir y Eliminar la Discriminación*	June 11th, 2003
Law to Promote Reading *Ley de Fomento para la Lectura y el Libro*	July 24th, 2008
Law on Religious Associations and Public Worship *Ley de Asociaciones Religiosas y Culto Público*	July 15th, 1992
Federal Law on Metrology and Standardization *Ley Federal sobre Metrología y Normalización*	July 1st, 1992
Codes	
Electoral Code COFIPE	January 14th, 2008
Civil Federal Code *Código Civil Federal*	May 26th, 1928
Commerce Code *Código de Comercio*	October 7th, 1889
Federal Code for Civilian Procedures *Código Federal de Procedimientos Civiles*	February 24th, 1943
Federal Criminal Code *Código Penal Federal*	August 14th, 1931

(continues) LEGAL PROVISIONS	Date published in the DOF
Rules of procedure	
Rules of Procedure for the Federal Law of Radio and TV *Reglamento de la Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*	October 10th, 2002
Rules of Procedure on the Access to Radio and TV During Electoral Times *Reglamento de Acceso a Radio y Televisión en material electoral*	August 11th, 2008
Rules of Procedure on Illustrated Publications and Magazines *Reglamento sobre Publicaciones y Revistas Ilustradas*	July 13th, 1981
Rules of Procedure on paid Services of TV and Radio *Reglamento del Servicio de Televisión y Audio Restringidos*	February 29th, 2000
Rules of Procedure on the Federal Law of Copyright *Reglamento de la Ley Federal del Derecho de Autor*	May 22nd, 1988
Internal Rules of Procedure of the Ministry of Interior *Reglamento Interno de la Secretaría de Gobernación*	July 30th, 2002
Operations Manual of the National Council for Radio and TV *Manual de Operación del Consejo Nacional de Radio y Televisión*	January 15th, 2003
Decrees	
Decree to Reduce the Fiscal Burden Imposed over Broadcasters *Decreto por el que se autoriza a la SHCP a recibir de los concesionarios de estaciones y radio y televisión el pago de impuesto que se indica*	October 10th, 2002
Agreements	
Agreement to Establish General Rulings for Public Advertising Campaigns for the Federal Government *Lineamientos generales para la orientación, planeación, autorización, coordinación, supervisión y evaluación de las estrategias, los programas y las campañas de comunicación social de la Administración Pública Federal*	Published every fiscal year
Agreement About the Ratings for TV Movies and Shows *Acuerdo mediante el cual se emiten los criterios generales de clasificación de películas para la televisión, tenelovelas, series filmadas y teleteatros grabados*	March 2nd, 2007
Agreement About the Ratings for Movies *Acuerdo mediante el cual se expiden los criterios para la clasificación de películas cinematográficas*	April 4th. 2002
Agreement to Form the Inter-ministerial Commission for the use of the Free Broadcasting Time Granted to the State *Acuerdo por el que se constituye una comision intersecretarial para utilizar el tiempo de transmisión que dispone el Estado*	August 21st, 1969
Norms	
NOM-01-SCT1-93 AM Frequencies	November 10th, 1993
NOM-02-SCT1-93 FM Frequencies	November 11th, 1993
NOM-03-SCT1-93 TV Frequencies	November 15th, 1993
Additional regulations	
General Health Law *Ley General de Salud*	February 7th, 1984
Rule of Procedure of the General Health Law on Public Advertising *Reglamento de la Ley General de Salud en materia de publicidad*	May 4th, 2000

Source: elaborated with information available on the web site of the Ministry of Interior:
http://pnmi.segob.gob.mx/PNMP_compilacion_juridica.php (last accessed: January 12th, 2014)

Nevertheless, a clear and common understanding about the rationale of the legal proscriptions that may affect government communicator's strategies and tactics, as well as their day-to-day interaction with the media was difficult to get from the analysis of the interviews. For some participants, the new political regime (the federal government in coordination with the legislative and other political actors) was regarded in charge of embracing a new regulatory framework for the state-media relation that promoted access to information, transparency and accountability from both sets of actors, the government and the media. For others, however, the media appeared to be in need of additional internal regulations to promote higher professional standards and new codes of ethics to enhance investigative journalism. From this stance, the media was seen responsible of promoting new rules and codes that strengthened their vigilant role as a Fourth Estate. The state was seen to play a key role in protecting rights such as freedom of expression and access to public information. Nevertheless, particular duties for the government in terms of information and a more fluent and transparent relationship with the media did not emerge in the analysis as key themes in the conversations with government communicators.

The discrepancy about the role and purpose of media regulation in government communication and in the routine interaction with the media can be traced to the intense debate generated by the media policy reforms put forth by the Fox administration. The next section of the chapter takes a closer look at these initiatives. It centres the analysis on what these rulings proscribed, but also on interviewees' perceptions about how these statutory regulations shaped (or not) their routine interaction with the media.

5.2   Choosing to regulate

'Was it unexpected? No, I wouldn't say so', an interviewee (A3) pointed out when referring to the intense debate triggered by the media policy initiatives passed during the Fox administration. The account continued as follows:

> It did put us [government communicators] in an awkward position. But looking backwards, one has to admit that any change to these rulings would have had impacted our job, in one way or the other really […] May be what we probably did not see coming, at least not as clear enough as we should have had to, was that throughout *el sexenio* [the term] we were not be able to get rid of this latent idea that president Fox was using media regulation as a means to perpetuate cosy relationships with the media. But I can tell you something for sure: for me and I guess for journalists too our day-to-day job were anything but cosy!'

This sort of paradox was a common starting point when discussing media regulation with participants. On the one hand, the intense debate surrounding media regulation suggested that the new government was trying to keep close ties with the media to ensure positive coverage, just as the authoritarian regime did it over decades. From this perspective, one might conclude that when comparing the new political regime with authoritarian rule, nothing was really new (or in positive terms, more democratic) about how the Fox administration conducted, and more worrying, conceived its relationship with the media.

On the other, interviewees alleged that journalists and news media in general were quite adversarial in their attitude towards information coming from official sources, especially those from the executive. Negative headlines were common. Plus, participants commonly stressed great difficulties in separating the news agenda from the debate generated by the media policymaking process. As a participant puts it (B5):

> Why should a journalist trust information coming from an official source that seems terrified of regulating the media; of facing negative coverage; of setting the ground for the media to finally be a real watchdog? […] But let us face it: nothing of this was as evident during the authoritarian years as it is now. That represents a big change, isn't it?

This section of the chapter goes briefly through the four media policy initiatives put forward by the Fox administration. In a chronological order these are: (1) a much celebrated transparency law (DOF, June 11th 2002), and in contrast; (2) a highly criticized presidential decree to reduce the fiscal burden imposed on broadcasters back in the late 1960s (DOF, October 10th 2002); (3) the controversial new rules of procedure for the 1960 Federal Law for Radio and Television (DOF, October 10th, 2002), and; (4) an eventual failed set of reforms to the FLRTV, passed in April 2006 (DOF, April 11th 2006) and overruled by the Mexican Supreme Court of Justice in July 2007 (DOF, July 20th 2007).

These four formal statutory rules represent how the Fox administration aimed to build a new relationship with the media. As shown in the interviews, paradoxically, far from making the relationship more fluent or transparent, these rulings opened the door to additional challenges making it more difficult to break down with traditional conceptions about the legality, legitimacy and effectiveness of media regulation in Mexico.

One key characteristic (and danger) of the authoritarian regime in Mexico was the secrecy surrounding data and information about public administration. For decades, it was difficult to know with a certain amount of certainty as to what the president's salary was (or any other office-holder), how much the government spent on public programs and policies (infrastructure, education, health, security, housing, to mention a few), or how many registered public officers (doctors, teachers, bureaucrats) were actually working in the public sector. These figures, among with other key information about the government, simply appeared as sealed secrets.

One could argue that difficulties to access government information were partially caused by the fact that the different authoritarian administrations kept this data on different files and formats, making it simply impossible to get access to this information and have accurate figures about the government. However, a general agreement among Mexican researchers suggests that no matter how diverse the challenges to access public information were, these were primarily caused by a deliberate lack of transparency endorsed by authoritarian rule (see for instance: Escobedo 2003 and Guerrero 2010c).

As part of a comprehensive reform of public administration, the Fox administration passed a Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information (LFTAIPG, an acronym for *Ley Federal de Transparencia y Acceso a la Información Pública Gubernamental*) that, in short 'forces the government to open its files' (IFAI: 7). In general terms, the Mexican transparency law states: mandatory and efficient access to public information (DOF, June 11th 2002, LFTAIPG: articles 1 and 2); guaranteed protection of personal data (article 4 and 20 to 26); transparency obligations for governmental federal agencies (articles 7 to 12) and for other bodies of the state (articles 61 and 62), and; special considerations about privileged information and confidential data (articles 8 to 19). The law also considers operational matters such as: fees (article 27); the creation of special liaison units and committees to process information requests (articles 28 to 32); procedures to access public information (articles 40 to 48), and; sanctions for misconduct or the non-fulfilment of the obligations imposed (articles 63 and 64). It's rulings also prescribe the creation of a special autonomous federal body (IFAI, the acronym for *Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información y Protección de Datos*, Federal Institute for Access to Public Information and Data Protection) in charge of promoting the right of access to public information; deciding

about controversies related to information requests, and; protecting certain kinds of data (articles 33 to 39).

During its first years, the Mexican transparency law was seen as a great success. Transparency and the right to access public information were cornerstones for democracy and thus, the steps forward to the consolidation of a new political regime in the country. Plus, the government was finally committed to open 'a public window' (Ugalde 2002) through which citizens were able to scrutinize the practice of their governors and to denounce their abuses; something which was just unfeasible during the authoritarian era (Guerrero 2002).

It thus took a while before national researchers and practitioners were able to spot the challenges involved in transparency and public data disclosure (see for instance: Fox *et al.* 2007; Quintana 2008: Ch7; Vergara 2008; Guerrero 2010b). The analysis of the interviews showed, for instance, that for participants, transparency and general access to public information represented both a democratic guiding principle and a problem. The following extract for an interview (B1) captures this sense well:

> We can all agree that these formal proscriptions [the Transparency and Access of Government Public Information Law] were a firm step towards accountability and transparency; this is of course a good sign; no one can really deny that, nobody will dare to do it! What I am saying here is that in practice, the transparency law was far from an ideal vision. We [officers at the Presidential Office of Communications], for example, had no formal procedures to know about requests of information, especially about who was using this public information resource. And suddenly we faced these strident headlines using information apparently disclosed by a formal access of public information requests. Or we also went through the opposite: editorials showing that for no good apparent reason and because a request of information did not receive a proper answer, the government was withholding information about government performance, expenses or who knows what else, anything really!

As shown in the analysis of the interviews, transparency and access to public information imposed at least three challenges for participants. The first one was about the use of this legal resource as a journalistic practice that, according to the interviewees, was not fully disclosed by journalists or editors. Therefore, for participants, public information seemed to be valuable for the news media not purely because it is in the public interest (at least ideally) to scrutinize the regular functioning of the government. It was also newsworthy because it can be translated into scandalous (and profitable) headlines. 'When it comes to the news agenda being transparent', put briefly by an interviewee (B9), 'was almost the same as being suicidal!' This is naturally, an extreme appreciation. But in general terms, participants approached the new transparency and

access to public information law with certain caution and suspicion about how media were actually using the resources and public data proscribed in the law.

A second challenge closely related to the former appreciation was about the fact that government communicators did not know who the requesters of public information were from or how the information disclosed was actually being used in news coverage. For instance, in one way or another quite a few interviewees complained about the fact that requests of information through the transparency law were not really anonymous if they were about to being published as scandalous headlines.

In a similar trend, a third challenge imposed by the access to information law from the interviewees' stance was about a certain lack of clarity regarding the parameters for some public information to be released or some other information to be kept as confidential. The law is clear about privileged information and confidential data that compromises for instance, national security. Nevertheless, government communicators complained that media tended to treat the unsolved requests as a deliberate government communication tactic to withhold relevant information.

In sum, as sharply put by one interviewee (B10) 'we [government communicators] learnt the hard way in that in a new political environment, transparency could and actually meant several contradictory things'. As shown in the interviews, government communicators tended to develop new strategies and informal techniques to deal with transparency. These alternative tactics included, for instance, openly recommending journalists to complete a request for information form if the topic in question was a controversial matter. 'Some of these tactics' expressed one interviewee (B11) 'gave us [government communicators] some time to deal with the issue, especially to find out what data was available to formally answer information requests'. Or as harshly put by another participant (B14): 'if they [journalists] learnt that transparency was an effective tool in news making, we [government communicators] also found a good use for it in media management'.

5.2.2   The presidential decree to reduce the fiscal burden imposed in 1969 over broadcasters

The preamble to the decree endorsed by president Fox that aimed to reduce the fiscal burden that was imposed over broadcasters in the late 1960's reads (DOF, October 12th 2002):

> This decree offers legal certitude and security to radio and TV broadcasting concessionaries because it provides a new form in which in the future and

according to their social function, the concessionaries will be able to comply
with their fiscal obligations.

The paragraph makes reference to a long history of legal and procedural controversies
surrounding the 'free' broadcasting time granted to the state by law. The issue stretches
back to 1968, when president Díaz Ordáz (1964-1970) aimed to impose a tax equivalent
of 25% over the revenues of private enterprises operating under broadcasting
concessions and licenses (DOF, December 31ˢᵗ 1968, *Ley de Ingresos de la Federación* (LIF):
article 9), which was naturally, the case for radio and TV commercial broadcasters. If
these entrepreneurs were not able to cover this new tax, the measure offered instead the
possibility for broadcasters to cede 49% of their shares to either a public investment
society or to a public trusteeship that could sell these shares to the public in general
(DOF, December 31ˢᵗ 1968, LIF 1968: article 16). Therefore, instead of paying a 25%
tax on their revenues, broadcasters could choose to concede the state 49% of their
shares.

Naturally, Mexican broadcasters were strongly opposed to these measures. After
a long and difficult process of negotiation that for some analysts showed the real
capacity of broadcasters had to overcome the authoritarian regime's controlling
attempts (see for instance: Fernández Christileb 1982: Ch3; Sánchez Ruíz 2005: 406-411;
García 2008: Part 2, Ch1; Guerrero 2009: Ch2), the Díaz Ordáz administration came up
with a third option for broadcasters to comply with this new fiscal obligation. Instead of
paying a 25% tax or ceding 49% of their shares to the state, broadcasters could choose
to pay the new tax by ceding 12.5% of their daily airtime (180 minutes) for each station
to the administration in turn for it to be used for governmental announcements and
public advertising (DOF, July 1ˢᵗ 1969). This broadcasting time was named 'fiscal time'
(*tiempos fiscales*) to differentiate it from the 'state time' (*tiempos oficiales*, 30 minutes of daily
airtime for each station) that broadcasters were compelled to cede to the state.[42]

More common than not, the authoritarian regime was unable to produce enough
materials to cover the daily airtime (official or fiscal) that it had available. Thus, the
executive automatically gave back this spare airtime to broadcasters who used it for
commercial purposes, especially for commercial advertising. Plus, when the state (mainly
the executive) did produce TV or radio materials to use for the official and fiscal times,

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[42] This measure was established by the 1960 Federal Law of Radio and Television (LFRTV, an
acronym for *Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*. DOF, January 19ᵗʰ 1960: Article 59 of the current
law) as compensation that broadcasters have to grant to the administration in turn for the using
of a public resource (airwaves) for commercial activities in the private interest.

these programmes were frequently transmitted at low-rating times. In the end, the 'free' airtime that broadcasters granted to the state was, as Guerrero (2009: 76) puts it, more 'a fiscal subsidy' than a controlling measure or in more positive terms, an effective tool that authoritarianism relied on to communicate the government.

Arguing that this was both an archaic fiscal measure and an inefficient way to communicate with the public (DOF, October 12th 2002: preamble), president Fox passed a presidential decree to reduce the fiscal broadcasting time from its original 12.5% to 1.25% of the daily airtime (18 minutes for TV stations and 35 minutes for radio stations) to be transmitted between 6am and 12pm. Ideally, this measure aimed to strengthen the social function of broadcasters and to efficiently use and administrate the free airtime available to the state (DOF, October 12th 2002: preamble). Nevertheless, far from reaching these goals, the analysis of this ruling showed that the new government retained certain authoritarian traits in terms of media regulation such as the capacity of arbitrarily passing media policies without consulting them with other actors (legislators, civil society) or placing particular benefits (for the industry mainly) over the public interest. As put by an interviewee (A6):

> Let us be fair, this was a presidential decree, and thus it was difficult to deny that the president still had a strong and a direct role in shaping the relationship with the media [… Plus,] nothing really changed in terms of *tiempos oficiales*; frequently there were not enough materials to cover these times, but on the other hand it was suspected that the Fox administration did pay huge amounts for advertising at commercial rates that represented a good income for media moguls.

From this stance and as shown in the interviews, it seems that the decree to reduce the fiscal burden imposed to broadcasters in the 1960s had a boomerang effect for the Fox administration in at least two respects. Firstly, with this initiative, the executive (the president mainly) showed that it retained the capacity to decide and implement rulings directly affecting the relationship between the state and the media. Other political actors and governing powers were not considered in this ruling to have a relevant influence on this process.

Secondly, critics of this legal measure question, for instance, who in the end (the state or the media) profited from the 10% of daily airtime that broadcasters regained. On the one hand, the state struggled to efficiently use the free airtime available, as stated in the preamble to this regulatory measure. On the other, the new government considerably increased its expenditure in public advertising (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Fundar 2009; Guerrero 2010a). These messages and public campaigns were broadcasted (just as the authoritarian rule used to do it) during commercial times

through juicy private advertising contracts with media conglomerates (see for instance: Guerrero 2007, 2010a: 276; García 2008: 268-274; Bravo 2011: 61).

5.2.3 *Amendments to the 1973 Rules of Procedure for the Federal Law of Radio and Television*

In a similar spirit to the two previous initiatives that presume the role of the media as essential in consolidating democracy (DOF October 10th 2002, Rules of Procedure for the LFRTV: preamble, see also articles 1 to 6), the Fox administration passed a new set of rulings for the LFRTV (an acronym for *Ley Federal de Radio y Televisión*). These rulings included measures to redefine the procedures for granting or renewing broadcast concessions (DOF October 10th 2002, Rule of Procedure for the LFRTV: articles 11 to 13); to clarify the role of the executive in this process (articles 7 to 10); to regulate the broadcast of national and international produced materials according to their content and purpose (national programs, articles 24 to 27; international programs, articles 18 and 24; *juegos y sorteos*, articles 19 to 22); to set certain limits to commercial advertising (articles 39 to 46), and; to set new parameters for the use of the airtime granted to the state (articles 15 to 17) in the 1960 LFRTV.

Nevertheless, as shown in the analysis of this regulation, diverse aspects raise crucial questions about the kind of relationship the Fox administration aimed to construct with the media. First, as stated in this ruling, nothing really changed about the key role that the executive has traditionally played in granting, renewing or denying broadcasting licenses to incumbents or new competitors. The Ministry of Communications (*Secretaría de Comunicaciones y Transportes*) and the Ministry of Interior (*Secretaría de Gobernación*) retained a crucial role in this procedure (article 12, fraction III) following quite vague parameters such as 'selecting the ones which, according to their [the ministries'] judgment better satisfy the social interest' (article 11, fraction I-h or fraction IV; also article 12, fraction III) or 'consider if the concessionary has made good use of the airwaves' (article 13, fraction I). Nevertheless, the ruling does not specify, for instance, what the parameters are to determine which broadcasters 'better satisfy the social interest' or had made the 'good use of the airwaves'.

Second, as it happens with the airtime that the state receives from broadcasters as a part of their fiscal obligations (*tiempos fiscales,* DOF, July 1st 1969), the executive remained in charge of administrating the airtime granted by the LFRTV (*tiempos oficiales,* DOF, January 19th 1960). This practically meant, as traditionally had been done, that other powers of the state (the legislative and the judiciary) received considerably less

airtime than the presidency, for instance, or less than other ministries or agencies from the executive. While the measures to ensure a daily broadcasting space for public announcements in radio and TV aims to promote communication between office-holders and citizens (as it was also envisioned and sustained throughout the authoritarian era), at the outset of the new political regime this free access to airtime rested as a governmental prerogative commonly used for a sort of (borrowing Blumenthal's words) presidential 'permanent campaign' (Blumenthal 1982); just as authoritarian rule had used this airtime over decades.

Third, far from re-positioning the role of the state to ensure a competitive media market through licensing, this ruling confirmed that broadcasters, especially incumbents, retained certain privileges such as certainty about their concessions and licenses (articles 11 to 13 refer to article 16 of the LFRTV that allows an automatic renewal). The new ruling also perpetuated lax regulations regarding commercial advertising (article 46, for instance, allows broadcasters to freely use the airtime between 12pm and 5:59am), and corroborated the ample room that Mexican broadcasters have traditionally used to decide the quality and scope of their programming (articles 27 to 38).

5.2.4   Failed reforms to the 1960 Federal Law of Radio and Television
Several analysts have assessed the shortcomings and consequences of the *Ley Televisa* (see for instance: Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Guerrero 2010a: 277-290; Sánchez *et al.* 2010), a nickname to the reforms to the LFRTV put forth by the Fox administration that makes reference to the influence and privileges the big media conglomerate retained during the policymaking process. In general terms, these studies agree on the notion that the Fox administration deliberately chose to perpetuate a media regulatory framework that served to shield the commercial interest of the media to the serious detriment of the public interest. From this perspective, the new government deliberately declined the possibility (just as the authoritarian regime did over decades) of re-positioning the state and the public interest in a relationship where media conglomerates retained substantial advantages and privileges such as a preferential treatment for incumbents in terms of broadcast licensing; as a lax (or even non-existing) regulation on commercial advertising, on the digital switchover or regarding to the potential access of incumbents to other telecommunications markets such as high speed internet services (DOF, October 10th, 2002).

An analysis to this regulation shows that even when a comprehensive reform to the 1960 FLRTV was much needed, it is actually difficult to offer a different (perhaps a more positive) account about these reforms. Indeed, in 2007 the Mexican Supreme Court declared invalid diverse articles of the new law (articles 16, 17-E, 17-G, 20, 21, 28) arguing the unconstitutional nature of these measures (DOF, August 20th 2007, LFRTV: Fraction II). For instance, about the preferential treatment that incumbents were meant to receive when renewing their broadcasting concessions (LFRTV: articles 16, 17-E, 17-G, 20, 21), the Supreme Court sentenced that a fixed 20-year license and the possibility of automatically renewing it was against an equal access to broadcasting (a constitutional right) and against the state's right to regulate the electromagnetic spectrum (also stated in the Mexican Constitution). In a similar spirit, the Supreme Court ruled against the possibility for broadcasters to offer other telecommunication services (such as high-speed broadband or mobile services) arguing that the law was unclear about the procedures and costs of these new concessions (for a good summary of the Supreme Court's sentence see: Guerrero 2010a: 280, Table 6.3).

Similar to the previous three initiatives described in this chapter, the reforms to the archaic FLRTV show some authoritarian traits such as the key role the executive play in granting broadcasting licenses or the privileges that incumbents have over potential new competitors. Plus, the policymaking process made evident the actual power media conglomerates had to influence media policy. Naturally, this media's indication of power was not something new. Previous administrations that had attempted to modify this law also faced strong opposition from the industry that was frequently complemented by the capacity of media moguls to influence the policymaking process (Fernández Christileb 1982; Guerrero 2009, 2010a). However, the fact that the Fox administration was unable to ignore or suppress the public debate surrounding the *Ley Televisa* represents, from the participants' point of view, a breakdown with past regulatory practices. The following extract from an interview (A14) serves to illustrate this point:

> During the authoritarian decades there were previous attempts to reform the Federal Radio and Television Law. But none of those efforts got that far and for sure, none of those had the consequences that the *Ley Televisa* had. We are talking about a legislation that the Supreme Court rejected. The process involved a whole diversity of actors. We had the government, the three branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judiciary. Here we cannot just blame the president or his party, as we may blame the authoritarian regime for the lack of interest in regulating the media […] We had political parties; congresspersons and senators of the same political party defending divergent

interests. The industry showed its power. But we learnt the media is not a single actor. We saw newspaper headlines that denounced broadcasters' interests behind the legislation; we had radio talk showing different aspects of the same regulatory process. Academics had plenty space for assessing the process. It was an issue in the public debate [...] Nothing like this could have happened before.

To recapitulate, the media policy initiatives put forth by the Fox administration during the first years of democracy in Mexico may have aimed to perpetuate an era of cosy relationships with the media (see for instance: Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Trejo Delarbre 2011). Nevertheless, under the new political conditions, it was no longer possible to carry on with past regulatory practices. As emerged from the analysis of the data gathered for this thesis, the intense debate surrounding these regulations showed first, that it was not longer possible to exclude other actors from the policymaking process. The new-access-to information law for instance, was a result of a long negotiation between the executive and the legislative, and within the latter, between different parliamentary groups (Doyle 2002; Fox *et al.* 2007; Guerrero 2010b). Remarkably, civil society also played a key role. A strong alliance between journalists, human rights advocates and academics fuelled the debate about the need for transparency and disclosure of government information. In so doing, civil society also promoted an open and permanent forum to publically denounce the government's suspected tactics to slow down or change the course of the negotiations in terms of disclosure and access to public records (Doyle 2002; Escobedo 2003: 78-85; Gill and Hughes 2005: 127).

Second, the influence of divergent interests in the outcome of these media policies was also evident. For instance, as shown in the interviews, the intense debate surrounding the failed *Ley Televisa* made it clear that media is actually a plural noun. Differing positions between the press and broadcasters pointed at conflicting interests between the big conglomerates (Televisa and TVAzteca) and smaller media groups. These confrontations within the media eventually contributed to impose certain limitations to proscriptions that originally aimed to grant preferential treatment for incumbents. Moreover, apart from the media and the executive that evidently were key actors in policymaking, other actors within the federal government and the other two branches of government also played a role key, especially by denouncing the attempts of the executive to direct the process in benefit of the media's commercial interests.

Third, the role of the executive (especially the president) as media regulator thus showed certain limits. A clear example is the decision to decrease the fiscal burden for

broadcasters. This legal measure was highly criticized for both the role that the president played and for the privileges the industry retained in policymaking. The fact that this ruling was a presidential decree made evident by two aspects of traditional regulatory practices that clashed with the new political setting: on the one hand it had been the president who actually endorsed a reform aimed to protect the commercial interest of broadcasters; on the other, this law had been passed without further consultation with other regulatory instances such as the chamber of deputies or the senate. Similarly, the amendments to the 1973 rules of procedure for the LFRTV were received with ample criticism and eventually contributed to denounce the overwhelming role the executive has traditionally had in granting broadcast licenses and deciding about media contents.

Fourth, the need for an independent regulatory authority also became evident. For instance, the decision of the Supreme Court to overrule the *Ley Televisa* accounts for the difficulties the legislative faced to promote consensus among different parliamentary groups. In this process, the executive also showed serious limitations in balancing the interests of a commercial-driven media with the rights and needs of the citizens. An independent regulator was thus seen as a necessary entity for both citizens and the state.

Fifth, the media policymaking process described above also made evident divergent understandings about the goals and uses of media regulation. Passing new statutory rules proved not to be enough. Transforming media policy into new beliefs, practices and enforcement mechanisms became a pending task in the state-media relationship under the new democratic setting. The following section of this chapter discusses further the difficulties to translate past and new media regulations into day-to-day practices and common understandings about the rationale and effectiveness of media regulation at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico.

5.3   A logic of (in)appropriatness

'Describing action as rule-following', write March and Olsen (2004: 8), 'is only the first step in understanding how rules affect behaviour'. These pages aim to trace the relationship (if any) reported in the interviews between rules and the day-to-day relation among government communicators and the media. In so doing, the analysis centres on the influence that the regulatory framework previously described shaped (or not) participants' common understandings and beliefs about the state-media relation under the new democratic setting.

From this stance and to sharply contrast to what neo-institutionalists approach as 'a code of appropriate behaviour' or 'logic of appropriateness' that originates from formal rules and that is learned and internalized through socialization or education (March and Olsen 1989: 22; 2004), this section of the chapter uses the term 'inappropriateness'. This notion does not aim to challenge the analytical utility or implications about the ultimate authority or legitimacy of rules approached as both cognitive and normative proscriptions that point at appropriate or exemplary behaviour.[43] It neither aims to simplify the notion of 'appropriateness' as to what is commonly understood as 'right to do' and merely differentiate it from what is assumed to be 'wrong'. The rather limited function of the term 'inappropriateness' and that naturally only applies to this study is to allude to a common understanding and high level of self-reflection among participants about the impossibility of carrying on with past media regulatory traditions and assumptions about the value and purpose of media regulation.

Rather than thinking on (new and old) written laws and regulations that ruled the state-media relation during the first years of democracy in Mexico as 'appropriate', and arguably, due to the intense debate generated by the media policy reforms and initiatives put forth by the Fox administration, the interviewees tended to refer to this legal framework as 'out of date' (A17), 'not functional' (B14); 'not longer possible' (B10) or 'frankly, a set of proscriptions that under the new political conditions posed more challenges than securities for both the media and the government' (A19).

Thus, this thesis uses the term 'inappropriateness' as an umbrella notion that groups together common appreciations among participants about the use of statutory rules to dictate their behaviour towards the media. This is not simply to say that interviewees were able to distinguish between what is appropriate and what is unacceptable when relating with the media and in so doing, these officials just chose to avoid what in democracy is commonly understood as inappropriate behaviour: regulation as a form of state control, bribes, threats, controlled information, to mention only a few but common past practices. As used here, the notion of 'inappropriateness' makes reference to the connection that neo-institutional theory (especially the sociological strand, see Chapter Three, section 3.2) makes between rules and behaviour. The term points to what participants in this study referred to as 'not to do' when interacting with the media and that in general terms, seemed to denote a tacit

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[43] For critical approaches to the notion of 'appropriateness' see for instance: Christensen and Rovik 1999; Sending 2002; Thoening 2003; Goldmann 2005.

understanding about the (i)rationality or (in)effectiveness of media regulation in shaping government communicators' behaviour.

From this stance, a thematic analysis on the interviews (for details on this method to analyse the empirical data collected for this thesis see Chapter Four, section 4.3.2) showed that this 'logic of inappropriateness' can be grouped on three common understandings or beliefs about media regulation that may have served to link (legitimize) what was written in formal rules to the actions of those involved in the state-media relation during the authoritarian era, but that were not longer valid (at least ideally) or sustainable in the new democratic setting. These are common (mis)understandings among participants about: (1) the rationale and purpose of media regulation; (2); the power and influence of the media in communicating politics, and; (3) the presumed value in government communication of public information as a valuable commodity exchangeable for positive news coverage. In what follows, these three aspects are discussed further to weigh up to what extent the legal framework for the state-media relation available at the outset of the Mexican democracy shaped government communicators' behaviour in their day-to-day interaction with the media.

5.3.1   Rules: what for, in whose interest?

'I do not make the rules; that it is not my job', said one participant (B10): 'my job is to engage with a fluent relationship with the media; to get the message of the government out to the public through different media outlets and formats'. While obvious, this appreciation aimed to stress that government communicators are not legislators. Those dealing with the media on a daily basis are not the ones in charge of policymaking. However, in practical terms, this distinction was not that clear in the authoritarian era. During those decades, it seemed that it was the executive (the president mainly) who traditionally put forward new regulations and made sure that media policy initiatives and reforms were passed as endorsed by the authoritarian rule. For instance, both the 1960 LFRTV and its 1973 rulings were products of presidential initiatives. At first glance, it appeared as if the legislative had little influence and room to manoeuvre in policymaking. However, academic research shows that it was precisely in Congress where media found space for lobbying and ultimately for influencing the outcome of media regulation processes in a constant and frequently effective effort to protect their commercial interests (Fernández Christlieb 1982: Ch2; García Rubio 2008; Guerrero 2009: Chs2 and 3).

Thus, a clear picture about the extent and scope of the media's influence in policymaking was a privileged stance reserved for those interested in disentangling the complexities of a very particular relationship that diverted away from the explanations rendered by the authoritarian paradigm of state-media relations (see Chapter Two). Nevertheless, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the reforms and initiatives put forth by the Fox administration made evident the role that the media have traditionally played in policymaking to a larger audience. It is difficult, however, to determine to what extent the intense debate and criticism set off by media policymaking during those years served to transform rules and common understandings among government communicators about the rationale and value of media regulation.

On the one hand, as envisioned by the Fox administration (especially the *Ley Televisa*), the new regulations did not impose clear limits to the influence that media could (or actually) have on policymaking. There were not, for instance, clear proscriptions about the media's capacity to lobby in congress. Naturally, this is a reflection of the fact that lobbying in Mexico is not clearly regulated.[44] It is suspected that media moguls do shape policymaking by making use of a solid network of (not regulated or formally recognized) lobbyists strategically placed within workers' unions, political parties, governmental entities (within the presidency, the Ministry of State or the Ministry of Communications, for instance), as well as represented by diverse industry bodies or trade associations such as the Mexican Chamber for the Industry of Radio and Television, *la Cámara Nacional de la Industria de la Radio y la Televisión,* or; the National Council for Advertising, *el Consejo Nacional de la Publicidad* (see for instance: Guerrero 2009, 2010b; Sánchez Ruíz 2009; Caballero Pedraza 2009; Lima Carmona 2009). Nevertheless, for the interviewees, the fact that during the initial years of democracy in Mexico, the media's influence in policymaking was evident and undeniable pointed to the need to clearly identify the goals and values underpinning the justifications for media regulation, in particular to seek clarification about the multiple roles that the media plays as a powerful industry with ample capacity to influence policymaking; as a channel of communication between the political regime and citizens, and; an open forum for public debate. The following extract from an interview (A9) captures well the general attitude among participants:

> We [government communicators for the Fox administration] may not have a

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[44] For studies on lobbying in Mexico see: Lerdo de Tejada and Godina Herrera 2004; Galaviz 2006; Gómez Valle 2008; Astie-Burgos 2012.

direct role on policymaking, that is true. But the fact that these rules do affect our daily job both in terms of what is prescribed in these regulations and about the real influence that these laws impose over relationship between the government and the media give us a certain voice in media regulation: no matter how many new or old rules are out there, if these regulations do not imprint a clear sense about the rights and duties for both the state and the media it is not going to be possible to eradicate the well spread notion about *both* the governing elites' *and* the media's reluctance to promote a true 'watchdog' (emphasis done by the interviewee).

From this perspective, the regulatory framework available at the outset of the Mexican democracy is regarded as incapable to redefine old conceptions about the value and role that media regulation imposes on both the government and the media. On the other hand, however, even when participants were to some extent, clear about the need of statutory rules that clarify the role of both sets of actors in policymaking, the interviews showed that the prime beneficiary of these rulings was not that well established, since at least two distinctive and at times, contradictory rationales for media regulation can be identified.

For quite a few participants, the ultimate purpose of these media regulations appeared to be strengthening the vigilant and denouncing role that media *should* play in democracies. This conception seems to prioritise the media as a cornerstone for the new political regime over other actors. It also points at the urgent need to counterbalance a well spread perception about media regulation as a means which is available to and regularly used by both the governing elites and the media to protect the industry. A clear regulatory framework is thus approached as a necessary measure to start disentangling the interdependence that has traditionally linked the state and the media in an effort to ensure that the rules in place do help (or force) the media to fulfil the expectations imposed by the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

For another large group of interviewees, however, new statutory rules seem to be needed to constrain the overwhelming and not always positive influence that media acquired in communicating politics with the political transition. The following quotation (B1) serves to illustrate this point:

> We are certainly facing a completely new scenario. This applies for both the government and the media. As government communicators we need to radically change and adapt to the media's role in democracy since this represents both an opportunity and a threat: an opportunity to place the government's message in an increasingly competitive news agenda; a threat when this message is distorted and is used to the economic benefit of those that should serve democracy as trustful channels of communicators. There is an urgent need to set clear limits to this power.

From this stance, media regulation is seen as a mechanism to set clear duties and rights for the media. The emphasis, however, is placed on the duties and as shown more explicitly in the quotation above, on the limits that regulation should impose to the media's power in communicating politics. As put by the interviewee quoted above, this power is linked to the overwhelming interest and actual capacity the media have to advance their own economic interests in what is perhaps seen (although not explicitly stated) as a threat to a true and efficient Fourth Estate. Regulation thus appears as a necessary measure to ensure that the potential that media have to strengthen democracy (as a vigilant watchdog, as a resource to make governing elites accountable or as an open forum for public debate, to mention a few of the functions of the media in democracies) is not distorted and is used to shield the industry from further regulation that may harm their economic affluence.

Arguably, the bottom line on this divergence of opinions about the purpose of media regulation is a vague rationale underpinning the justification of these laws. For instance, contrary to what has happened in other democracies where media regulation has triggered an intense debate about the challenges and benefits embedded for citizens (for the UK case see for instance: Feintuck and Varney 2006; Clarke *et al.* 2007; Lunt and Livingstone 2011), in the interviews conducted for this study an explicit mention of citizens as the prime beneficiaries of these laws was practically absent. This may be traced to the fact that these conversations with government communicators centred the attention on the relationship between the state and the media. The role of citizens in this process was perhaps unintentionally relegated by not putting them as the main topic during the interviews. Nevertheless, linking the main purpose of media regulation with the need to protect and enhance the role of citizens in democracy was also possibly a consequence of a vague rationale underpinning the justifications for these laws. Even though media regulation generated an intense debate among diverse actors and received ample news coverage, at the outset of the Mexican democracy it seems that two aspects that characterized media policy in the authoritarian rule remained: a lack of clarity about the rationale of media regulation and the underdevelopment of a strong rational legal authority that strengthens the links between rules, the willingness to follow them and functional enforcement mechanisms to guarantee the protection of the public interest transcending particular interests.

5.3.2 Almighty media: 'state capture' and market concentration

'It is all about power, is it not?' stressed one interviewee (B2) and went on to explain:

> In the end it is all about power: the power the media have to destroy (or construct) any politician's image; the power they have to allow (or deny) the access of any political actor to the news agenda; the power they have to control the market, and; the economic power they have to launch any economic enterprise and ensure that it develops into a profitable business.

This was not an unusual point of departure among participants when discussing the role of the media in the Mexican democracy. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the interviews shown a shared concern about the increasing and seemingly unconstrained power that Mexican media acquired in the new political regime. This is not to say that interviewees seemed to overlook the influence and role this set of actors played during the authoritarian era. Nevertheless, in the new democratic setting, this influence appeared to be evident to a larger diversity of actors (government officials, legislators, political parties, civil organizations, academics). The interviewees also traced the influence of the media to other activities apart from media policymaking. For instance, participants made extensive reference to the widespread influence Mexican media have in news making, public advertising, in the public debate as gatekeepers or in government communication as the main channel of communication between the government and the citizens. Moreover, media's influence (frequently referred by the interviewees as 'media power') was seen as extending well beyond communicating politics. Media moguls were also referred to as influential businesspersons in an ample range of enterprises such as telecommunications (especially with the forthcoming technological convergence of broadcast, mobile telephone and internet services), investment banks and diverse entertainment ventures that ranged from sports to casinos.

Put simply, as an interviewee did (A8), participants seemed to agree on that: 'Everything! Everything is wrong about the overwhelming and unrestrained power of the media'. Naturally, this is an extreme and almost melodramatic way to express concern about the influence that media have in the Mexican democracy (for more thoughtful accounts see for instance: Trejo 2001, 2004a, 2004b; Juárez 2009). Nevertheless, the fact that the question of the media's influence and power was reported with a sense of inevitability and pointed at the state's presumed incapability to constrain it arguably represents a key challenge for the new political regime in two aspects: first, to enhance a new regulatory framework that responded to the new political conditions; and second, to translate statutory rules into day-to-day actions that move the state-media

relation away from the authoritarian past and closer to the aspirations imprinted in the liberal-democratic paradigm.

5.3.2.1 From collusion to 'state capture'

More common than not, participants were prone to denounce the media's constant efforts to influence media policymaking privileging their own economic interests over their duties as vigilant watchdogs or as an open and diverse forum for public debate. From this stance, interviewees approached media regulation more 'as a pragmatic response to the media's corporate pressure' (A18), than as the result of an inclusive policymaking process aimed to protect the public interest. In these accounts, the emphasis was regularly placed on the mechanisms through which media conglomerates are seen to shape policymaking to gain specific advantages, often through the imposition of anti-competitive barriers that generate gains to selected powerful firms at significant social cost.

Because media moguls are seen to use the influence they have over government officials, legislators and politicians in general to block policy reforms that might eliminate the industry's economic advantages and that promote the emergence of a vigorous Fourth Estate, media power was regularly pictured in the interviews both as a cause and as a consequence of poor regulation. As put by an interviewee (A20):

> Let us be honest: how far a regulatory process could get if those involved on it –the industry, the legislative, the executive and other relevant actors in policymaking— remain reluctant to embrace a new role first, by ensuring that new legislations respond to the new political conditions, and; second, by embracing the duties that come attached with new rights?

This is, naturally, a rhetorical question that the analysis of the interviews did not answer. Nevertheless, it arguably serves to illustrate a shared notion among participants about the reluctance of both the rulers and the media to enhance a new role in policymaking (ideally modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm). Rather than serving as a mechanism by which rules and common beliefs about regulation evolve and replace old rulings and conceptions about media regulation, this stance perpetuated the notion that media policy can be used to protect the interests of those in power: governing elites and media moguls. Moreover, from this perspective, the new political regime appears trapped in a vicious circle in which the institutional reforms necessary to improve media regulation are undermined by the power media conglomerates have to shape the policymaking process and by the incapacity of the state to constrain the overwhelming influence of the industry.

5.3.2.2 Market concentration and lack of competition

Mexican media (at least at the time of this publication) function in a highly concentrated market where few moguls have the capacity to set the directives in terms of the supply (programmes: kind and quality) and the prices of the services they offer (mainly advertising). During the first years of democracy in the country (and up to the date of this publication), only two TV broadcasters controlled 95% of the frequencies available; four radio broadcasting groups held 48% of the concessions (Guerrero 2010c: 25 using official data from the Mexican Ministry of Communications and Transport), and; only one editorial group had a strong presence at national level, while only a handful more appeared to have good circulation rates in the biggest cities of the country like Mexico City, Monterrey or Guadalajara (Vidal 2008: Ch5).

As shown in the interviews, the fact that a few very rich and influential businessmen control the media market imposed at least three challenges to modify old conceptions about the value and purpose of media regulation. First, during the first years of democracy there was widespread suspicion surrounding media policy regarding the ultimate beneficiaries of these regulations (the public interest or the media), but also about who (the industry or the state) was backing up these rulings. From this stance, the media appears as a strategic but not formally recognized policymaker able to impose their own will over the new duties and responsibilities this set of actors *should* play in the new democratic setting. In contrast, the state seems unwilling and incapable of setting legal and informal mechanisms to limit the influence of the media in policymaking.

Second, the possibility to open the market to new competitors seemed unlikely to happen. The rulings passed by the Fox administration perpetuated a licensing and concessions regime for broadcasters that privileges incumbents over new competitors (see above section 5.2). Moreover, due to the high initial costs involved in enterprises like broadcasting or press of national circulation, the possibility of new shareholders willing to take the risk and compete with media owners that have extensive expertise on the business and especially certain privileges granted by law (such as automatic renewal of licenses) appeared to be merely unrealistic.

Third, similarly, the possibility for new actors (other branches of government, opposition parties, office holders at different levels of government –local, federal, national--, civil society, academics) to establish a relationship with the media based on democratic principles such as open access to the news agenda or diversity of voices in the public debate also appeared to be unfeasible. For media moguls these actors are potential new clients in need of a channel of communication with their publics

(costumers). As once expressed by the owner of Televisa, democracy has proved to be a highly profitable business (quoted by Lawson 2002 and Trejo Delarbre 2004a).

In short, media concentration on handful powerful businessmen made it more difficult to change old perceptions among government communicators about media regulation being a handy tool for those in power (media owners or governing elites). In fact, the media policy reforms and new regulations put forth by the Fox administration in some sense served to confirm that media regulation continued to served as a mechanism to shield particular interests to the detriment of the public interest.

5.3.3 *Public information: from a commodity exchangable for positive news coverage to a public good?*

A third theme that emerged from the analysis of the interviews as a key challenge to translate rules into actions that contributed to modify the state-media relation according to the expectations set by the change of political regime was a shared notion among participants about the value of public information as a commodity exchangeable for a guaranteed access to the news agenda through positive coverage. As seen earlier in this chapter (section 5.2.1), in terms of government communication, Mexican transparency and access to public information law (2002) did not necessary translate into new practices and beliefs regarding the disclosure and use of governmental data. The government was indeed forced to open its archives, surely a long overdue task. Nevertheless, on the one hand, as shown in the interviews, government communicators did find alternative informal mechanisms to deal with (and prevent) information disclosures that could potentially be translated into strident headlines. On the other, the media also found a way to obtain information through transparency regulations that could be used to denounce abuses and malpractice of those in power. Arguably (but commonly denounced by participants), and far from being moved only by the duty of keeping governing elites accountable and under close scrutiny, the media's primary motivation was regarded as the potential economic benefits typically involved in highly adversarial journalism and scandalous headlines.

'There is no need to be naïve', an interviewee said firmly (A2), '[…] information, as the saying goes, is indeed synonym to power; this is not going to change with or without transparency laws, here in Mexico or in any other part of the world […] what these rulings are for is to set clear goals and limits to this power'. This argument was carefully crafted to point at both the benefits and challenges embedded in transparency and information disclosure. Clear parameters about transparency and access to

information ensure that governmental data is available and that this process enhances the scrutiny of those in power. Nevertheless, these parameters lose relevance if they are not fully respected.

The shared notion among participants about access to information being a right that could be easily transformed into strategic communication tools, work against the possibility of modifying and replacing old practices and beliefs surrounding government communication at least in two forms. First, this perspective made it more difficult for participants to establish a clear link between what is written in the transparency law and their regular interaction with the media. The law was seen as long overdue proscriptions that were needed for democracy to take root. However, in the process of adaptation to the new rules of the game, the predispositions of public officials regarding transparency and the disclosure of public information became evident. Withholding governmental information was part of a deeply rooted 'culture of secrecy' (Roberts 2006: 107). Moreover, the lack of transparency was also a common communication practice that had served as a key driver in the routine relationship with the media. Without developing new routines designed to incorporate the effect of the new transparency and openness regulations, it was very unlikely to modify traditional beliefs about the value of information as a scarce commodity.

Second, far from being regarded as a secure and useful measure to transform government communication in a way where it could enhance the restoration of public trust in government, participants showed a certain amount of mistrust and uncertainty about the benefits of disclosure and openness. In fact, transparency was regarded as a dangerous route to follow. It represented a new way to measure the value of information that (suddenly) had stopped to be a rare commodity and became, at least ideally, a public good. Nevertheless, as expressed in the interviews, the expectations imposed by what was written in the new transparency rulings were not necessarily enough to pave the road to cooperation and trust between the government and the media. Even when (ideally) the government had nothing to hide, suspicion and mistrust was a common point of departure in initial experiences with the Mexican transparency law. Endorsing a new regulation did not solve the struggle for control over government information. A great amount of work and responsibility has to be undertaken by both those that open governmental files to public scrutiny and those that position this information in the public debate. From participants' accounts, it seems that both sets of actors remained reluctant to fully embrace this challenge.

In short, from the interviewees' point of view, a vigorous commitment to the new transparency regulations were not going to automatically replace routines, that for a very long time had been conceived as forced negotiations and compromises that served to keep the governing elites and the media at close complicity. The assumption that the necessary (but challenging) change from collusion to confrontation (from secrecy to openness) will bring benefits for the government and the media was not fully embraced by both sets of actors. During the initial years of democracy in Mexico, the challenges embedded in transparency and access to government information were evident, and according to participants, overweighed its potential benefits.

Conclusions

'I do not know what else we could have done', said an interviewee concerned but also theatrically (B3). The account continued as follows:

> The country needed a change; the Fox administration brought that change. People might disagree about the potential or the direction of this change, but we cannot deny that there was a change. In terms of the relationship with the media, things will never go back to what they used to be. Look at the press, television or radio; everyone talks about the media and the challenges to regulate these powerful conglomerates. That is a change. Before nobody talked about that, now anyone can make a critical statement about media regulation without being spotted and highly criticized.

The media policy endorsed by the Fox administration may have represented a change. Nevertheless, a notion of a grand regulatory failure surrounds the debates about media regulation and at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico. Yet, few systematic efforts have been made to distinguish its causes from its consequences. Some explanations are grounded on notions of power: at one extreme the increasing power (both economic and political) of media conglomerates; on the other the lack of power (and willing) from the part of the new political regime to set new 'rules of the game' (see for instance: Esteinou and Alma de la Selva 2009; Guerrero 2010b, 2010c).

Other accounts about the state of media policy during the first years of democracy in Mexico take a closer look at how Mexican media have looked at the challenges that the current regulatory framework represents to journalism and to the realization of the expectations imposed over the media by the liberal democratic paradigm (Lawson 2002; Hughes 2006; McPherson 2010). These accounts tend to conclude that media themselves struggle to embrace and fulfil their duties.

From both stances a key question remains: did media regulation at the outset of the Mexican democracy dictate the actions and behaviour of those involved in the state-

media relation? This is, it must be said, an ambitious question. Plus, as seen in this chapter, it is actually difficult to offer a straight answer. After all, what is written in laws (old or new) become meaningful through interpretation (Black 2002) and through the links that these common beliefs establish between rules and behaviour (March and Olsen 2004, 2006). Statutory regulation set duties and responsibilities that make some courses of action more likely than others. The extent to which these routes are (or not) followed greatly depends, however, on common understandings, values and shared beliefs about the purpose and benefits of regulation (March and Olsen 1989, 2006, 2004). Nevertheless, these aspects (understandings, values, beliefs, rationale and benefits) are difficult to measure with certain precision. Thus, offering a clear picture of the links between rules and actions is actually problematic (Christensen and Rovik 1999; Sending 2002; Goldmann 2005).

This chapter, however, has shown that the challenge is worth taking. The analysis indicates that for the interviewees to successfully relate with the media –to get the government's message across different media outlets— was constrained by a complex combination of lax regulations inherited from the authoritarian rule, the breakdown of past regulatory practices and a notion of inappropriateness that made some courses of action more difficult and facilitated others. In essence, the Fox administration's attempts to regulate the media can be equated to undertaking a somewhat hazardous journey through unknown shifting terrains. The influence (positive or negative) of statutory media regulation during these years did not entirely arise from what formal regulations proscribed. Moreover, passing new media laws proved not to be enough to eradicate past beliefs and attitudes towards a rational-legal authority and to establish new parameters for the state-media relation.

To a large extent, the media policymaking process shaped the state-media relation in some indirect and informal, yet influential ways. First, it was simply not possible for the Fox administration to ignore or postpone an intense debate about media regulation, as authoritarian rule did it for decades. Second, the challenges to translate formal rules into new practices and behaviour that corresponded to the new democratic setting became evident not just in regards to the highly contested initiatives (for instance, the *Ley Televisa* or the presidential decree to decrease the fiscal burden to broadcasters), but also in the much celebrated transparency law. Third, government communicators started to develop what in this thesis has been referred to as 'a logic of inappropriateness'. Drawing on neo-institutionalists' notion of 'appropriateness', the

term 'inappropriateness' is used in this study to put emphasis on what interviewees referred to as practices and beliefs that were no longer possible to be seen as directives of the state-media relation in the new political setting.

'A conception of human behaviour as [a] rule and identity-based', write March and Olsen (2004: 11), 'invites a conception of the mechanisms by which rules and identities evolve and become legitimized, reproduced, modified and replaced'. As seen in this chapter, the remaining challenge for the new political regime was to translate the notion of inappropriateness among government communicators into day-to-day routines and formal statutory rulings that serve as vehicles to transform past conceptions about the rationale and value of media policy. Even though the Fox administration gave the impression of being more comfortable perpetuating a vague media regulatory framework than to undertake a comprehensive media reform, from the perspective of the interviewees it was no longer possible to carry on with lax and ineffective regulations. Nevertheless, the period under analysis (2000-2006) was probably too soon to determine the extent to which this notion will evolve (or not) into new formal rules and beliefs. What the analysis shows in this chapter is that during the first years of democratic rule in Mexico, rather than overturning past regulatory practices and conceptions about the rationale and value of media regulation, the media regulatory framework in place (old and new regulations) perpetuated informal responses that had the effect of limiting the significance (positive or negative) of what is proscribed by these laws.

6   Inside the black box: the machinery of government communication

> *President Fox decided to implement an open leadership*
> *in which freedom (including freedom of speech)*
> *became the hallmark of his administration.*
> *His communication strategy was aimed at meeting*
> *the information requests of the media and public opinion agendas;*
> *at the same time making it clear to the media the priorities*
> *set out in the government's agenda, such as housing,*
> *medical care, education and democracy.*
>
> *Yolanda Meyemberg and Ruben Aguilar-Valenzuela,*
> Government Communication in the Mexican democracy (2013)

This chapter investigates the structure and functioning of government communication during the first years of democratic rule in Mexico. It takes a closer look at the Presidential Office of Communications (POC), or *Coordinación General de Comunicación Social*. As seen in more detail in Chapter Three (sections 3.2.2 and 3.4), an institutional approach to the organizational dynamic of government communication aims to investigate how human and material resources are mobilized into actions. This perspective moves the analysis from mere descriptions about organizational charts and managerial techniques to place the focus on how administrative structures and regular practices influence the way government communicators relate to the media on a daily basis. For instance, in the Mexican case, rigid administrative structures may have imposed constraints for new managerial strategies and innovative practices to take root. This chapter will allow a better understanding on why, but also how, the inherited machinery of government communication and past traditional practices in combination with new strategies shaped government communication and the state-media relation in the new political setting.

As explained earlier in this thesis (Chapter Three, section 3.2.2), the analysis presented in the following pages builds on Sanders' *et al.* research on the functioning of government communication offices (Sanders and Canel 2010, 2012; 2013a; Sanders *et al.* 2011). The framework used by these authors has been adapted to allow the use of precise analytical tools such as Seymour-Ure's (1991, 2000) approach to the role of the chief executive as the main government communicator and Pfetsch's (1998, 2008) conceptualization of strategic communication (see Chapter Three, section 3.4).

Using this conceptual framework, the following pages address four specific empirical research questions:

- How did the government machinery of communication function at the outset of the Mexican democracy?

- What was its administrative structure?

- How did it work on a day-to-day basis?

- What does this organizational structure and functioning tell us about the relationship between the new governing elites and the media?

To answer these questions, as explained thoroughly in Chapter Four (section 4.2.2), this study draws on data collected from interviews conducted with government communicators. Official documents on organizational charts, budgets and rules of procedures were also used as a supplementary source of empirical data.

This chapter shows that change and stasis are two complementary aspects of government communication during the first years of democratic rule in Mexico. In contrast to the transformation prescribed in the liberal-democratic model of state-media relations, this interplay between change and continuity points to a process of small and rickety changes. From this stance, the lingering influence of the authoritarian past appears as purposeful strategy rather than a mere inertia. The Fox administration did have certain agency and capacity to decide which practices to keep and which ones to quit.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section looks at the administrative structure the new political regime inherited from the authoritarian rule. Mexican authoritarianism invested little attention and effort in updating a machinery of government communication that over the years, evolved into a big apparatus characterized by redundancies and a lack of synergy. Random improvements and additions were done more according to day-to-day needs and the emergence of new communication technologies, rather than by following a long-term communications strategy. Overwhelmed by other priorities, the Fox administration did not undertake a comprehensive reform of this archaic administrative structure and simply built on it to communicate with citizens in the new political setting.

The second section of the chapter takes thus a closer look at the organizational charts and resources invested in communicating the new government. It shows that the new practices introduced by president Fox and his communication strategists clashed with quite inflexible administrative structures and cadres of government communicators, that gained professional expertise throughout the decades of authoritarianism and who

were fairly adverse to change. Plus, the new government also lacked a comprehensive strategy to tackle administrative and managerial flaws that characterized government communication during the authoritarian era such as opacity and potential clientelistic relations with the media linked to the financial resources invested in publicizing the government.

In this scenario, the third section of the chapter directs the searchlight to the role that the leader (the president or other relevant managerial positions such as the head of communications or spokesperson) played in communicating the government. Intuitively, one may expect the new governing elites to embrace a governmental communications strategy that, according to the liberal-democratic paradigm, gave voice to other actors; that is, an inclusive strategy that moderated the key role the president has traditionally played in communicating politics to Mexicans. Nevertheless, as seen in this section of the chapter, the Fox administration continued with the practice of designing and coordinating the communication strategy for the federal government from the POC. As such, the role of the president in communicating politics and the relationship with the media remained crucial for the new political regime. However, new challenges and alternative communication strategies emerged in trying to perpetuate this practice.

The fourth section of the chapter goes into detail about the processes of communicating politics under the new political setting. It investigates day-to-day tasks involved in government communication such as planning, coordination, as well as information gathering and dissemination. This approach allows an assessment as to what extent Mexican communicators struggled to keep in balance two trends that current political communication literature identifies in communicating politics to citizens. On the one hand, there is a traditional regime or 'party-centred' communication that uses the notion of 'the public' as an abstraction to advance a partisan agenda (Mazzoleni 1987). The aim of this communications strategy is to mobilize political support and to legitimize public policies through information dissemination and public advertising. In this process, as Pfetsch (2008: 73) puts it, media are 'the means, but not the ends of action'. On the other hand, there is the use of more strategic communication that aims to tailor government messages according to the media's formats, information needs, news values and commercial patterns. From this stance, mass media become both the means and target of government communication. In this process of 'mediatisation' (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2011),

'voters' attention and approval are regarded as commodities to be produced by the most efficient means possible and bartered for advantage' (Swanson 1992: 399).

Tracking the use of strategic communication by placing the focus on the measures of public response and evaluation mechanisms that the Fox administration used to assess the effectiveness of its communications strategy, the fifth section of the chapter shows that in the conversations with Mexican government communicators, straightforward explanations about the use of public opinion polls or alternative mechanisms to include citizens' perceptions and make government communication more participatory were scarce. At the same time, the analysis of the interviews and the official documents collected for this study shows that a clear recognition about strategic communication as a tool to tailor an image of the government that aims to promote political goals, rather than to hold governing elites accountable, was difficult to grasp.

The conclusions to this chapter link the main empirical findings presented in the following pages with the conceptual framework advanced in this thesis. Going into detail of the structural adjustments and managerial changes on the form and the functioning of the administrative units in charge of government communication, especially the POC, allows the assessment of a variety of influences the authoritarian past imposed over the structure and functioning of the machinery of government communications used at the outset of the Mexican democracy. It also shows that organizational charts, managerial techniques, day-to-day routines and potential mechanisms to evaluate public response are not only administrative or technical specifications. These characteristics of government communication also create a specific environment that influences the state-media relation in diverse informal ways, and overcome mere technical or pure normative explanations about this interaction.

6.1   The communications machinery: the authoritarian past and its legacies

The Fox administration inherited an intricate and inefficient machinery of government communication. Each part of this entangled apparatus responded to particular communication needs that the authoritarian regime developed over decades. Once in place, these administrative units and functions remained practically unchanged. Some of them even became obsolete or redundant as new communication needs, tasks and technologies emerged without parallel administrative and managerial strategies being able to synchronize diverse administrative units and practices into a functional and efficient system to communicate the government.

Table 6.1 below shows a snapshot of this administrative structure. As seen, the authoritarian rule organized its communications strategy into tasks that can be grouped in two: (1) the day-to-day relation with the media and news management; and (2) various public communication services such as diverse sound, image and web services, as well as feedback mechanisms to measure public opinion and response to government' messages.

Table 6.1   **Government machinery of news management and political communication (2006)**

Service	Administrative unit in charge	Established
General media and news management relations		
Press conferences and press releases*	Spokesperson	Reinstalled. 2004
	Presidential Office of Communications, POC *Coordinación General de Communicación*	1936
News agency	NOTIMEX	1968
Media Monitoring*	POC/ Outsourcing	1936
Information archives*	National Archive *Archivo General de la Nación*	1936
Public Communication Services		
Public Opinion Polls and Studies	Office of Image and Public Opinion/ POC / Outsourcing	1980s
Image and sound services	CEPROPIE (Production Centre Of Special Information Broadcasting)	1990s
Web services	POC	1994
Access to information**	Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Government Public Information	2002

* These functions were an integral part of the communication tasks originally ascribed to the Office of Public Advertising and Government Propaganda that back in the 1930s, was part of the Ministry of State (*Secretaría de Gobernación*). With the creation of an independent ministry for government communication in the late 1930s, these functions remained controlled by a single administrative unit. In the 1940's, by establishing independent communication offices within the different ministries of the executive, media monitoring became a decentralized task that responded to each ministry's information needs. The national archive became, and until the date of this publication remains a decentralized organism of the Ministry of State in charge of the storage of official information about the federal government.

** Chapter 5 (section 5.2.1) provides a detailed analysis on the Mexican law on transparency and access to governmental information, especially in terms of the role it played during the Fox administration in the design and functioning of government communication and in the day-to-day interaction with the media.

6.1.1 Media and news management relations

The day-to-day relationship between the Mexican government and the media has traditionally been conducted through a special administrative unit directly linked to the president's office. Different post-revolutionary administrations (1910 onwards) created different figures and offices within the presidency or as part of other ministries (the Ministry of State or the Treasury, for instance) to fuel Mexican and international press with news about the government's achievements and political developments in the country. The main purpose of these communication offices was to promote a favourable image of government in a context of persistent problems such as constant economic crisis, poverty and instability, to mention a few.

In the mid 1930s, for instance, president Cárdenas established a public advertising and propaganda office within the Ministry of State (*Secretaría de Gobernación*). The goal was to centralize government communication and coordinate the state-media relation from a single administrative unit that provided information about the government to national, regional and international authorities, press agencies and newspapers. 'This office was born', writes Hernández (1995: 59) 'as a governmental defensive front in the middle of constant internal upheavals and an open confrontation with the political elite'. In this context, the focus of the government's communication strategy was the president. The ultimate goal was promoting a favourable image that maximised the achievements of authoritarian rule and minimised the (multiple) unsolved problems in the country.

By the late 1930s, this office for public advertising and propaganda had evolved into an independent administrative unit, the Department of Public Advertising and Propaganda (*Departamento de Publicidad y Propaganda*). This entity had a similar administrative structure to a ministry or department in that it had its own budget and decision-making capacities. It was, for instance, in charge of the design and performance of the communications strategy and advertising campaigns for the federal government. This department also centralized two additional communication tasks: media monitoring and the storage of governmental information in a national archive (Mejía-Barquera 1988; Hernández 1995). As Hernández (1995: 62) puts it:

> The Department of Public Advertising and Propaganda became a 'laboratory of communication' for the federal government; this is, a place where all official information was concentrated, processed and distributed. The department controlled and kept a close surveillance over official information. Censorship was also part of its functions [… through diverse] mechanisms of control that the government imposed over the dissemination of official information.

In the 1940s, separate and relatively independent communication offices within each ministry of the executive replaced the centralized *Departamento de Publicidad y Propaganda*. Each of these communication offices had its own media monitoring system and was responsible for nurturing a fluent relationship with the media, especially with the journalists that covered each ministry's specific policy area. Under this scheme, the Ministry of State recovered some of its functions as a central entity in the design and functioning of the state-media relation. For instance, it kept the control of the national archive (*Archivo General de la Nación*) and it was also the entity responsible for reviewing and renewing licenses for broadcasters and to keep a registry of all printed publications in the country that included information about their contents, circulation rates and the population they targeted.

This administrative structure gave each ministry of the executive more room to design and manage its own communication offices according to specific needs and communication functions. Although government communication was dispersed among diverse administrative units, its main function remained: to restrict the dissemination of official information and to publish positive press releases that praised the achievements of the administration in turn, putting an especial effort on disseminating a positive image of the president (Arredondo and Sánchez-Ruiz 1986).

Over the following decades (1950s-1980s), the Ministry of State and the different communication units within other ministries of the executive kept functioning, but they gradually lost their independence and relevance in the design and functioning of government communication as different administrative units within the president's office (such as *la Dirección General de Comunicación Social de la Presidencia* and *la Unidad de la Crónica Presidencial*) centralized these functions. By the early 1990s, the POC functioned as a large and expensive apparatus in charge of communicating the government mainly through a fluent relationship with national media moguls and through extensive public advertising campaigns that aimed to increase the popularity of the president in turn (Arredondo 1992; Alonso 1993).

Parallel to this intricate set of administrative units in charge of government communication, NOTIMEX, the Mexican state news agency, was created in the late 1960s to ensure that every newsroom (press and broadcast) received press releases and pictures of the president during key activities and events. As envisioned by authoritarian rule, the ultimate goal of an official news agency was to promote a positive image of the political regime, and in particular, of the president. NOTIMEX thus aimed to function

as an informative news channel at international, national and regional levels that reported news about the executive. Over the years, this news agency evolved into a big and slow bureaucratic agency for official news making, especially about the president and his own political agenda.

Throughout the transition to democracy, NOTIMEX was not able to break with the structure and functioning imposed by authoritarian rule. By 2000, when the PAN came to government, the agency was an archaic apparatus that hardly responded to the information needs imposed by new communication technologies or by more competitive national or international informative services. The following quote from an interview conducted for this thesis captures this sense well (A6):

> It is difficult not to think on NOTIMEX as an archaic news agency. Not only have the media now, have had for decades now, other sources of information, but also journalists from all media outlets are very sceptical about a state owned source of information. Manipulation, control and propaganda are deeply embedded on the conception of an official news making structure. I do not think we [the Fox administration] were able to change this conception or were even ready to deal with the issue of what to do with NOTIMEX. It simply kept functioning, it seemed the reasonable thing to do while something else came up, but at the end of the administration nothing had really changed for this news agency.

6.1.2   *Public communication services*

Public communication services during the authoritarian regime were approached as a set of communication tools that the different administrations selectively used to tailor and disseminate a favourable image about their governments. Over the years, these services evolved as different communication needs and technologies emerged. For instance, in the late 1980s, public opinion studies became a relevant instrument in the design of public advertising campaigns. As part of the POC, a small special team of government communicators with experience on public opinion surveys started experimenting with different feedback mechanisms to measure public response. These pioneer exercises to measure public response included, for example, some unsystematic telephone opinion polls or focus groups that were some times conducted by the POC itself and others by external public opinion firms. These polls functioned as a source of information about citizens' perceptions about specific political campaigns in terms of the topic, the message used or the potential medium to transmit it. As an interviewee (A15) puts it:

> The Office of Public Opinion and Image (*la Oficina de Opinión Pública e Imagen Presidencial*) is a relatively new addition to the Presidential Office of Communications. Back in the late 1980s, early 1990s, public opinion polls became a handy tool in political communication. Not just different publications

started using public opinion polls to backup political news with strident figures. These polls also became an extra element to take into consideration during electoral periods, especially in the 1994 presidential election. The presidency started using these kinds of tools to have a better sense of citizens' attitudes and feelings toward the government […These mechanisms] served the presidency as a barometer to measure public response. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, these tools were also seen as a megaphone for regular citizens that rarely had the chance to express their opinion and be heard.

This argument was carefully crafted to emphasise that public opinion polls were not approached as highly crafted communications strategies. Nevertheless, critics argue that public opinion studies in the last administrations of the authoritarian era were used as a political tool rather than as a pure measure of public response or as a mere feedback mechanism (Reyes Heroles 1995; Moreno 1997). The Salinas (1988-1994) and the Zedillo (1994-2000) administrations made extensive use of public polls conducted by the government itself or outsourced them as an additional resource to justify their policies and to praise the approval ratings of their governments (Basáñez 1997; Trejo Delarbre 1997; Kuschick 2000).

Indeed, the interviews showed that it is difficult to offer an alternative perspective about the use of public opinion instruments in government communication. Participants, as explained later in this chapter (see section 6.5), showed certain restrictions to openly speak about the role of these mechanisms in the design and functioning of government communication during the Fox administration. Moreover, official documents about the early years of the Presidential Office of Public Opinion were either difficult to trace or more likely non-existent since no official records whatsoever were found about the use, scope or cost of public opinion polls in the archives of the POC.

Along with these pioneer efforts to measure public response and use these mechanisms in the design and functioning of government communication, two additional public communication services were established towards the end of authoritarian rule. A specialized centre for the production of electronic information and TV programs (CEPROPIE, for its acronym in Spanish) was established in the mid 1990s as a decentralized organism of the Ministry of State. This entity was in charge of the production of visual and sound materials for the executive, especially for the president: his speeches, daily activities and special events were recorded, edited and an official version was transmitted and distributed through this entity to different media outlets. Plus, although it remains unclear to what extent the presidency and the federal government made use of private public advertising services, in principle CEPROPIE

was also in charge of the design, production and distribution of governmental campaigns.

For its part, the web pages of the presidency and diverse internet services of the different ministries of the executive started working in the last years of the Salinas administration (1988-1994). Compared to what these home pages are at the date of this publication, these first electronic portals to government information served as mere bulletin boards for relevant information about the government in turn such as press releases, transcripts of speeches, pictures, organizational charts or relevant contact information.

To sum up, during the Fox administration, the machinery of government communication in the authoritarian regime set up throughout long decades of control over public information and close complicity with the media kept functioning without major changes. This imposed at least three challenges for the new government.

Firstly, a comprehensive reform to this apparatus represented a titanic and entangled task. It required simultaneous structural and administrative changes to several organisms that for decades had been functioning mainly by inertia. These administrative units were actually highly unfamiliar to change and as such, less receptive to improvements. Structural reforms and managerial changes had to be orchestrated by a communications strategy that had to take into consideration not only the day-to-day government-media relationship, but also key matters in terms of internal coordination, information gathering and dissemination through different communication functions and channels. As explained in the following pages, such an ample reform did not occur. Most of the communication organisms inherited by the authoritarian regime kept working in serious detriment of a more fluent, transparent and accountable government communication.

Secondly, without comprehensive administrative reforms, the new government was unable to change or re-train old communication cadres working in these organisms. The new governing elites did not have the capacity to replace these public officers with new personnel that had both, extensive experience in government communication, as well as having close ties with the new administration and with the PAN. Priority was given to replace some key executive and managerial posts with people with certain experience on communication and close to president Fox. Most of the middle and street-level officers that had been trained and gained professional experience in government communication during the authoritarian era remained in their posts.

Thirdly, this archaic machinery of communication was simply unable to respond to progressive changes within the media (competition among outlets, increasing diversity of formats, constantly evolving communication technologies) and in the political communication landscape (diverse actors participating in the public debate, 24/7 news cycles, strident and adversarial headlines). The new political and communication environment demanded from the Fox administration quick responses and more proactive and strategic communication. As seen in the following section of this chapter, after a few failed attempts to orchestrate reform to diverse organisms and to adjust past practices to new communication demands toward the second half of the term, the Fox administration ironically opted for a more centralized strategy in which the POC played a key role, as it did during the authoritarian era. This strategy perpetuated past authoritarian communication tactics, including the minor role that other actors and administrative units such as NOTIMEX (the governmental news agency) or CEPROPIE (the image and sound production centre) played in communicating the government under the new democratic setting.

6.2 Communicating the government in a new era: administrative structure and resources

This section of the chapter examines the lessons to be learnt for government communication from the first years of the new political regime in Mexico. It sets out continuities and the changes adopted by the Fox administration with regards to the re-design of administrative structures and the adjustment of human and financial resources invested in communicating the government. In so doing, the analysis focuses on three key aspects of government communication: (1) a brief account of the central role that the POC retained in communicating the government; (2) the cadres of government communicators that put (or not) certain changes into practice, and (3) the financial resources invested in this process.

6.2.1 President Fox's Coordinación General de Comunicación Social

The central administrative unit for government communication in Mexico has traditionally been the POC. The office is in charge of designing and coordinating a general communications strategy for the federal government. Its formal title, *Coordinación General de Comunicación Social* (literally meaning the General Office of Social Communication) aims to depict its functions: an administrative unit that works as the main channel of communication between the federal government and the public. Its

main task is to design and to coordinate among different entities of the executive a communication strategy that keeps citizens informed about the government's actions and policies. The title, however, is quite imprecise, since 'social communication' obscures the fact that the office persists as a media-relations and public advertising mechanism rather than as an administrative entity committed to address citizens' information demands about 'social' matters.

During the Fox administration, the POC continued to be a media relations unit in charge of giving prompt and coherent responses to information requests from different media outlets. A fluent and permanent direct channel of communication with citizens remained absent. A snapshot of the office's organizational chart like the one shown below in Figure 6.1 depicts this trend.

Figure 6.1   Presidential Office of Communications: organizational structure (2006) (*Coordinación General de Comunicación Social*)
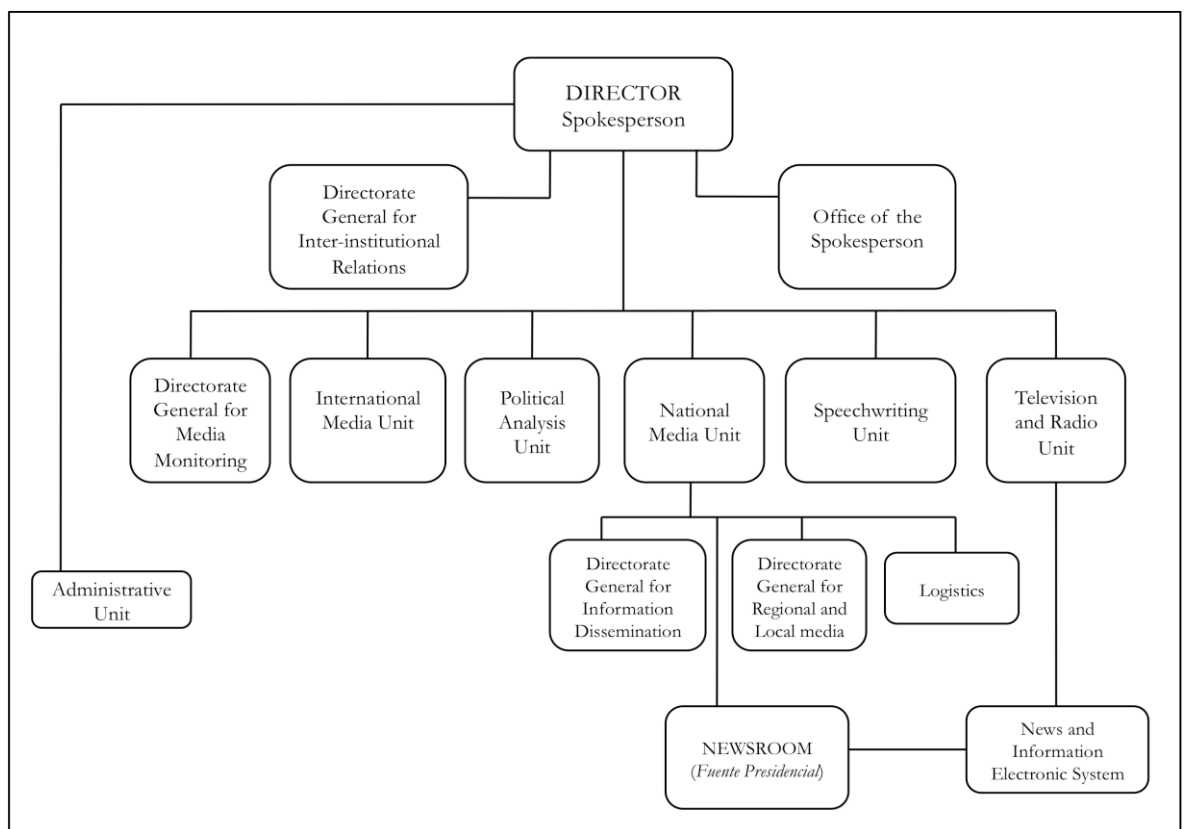
Source: Elaborated with information on the Fox's Presidency web archives, http://fox.presidencia.gob.mx/directorio (last accessed: November 23rd 2008). See also: Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a

The functions of media relations and news management tended to dominate president Fox's POC. As seen, towards the end of the administration, the office was organized

around eight main offices: the Office of the Spokesman; the Directorate General for Inter-institutional Relations; the Directorate General for Media Monitoring; the International Media Unit; the Political Analysis Unit; the National Media Unit; the Speechwriting Unit, and; the Radio and TV Unit. Most of these offices dealt with media relations, while little attention was placed on developing other channels of direct communication with citizens. For instance, the Directorate General for Inter-institutional Relations and the Office of the Spokesperson (see below in section 6.4.1) were two pillars in coordinating the government's communications strategy with the ministries and agencies of the federal government. The aim was to present the government to the media as a single and strong voice. In so doing, the Directorate General for Inter-institutional Relations served as an intergovernmental channel of communication 'with the purpose of responding to the information demands of the media' (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a). Similarly, the Office of the Spokesman responded to one specific concern of the Fox administration: to maintain and facilitate a coordinated and fluent channel of information about the government's achievements and programs (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007c; 2007b). The office's main communications tool was a daily press conference with the presidential corps of journalists (*la fuente presidencial*) ascribed to the presidency. In this daily meeting with the press, the spokesman presented the president's agenda for the day and responded to specific questions from national journalists and international correspondents.

The emphasis on media relations and news management was also present in the work of the other offices that constituted the POC. The Unit for International Media, for instance, functioned as a permanent channel of communication with international correspondents to provide information about Mexico to other countries in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores*). Similarly, the units of National Media and of TV and Radio maintained permanent contact with the media through a newsroom within the presidency that worked 24/7 and through an electronic system for news and information (*Agencia Electrónica de Noticias e Información*) where access was restricted to journalists ascribed to *la fuente presidencial*. For their part, the Directorate General for Media Monitoring and the Political Analysis Unit produced reports and analyses on news coverage that served as key tools in the design of news management and communication strategies aimed to ensure that the government's messages had a place on the news agenda (see below section 6.4.2).

Moreover, the Fox administration took two additional managerial decisions that point at the prominent role that the media retained in communicating the government. Firstly, the post of spokesperson was formally reinstalled towards the end of the term (2004) as a permanent channel of communication with the media and as a coordination strategy with other entities of the federal government (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007c). The following extract from an interview (A1) summarises well the main purpose of this action:

> The figure of a spokesman for the president has obviously existed in Mexico in previous governments. It is actually a key appointment in other countries; look at the US, for instance or think on the Blair years in the UK. In Mexico, every head of the POC (*Director General de Comunicación Social*) has performed as a spokesperson where in one way or another she or he has addressed the media from this position as the official voice of the government in turn. However, what president Fox aimed at by formally reinstalling a special administrative unit for the spokesperson was to maintain a permanent and direct channel of communication with the media. The main goal was then to maintain a continuous presence on the news agenda, and to offer a coordinated and strident message about the government's policies and achievements.

Secondly, in early 2001, the POC was divided into two distinctive administrative units in an effort to stress the distinction between what the Fox administration regarded as two complementary key functions of government communication: information (public advertising) and communication (media management). The *Coordinación General de Opinión Pública e Imagen* (Office of Public Opinion and Image, OPOI) was created as an independent separate administrative in charge of the former, while the POC coordinated the latter.

The duties of the OPOI included the design, coordination and development of non-news communication strategies and public opinion studies; to establish guidelines for the image of the presidency; to generate information relevant for decision making regarding mass communication and public opinion, and; to design and coordinate the web pages of the presidency (DOF, January 4th 2001). This division of functions proved to be difficult and just a few months later (DOF, July 3rd 2001), the OPOI returned to being part of the POC. Later in the term, the POC split again and the OPOI recovered its original tasks (DOF, January 8th 2002).

In terms of the analysis, two aspects are relevant about these constant adjustments on the organisation and division of tasks involved in communicating the government. First, from one change to the other, new administrative structures and positions were created, increasing both the human and financial resources needed to support these changes. Table 6.2 below shows how, in comparison with the previous

two administrations, the POC considerably increased its personnel during the Fox administration.

This may have responded to the explicit differentiation the new government made between the public relations function of government communication on the one hand, and news management and media relations on the other. Although this distinction had existed before, since the POC had traditionally managed and coordinated both functions of government communication, the Fox administration created two different and relatively independent administrative units.

Table 6.2   Government communication officers in the Presidential Office of Communications

Office	Administration		
	Salinas (1988 – 1994)	**Zedillo** (1994 – 2000)	**Fox** (2000 - 2006)
POC	60*	93*	205
			132a	73b

a. Presidential Office of Communications, POC
b. Office of Public Opinion and Image, OPOI

* Approximate figures that include public officers dealing with communication matters (news management, media relations, media monitoring, public opinion or public advertising)

Source: approximate figures elaborated with information collected in the archives of *Los Pinos*, the Office of the President. For the Fox administration this information was available at the presidency's web page: http://fox.presidencia.gob.mx/directorio/ (last accessed 23rd November 2008).

This increase in personnel may also have been the result of constant and gradual improvements in the government's communications strategy. In the last decades, Mexican public communicators faced the emergence of new communications technologies and new media platforms, as well as a greater diversity of voices participating in the public debate. These new communication demands required a new set of professionals able to perform additional and specialized tasks. In any case, the Fox administration did face a communication environment that imposed new functions and demanded new cadres of professional communicators.

Second, this continuous change of duties and budgets showed the distinction yet blurred lines between public relations and media management functions of government communication. The frequent administrative adjustments mentioned above made it more difficult to disentangle the links between the government and the media. While the

POC was in charge of daily news management activities (such as press releases, conferences, speeches, web news services, media strategies across different ministries and agencies of the executive), the OPOI (when it worked separately) managed advertising campaigns and their contracts with the media and special advertising firms, public opinion studies, public relations and media consultancies. All of these were expensive media and communication services that lacked clear regulations or internal rulings. Far from being more transparent and functional, the constant change of duties, budgets and managerial techniques clashed with other administrative aspects (such as personnel training, organizational structures or budgets) that were more resistant to change and thus unable to adapt as quickly as new changes on organizational structure or management occurred.

6.2.2   Human Resources: media mavericks?

The communications strategy of the Fox administration practically relied on the same administrative structure that the PRI had established and strengthened during decades of authoritarian control over governmental information and interdependent relations with the media. For the new government, it was not only difficult to change administrative structures and institutional arrangements that had been functioning for decades, but it was also almost impossible to replace more than thirty communication teams –since each ministry and semi-independent governmental agency has its own communication office— with new bureaucrats.

At first glance this seems puzzling, especially because the Fox administration retained ample capacity to replace past authoritarian communication teams with cadres of professional government communicators able to respond to the new information and communications settings. For instance, Civil Service Law (CSL), which was introduced for the first time in Mexico in 2003, did not mandate a professional civil service for the offices of government communication (DOF, April 10th 2003). Contrary to what happens in countries like the UK or France (see respectively: Sanders 2013 and Maarek 2013), the federal government in Mexico is not required to fill up information, communication and public advertising posts with civil servants that have ample expertise on information and communication matters and who are expected to serve governments of different political stripes following the civil service ethos of political neutrality.

In Mexico, government communication has traditionally been (and at the time of this publication still is) designed and executed by public officers and special advisers

who did not necessarily have extensive expertise on communications or state-media relations and who are more responsive to each administration's goals rather than to a long term and political neutral communications strategy. In democracy, Mexican governments have thus retained the capacity to make political appointments, especially at the top and second tier positions in the administrative structure, tying government communication to each administration's goals, as well as individual priorities. For instance, as seen in the following pages, president Fox instituted a multi-political party and highly professionalized cabinet in which expertise was privileged over partisan or militant links with the PAN, or so it was argued. Interviewees stated that, to some extent, to fill up high-level and managerial positions in government communication, the administration followed a similar strategy. Nevertheless, a closer investigation of the profiles of the heads of the POC, show that most of these political appointees were also pursuing their own political agendas while serving as public officers.

6.2.2.1 Recruitment processes: out of the reach of the 2003 Mexican Civil Service Law

When the PAN won the presidential in 2000, public servants in Mexico were not part of a professional, permanent and non-partisan bureaucracy. It was towards the second half of the term (2003), when the first Mexican Civil Service Law (CSL) was passed. This measure responded to the long overdue duty of the Mexican state to implement legally binding mechanisms ensuring that government positions are filled 'under the basis of merit' (CSL 2003: article 2) with the most competitive people. The main goal of the Mexican CSL is then, to 'stimulate the development of public administration' through official appointments based on 'legality, efficiency, objectivity, quality, impartiality, equity, competence, merit and gender equality' (*ibid*).

Nevertheless, communication offices were intentionally excluded from the Mexican CSL and its subsequent regulations. That is, the law considers public officers ascribed to government communication offices (*oficinas de comunicación social*) as 'support personnel' (*gabinete de apoyo*) of 'free appointment' (*libre designación*) by the next hierarchical position on the organizational chart (CSL 2003: article 7). Generally, offices of communications at the federal level are under the supervision of the head of the administrative unit (for instance, ministers or heads of office) whose appointment also remains outside of the scope of the CSL (CSL 2003: article 8). Along with other key governmental positions and offices (such as ministers, deputy ministers, heads of office or accounting offices), government communication offices represent crucial functions

which, according to this regulatory framework, remain linked to each administration's policy interests and goals (CSL 2003: article 7).

These exemptions to the Mexican CSL had implications regarding the kind of personnel the Fox administration assigned to the communication offices of the executive, especially the POC. For instance, the new political regime in Mexico preserved a long lasting authoritarian tradition aimed to assure the governing elites in turn of the control of key areas such as information management and media relations. In terms of government communication, the Fox administration kept the capacity to fill up its communication staffs with personnel close to the ruling elites.

The new government also retained the privilege of directing the communication and public advertising strategies of the federal government towards its particular political goals. In evident contradiction with the spirit of the CSL, the first democratic government in Mexico kept an ample capacity to freely fill up the public communication offices of the federal government with appointments at all administrative levels (senior, managerial, middle and street-level officers) that were not necessarily supported by political neutrality, extensive professional expertise on communication or strong media skills.

6.2.2.2 Government communictors' professional profiles: background, skills and media training

A great part of the government communicators that worked for the Fox administration gained their professional experience through professional practice within political parties or government structures, rather than through academic education or expertise in the fields of media or communication. That is, most of the government communicators that served for the first democratic administration were trained as public officers or party militants during authoritarian rule.

As it emerged from the analysis of interviews, the Fox administration kept most of the middle and street-level government communicators that served during the authoritarian regime mainly for two reasons. First, the new government did not have the capacity to replace hundreds of bureaucrats working within several communication offices of the federal government. In order to keep the machinery of government communication working, it was necessary to keep these cadres of communicators even if they may have retained past conceptions about government communication and the state-media relation, and were fairly reluctant to new managerial techniques and strategies.

Table 6.3   **Profiles of the heads of the Presidential Office of Communication**
(*Oficina de Comunicación Social de la Presidencia de la República)*

ADMINISTRATION	HEAD OF THE POC	BACKGROUND
Carlos Salinas (PRI, 1988 – 1994)	Otto Granados Roldán (Dec. 1988 – April 1992)	*Party, government and campaigning*. Communications and Campaign Manager during Salinas' presidential campaign (1988). Different government appointments.
	José Carreño Carlón (May 1992 – Dec. 1994)	*Government communication, media, academia*. Former Head of *El Nacional*, a state newspaper sold in 1993 to private media. From Dec. 2012, Head of the *Fondo de Cultura Económica* (FCE), a state decentralized publishing house.
Ernesto Zedillo (PRI, 1994 – 2000)	Carlos Salomón (Dec. 1994 – January 1996)	*Party and government*. Former Head of the National Lottery.
	Carlos Almada (January 1996 – Sept. 1997)	*Party and government*. Former Head of the federal electoral body before it became an autonomous institute. Several party appointments, as well as positions at the federal and local governments.
	Fernando Lerdo de Tejada (Sep. 1997 – March 2000)	*Party and government*. Former Head of the Institute for Consumers' Protection.
	Marco Provencio (March – December 2000)	*Government communication*. Head of Communications for diverse governmental offices.
Vicente Fox (PAN, 2000 – 2006)	Marta Sahagún (Dec. 2000 – July 2001)	*Campaigning and government communication*. Head of Communications during Fox's term as governor of Guanajuato and campaign manager during his presidential campaign (2000).
	Francisco Ortiz (July 2001 – September 2001)	*Public relations and marketing*. Head of Public Opinion and Advertising during Fox's electoral campaign (2000). Former marketing deputy at Televisa and associate advertising manager at Procter & Gamble.
	Rodolfo Elizondo (Dec. 2001 – July 2003)	*Party and government*. Senator, Congressman and Mayor of a local government in Durango.
	Alfonso Durazo (July 2003 – July 2004)	*Politics and government*. Different parties' (PRI, PAN, PRD) appointments, including minister and Zedillo's private secretary during his presidential campaign (1994).
	Rubén Aguilar Valenzuela (July 2004 – Dec. 2006)	*Communications, media relations, campaigning, academia*. Former Head of Communications for the 2000 PRD's presidential candidate. Extensive professional expertise as journalist and international correspondent.
Felipe Calderón (PAN, 2006 - 2012)	Maximiliano Cortázar (Dec. 2006 – July 2010)	*Campaigning and government communications*. Head of Communications during Calderon's term as minister of Energy and during his presidential campaign (2006).
	Alejandra Sota (July 2010 – Dec. 2012)	*Party and government*. PAN militant and public officer in different governmental entities as part of Felipe Calderón's inner group of collaborators.
Enrique Peña Nieto (PRI, from Dec. 2012)	David López (from December 2012)	*Party, government communications and campaigning*. Head of Communications for diverse entities at the federal and regional governments. Head of Communications during Peña Nieto's term as governor of the state of Mexico and during his presidential campaign (2012).

Secondly, when it came to appointments at the managerial level, some interviewees insisted that the Fox administration did privilege professional expertise in government communication and media relations over party links or political appointments. The following extract of an interview captures well a common understanding among participants (A4):

> President Fox had a different perception about government communication and about the government's relation with the media. His team and close collaborators had extensive expertise on these matters. What was relevant for president Fox was the expertise and insights these individuals could bring to the government's communication strategy. Their partisan links or previous public positions that were not related to communication matters were not considered that relevant for the tasks they were expected to perform.

However, a closer look at the heads of the POC during the Fox administration renders a quite different picture. At first glance, Table 6.3 on the previous page may suggest, as stressed in the quote above, that when appointing the heads of the POC, president Fox did privilege the media and communications experience of his chief communicators over their partisan links or previous political appointments. This seems to be the case for three out of five of the public officers that hold this position during the Fox administration: Marta Sahagún, Francisco Ortíz and Rubén Aguilar Valenzuela, who held extensive professional expertise on communication. Among these, perhaps the most representative and intriguing appointment is the latter. Not only did Aguilar Valenzuela serve as Communications and Campaign Manager for Fox's main contender during the 2000 presidential election, he also had an extensive professional career in news coverage and journalism that was consolidated through several decades, by serving as international correspondent based in diverse Latin American countries.

For their part, Marta Sahagún and Francisco Ortíz also had solid professional careers in media and communications, especially in political campaigning and advertising. Sahagún, the first woman serving as a head of the POC, was in charge of communications and media relations during Fox's government in Guanajuato. She was also his Communications and Campaign Manager during the 2000 presidential election. Once in federal government, she served as head of the POC until mid 2002, when she left the post to marry president Fox. As first lady, Sahagún received great media attention, although not always positive. She was frequently criticised for diverse scandals surrounding her personal life and for her open aspirations to run for the 2006 presidential election.

Before serving as Fox's Public Opinion and Political Advertising Manager during the 2000 presidential campaign, Francisco Ortíz was marketing deputy at the editorial branch of Televisa (the Mexican broadcasting conglomerate) and Associate Advertising Manager at Procter & Gamble. During the first two years of the Fox administration, Ortíz was in charge of the OPOI. He replaced Sahagún as head of the POC, but resigned from this position few months later to present his candidature to the Mexican Tourism Board (*Consejo Nacional de Promoción Turística*), a decentralized organism of the Ministry of Tourism (*Secretaría de Turismo*). Ortíz won those elections and was the head of that board for two years.

It is difficult, however, to fully agree with the point that Fox's heads of communication were serving in public office solely on their professional credentials and not moved by their own political interests. The case of Alfonso Durazo, for instance, became emblematic for the media. Before joining the Fox administration, he cultivated a long political career as a PRI militant. After holding several positions within that party, he served as private secretary of Zedillo, the PRI candidate and winner of the 1994 presidential election. A few years later, Durazo switched parties to join Fox's presidential campaign in 2000. In 2003, president Fox appointed him as head of the POC. Nevertheless, after an open confrontation with the president that was extensively covered by the news media, Durazo resigned from his post in 2004. A few months later, he joined the electoral campaign team of the PRD (*Partido the la Revolución Democrótica*), the PAN's strongest contender in the 2006 presidential election. At this point, the news media had enough arguments to constantly criticise Durazo from using governmental and diverse parties' appointments to catapult his political career regardless of crucial differences on parties' platforms or political leadership.

Along with other (and frequent) media scandals surrounding president Fox's heads of communications (especially regarding their lack of experience on government communication, their serious professional limitations to deal with information demands and an increasing number of political actors in the news agenda or their close links with media moguls), the cases of Durazo, Sahagún and to a lesser extent, the cases of Ortíz and Aguilar Valenzuela, were used in news coverage as strident headlines that disseminated the perception that communication and media relations during the Fox administration served more as a political tool than as an open and trustful channel of information and permanent contact with the citizens (see for instance: Guerrero 2007; Gutiérrez López 2008; Bravo 2009).

6.2.3   Financial resources: tangled budgets and opacity

One of the best-kept secrets about government communication in Mexico has traditionally been how much it costs and how exactly public funds are distributed into the different and entangled tasks involved in communicating the government. During the authoritarian regime, this secrecy about government communication budgets and advertising expenditure may have appeared as part of the strategy the regime orchestrated to keep the media at close complicity (Lawson 2002: Ch3; Guerrero 2009: Ch1). To a great extent, the Mexican media, especially the press, heavily depended on government advertising as a key source of income. In order to prosper economically, media owners in turn consented to keep the administration as their main advertising client. It is even suspected that the federal government paid considerable higher prices for advertising than private firms and other clients (Cole 1975; Bohmann 1986; Keenan 1997). The capacity of a fully independent and vigorous Fourth Estate was clearly undermined by the financial links that tied together authoritarian rule and the media.

At the outset of the new political regime, the opacity regarding the financial resources invested in government communication and especially in public advertising remained in practice. This inspired suspicion about the public resources spent and also about the motivations of both the government and the media behind contracts for government communication and public advertising campaigns (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Villanueva 2010). In the analysis of the interviews and the document research conducted for this thesis, three conditions accounted for this persistent lack of clarity about the amount and purpose of financial resources invested in communicating the government.

Firstly, in official documents such as the Annual Federal Expenditure Budget (PEF, the acronym for *Presupuesto de Egresos de la Federación*) or internal rulings on public advertising campaigns (such as the *Lineamientos Generales para la Erogación de Recursos en Materia de Comunicación Social*), an intricate set of activities and financial resources were (and at the time of this publication still are) grouped under the generic term 'government communication' (*comunicación social*). Generally, the term puts together a great diversity of tasks that range from the regular functioning of dozens of offices of communication (one per ministry and additional organs of the federal government) to more targeted tasks such as public opinion studies, special media management consultancies or strategic public advertising campaigns. For instance, according to the 2004 PEF, more than 70 administrative units of the executive received funds for

communication, media relations and public advertising. Only the Ministry of Interior, made up of 19 different offices –including the office of communications- received funds to be spent on diverse activities related to communication, media monitoring, media relations or public advertising (PEF 2005: 3). It thus remains difficult to calculate an estimate about how much exactly that ministry spent on government communication in that year by simply adding different figures and budgets. One runs the risk, for example, of duplicating figures since several administrative units performed complementary or even similar communication tasks without being clearly indicated.

Secondly, the Fox administration lacked a formal disclosure mechanism about general budgets and official expenditure on government communication. For instance, for each of the six years of the term, the PEF specified different categories of expenses related to government communication (*comunicación social*). Nevertheless, as mentioned, it remained unclear as to how these resources were distributed among a great diversity of administrative units dealing with government communication issues or among diverse tasks involved in communicating the government. One interviewee (A2) used the example of public advertising campaigns on health issues to illustrate this point:

> At the federal government, 'health' (*salud*) is under the management of three governmental agencies: the Ministry of Health (*Secreataría de Salud*), the Mexican Institute of Social Security (*IMSS*) and the Institute of Social Security for State Workers (*ISSSTE*). Naturally, there are mechanisms among these entities to coordinate special advertising campaigns. But most of the time, each institution uses its own financial and human resources to publicize governmental messages and achievements, as well as to deal with the media. Each institution has ample room to manoeuvre: its own communication goals; and resources and mechanisms to relate with the media and to communicate to citizens on a day-to-day basis.

The capacity that each government entity has to design and implement its own communication and media strategies, makes it difficult to get a total estimate about the resources the federal government invests in political communication and public advertising. Without a general and coordinated mechanism that discloses information about the different tasks, personnel and resources involved in communicating the government, it remains difficult to get a clear picture about both the cost and purpose of government communication, especially those highly publicized political campaigns that celebrate the achievements of the administration and in electorally sensitive policy areas such as hospitals, schools, roads or food programs.

Thirdly, clear information about public advertising contracts with the media was also (and at the date of this publication still is) missing. Government advertising is a key

business area for the Mexican media, and at the same time it establishes a direct financial link between the federal government and the media. However, for the Fox administration, there was not legally binding responsibilities to disclose the contracts signed with different media outlets and the amount invested in publicizing the government. The media were also exempt of this obligation. It is, for instance, difficult to know how much exactly a TV advertising slot on prime time costs since advertising contracts are not open to public scrutiny. For example, the spread of suspicion surrounding the disproportionate increase of public advertising during the Fox administration is generally sustained on the basis of the number of government advertisements circulating within different media outlets (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Fundar 2009). Nevertheless, it is difficult to have some certainty about the actual expenditure on public advertising since both the government and the media do not have legal obligations to disclose this information.

In short, during the first years of a new political regime in Mexico it remained very difficult to get transparent information about the financial resources invested in government communication. There was a notable lack of legally binding obligations and mechanisms for both the federal government and the media to disclose detailed information about the cost, tasks and purpose of multi-million advertising contracts.

6.3   The messenger: state, government or presidential communication?

Government communication at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico remained a strategic instrument at the disposal of those who were in power, especially the president and his cabinet members who used government communication and the day-to-day relation with the media to pursue their own political interests and career goals.

Throughout this process, however, the central role that the president had traditionally played in communicating the government started showing certain limitations. The analysis of the interviews showed these restrictions were, ironically, closely related to two government communications strategies put forth by the Fox administration to retain the control that the POC traditionally have had over the news agenda.

Firstly, and particularly, at the beginning of the Fox administration, each ministry and agency of the federal government was given ample room to manoeuvre in terms of designing and implementing their own communications strategy. New actors (opposition parties, organizations of the civil society and public officers from other

branches or at the others levels of government) started gaining more visibility and spaces in the news agenda. The figure of the president as a single interlocutor for the federal government appeared incapable of simultaneously responding to the diverse topics, opinions and information demands generated by this increasing diversity of actors in the public debate. Thus, at the beginning of the administration the aim of a governmental communication strategy was to compensate this variety of actors and divergent points of view in the news agenda with multiple voices that could promptly respond to different information needs or potential attacks from other political actors.

Nevertheless, more common than not, individual ministers preferred to address the media and to speak directly for their own political interests. In so doing, they acted as their own spokesperson, strategist and media relations agent (Seymour-Ure 2000) without referring to a more general communications strategy for the federal government. This tendency ended up eclipsing the figure of the president as the head and manager of the government's communication strategy. Different messages and especially contradictions among ministers were of ample media coverage. In this scenario, policy initiatives or government achievements publicized from the presidency tended to lose visibility against news about media skills and personality traits of multiple voices addressing the media, especially of charismatic ministers that were prone to increase their popularity thorough their own media management strategies and their close relations with journalists and media moguls.

Secondly, towards the end of the term (April 2005), the post of the spokesperson for the president was formally reinstalled as a key coordination and communications strategy. As the term progressed, president Fox started looking older, more tired and annoyed by constant adversarial headlines about his personal life. For instance, at different occasions he openly showed his reluctance to directly speak to journalists. Thus, an alternative facilitator and mediator between the administration and the media was needed. In addition, the contradictions within the cabinet were reported in the news media as continuous scandalous headlines. It was also necessary to establish a permanent and coordinated channel of communication between the federal government and the media.

The office of the spokesperson was placed within the POC and the head of the office at that time was appointed as spokesman. As such, he was in charge of four tasks. Two of these tasks were considered key functions of government communication: to inform about policies, programs, strategies and achievements of the federal government,

and to situate the topics of special interest and relevance for the president in the news agenda. The other two were considered supplementary actions: to coordinate the government's message among the different ministries and agencies of the federal government, and to respond to crises or unanticipated events with prompt information (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007c).

From the analysis of the interviews and from a handful of written accounts from president Fox's spokesman (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a, 2007b, 2007c) it appears that the post of the spokesman aimed to serve a dual purpose: to publicize the president and to coordinate the government's communication strategy. Nevertheless, being directly subordinate to the president and due to the fact that it was president Fox who chose his spokesman seems to have been made this position a primary strategic instrument for the president. Thus, it is difficult to argue that this communications strategy promoted an integrated communication strategy for the federal government since one of the key duties of the spokesperson as reported by the interviewees and written by president Fox's spokesman himself was to publicize and promote the president in the news agenda (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a).

Summing up, as the term progressed, the president gradually lost the key figurehead role that he had traditionally played as the most powerful government communicator in Mexico. This rather than being the result of a deliberative communications strategy for the state or for the federal government that responded to the new political setting appears to be an unanticipated consequence of two communications strategies that, ironically, aimed to centre the news agenda towards the president and his government. Firstly, to respond to an increasing diversity of actors and voices in the public debate, at the beginning of the Fox administration, ministers were granted with ample capacity to speak directly to the media, something that very rarely occurred under the authoritarian regime. However, this governmental rather than presidential communications strategy gave charismatic ministers the platform to burnish their personal image in pursuing their own political goals. The potential for a harmonious communication strategy for the federal government or the state was seriously damaged by divergent messages and personal agendas. Secondly, in an effort to revert this tendency and to concentrate the voice of the government on a single figure, president Fox formally reinstalled the figure of spokesperson. This, however, pointed to a further decline in the importance of the president in government communication especially when president Fox himself appeared reluctant to play a key role in this task.

The temptation to use government communication in the interest of the governing elites remained in place during the first years of a new political regime in Mexico. Nevertheless, it did not rest as a prerogative exclusively granted to the president. Other members of the government learnt that the blurred distinction between presidential, governmental and state communication that persisted at the outset of the Mexican democracy could be transformed into a powerful communications tool to catapult individual political careers.

6.4   The process: day-to-day practices

In terms of the functions performed and the daily functioning of government communication, during the Fox administration the design and tasks put into practice point at the key role that the media retained in government communication. Nevertheless, in contrast to what happened during authoritarian rule (see Chapter Two), at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico, the media were no longer considered as friendly allies that could be kept at close complicity if the administration in turn agreed on protecting the industry's economic interests. As shown in the interviews, government communicators tended to regard the media as an ambivalent political actor that had the power of both constructing and destroying political careers. For participants it was also evident that new voices in the public debate were getting more space in the news agenda. In terms of communication, these actors represented dissonant voices that diverted citizens' attention from government messages to other voices and political forces.

In this scenario, the interviews showed that the Fox administration considered that maintaining a permanent communications campaign (Blumenthal 1982) was necessary to sustain government popularity. As emerged in the analysis, this demanded two key actions: a strategically planned communication strategy able to produce clear-cut messages favourable to the government, and; proactive media management strategies that ensured a continuous (and positive) presence in the news agenda and that helped to retain the media at close complicity. Nevertheless, government communicators struggled to balance these two complementary goals. As explained by the interviewees, strategic communication proved to be a dangerous tool: it had implications for public trust in government, whilst at the same time it triggered other political actors' (especially opposition parties') capacities to tailor their own media

management strategies to compete with the government's voice in communicating politics to citizens.

6.4.1   Objectives, planning and coordination

Officially, the POC is 'the administrative unit in charge of giving information to citizens and to the media about the presidency' (DOF, December 13th 2004: article 4). However, as mentioned, the office has traditionally served as the planning and coordination entity for the communications strategy of the federal government. As written by president Fox's spokesman and head of office towards the end of the term (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a), the particular objectives of the POC were:

(1) To articulate the actions aimed to truthfully and promptly disseminate the messages, programs and actions of the president to the media and citizens;

(2) To design programs and policies to respond to the information needs of the citizens and the media;

(3) To present to the president special programs to disseminate and to promote the programs and actions of the government;

(4) To coordinate the communication (*comunicación social*) of the public sector;

(5) To periodically evaluate the results of the dissemination policies about the actions and programs of the president;

(6) To operate the communication strategy of the presidency.

All of these functions are directly related to planning and coordination of the communications strategy for the president in particular, and of the federal government in general. Nevertheless, as the interviews showed, a reduced number of high-level officials were in charge of a great number of tasks related to planning and coordination. Thus the vast part of Fox's government communicators did not undertake much designing or coordination work since the inner circles of government communicators, especially the head of the POC in coordination with the directors of communication and special advisers were the public officers in charge of these functions. In contrast to what happens in other countries like the UK or Sweden (see respectively: Sanders 2013; Falasca and Nord 2013), media and communications advisers for the Fox administration were part of the administrative structure of the POC. Rather than being hired outside the office's organizational charts, these communicators were employed as high-level public officers. Their primary function was to evaluate the communications environment and to propose communication strategies in response to particular needs

of the president and the federal government. Crisis management and the coordination of communications strategies for special events were also under their control.

In terms of the coordination of a general communications strategy for the federal government as mentioned earlier in this chapter, at the beginning of the presidential term, ministers were granted ample room to design and conduct the communications strategy for their ministries. After a series of contradictions within the cabinet, president Fox formally reinstalled the figure of the spokesman. Along with the unit for inter-institutional relations (see Figure 6.1) this was a permanent channel of communication between the POC, the ministerial offices of communication and other agencies of the federal government. The Office of the Spokesman was thus regarded as a coordination entity that aimed to communicate the government with a single voice and through a permanent channel of communication and interaction with the media.

Nevertheless, the coordination among diverse entities of the federal government and simultaneous messages remained an issue throughout the Fox administration. As the figure of the spokesman became more visible through daily press conferences, it also started showing certain limits, especially in terms of influence, coordination and news management. The position, for instance, had not been granted with effective managerial capacities or specific and clear functions. For instance, the post had been established as a 'multi-job appointment' (A18) with certain operational limits. The job was regarded as a coordinator of government communications; an adviser on media relations; an intermediary between the media and the government; and as a media monitor and a quick fire mechanism to respond to the information needs of the media.

Hierarchically, however, the position did not have a ministerial level as it did not have the same level of or decision-making capacity as a cabinet minister. In addition, the spokesperson was not formally part of the cabinet. Nevertheless, president Fox's spokesman was a part of his inner group of collaborators and played a crucial role in designing and managing the government's communication strategy towards the end of the administration. In so doing, the spokesman not only faced great challenges in trying to coordinate the appearances of cabinet ministers on the media, but also his capacity to serve as a coordinator of government communication, intermediary and adviser on media relations was seriously damaged by a general perception in news coverage about his main task being to correct misunderstandings within the government and divergent viewpoints among key public officers.

6.4.2   Information gathering: the evaluation process of media and political environments

Most of the administrative units of the POC directly dealt with information gathering
and media monitoring tasks (for a snapshot of the office's organizational chart see
Figure 6.1). For instance, the Directorate General for Media Monitoring (*Dirección de
Monitoreo y Síntesis*) was in charge of 24-hour media monitoring. Its main function was 'to
keep the president and the head of the POC permanently informed about news
coverage' (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a). The materials (reports and analyses) this office
elaborated as reported by the interviewees, served as key tools in the design and
functioning of every-day communication strategy and in the routine relationship with
the media. These materials included reports on the main political news in the press, TV
and radio, plus additional documents that summarized these tendencies in the main
political editorials and columns.

Similarly, the Political Analysis Unit and National Media Unit (the *Área de
Análisis de Prensa* and the *Dirección General de Prensa Nacional*) elaborated on detailed daily
reports and analyses on the political news in the press, TV and radio. The interviewees
also mentioned these documents as relevant inputs for the daily press conference carried
out by president Fox's spokesman and for the diverse coordination meetings among the
directors of communications. The International Information Unit (*Unidad de Información
Internacional*) also performed media monitoring tasks and elaborated on different
documents of analysis in international news about Mexico.

6.4.3   Information dissemination: communication channels

During the Fox administration, mainstream media remained the main channel to
disseminate information about the government. As seen, the figure of the spokesperson
was formally re-established as the main channel of communication and key contact with
the media. As such, president Fox's spokesman met every day with the corps of
journalists ascribed to the Office of the President (*la fuente presidencial*). This meeting was
conducted in a format of an early daily press conference that took place after a
coordination meeting with the head, directors and advisers of the POC.

Direct or interactive communication with citizens was rare.[45] As reported in the
interviews, this communication channel did not represent a central tool or at least, the

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[45] President Fox held a weekly radio program *Fox Contigo* (Fox with you). The program was
transmitted at noon on Saturdays. It was one hour long and the format generally consisted of a
brief introduction by the President on a specific subject or policy for each week such as health,
education, housing, or infrastructure, to mention a few. Then, a specialist on the topic (public

role it may have played was not comparable to the relevance participants placed upon media relations and news management strategies. Direct mail or calls to citizens were regarded, as one interviewee put it 'to be out of fashion' (B10) communication techniques that have serious limitations in terms of reaching the vast majority of citizens. Alternative direct means of communication also faced certain constraints. Back in those days (2000-2006), the web pages of the presidency were seen more as an electronic bulletin board to post official messages and publish press releases than as an interactive platform to communicate directly with citizens. Blogs and social media platforms were in their infancy, and as such, these tools were not considered a relevant channel of communication or a central component of the government's communication strategy as they are at the date of this publication.

In terms of information dissemination, the interviews showed that these functions were carried out mainly through news management and media relations. In so doing, government communicators stressed that they struggled to balance two different and potentially contradictory goals. On the one hand, in their day-to-day relations with the media, they followed the mere ambition of gaining political support through official information that enhanced citizens' trust on the government. A 'party-centred' or 'political logic', as the literature on political communication describes it, aims to mobilize political support through effective communication strategies. From this stance, the goal is to legitimize public policies and actions through media coverage (Mazzoleni 1987; Pfetsch 2008). Information dissemination and media relations then become two reliable channels to promote public policies, legislations and political platforms that strengthen citizens' confidence in the government in contrast to other parties' proposals. Naturally, government communication during the Fox administration did seek legitimacy and the support from citizens, and from potential voters.

On the other hand, Mexican government communicators also reported following a 'media-logic' that assumes media as both a means and a target of public communication (Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Schulz 2004; Strömbäck 2011). From this perspective, the aim is to keep the media on the government's side. This then implies a continuous effort to gain the media's support since they are approached as active players

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officers or academics) gave further information. On certain occasions, interviews with relevant people for the topic under discussion were included. It is relevant to state that in the empirical research conducted for this thesis, it was difficult to gather precise information about the impact of this communication tool in terms, for instance, of ratings and dissemination figures, the direct participation of citizens, its effectiveness or its actual influence on communicating the government to citizens.

on the political process. Communication officers, in consequence, invest more time and effort in implementing a government communications strategy carefully designed to secure positive media coverage. As explained thoroughly in the following chapter of this thesis (Chapter Seven), this process imposed both new challenges and opportunities for Mexican government communicators. Nevertheless, it did not completely replace the traditional role that government communication has played in publicizing a positive image of the administration in turn.

6.5   Public response and evaluation mechanisms: in polls we trust?

The analysis of the interviews showed significant divisions among government communicators about the role of public feedback and general opinion surveys in the design and functioning of president Fox's government communication. It was, for instance, difficult to speak freely with participants about how these tools were used in communicating the government or about the different mechanisms the presidency and especially the POC or the OPOI used to measure public opinion in order to have a better sense of citizens' perceptions about the government's performance, initiatives or flaws.

Across the interviews there were several mentions and a certain common understanding among participants about 'telephone opinion polls' and 'presidential approval ratings'. Nevertheless, when trying to extract more information about what these polls and ratings were (measures, procedures, target population and so on) or what entity was in charge of designing and conducting these mechanisms of public opinion and feedback, interviewees tended to give complicated answers. The following extract from an interview (A17) captures this general attitude well:

> Researcher: You mentioned something about 'approval ratings'. Can you expand on this, for instance, the mechanisms used to measure these ratings: methodology followed, population participating, the administrative unit in charge […] I am guessing we are talking about public opinion polls…
>
> Interviewee: Well, you know, these ratings, they were, actually are everywhere: *El Universal, Milenio, Reforma, El financiero*, you name it. I mean, newspapers have now this tendency of transforming every poll into strident headlines: 'President Fox: the highest approval rates in history', that was a good one […]
>
> Researcher: […] just to be clear, these ratings we are talking about are the ones newspapers conducted themselves, right? Or was it the case that the presidency, for example, the president's office of communications also conducted its own polls and ratings?
>
> Interviewee: What I am trying to say here is that these polls became an indicator of performance. That did not happen during the authoritarian era; back then

there was nothing like this. We [government communicators for the Fox administration] were not directly in charge of the methodology followed, participants or the firm conducting the poll. What mattered for us in terms of government communication was the headline; the number: '7.5 presidential approval rate; the highest ever'; that was an indicator for the job we were doing, but also for the media, for the people. Everyone could read, could understand this figure without going necessarily into methodological explanations.

Researcher: And trust, I mean, me, you, could any Mexican trust these figures?

Interviewee: Well, trust is another issue, isn't it? As government communicators we had to deal with the figure: '7.5'; with the headline, that was our job, conducting the actual poll and deciding if it was indeed trustful was someone else's […]

The analysis of the interviews showed that the reasons for a general lack of clarity among interviewees about the mechanisms they used to measure public response could be grouped into two main explanations. Firstly, as pointed in the quotation above, not all government communicators were directly involved in designing and conducting public opinion polls or other feedback mechanisms. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Fox administration made a clear distinction between the OPOI and the POC by creating two separate offices: one in charge of public advertising (the OPOI) and the other in charge of media relations (the POC). Participants that were part of the latter (the majority of them) were less responsive about the distinctive evaluation mechanisms the Fox presidency used in its daily functioning. Interviewees that worked for the former naturally had more information about the distinctive mechanisms used to measure public opinion and as a consequence, were more open to questions about the role of the general public in designing, for instance, certain public advertising campaigns. As one participant puts it (A11):

There were different tools that helped us to design and to test public advertising campaigns, similar to the ones used in private advertising. But our main indicator was the public: their needs, problems, expectations. We were just one part of the government's machinery working with and for the people…

Direct responses about public opinion and feedback mechanisms, however, were rare even among those public officers working for the public opinion and advertising office. In this study, it was not possible to gather basic data about what these mechanisms were, how they were designed or how often they were conducted, let alone other sensitive topics about how much did polls cost or what companies were conducting these general opinion studies, since it was clear from some official documents on human resources and organizational charts that formally, there was no personnel assigned to directly conduct these surveys.

Secondly, discrepancies among participants were also related to the position they held within these two presidential offices. One group, especially high-level public officers were very cautious about openly admitting the role of public opinion surveys as tools for government. As seen in the quotation above, there was a vague sense of the design and functioning of government communication (perhaps more in public advertising than in news management) and that there were indeed certain feedback and public opinion mechanisms used. Nevertheless, public officers at managerial positions (heads of office and directors) generally took care on stressing that it was 'the public' who remained 'the main indicator' (A2) for public response and feedback.

The reluctance to fully recognize and openly talk about the role that public opinion polls played in the Fox administration might at least to some extent be traced to the severe criticism of how other tools were used in government communication such as increasing expenses on public advertising received in the new political regime (see for instance: de la Mora 2009, Fundar 2009; Bravo 2011). The first democratic government was under constant scrutiny for the methods it used to communicate public policy proposals and achievements. The main critique was about juicy advertising contracts that compromised the capacity of the media to play a more vigilant and adversarial role. For some, it was also evident that such large amounts invested in government public advertising aimed at 'selling' an image of Mexico that hardly corresponded with the national reality (see for instance: Guerrero 2010a; Article 19 and Fundar 2010; Villanueva 2010).

Another group of interviewees, mainly middle and street-level government communicators insisted that their job was not to design, conduct or even question the mechanisms the Fox administration was using to measure public opinion in matters of government communication. This point refers to the fact that these public officers were indeed dealing with day-to-day news coverage and news agenda issues, rather than with the design of government communication and public advertising. For these participants, public opinion polls or other mechanisms to measure public response and feedback became relevant as the media used them as journalistic tools. From this stance, the attention placed on these mechanisms was not so much about how they were designed or who they were conducted by, but how the results were used in news coverage. As one interviewee put it (B6):

> Let us face it, journalists tend to pay little attention to how these ratings are calculated or obtained; as long as these figures can say something about how the government is doing or not doing its job. And to be quite honest, that is really

what people want to know: if the government is delivering and most of all, if it is solving problems. The regular reader does not want to be bored with statistical or methodological details about how, when or who participated in these opinion polls. It is much more interesting to translate these methodologies and figures into information that says something about the government.

A similar picture emerges from the analysis of the few official documents that mention the use of diverse mechanisms to measure public response in communicating the government. For instance, one internal ruling on government communication and public advertising (*Acuerdo por el que se establecen las normas y lineamientos generales para la erogación de recursos presupuestales en materia de comunicación social*) refers briefly to the use of market surveys, public opinion polls, focus groups or similar public response studies as mechanisms to justify and determine the scope and range of public advertising campaigns (DOF, January 23rd 2001: articles 6 and 8). Thus, to receive the approval and the funding necessaries to launch a public advertising campaign, the different ministries of the federal government can support their applications with relevant data emerging from studies on public response and feedback. Nevertheless, from this document it is not clear if these studies play a more significant role in, for instance, deciding the message, scope or cost of the advertising campaign under consideration.

To sum up, a clear understanding of how the Fox administration used public opinion and feedback mechanisms in designing and conducting its government communication was difficult to reach from the interviews and the supportive research of official documents conducted for this thesis. Among participants, there was an apparent common understanding about the use of certain 'telephone polls' and 'presidential approval ratings' as tools applied in the design and functioning of government communication. Nevertheless, interviewees hardly spoke openly about how these measures were designed or conducted. Other crucial aspects about these mechanisms such as their cost, benefits or challenges for government communicators remained under the shadows.

Moreover, there were significant divergences among interviewees about how these mechanisms of public response were (if at all) used in government communication. High-level officers emphasized that it was the public --and not purposely designed or outsourced public opinion polls-- that remained both the essence and target of government communication. However, it was not clear what the role of the general interest was in government communication or how it was included in the day-to-day relations with the media. For their part, middle and street-level officers were less concerned with acknowledging the use of polls and other mechanisms to measure

public response in government communication. For these participants, these figures were indeed part of their job mainly because this kind of data receives great media attention and is generally used in political news coverage.

Regarding official documents, few of them such as internal rulings for government communication and general rulings on public advertising do mention the use of diverse tools to measure public opinion. Market surveys, opinion polls or focus groups are, for instance, considered potential tools in justifying the kind of public advertising campaign (topic, medium to be transmitted, length) under deliberation. Nevertheless, these documents did not state the role these tools play in government communication, especially in terms of selecting the message or scope of public advertising campaigns.

The insights emerging from the interviews and the supportive official documents research conducted in this study imply the use of diverse mechanisms to measure public opinion and response in the design and functioning of government communication. Nevertheless, it is not clear to what extent these mechanisms were useful tools or essential indicators in dictating the purpose of the communications strategy for the government at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

Conclusions

This chapter took a close look at the structure and functioning of the machinery of government communication during the Fox administration. An institutional approach to this apparatus has been useful in gaining a better understanding on how specific organisational settings and practices imposed both challenges and opportunities in the way the new government communicated to citizens and in so doing, related to the media on a daily basis. Two lessons emerge from this perspective that are difficult to grasp from a pure normative approach to the state-media relation in new democracies.

Firstly, change and stasis were two sides of government communication in the new democratic setting. In contrast to the transformation prescribed in the liberal-democratic model of state-media relations, the interplay between change and continuity seen in this chapter points to a process of small and rickety changes.

For instance, in terms of organizational design, the Fox administration did try to impose new recruitment trends for the top and second tier positions in government communication (high and middle-level officers). This strategy aimed to privilege professional expertise in communications and media relations over partisan links. It is

maybe naïve to expect government communication to be truly politically neutral. Nevertheless, without mechanisms such as a civil service for government communicators, it remained difficult to eradicate the temptation of using access to mass media and public advertising as a means to achieve personal political aspirations rather than as a channel of communication to provide clear, truthful and factual information to citizens. The control that Mexican governing elites have traditionally had over the design and functioning of government communication persisted at the outset of the Mexican democracy. A comprehensive administrative reform that imposed the public service's ethos of political neutrality over information and communication officers was absent.

Regarding day-to-day government communication practices, the Fox administration established new strategies especially at the POC, such as the reinstallation of the post of the spokesperson and the breakdown of communication tasks into two offices that aimed to make a distinction between two key functions of government communication: public advertising and news management. Nevertheless, past practices remained and to a certain extent also played a key role in the way the new government communicated to citizens and related to the media. As seen in the chapter, these were, for instance, the key role that the president and the media played in publicizing a positive image of the government, or the lack of transparency about the financial resources invested in communicating the government, especially regarding juicy advertising contracts with the media.

Secondly, the lingering influence of authoritarian rule on the organizational structure and functioning of government communication in the new democratic setting cannot be assumed to be simple inertia. Instead of assuming the authoritarian past as deadweight over the new political regime, the interviews showed that the Fox administration did show a certain capacity to decide which administrative structures and practices to keep and which ones to quit. It is not, for instance, that Mexican government communicators failed to fulfil the expectations imposed by the change from authoritarianism to democracy solely because inflexible administrative structures and sticky communication practices prevented a change of political regime and thus made it more difficult for democracy to take root. The Fox administration did choose to build upon an archaic and quite inefficient machinery of government communication, and at the same time deliberatively perpetuated some practices that did not necessarily

help to move the government's communications strategy away from the authoritarian era.

Moreover, this chapter offered a closer look at interviewees' perceptions about the opportunities and challenges embedded in the design and functioning of strategic communication in which the media are regarded as both a means for and as targets of government communication. From this perspective and as it will be fully explained in the following chapter of this thesis (Chapter 7), an old temptation in private marketing and advertising also appears to hound the public sector: to publicize a 'product' (the government) through pretty packaging rather than marketing via its content (achievements and proposals).

7 Communicating politics: the limits of professionalization

> *Political communication systems are dynamic, constantly evolving, never settled.*
> *Just when we think we understand how it all works, things change.*
> *Sometimes the changes seem to be evolutionary,*
> *steps along a path that leads to a destination we can foresee.*
> *At other times, the familiar path turns into new and unexpected directions.*
>
> *David L. Swanson*, Transitional Trends in Political Communication (2004)

Democracy in Mexico was not a blank slate on which government communicators freely designed and established a new (arguably more democratic) relationship with the media. Drawing on Swanson's notion of 'political-media complex' (1992, 1997), this study puts forward an institutional approach to the state-media relation. As seen in the previous chapters of this thesis, this stance focuses the analysis on three key aspects of this interaction: the rules that guide it; the organizational dynamic that shape its day-to-day functioning, and; the patterns of change and continuity that it follows from and that, at the same time, imprint on history.

By studying government communicators in their daily interaction with the media, so far the research in hand has shown that the political-media complex at the outset of the Mexican democracy was a product of both provoked change and fostered continuity. Evidence of the conflict between traditional and new institutional formations has been found where archaic legal frameworks clashed with changing perceptions about the goals of and means for media policymaking and media regulation (Chapter Five) or where rigid administrative structures and budgets constrained new communication strategies and emerging organizational dynamics (Chapter Six).

'If institutions are purported to have a kind of staying power', asks Immergut (1992: 57), 'then how can [the] same institutions explain both stability and change?' This chapter takes a closer look at the interplay between change and continuity in the political-media complex during the first years of democracy in Mexico that has emerged from the analysis presented in the previous two empirical chapters.

To assess the process of change in the state-media relation, as it is seen from the perspective of government communicators in their day-to-day interaction with the media, this chapter draws on the notion of 'professionalization of political communication' (Mancini 1999; Negrine 2007; Gibson and Rommele 2009; Strömbäck

2009; Sanders *et al.* 2011) to couple the changes in political communication practices with the continuities emerging from the analysis of the empirical data collected for this study. In so doing, the following pages address two specific empirical research questions:

- Does political communication in Mexico show signs of the professionalization trends that that research has traced around the world?
- How does the development of this process shape the political-media complex in the country?

By tracking both innovation and permanence in the way the government communicates politics in a new democracy, this chapter shows the ways in which the professionalization of political communication in general, and government communication in particular, is gradually, cumulatively and incrementally transformed by the growth of specialized knowledge and techniques around newly introduced communication technologies and an increasing influence of the media in communicating politics. Nevertheless, at the same time this constant process of change is ultimately subtly and thoroughly reconfigured by certain capacity and agency that the new governing elites deliberatively and purposely retrained to perpetuate the role of past practices, old actors and traditional channels in communicating about politics.

The chapter begins by exploring the analytical tools that researchers on political communication have developed to study both a qualitative and quantitative shift in the communication of politics during the last decades. 'Professionalization', write Papathanassopoulos and his colleagues (Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007:14), 'cuts across other equally contested concepts such as modernization, Americanization, homogenization, as it deals with a more general process of change taking place in contemporary societies'. Thus, the first section of the chapter briefly describes these different concepts and stops on how the notion of professionalization serves as an 'overarching approach' (Negrine 2007: 31) to study an ever-going process of change in communicating politics. Researchers in this area of study tend to use (quite loosely it must be said) the notion of 'professionalization' of political communication within the historical context of permanent technological, social and political change. Nevertheless, this thesis focuses on the process whereby government communication is claimed to be different from the past through specialization and displacement (Scammell 1997). This stance allows the growth of specialized knowledge and techniques in the communication of politics to be highlighted, which is triggered by the newly introduced media technologies and platforms coupled with new government communication practices.

The second section of the chapter assesses if the changes in the way politics was communicated during the first years of the Mexican democracy are distinctive enough to permit to describe with a certain degree of confidence, a process of 'professionalization' of political communication. Primarily drawing on the analysis of the interviews conducted with government communications, the chapter focuses on two key aspects: (1) who are these professionals, and; (2) what do they do. As described by the interviewees, 'professionalization' of political communication at the outset of the Mexican democracy is seen to hit certain limits. These pages assess, for instance, the scope of the change in government communication in terms of a more efficient organization of resources and skills in order to achieve strategic planned goals.

The third section of the chapter casts doubt on the utility of accounts about the professionalization of political communication that in highlighting the growth of specialized knowledge and techniques around new political conditions or newly introduced communication strategies and technologies, undermine the role that indigenous factors, past practices and traditional actors play in government communication. Against the idea that a more professional government communication fully replaces old conceptions and practices, this section of the chapter touches upon the indigenous barriers to global trends embedded in the notion of professionalization such as the 'Americanization' of political communication, the secularization of politics, the commercialization of political news coverage and the modernization of communication technologies. This stance serves as the basis for elaborating an alternative perspective on the professionalization of political communication in new democracies that also points at the resistance from both government communicators and the media to break with past practices and beliefs about the value and functioning of political communication.

As for the other two empirical chapters, this chapter concludes by discussing the gains and losses of an institutional approach to the state-media relation in a new democracy. As argued in the following pages, the professionalization of political communication is best understood as a process of interrelated changes and continuities in politics, news media and in the tactics of both the government and the media to communicate politics. Focusing attention on the interplay between change and continuity helps to explain why political communication is not (or certainly not only) about innovation, 'professionalization', constant improvement and the displacement of old conceptions and practices. A better understanding of what these developments,

both singularly and collectively signify is needed. As shown in the following pages, the communication of politics is a process of gradual adaptation to new political and communication conditions that also show a certain resistance to break with the past.

7.1   Making sense of change and continuity in political communication

All over the world, academics are puzzled by the dynamics of change in communicating politics, especially during electoral campaigning. On the one hand, one could argue that ever-evolving information and communication technologies are almost totally responsible for crucial changes in the way politics is communicated. As new technologies and media platforms develop, both politicians and the media are forced to adapt their relationship to the opportunities (and challenges) these new devices and communication platforms represent. At least that seemed to be the effect that television had in political campaigning back in the 1950's (Kavanagh 1995: Ch1; Swanson and Mancini 1996b; Norris 2000: Ch5; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck 2002). It arguably also is the role that the internet and social networking have had in political participation and communication during the last decade or so (Dahlgren 2005; Lilleker and Jackson 2011).

On this view, researchers commonly find the concept of 'modernization' useful to explain a progressive adaptation of communication strategies and ultimately, the transformation of political communication. Change is thus triggered by the use of new technologies and a greater functional specialization of communication techniques and practices (Swanson and Mancini 1996b). Moreover, as a broader sociological process, modernization is also linked to other prolonged and global changes in politics, society and the media such as the commercialization of media systems, the individualization and differentiation of modern societies or the secularization of politics. These transformations have led to different forms of identity formation and participation in political life and thus in communicating politics (Hallin and Mancini 2004b: 28-32).

The secularization of politics describes, for instance, a trend of change whereby traditional patterns of public information and civic participation are replaced by more individualistic forms of social engagement and thus of political communication (Swanson and Mancini 1996a; Mazzoleni and Shulz 1999). From this stance, it becomes possible to trace the emergence of 'catch-all' parties and the decline of partisanship and voting turnout, coupled with increasing numbers of single-issued associations, non-governmental organizations or protest movements. As a result, traditional partisan ties between citizens and politicians weaken, while other forms of social organization

emerge. Non-governmental organizations and voluntary associations, for instance, progressively replace some of the key functions that political parties have traditionally played in society such as being a forum for public debate or function as key channels of representation and public participation (see for instance: Dogan 1997; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Kitschelt 2000). Thus, secularization processes confront both politicians and the news media with new realities such as the kind and amount of political information audiences are expecting; the support or attention that political actors actually receive from citizens and the diversity of actors participating in the political debate (Swanson 1997, 2004; Hallin and Mancini 2004b).

'The developments of political communication', write Pfetsch and Esser (2004: 12), 'thus mark the consequences of a fundamental transformation in society which has changed the three integral coordinates of the communication system –political actors, media, and the public'. These transformations are visible all over the world. 'In their products, in their professional practices and cultures, in their systems of relationships with other social institutions', as Hallin and Mancini (2004b: 25) put it, 'media systems are becoming increasingly alike. Political systems, meanwhile, are becoming increasingly similar in the patterns of communication they incorporate'.

From this perspective, concepts such as the 'Americanization' or 'global homogenization' of political communication describe striking similarities of the political-media complex all over the world. The idea that American practices and strategies in communicating politics set the example for other countries is admittedly, not new. Literature on the American political hegemony, the dominant Western cultural influence or the 'commercial deluge' of public broadcasting around Europe accounts for a long lasting influence that the American example has imposed over both politicians and the media in communicating about politics. For political communication scholars, however, the notion of 'Americanization' remains a useful working hypothesis to assess how far and most relevant, what and why communication practices are able to travel from one country to another, especially from the US to Europe (Swanson and Mancini 1996; Scammell 1997). At the same time, this stance allows both academics and practitioners to recognize the structural constraints on and the implications of importing, interpreting, adapting and putting into practice foreign innovations in communicating politics (Hallin and Mancini 2004b). At first glance, the global extension of deeper social and technological changes appears as a powerful influence that shapes the interaction

between politics and the media despite crucial indigenous differences among distinctive democracies and media systems.

Nevertheless, comparative research shows that national contexts do influence the way in which political communication changes around the world. On this view, social and political changes do acquire diverse forms and bring distinctive consequences that are directly related to specific contextual and indigenous aspects. For instance, the extent to which citizens remain attentive to the political process and even become active participants in the public debate, varies according to particular cultural, contextual and specific national adaptation strategies in communicating politics (Bennett and Entman 2001b). New information and communication technologies, the secularization of politics and the commercialization of public information occur in a context of other socio-political and economic changes that are both propellers of and constraints for the new technologies and communication practices to thrive.

For instance, the extent to which the news media and political actors all over the world are willing (or actually able) to adapt their communication strategies to maximize their personal utility is constrained by distinctive rationales about the purpose and value of media regulation (for a contrast between diverse regulatory rationales see: Livingstone *et al.* 2007; Hallin and Mancini 2004b). Therefore, diverse national contexts and indigenous characteristics do impose certain restrictions on importing and adapting new technologies and communication practices.

On the other hand, as Semetko and Scammell (2012: 1) point out:

> Although everything appears to have been profoundly changed by the new norm of ubiquitous wireless connectivity, the questions and concerns that lie at the heart of the interdisciplinary field of political communication remain the same […] Today's scholars are just as driven by an interest in understanding the mechanisms of power and influence as their predecessors.

That is, new technologies and ongoing social and political changes have traditionally been the motors of change in the interaction between politics and the media, and thus in communicating politics to citizens. The analytical tools used to assess this complex interaction should then be useful to distinguish between the *what* that this is perpetually changing and adapting to new technologies and innovative communication practices from the *why* and *how* these forces drive politicians and the media to transform their relation (Scammell 1997: 17).

In a nutshell, even when the three key components of the political communication system –politics, media and citizens— are embedded in an continual process of change, the key questions that originally brought together this area of studies

as an interdisciplinary yet unified field remain: how do we make sense of the patterns of change and continuity that are at the core of the political-media complex? If there has been a change in communicating politics, as the literature that assesses modernization, Americanization or homogenization patterns suggests, how are the particular aspects of those changes distinctive enough to argue for a 'new age' (Blumler and Kavanagh 1999) in political communication? Why do politicians and the media keep struggling to adapt their interaction to this ever-moving trend of change? What are the indigenous consequences and implications of these transformations?

7.1.1 *The professionalization of political communication: an overarching approach*

In recent decades, academic research on political campaigning has started to come to grips with this change in political communication. The notion of 'professionalization' allows an 'overarching approach' (Negrine 2007: 31) to a series of changes (on communication technologies, politics, the media and citizens) that occur simultaneously and are visible all over the world, but that debatably have different consequences across countries. Plus, this approach gives researchers a 'common point of focus' (Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007: 9) to investigate specific trends of change in political campaigning such as the use of new technologies or the increasing reliance of politicians on private-sector techniques and media advisors that bring their special abilities, expertise and practices (like marketing, image strategies –such as branding--, polling, spin doctoring or stagecraft) to politics.

Used as an umbrella concept, the professionalization of political communication denotes, as Holtz-Bacha (2007: 63) puts it:

> a process of adaptation to and, as such, a necessary consequence of, changes in the political system on the one side and the media system on the other, and in the relationship of the two systems. These changes follow from the modernisation of society, which is a development that is still going on and will take place in similar political systems sooner or later. Professionalization in this sense is a general and not culture-bound concept. Its actual appearance and the degree of professionalization in a given country are however dependent on a country's specific social and political structures and processes.

Figure 7.1 serves as a graphical representation of this process. It is a snapshot of a fluent and interrelated process of change that occurs simultaneously in politics, the media and citizens that at the same time, influences the way in which politics is communicated. Changes in politics can broadly be seen through adjustments (or even radical transitions) in the political system or more specific changes in political parties such as the emergence

of 'catch all' parties or the increasing influence and role that the personal image of the candidates plays in defining the course of politics.

For their part, media systems are also in a constant process of adaptation to new conditions such as the liberalization of markets, competition among different media platforms and concentration of media ownership. From this stance, media, however, are not seen as mere channels of communication between politicians and citizens. They also adapt their functioning to simultaneous changes in politics. At the same time, the way in which this set of actors perform and present the news impacts the course and practice of politics.

Figure 7.1   The process of the professionalization of political communication
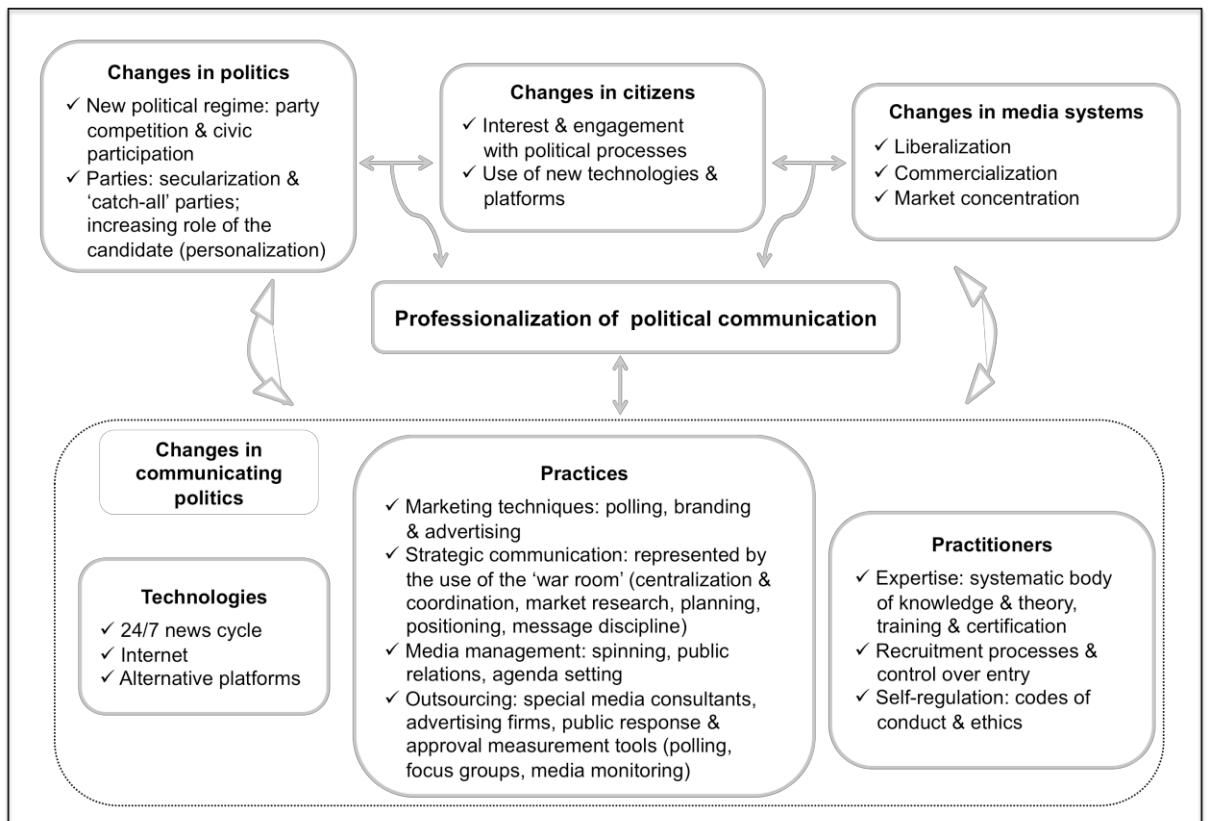
Citizens (or consumers) also play a key part in this ever-going process of change. Changes in technologies, politics and the media bring about changes in the way citizens engage with political processes and use (consume) media technologies to get the information they need about politics. Researchers debate about the extent to which citizens are (at all) taking part in politics be it through traditional means (party alliance, voting or participating on the public debate) or by using new communication technologies and media platforms (see for instance: Chambers and Costain 2000;

Anderson and Cornfield 2003; Fenton and Downey 2003; Jenkins *et al.* 2003; Dahlgren 2005; Habermas 2006; Castells 2008). The concept of professionalization also allows researchers to assess transformations on the ways citizens engage (or not) in politics by linking citizens' participation to both changes in politics and the media.

As a consequence, but also as a cause of this ongoing process of change, communicating politics appears inextricably bound up with the emergence of new technologies and the increasing use of private sector communication practices and skills. Practitioners adapt their communication tactics to new communication platforms, practices and resources (human and financial) to achieve highly crafted communication strategies and goals. From this stance, academic literature places emphasis on the risks involved in this process: from citizens transformed into mere armchair consumers of politics (Herman 2003; McNair 2005; Gaber 2007), to tailored communication campaigns that privilege the drama about political life over the substance of democracy such as deliberation, representation and inclusive policymaking (Gitlin 1991; Cappella and Jamieson 1997, Price *et al.* 2002; Sparks and Tulloch 2000).

To some extent, the interrelated developments pictured in Figure 7.1 are visible all over the world. 'Professionalization, as we use it here', write Papathanassopoulos and his colleagues (Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007: 14), 'cuts across equally contested concepts such as modernization, Americanization, homogenization, as it deals with a more general process of change taking place in contemporary societies'. Depending on the focus and the emphasis that research places on the causes or consequences of these common and simultaneous transformations, academics refer to different processes (global homogenization patterns, modernization or the contested, yet useful notion of Americanization) to summarise the ways in which political communication evolves. In this debate, the notion of professionalization of political communication remains as a 'point of focus' (Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007: 9) or a 'common theme' (Negrine 2007: 28) on the analysis of these simultaneous transformations.

7.2   A professional dilemma

Analysing change in political communication through the lenses provided by the umbrella concept of 'professionalization' is, however, problematic. The analysis of the interviewees conducted with government communicators showed that the idea of professionalization as reflected in the literature does not play out smoothly in practice. In assessing if the changes in the way politics was communicated during the initial years

of the Mexican democracy are distinctive enough to permit describing with a certain degree of confidence, a process of 'professionalization' of political communication, at least three challenges can be identified which relate to: (1) the broad conception and numerous characteristics embedded in the notion of 'professionalization' as a blanket theme to assess the current state of political communication; (2) the limits imposed by transferring to day-to-day government communication a concept that was originally tailored and usually used to evaluate political campaigning rather than government communication; and (3) the resistance of government communicators to fully admit and disclose the use of professional and strategic communication tactics in their daily interaction with the media.

7.2.1   *Being professional: diversity of meanings*
'Of course I would say I conducted my job professionally', answered a quite annoyed interviewee (B14) when asked about day-to-day work, especially regarding regular contact with the media. Admittedly, the question also meant to address whether participants regarded themselves as experts or more precisely 'professionals' on government communication. Nevertheless, the words 'professional', 'professionalization' as well as their variants (such as profession, professionalism) are contested terms. In its basic definition, the general concept of professionalization denotes notions of proficiency, experience, improvement, specialization and displacement of folk wisdom for specialized knowledge and formal education (see for instance: Scammell 1997; Lilleker and Negrine 2002). In contrast to amateur practitioners, professionals receive formal and specialized training. They are part of a profession: a full-time post of employment in which a group of individuals (commonly regarded as colleagues) share common knowledge, standards for practice and codes of ethics. Moreover, being professional means to display knowledge and possess certain skills. It also implies a self-conscious decision to devote on a full-time basis to a skilful practice that differentiates itself from trades and crafts that try to emulate the work, but lack of formal education, constant evaluation and specialization.

However, more common than not, all over the world the practice of political communication especially political campaigning is driven by folk wisdom rather than specialized training or academic knowledge (see for instance: Scammell 1997; Lilleker and Negrine 2002; Fröhlich and Holtz-Bacha 2003; Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007). Therefore, the particular assertion of professionalization as a corpus of individuals with

specific academic training in communicating politics may be problematic when tested against empirical evidence. At least this seems to be the case in this study.

For instance, when participants were explicitly asked about the notion of 'professionalization' through diverse questions about their day-to-day job and more precisely about their expertise, training and performance in general, several meanings and connotations of the term emerged. Contrary to what is commonly stated in the political communication literature, the discrepancies of meanings surrounding the term 'professionalization' made it difficult to use it during the interviews as a common 'point of focus' or an 'overarching' approach to fluent and interrelated processes of change that occur at different aspects and levels of the process communication of politics (Negrine *et al.* 2007). The following quotations from different interviews serve to illustrate this point:

> I kept my phone on 24/7, answered all my emails promptly, kept a fluent communication with *la fuente* [the pool of journalists ascribed to the POC]. I was especially disciplined about that: I was sure my counterparts received press releases on time; have any additional information they required as soon and as close as what they needed; I would not circulate any information without consulting it with the rest of the team; I was very clear that it was not my personal view what mattered, but the official stance, public information. And it was essentially what I did, what my job was about: to give journalists the public information they required to conduct the job in a similar manner, and as you asked 'professionally' (B12).

> The main goal of government communication (*comunicación social*), what we are here for, is to find the most effective ways of getting the government's message to the public, to everyone, at large. To achieve this target we work together with the media and in that sense we have to show a sense of respect for each other's work, needs and aims (A16).

> […] I mean, there is not something like a manual that tells me how to do my job. Most of what we do responds to every day particular needs in terms of information and the news agenda. I know we [government communicators and journalists] work under a mutual understanding of what we need from each other and what are the limits of this interaction. So I conducted my job within those boundaries (B11).

> No! I do think it was thought on in that way […] The point was to get a positive message out there. I phoned journalists, editors, colleagues at other ministries, friends […] We had constant meetings to coordinate the message, to tune-up the agenda with the message that we wanted to send. In special occasions, I have to say, we did call in some experts that could help us. We tailored stories so that journalists could hang on. The whole process was planned. We, I, was conscious of that and to be honest with you, I do not know if all this qualifies as a professional way to communicate the government to citizens […](A15).

The list of different connotations surrounding the term 'professionalization' could go on for several pages. The point here is to show how participants used the notion of

professionalization quite loosely. For some 'being professional' (frequently used as synonym of 'professionalism' or 'professionalization') was linked to a broad notion of ethics. That is, to 'act professionally' (A7) meant to do the right thing; what it was expected from government communicators to do in a state-media relation that was modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm: accountability, transparency, access to information, mutual understanding and respect for each other's work, to mention a few. In contrast, for other participants, the notion of professionalization was more a practical matter related with fulfilling the requirements of highly demanding positions: responding to the media's requests of information; being available and attentive 24/7; planning ahead; acting promptly, or; being prepared for unexpected outcomes.

This is not to say that participants lacked formal knowledge and special training. On the contrary, as seen in Chapter Six (section 6.2.2), most of these government communicators (at least in first and second tier positions) hold graduate academic degrees, have solid careers in media and communications or special and academic training in these matters. Plus, during the period under investigation, the POC ran a few media training courses aimed to strengthen these skills. However, the overt and explicit acknowledgement of the influence that these specialized strategies or more academic training played in government communication was relatively minor when assessing their job as 'professional'. Practitioners' accounts pointed more at particular goals and practical standards to evaluate their performance: 'get the message out there; keep the citizens informed, setting the news agenda, preferably through positive headlines,' (B4).

In a few extreme cases, interviewees acknowledged that some of the practices related with their job such as public relations and media management were not necessarily 'professional'. These techniques are ultimately seen as tools to tailor government communication according to specific goals. Apparently, this (inevitably) implies a certain lack of transparency, message crafting and interdependent relations with the media. In other words, these tactics are regularly seen as tricky and unscrupulous Machiavellian practices that are far from being professional, but that are certainly necessary to adapt government communication to the new communications and political settings.

Arguably, it is highly unlikely that practitioners and academics share the same level of abstraction when referring to a problematic term such as 'professionalization'. It thus becomes very difficult to find a perfect match between what the literature describes and what practitioners do in practice. Nevertheless, the discrepancies emerging from the

analysis between the interviewees' accounts and current assumptions about the professionalization in the field of political communication point at two issues.

Firstly, it becomes difficult to corroborate with empirical evidence the claims of a literature that has primarily been developed and tested in older democracies. This is to say that processes that are taking place in one part of the world (Western old democracies) do not easily travel to other regions. But also that research has placed the searchlight on apparently global trends that 'seem to be an unavoidable consequence of a whole of series of inter-connected changes' (Papathanassopolous *et al.* 2007: 23), but that actually have different causes and consequences in new democracies. It thus becomes necessary to disentangle these changes to differentiate the *what* from the *why* of these transformations. In a new democracy like the Mexican example, the professionalization of government communication might be the consequence of changes in the media (increasing capacity of influence, restricted competition, concentration, high commercialization) and naturally, a transformation of the political regime from authoritarianism to democracy. Nevertheless, the interviews conducted for this study also pointed at more basic and practical conceptions such as 'doing the job right' and according to the expected; a perception that perhaps aims to differentiate government communication from what it used to be during the authoritarian era.

Secondly, using the notion of professionalization as an 'overarching approach', 'common point of focus' or 'common theme' (Negrine *et al.* 2007), to denote an ever-moving process of change in political communication obscures divergent conceptions surrounding this problematic term. As seen in the interviews, 'professionalization' understood as the increasing use of certain tactics such as media management and public relations was not necessarily conceived as an improvement. It was seen more as a 'necessary evil' (A15) to face the new communication demands. In contrast, professionalization conceived as 'being professional' (B14) was approached as a minimum standard of performance that was not necessarily linked with proficiency or efficiency, but aimed to denote a broader notion of responsibility and ethics arguably imprinted in government communication by the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

In short, as explicitly recognized in the political communications literature, the term 'professionalization' is problematic (see for instance: Scammell 1997; Lilleker and Negrine 2002; Negrine 2002). When travelling from old to new democracies, these flaws

appear to increase. A greater diversity of meanings and understandings emerge, while the reasons and purpose of this 'professionalization' also develop differently.

7.2.2   *From one war room to the other: the limitations of the 'permanent campaign'*

More common than not, political communication research points at the notion of professionalization to conceptualize and assess changes in communicating politics especially during electoral campaigning. This approach has only recently applied to government communication (Sanders *et al.* 2011, see also: Canel and Sanders 2010; Sanders 2011). 'Findings on the professionalization of election campaigning', write Sanders and her colleagues (Sanders *et al.* 2011: 524), 'cannot be generalized to non-electoral communication'. During political campaigning candidates are committed to winning votes and defeating opponents. Although these ultimate goals rest in day-to-day government communication (sustain public support and defeat opposition), keeping citizens informed about governmental actions, initiatives and policies on a day-to-day basis imposes different aims and challenges.

The notion of 'the permanent campaign' (Patrick Caddell 1976 –referenced on Heith 2004--; Blumethal 1982; Nimmo 1990; Ornstein and Mann 2000) aims to trace the use of practices and strategies used during electoral campaigning in government day-to-day communication. The concept points at a communications strategy that is grounded on a combination of stagecraft, image making and strategic political communication that turns governing into a perpetual campaign and 'remakes government into an instrument designed to sustain elected officials' popularity' (Blumenthal 1982: 7). In short, as Ornstein and Mann (2000: vii) put it: 'the line between campaigning and governing has all but disappeared, with campaigning increasingly dominant'.

Nevertheless, even when researchers tend to agree that modern government communication shares a blurred line with electoral campaigning, they also point (arguably less noticeable to most readers) at the limitations that government structures, organizational dynamics and above all citizens' perceptions and (frequently low) expectations about office-holders impose over highly crafted communication strategies steered by special advisers, polling consultants, spin doctors and media managers (see for instance: Lathrop 2003; Doherty 2012; Elmer *et al.* 2012).

As shown in the thematic analysis of the interviews conducted with Mexican government communicators, transferring the notion of 'professionalization' from electoral campaigning to government communication imposed certain limits and

challenges that can be grouped into two main topics. Firstly, once in government the full-time campaign by itself became a constant theme in the news agenda. In comparison with previous governments, the Fox administration was highly criticized by the increasing use and expenditure on public advertising (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Fundar 2009). The continuous exposure of strategic communication tactics tailored to 'sell' the new government as a product rather than to inform the citizens was primarily about the amount of financial resources invested and the potential clientelistic links with the media through juicy advertising contracts. But it was also about the perception that this kind of government communication was 'out of touch' with the national reality and aimed to hide serious flaws on government performance.

Secondly, president Fox was not the only one engaged in strategic communication and permanent campaigning. Other political actors (opposition candidates, public officers at different levels of government and even cabinet ministers) were also prone to seek public support through strategic communication practices. Opposition and political competition on fair grounds is the essence of democracy. Nevertheless, the suspicion surrounding the permanent campaign during the first years of democracy in Mexico was about the ultimate beneficiaries of highly crafted political communication. As put by an interviewee (B3):

> In retrospective, I wonder if we were sending the right message. The general perception seemed to be that the first government of the democratic era was struggling to fulfil the expectations imposed by the change of political regime. The fact is that the transition from authoritarianism to democracy was not going to be achieved by a single person: the president; or by a single set of actors: the government. But rather than being seen as a collaborative effort that involved confrontation, deliberation and ultimately consensus, the first years of democracy in the country were projected as 'media wars': continuous confrontations between different actors that prioritized personal goals over common purposes and in the public interest.

This may be an appreciation that matured over years of reflection and that most likely aimed to justify eminent flaws of government communication during the Fox administration. But it serves to point at one of the key limitations of the permanent campaign at the outset of a new political regime in Mexico: the risk of deliberatively placing the government in an endless fight against other political actors for public support; a strategy that may have made it more difficult for democracy to take root.

Summing up, campaigning and governing, as obvious as it may sounds, are two different things. Nevertheless, the notion that the government can be run as a 'permanent campaign' was well spread among interviewees. When transferred to

government, however, the 'permanent campaign mode' (Ornstein and Mann 2000: vii) represents some drawbacks especially in terms of credibility and trust among citizens showing that in practice, the continuous effort to sustain public approval does not play out smoothly, as it was the case in the new Mexican democracy.

7.2.3   *Special consultants and media advisers for hire: a boomerang effect*

As seen, academic research may insist on approaching political communication as a professionalized practice that 'refers to a process of change in the field of politics and communication that, either explicitly or implicitly, brings about a better and more efficient –and more reflective— organization of resources and skills in order to achieve desired objectives, whatever they might be' (Negrine 2007: 29).

Nevertheless, politicians (especially office-holders) do not sit back passively while the notion of professionalization spreads and is enthusiastically disclosed and criticized in news coverage as an expensive and manipulative practice that seeks to sustain public support by purposely distorting reality. Public officers, for instance, show some resistance to fully admitting the use of professional advisers, highly crafted communications strategies or specialized tactics (such as polling, advertising or spinning) tailored and executed by advisors or media experts (Scammell 1997). Arguably, this may be because even when distinctive characteristics of political communication such as persuasion, media management, advertising and stage crafting are (and have traditionally been) constitutive elements of politics and government, in the last decades these practices have been approached as Machiavellian techniques used to manipulate public opinion working against citizens' interest in politics and against voters' mobilization by deliberation, engagement and open participation (Jones 1999; Ingham 2003; McNair 2005).

Mexican government communicators interviewed for this study were also cautious to fully disclose or openly discuss the use of professional political communication tools and strategies. A thematic analysis of the interviews showed that the reasons for these resistances can be grouped in two interrelated sets of challenges: the ones embedded in democracies tailored for media consumption, and; the ones linked with the risks of giving ample room to manoeuvre to special consultants and media advisers.

Researchers in the field of political communication have stressed that the dangers embedded in the professionalization of political communication are many: from citizens transformed into disengaged consumers of 'infotainment' (Blumler 1992; Brants

1998; Delli Carpini and Williams 2001; Norris 2001; Thussu 2007); or news about politics presented as 'horse races' (Patterson 1994; Cappella and Jamieson 1997), or; strident 'sound bites' (Hallin 1992). 'Media democracies' (Meyer 2002) elevate presentation and stagecraft (charismatic politicians, catchy slogans, iconic media events) over content or statecraft (competition, deliberation and consensus among different political actors and projects).

These risks were not unknown to interviewees. As seen in more detail in Chapter 5 (section 5.3.2), participants showed concerns about media's increasing influence in both communicating politics and policymaking. Regarding the use of strategic communication practices and what in this study has been approached as the 'professionalization of political communication', interviewees were quite sceptical about the benefits of these practices. The following extract from an interview (A1) captures well the general perception among participants:

> I acknowledge that in any democracy a certain amount of mistrust and confrontation between the media and the government is necessary and healthy. I mean, a healthy distance between both sets of actors is necessary for a Fourth Estate to flourish; for democracy to work [… Nevertheless,] the intense confrontation between the media and politicians of whatever strand during the first years of democracy in the country gave us [government communicators] very little room to manoeuvre for informing and communicating the government's priorities and achievements. We tried different techniques. A few examples are: press conferences, media events, interviews in different media outlets, internet polls. But in general terms, these efforts by themselves became the headlines transcending the specific message we were aiming to place in the news agenda. I would not say that every new communication effort was a failure, but each one gave us something to learn from, especially about the potential drawbacks of what we considered new or alternative communications strategies.

This may be approached more as an open complaint about the active role that Mexican media acquired in communicating politics with the transition from authoritarianism to democracy, rather than as a thoughtful account of the professionalization of political communication during those years. Nevertheless, this stance shows that even when a more strategic and professionalized communication may have been the aim of the Fox administration, in practice these techniques did not play out smoothly. Media themselves were interested in disclosing the use of these practices surrounded by a certain amount of suspicion about the ultimate goal of these strategies.

Participants showed a similar perspective when referring to the role that special communication advisers (pollsters, spin doctors, campaign managers, web designers) or media consultants played in government communication during the Fox administration. 'Let us say', stressed one interviewee (A3), 'that the most important communicator

during *el sexenio* [the term] was president Fox himself'. This quotation serves to show the difficulties faced during the interviewees to openly discuss the participation of special advisers and other practitioners in government communication. In general, interviewees remained reluctant to recognize the role of external communicators. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, as seen in more detail in Chapter 6 (section 6.2), practitioners with special media skills were an integral part of the POC's administrative structure. Therefore, it might have not been necessary to duplicate (or recognized a potential duplicity of) functions, especially when the hiring of special consultants and media firms was most likely to become a potential negative headline by itself and a target of intense criticism in news coverage. However, in one way or another, participants did mention the use of special advisers and media training firms that (arguably) seldom helped the government with its communication strategy. But the analysis of the interviews did not produce clear data about the role and influence that these external (professional) communicators played in the design and functioning of government communication during the first years of democratic rule in Mexico.

In short, the analysis of the interviews revealed that the use of media advisers, spin-doctors and pollsters as strategic communication tools proved to be problematic: these practices were most likely to generate a 'boomerang effect' if journalists were to report its use in communicating the government as strident headlines. If the hiring of special media consultancies (their cost and tactics) were to be fully disclosed to the media, the most likely outcome would have been intense criticism and questioning about the ultimate goals of these strategies. This was actually the case for the increasing use of public advertising in the Fox administration. This practice was not just reported in news coverage as the result of opaque and clientelistic relations between the new government and media moguls, especially broadcasters. But it was also implied that political communication had been used to sell the government's achievements that hardly corresponded to the national reality (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Juárez 2009; Bravo 2011).

To recapitulate, the professionalization of government communication at the outset of the Mexican democracy was not an easy topic to discuss with government communicators that participated in this study. When specifically questioned about their performance in their job, most of the interviewees showed certain inclination to portrait themselves as 'professionals', 'experts' or 'skilled' communicators. Nevertheless, the notion of 'professionalization' as used in the field of political communication to denote

the specialization of tasks and the increased use of experts in political communication (Nord 2007: 82), proved to be problematic.

For instance, in the conversations with Mexican government communicators the notion of professionalization did not necessarily point at 'a higher state of development' (Negrine 2007: 35) that is implied in the literature. 'Being professional', broadly understood as performing the job according to the requirements set by the new political and communication conditions, rather than having specific technical and academic skills seemed to be the general connotation among participants. Plus, it was difficult to specifically assess the role that specialized and strategic communication practices played in government communication. According to the interviewees these tactics were the target of ample media criticism especially regarding the ultimate goal and the financial resources involved in strategic and specialized government communication tactics.

Arguably, in a new democracy like the Mexican one, the reluctance among government communicators to fully embrace (or admit) the notion of professionalization is (was) a temporary phase that will last (or lasted) while both the government and the media adjust(ed) to the new conditions. From collusion, complicity and a more interdependent relationship that characterized authoritarian rule, government communicators at the outset of the Mexican democracy overtly blamed the media for sensationalizing and savagely reporting the governments' communication tactics as scandals overshadowing complex political and social issues. This kind of coverage seemed to be the media's response to show the influence they have acquired in framing and setting the news agenda, but also in denouncing the ways in which the Fox administration tried to manage the news in order to reduce criticism and negative news coverage. As democracy takes root, perhaps both sets of actors will be (are more) willing to openly recognize and discuss the diverse range of practitioners and strategies embedded in communicating politics, as well as to objectively weight the risks and benefits of political communication as a highly skilled profession.

7.3   Indigenous barriers: 'professionalization' and 'Americanization' south the Rio Bravo

'International trends', writes Nord (2007: 81), 'probably do not explain everything when it comes to political communication practices in a nation. Distinctive features in individual countries such as the nature of political systems, media structure or public opinion still matter, which is why it is productive to consider the interplay between

international trends and national traditions in this field'. From this perspective, another challenge embedded in the notion of professionalization is that at the theoretical level and as pictured in Figure 7.1, it becomes very difficult (and confusing) to deal with the simultaneous and continuous processes of change that combine social and political forces with technological innovations that at the same time, are constitutive of transformations in the media, politics and citizens. On this view, change is imminent and it seems to take place simultaneously in diverse aspects of the state-media relation that are visible all over the world.

Nevertheless, the analysis becomes problematic when the causes of change are also regarded as the consequences of a continuous process of transformation. It must be acknowledged, for instance, that neither of these actors (political parties, governments, citizens, the media) or communication practices and technologies are what was used a couple of decades ago. In many ways, the political-media complex and the communication of politics have always been in a state of constant evolution (see for instance: Swanson and Mancini 1996a; Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Norris 2000). Thus, it becomes almost unfeasible to identify the motor of specific changes in a single factor or condition. Developing a broader understanding of what of each these developments signifies goes beyond a mere description of interrelated changes that seem to be taken globally. It demands a cautious analysis of the indigenous barriers streaming from particular historical trajectories and common understandings about the purpose and value of political communication that '*are* most likely the motors of change' (Scammell 1997: 1, emphasis from original; see also: Swanson and Mancini 1996a; Nord 2001; Pfetsch 2001; Plasser and Plasser 2002).

In the Mexican case, one might expect that in being so close to the US, Mexican politicians and government communicators are prone to look at their northern neighbour's example of designing and implementing political communication strategies both during electoral campaigning and once in government. After all, as seen in Chapter Two (section 2.3), Mexican media bears more of a resemblance to the American commercial system than to the European tradition of public service broadcasting or partisan press. Plus, media content (TV programming, news, films) has traditionally travelled from the US to Mexico relatively easily (McAnany and Wilkinson 1996). In terms of the political regime, Mexico naturally more resembles the US Presidential system rather than the European parliamentary systems. Similarly to what happens during the American elections and especially in terms of contenders and government

formation, Mexicans also witness a political competition reduced to two or three political parties led by charismatic candidates. Among them, only one wins the right to lead the executive. Other key electoral battles are fought to fill the seats at congress. Nevertheless, at the national level the most relevant and thus visible political struggle occurs at the presidential electoral campaign.

In this general context and very similar to what happens in the US, for Mexican politicians media becomes an indispensable part of a carefully crafted communication strategy. Presidential candidates of whatever strand use a wide range of resources (human and financial), communication technologies and media platforms to mobilize citizens, win votes and defeat their opponents. In so doing, a good example of how to run (and ultimately win) political campaigns is just there, handy and apparently suitable. Therefore by looking northwards, Mexicans (journalists, political campaigners and government officials) have available *the* quintessential role model of modern political communication and electoral campaigning.

More common than not, however, interviewees were cautious to point out the difficulties of assuming the Mexican political and media context similar to the American without acknowledging crucial differences among countries, especially when dealing with issues related to government communication and the state-media relation. Their accounts frequently stressed the influence that other factors play in importing and adapting communication strategies used in the US. 'At first glance', explained an interviewee (A17), 'these strategies appear relatively successful, unproblematic and easy to emulate. Let me tell you something straightaway: that was not the case in Mexico, at least not what we [government communicators working for the Fox administration] experienced. The story is much more complicated than that'. The following pages are then an attempt to make sense of and disentangle the different aspects and processes emerging from the analysis of the interviews involved in this 'story'.

7.3.1   From authoritarianism to democracy: a new conception of political parties and the voter?
It is difficult to objectively weight the changes in politics (as pictured in Figure 7.1) when looking at a transition from authoritarianism to democracy. One may (correctly) expect a radical transformation at least in terms of the role that political parties, public deliberation and civic participation play in the new political configuration. From this stance, the new political regime *should* acquire a different conception of the citizen as a key actor of the political process. In contrast to what happened in authoritarian rule, in democracies citizens *should* have the ultimate capacity to decide about who is going to

represent the public in government. Citizens are to whom the government is accountable and *should* inform about the progress and challenges in public policy. Citizens are also for who the political regime *should* promote deliberation and find consensus among different actors to respond to the public interest. In this scenario, political parties also acquire a key role. They *should* be a forum of civic participation and deliberation, and at the time they *should* represent different projects and routes to achieve specific goals. Media also become cornerstones for democracy to take root. They *should* become a primary channel of communication between governing elites and citizens; as they *should* hold the political regime accountable and *should* serve as an open forum for public debate.

Nevertheless, the transition from authoritarianism to democracy in Mexico did not necessarily match this normative paradigm (see for instance: Loaeza 2008; Segovia 2008; Aguayo 2010; Merino 2012; Valverde and Hilderbrand 2012). Politics became a battlefront where political parties savagely (and quite unethically) fought for presence and control in the public debate. The Fox administration seemed unable to fulfil the expectations imposed by the political change, while citizens gradually lost confidence and trust on the new political regime. For their part, media emerged as active and powerful actors in the political process. Their influence was evident in setting and framing the news agenda, but also in media policymaking and as an industry that extended its sphere of influence to other businesses beyond communicating about politics (Trejo Delarbre 2001; Guerrero 2010a). In this scenario, political communication became a powerful tool for governing elites, politicians of all strands and the media in a constant struggle for power and control, while citizens seemed to be relegated as mere consumers of endless political drama. From authoritarianism to democracy there is naturally a process of perpetual change described by simultaneous developments in politics, the media and in the ways in which politics was communicated. Nevertheless, this process is quite different from the one assumed in the notion of professionalization used in current political communication literature. When applied to the Mexican case, two key differences seem to set certain limits to the concept of professionalization as 'an unavoidable consequence of a whole series of inter-connected changes' (Papathanassoupoulos *et al.* 2007: 17).

Firstly, the overwhelming influence of Mexican media as a political actor appears as a key determinant in the way political communication was conducted in the first years of democratic rule. 'The triumph of media logic' (Papathanassoupoulos *et al.* 2007: 17)

does account for the increasing role that Mexican media played as both channels and targets of political communication. Nevertheless, it also points at the role that this set of actors had (and at the day of this publication still has) in determining who has (or has not) access to the news agenda and under what terms these actors would (if at all) have a place in news coverage. Therefore, contrary to what happened during the authoritarian regime in which the governing elites and the media found a way to keep their interest and influence in balance through a series of interdependent and mutually beneficial links, at the outset of democratic rule the lack of counterbalances (regulation, common understandings or informal practices) to media power and influence in politics seems to point at the media (and not the citizen) as a compass that set the direction of political communication. Similarly, in contrast to what happens in older democracies (in Europe and arguably to a lesser extent in the US) where political parties and candidates acknowledge the need to mobilize the resources offered by the media (information, visibility, contact, to mention a few) to keep in touch with constituencies that are less and less interested and involved in politics, the battle for media attention in the Mexican context seem to be fuelled by politicians' aspirations of defeating (even delegitimizing) other political actors. In so doing, the appeal is not for citizens, but for the media that are regarded as key determinants of political influence and voters' support.

Secondly, political actors (in government and in opposition) seemed to be moving towards a process of 'unprofessionalization' in that they tend to use past authoritarian practices such as collusion with media moguls and journalists through juicy advertising contracts or access to public information in exchange of positive coverage to communicate about politics. In this process, strategic communication practices such as polling, media management, public relations and advertising were certainly handy. Nevertheless, contrary to what the notion of professionalization implies, these tactics do not necessarily lead to an improvement of political communication enhanced by more efficient ways to organize the resources (funds, personnel, skills) available. Therefore, rather than moving towards the 'standards of the best' (Negrine 2007: 29), the way in which political communication was conducted at the outset of the Mexican democracy, and in general terms the interaction between politicians and the media, posed additional challenges for the new regime to take root. It was, for instance, difficult to picture a state-media relation modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm in a context where both sets of actors remained reluctant to lose the privileges (certainty, complicity, support, to mention a few) they gained during the authoritarian regime.

7.3.2 Following modernization trends at its own pace: the use and reach of new communications technologies

It was not at all uncommon for the interviewees to refer to new communication technologies and communication strategies as a process of adaptation. 'In this job, technology', said an interviewee (B5): 'is always a powerful reason to change'. This account continued as follows:

> think about e-government, *compranet net* [an open electronic system that displays the contracts and acquisitions of the government from private contractors], or simply the web pages of the ministries. It is just absurd to deny the influence that these communication tools impose over our daily work.

Technological developments on communication frequently emerged in the interviews as an impulse to adapt government communicators' strategies and to redefine their day-to-day relationship with the media. Interviewees, for instance, stressed that both public officials and journalists are constrained by specific timeframes and formats imposed by communication technologies. For instance an interviewee (B12) explained: 'admittedly, no headline, nor sound bite is going to be longer than 10 words'. Therefore, communications technologies and their formats impose certain constraints that shape the way in which government communicators plan and conduct the communications strategy. The following extract from an interview (A6) captures well the general perception among participants:

> Let us face it, the regular Mexican is not aiming to be an informed citizen that reads the newspaper regularly or seeks for detailed information to make an informed judgement about the government, about politics. TV and radio may influence the way Mexicans think about their federal government or specifically their president. The internet has enabled, for instance, a permanent news cycle […] But the reality is that the judgement of the average Mexican about politics comes down to what he or she needs and essentially has or does not have. Obviously, it is impossible to fill these gaps with communication. But it is by communicating with the media the government's vision and proposals about how to solve these problems that we can reach citizens. This process requires attractive sound-bites, good events, good news and that is what we [government communicators] are for.

The recognition about the limited reach of diverse communication platforms (both old such as newspapers and new as the internet) among Mexicans raises questions about first, to what extent the new communication technologies and platforms replaced more traditional political communication media platforms such as TV or radio at the outset of the Mexican democracy. After all, at that time Mexico was (and at the time of this publication is still) a country where the majority of the population has access to TV or radio (for the period covered in this study 92.8% and 92.2% of the households in the country respectively) and only less than a third of the population had access to a

computer, let alone access to the internet that was restricted to less than 10% of Mexicans (data for 2005-2006 in Gómez and Sosa Plata 2011: Ch1).

It is also intriguing if Mexican government communicators during the first years of democratic rule in the country approached new communication technologies as a means or as an end in communicating politics. For instance, the extracts of the interviews quoted above suggest a relatively straightforward recognition on how changes on the communication technologies (24/7 news cycles; new formats for the government's message; diverse media platforms, to mention a few) demand a more dynamic relationship with the media. What is not as clear from these accounts, however, is the extent to which these technological developments modified the way in which government communicators conceived how Mexicans learn about and engage with politics. For some participants these new technologies were seen as essential channels to reach Mexicans. Others (few) expressed certain concerns about the reach of new media platforms as primarily sources of communication. Arguably, this approach responds to the actual limitations Mexicans in general face when accessing new communications technologies and platforms. 'Be realistic', an interviewee (B12) emphatically said, 'how many Mexicans have access to internet?'

Admittedly, the Fox administration was just seeing the beginning of new interactive social media resources as buoyant communication platforms. For instance, it was not until the Calderón administration (2006-2012) when the president and his cabinet started *tweeting* or *blogging*. President Fox, in contrast, relied on a more traditional way of direct communication with citizens through his national weekly radio emission *Fox Contigo* [Fox with you]. In words of president Fox (*Fox Contigo*, November 25th 2006):

> *Fox Contigo* not only allowed me to listen to the proposals, opinions, questions and comments of the citizens, but it was also an open, warm and friendly space to talk about real work; about the effort that every public officer in all the areas did to serve the Mexicans; to improve the quality of life for our families and to secure a better future for the new generations.

It was not a coincidence that president Fox had chosen radio, traditionally the most accessible and popular means of communication among Mexicans, to speak directly to citizens. But also other choices appeared not to render similar benefits. In the case of interactive media, for instance, at that time in Mexico these platforms were at an early stage and as such, they were not of great relevance for government communicators during the first years of democracy in the country. Plus, main stream media (especially broadcasting) were regarded as ambivalent political actors that at times were prone to

support the new government, but at others assumed an adversarial position that did not leave room for an objective and constructive dialogue among diverse actors in the public debate.

7.3.3   *The Mexican government communicator: a semi-amateur status*

The level of professionalization of government communicators at the outset of the Mexican democracy can be assessed through diverse characteristics. Firstly, as seen in more detail in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.2), a great number of these public officers have had some academic or specialized training in politics, communication or the media. Therefore, in general terms, at the first and second tiers of the administrative structure (heads of office and middle-level officers), government communicators during the Fox administration were generally hired by their professional credentials rather than by their partisan or personal links with the governing elites.[46] For their part, street-level officers also had extensive professional expertise in government communication that they gained during the authoritarian years. Most of these public officers remained in their posts after the change of political regime. Over all, in one way or the other, government communicators during the first years of the new political regime in the country were not at all unconnected to government and political communication. A certain (though not uncommonly high) level of professional training and academic knowledge could be found among rank and file government communication officers during the years covered by this study.

Secondly, in terms of the day-to-day government communication and especially the routine interaction with the media, the structure and functioning of government communication offices, especially the POC, resembled other countries' where professional communication tools and strategies steer their design and day-to-day practices. 'There are of course, great differences', said one participant (B4), 'but if you look at other governments in Latin America or even the US, our communication offices, at least at the executive federal level of government share certain characteristics'.

Chapter Six (section 6.2) offered a detailed analysis of the administrative arrangements and daily operation of the POC during the Fox administration. For the discussion about the process of professionalization on government communication and more generally in the state-media relation presented in this chapter, it is useful to keep

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[46] A caveat to this argument was offered in Chapter 6 (section 6.2.2) that shows how this professional expertise or academic training in government communicators at managerial levels did not prevent these officers to use their public appointments to catapult their own goals and political agendas.

in mind, for instance, that the office went through diverse structural changes to separate two functions that were seen as cornerstones of government communication during the Fox administration: media management (conducted by the POC, in which the Office of the Spokesperson was included) and public advertising (that included campaigning and mechanisms to measure public response coordinated by the OPOI).

In terms of regular functioning, these administrative units also showed some of the professionalization patterns described in the current literature of political communication. For instance, the centralization of the government's communication strategy in the POC or the use (although not fully admitted or clearly disclosed) of special consultants and private firms for media training or public support research points at trends that offices of communication are following in other parts of the world (the US, the UK, France, Italy, to mention a few; see for instance: Negrine *et al.* 2007).

Thirdly, and closely related to the previous point, strategic communication tactics such as public advertising, media management and polling were not alien for interviewees. On the contrary, participants were quite familiar with terms such as 'spin-doctoring', 'stagecraft', 'framing', 'agenda setting' or 'media training', to mention a few terms that denoted certain tacit knowledge of these strategies. For example, one participant said quite naturally (B2): 'well those media trainings were not going to automatically solve all our problems'. Or another expressed concern that: 'the problem with trying, at all costs, to set the news agenda and steer journalists' attention to specific topics is that you never know what the outcome will be' (A16).

Participants, however, did not consider themselves media managers, spin-doctors, pollsters or campaign managers. The interviews showed that these officials remained sceptical about the overall advantages of strategic communication techniques as these strategies were approached as potential (commonly negative) news topics in themselves. As expressed by the interviewees these practices were reported as strident headlines denouncing the use of obscure, expensive and Machiavellian techniques aiming to sell an image of Mexico that did not match the national reality.

In the same line of argument pointing at some resistance from participants to fully embrace the notion of professionalization, the analysis of the interviews showed the limits of new communication technologies in government communication at the period of time under analysis. As mentioned, back then, interactive technologies and social media platforms were in their infancy. Nevertheless, the reach and relevance of alternative information and communication technologies were constrained by the

limited access that Mexicans on average had to the internet and by the general perceived (reduced) utility these technologies had for public officials who (quite right) still considered main stream media as the main channel for government communication.

To sum up, when analysed together, the reported reluctance of participants to fully embrace (and put into practice) the notion of professionalization understood as better practices and standards of political communication, added to the limitations on the use of new communication technologies in government communication and a persistently limited role of the regular citizen in the public debate, represent three significant barriers to importing and adapting American or more professionalized methods of communicating politics to the Mexican context during the first years of democracy in the country.

Firstly, the conception of the citizen played a limited role in communicating politics. As seen in the interviews, the key actors in this process of communication continued to be politicians and the media. A crucial change may point at the greater diversity of actors participating in the public debate that ultimately became contenders of the government in its constant effort to dominate the news agenda. Nevertheless, the role of the citizen as a voter, and as a key determinant of the democratic process, appeared to be undermined by political actors (including the media) that were determined to advance their own agendas transcending the public interest.

Secondly, low amounts of enthusiasm among interviewees for the use of new communication and media platforms can be assigned to two conditions. The use of alternative media platforms such as the internet or interactive social media was, at the time covered by this investigation, restricted to a very small portion of the population. Plus, participants pointed to mainstream media, especially TV and radio as the traditional and most popular communication channels to reach citizens. Their attention to new communication technologies and media platforms were due to the impact these developments may have in journalism rather than what these new communication platforms may represent as a direct form of citizens' participation in the public debate.

Thirdly, from the analysis it is difficult to confirm that participants regarded themselves as professionals in communicating politics. As pictured in the corresponding literature, these professionals show certain skills, specialization and proficiency in the use of specific tools and strategic communication tactics. In so doing, they tend to replace old cadres of communicators that are driven by folk wisdom and have limited expertise with new technologies and strategic communication tools. Looking at the

dangers embedded in more strategic political communication skills and practices, participants remained reluctant to fully recognize the extent to which these tactics played a key role in government communication during the Fox administration, a salient divergence from the idea generally embedded in the notion of professionalization, in which strategic communication tactics and tools are approached as determinants (positive and negative) of political communication all over the world.

Conclusions

This chapter showed that professionalization trends of political communication in Mexico were similar to those that other democracies are following in that change is eminent: strategic communication (although not fully disclosed) played a key role in communicating politics during the first years of a new political regime in the country; crucial transformations from authoritarianism to democracy opened the public debate to diverse voices, and; the media acquired new duties, but also opportunities to increase their influence in communicating politics and maximize the industry's economic benefits.

Nevertheless, these pages also showed that political communication was not merely a reflection of the professionalization trend described in the literature. From traditional communication practices to persistent links between the political regime and the media, several aspects of the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy fell through the analytical cracks of the notion of professionalization in the study of political communication. To state as an umbrella concept, the notion of professionalization imposing certain analytical challenges is hardly a theoretical innovation (see for instance: Scammell 1997; Lilleker and Negrine 2002; Negrine 2007). Yet this point needs to be stressed for it frequently gets lost in extreme accounts that on the one hand point at revolutionary ways to communicate politics, or on the other, which denounce the dangers embedded in global trends that obscure crucial differences among countries. Therefore, by just confirming that professionalization of political communication is an unavoidable global trend adds little to the debate.

The interviews with government communicators revealed, for instance, that it was early in the Fox administration when 'professionalized' and strategic communication techniques hit some limits which proved to be risky. Mexican media (especially broadcasting) continued to be (and at the date of this publication still are) both a strong business and a key political actor that combined a commercial and political logic in protecting their own interests. For participants, the professionalization

of political communication imposed challenges (arguably rather than benefits) that streamed from an increasing diversity of political actors in the public debate competing for media coverage and that, like the government, were also prone to tailor their own media strategies to steer the news agenda.

Thus, on the way to synthesizing the many influences discussed in this chapter, is by putting emphasis on that 'change', as Olsen writes (2010: 17), 'often implies that existing, legitimate normative and organizational principles are reinterpreted, recombined, and rebalanced, rather than one set of principles completely replacing or dominating all others'. In other words, using the notion of the professionalization of political communication to assess the state-media relation during the first years of the Mexican democracy is useful only when coupled with the continuities from the authoritarian past.

Against the common notion that political communication around the world is becoming carefully planned and tailored for new communication formats and according to strategic goals, government communication in Mexico during the first democratic administration was characterized more by a daily process of trial and error to set the news agenda through old and new practices. As commonly explained by the interviewees, in practice a more professional government communication was not played out smoothly. More common than not, divergent goals, uncoordinated efforts and a multiplicity of official sources talking to the media made it more difficult for government communicators at all levels to follow a clear communication strategy. Plus, government communication knowledge and practice continued to be dominated more by folk wisdom than by a professional and regulated practice.

8 Discussion and conclusions

Political science –indeed social science as a whole—
benefits from the coexistence and competition of varied approaches to theory and research.
And it benefits more from dialogue that crosses distinct traditions.
[… M]ultiple approaches can set the stage for creative
new blends of methodology and theorizing,
especially as new generations of young scholars
pick and choose to combine ideas from their elders.
Breakthrough studies can combine lines of analysis, generating powerful synergies
from the complementary strengths of alternative traditions.
Indeed, many breakthroughs have already happened…

Paul Pierson and Theda Skocpol, Historical Institutionalism
in Contemporary Political Science (2002)

How did the process of democratization change the political-media complex in Mexico? The aim of this thesis has been to provide a better understanding of the interaction between the state and the media in a country that recently transited from authoritarianism to democracy. As the main research question suggests, the thesis drew on the notion of 'political-media complex' (Swanson 1992, 1997) and augmented it by introducing a conceptual framework that centred the analysis on three specific institutional factors to investigate the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

Rather than using current afflictions or unfulfilled expectations from the new political regimes or the emerging (transitional or hybrid) media systems as a traditional normative entry point into the study, the thesis advanced a framework that analysed the rules, organizational dynamic and patterns of change and stasis that conditioned –enabled or constrained— the interaction between the state and the media in a new political regime in Mexico.

The analysis that supports this thesis drew on interviews with government communicators about their relationship with the media during the first opposition administration in the Mexican federal government (PAN 2000-2006) and on supportive document research of official documents. The study showed that 'thinking institutionally' about the state-media relation in new democracies allowed a better understanding of a complex process of adaptation that combines change and stasis: on the one hand, there are formal rules and procedures such as legal frameworks, budgets or organizational structures that emerged in this thesis as rigid and facing diverse

challenges to adapt to the new political conditions. On the other, there are informal arrangements such as shared unwritten norms, common knowledge and beliefs, day-to-day practices, roles and attitudes that at times set off crucial changes in the political-media complex, but in others were seen as salient obstacles for democracy to take root. This ambivalence suggested the need to pay more attention to informality as a key factor affecting the relationship between the governing elites and the media in new democracies.

This final chapter draws together the evidence provided in the three empirical chapters (section one) and touches upon how these insights are responsive to the conceptual framework put forward by highlighting this thesis' theoretical contributions (section two). The chapter also reflects on the limitations of this study in terms of methodology and research design (section three) and concludes (section four) by pointing at potential pathways for further research on the state-media relation in new democracies.

8.1   Summary of empirical findings

The analysis of the interviews conducted for this thesis revealed that government communicators perceived a relationship with the media more complex than the one pictured by a single traditional model of the state-media relations. The liberal democratic paradigm falls short, for instance, in offering a thoughtful understanding of a variety of links that tied together the new political regime and media during the first years of democracy in Mexico. As seen in this study, this interdependence did not match traditional means of state control such as state censorship and guidance, repression, economic dependence of the media on public funding or even state media ownership (see for instance: Siebert *et al.* 1956; Gunther and Mughan 2000b). Far from being controlled or being threatened by the state, Mexican media continued to be a key political actor in the new democratic setting (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002; Trejo Delarbre 2004b; Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Guerrero 2010a, 2010b).

The new political regime struggled to eradicate some of the links that tied the governing elites and the media during the authoritarian era. The Fox administration also failed in strengthening the conditions for the media to play a more vigilant role and to enhance pluralism and accountability, as the liberal democratic model of state-press relations prescribes. For instance, this government was not able to pass a comprehensive media reform that protected both citizens and the media from the

potential dangers of the market such as media concentration; or an excessive commercial deluge that tends to drive media contents and the commercial interests of the industry (see for instance: Feintuck and Varney 2006; Lunt and Livingstone 2011). Moreover, government communicators at the federal level did not fully discard traditional authoritarian practices of media control such as clientelistic relationships or interdependent links with media moguls through intertwined political interests or juicy public advertising contracts.

Nevertheless, the new governing elites did not have either the capacity or partially the will, to keep the media under strict surveillance and control, as the traditional authoritarian model of state-media relations suspects. Nor were Mexican government communicators inclined (or able) to carry on with past practices such as repression or corruption to keep journalists at close complicity. Democracy did set new conditions (an increasing diversity of actors in the political debate; media liberalization; access to public information) that made traditional means of media control unfeasible. Plus, the process of democratization in Mexico also set new aspirations and goals for government communicators.

Key questions thus remain if the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy is to be analysed through the lens of the liberal-democratic paradigm: did the new political regime in Mexico fail in fulfilling the expectations set by the democratic transition? How did the new governing elites differ from the authoritarian regime? How did past practices tint the new democratic setting?

At first glance, the political economy approach to state–media relations may appear useful to answer these questions and clarify the complexity of the Mexican case. For instance, one of the key assumptions in this paradigm is the relevance and ultimate power that media markets acquire in liberal democracies (Mosco 1996; McChesney 1999; Herman and Chomsky 2002; Thomas and Zaharom 2004). Thus, in contrast to the strict control that authoritarian rules impose over the media, a strong commercial media system frees itself from the dependence of the state. In a democracy, media acquire their own means of funding and are expected to develop a critical attitude towards the information provided by state sources through professional and investigative journalism. In addition, the state also acquires a new role on shielding the citizens from the potential dangers of a commercial media system such as market concentration or lack of journalism ethics. This, naturally, is not an easy task for democracies (old or new) since the borderline that divides media regulation from state control becomes subtle when

media's or political interests are at stake (Feintuck and Varney 2006; Tambini 2009; Lunt and Livingstone 2011).

However, in the Mexican case, the political economy perspective may render a wrong impression about the development of media markets in Mexico. Throughout the democratization process, the media has certainly gained new public spaces and freedom in pursuing a more vigilant and denouncing role (see for instance: Lawson 2004 or Hughes 2006). But in general, Mexican media (especially broadcasting) has remained reluctant to loosen the privileges the industry acquired during the long decades of authoritarian rule such as privileged licensing to incumbents; lack of competition; a weak tradition of public service broadcasting; poor journalistic professionalism; the practical inexistence of self-regulatory media mechanisms and the lack of strong and independent regulatory agencies (see for instance: Trejo Delarbre 2001; Guerrero 2009).

In the new democratic setting, the Mexican media's potential to evolve into a strong Fourth Estate was (and to the date of this publication still is) compromised by close links between the media and the new governing elites. As seen in this thesis, these ties were (and most of them still are), for instance, the key role the media played in media law and policymaking; juicy public advertising contracts; a news agenda that kept privileging the figure of the executive among other actors, or; a process of the professionalization of political communication that did not fully replace past authoritarian communication practices. Moreover, media's concentration in the hands of a few traditional media moguls continued to be a key obstacle for market competition and for a broader diversity of political actors to participate in the public debate. The political character of the Mexican media had a direct influence on news coverage in that it mainly responded to particular interests of the industry, especially of media owners.

In this scenario and as seen in Chapter Five, the Fox administration faced key challenges in passing a new regulatory framework that responded to the new political conditions. Firstly, the legal framework inherited by authoritarian rule was a complex set of entangled and out-dated statutory regulations that did not respond to the new political conditions. Secondly, media moguls kept a key role in policy making as they made extensive use of the political and economic resources at their disposal to protect their economic interests (Trejo Delarbre 2004b; Esteinou and Alva de la Selva 2009; Guerrero 2009).

Box. 8.1   **Summary of empirical insights emerging from this thesis**

Chapter 5. Media regulation: formal rules and a logic of (in)appropriateness
- The influence of statutory media regulation at the outset of the Mexican democracy cannot be explained entirely by what was proscribed in these regulations
- The legal framework inherited by the authoritarian rule was out of date and unresponsive to the new political conditions
- Media moguls kept a key role in media policymaking in the new democratic setting
- Passing new statutory rulings proved not to be enough: government communicators faced a variety of difficulties in transforming the new rulings into 'appropriate' behaviour
- The policy making process put forth by the Fox administration shaped the state-media relation in more informal and indirect ways. This process was also a key detonator of small and gradual changes in the political-media complex

> *Media regulation at the outset of the Mexican democracy appears as both a mechanism to perpetuate entangled political and economic interests between the new governing elites and the media, and as a detonator of change, especially regarding the actors participating in the policymaking process and regarding the evident need to translate statutory regulation into day-to-day communication practices that serve the general public interest*

Chapter 6. Inside the black box: the machinery of government communication
- New managerial techniques and organizational routines clashed with archaic administrative structures and communication practices
- These tensions within the POC were traced to traditional beliefs about the value of information and past authoritarian communication practices that responded slowly to the new political conditions.
- Nevertheless, government communicators did not remain on the same path that characterized the relationship with the media in authoritarian rule
- Authoritarian legacies served more as a guide in need of essential adaptations to the new political context

> *Government communication is seen as a complex combination of inflexible bureaucratic structures, new managerial techniques and a selective use of past authoritarian strategies*

Chapter 7. Communicating politics: the limits of professionalization
- Mexican government communicators like almost any typical political communicator in the world, were prone to using strategic communication and media management techniques
- In this process, however, past authoritarian communication practices and beliefs about the value and role of public information kept a key role in communicating politics
- For government communicators, the professionalization of political communication hit certain limits that streamed from an increasing diversity of political actors in the public debate competing for media coverage

> *The professionalization of political communication in Mexico is shown to follow global trends. Nevertheless, this process hit certain limits streaming from the new political conditions such as an increasing diversity of political actors in the public debate competing for media coverage and equally prone to use strategic communication practices*

Thirdly, news coverage also continued to be a key resource exchangeable for deference and various forms of protection for tangled economic and political interests between the new governing elites and the media.

Nevertheless, the media policymaking process put forward by the Fox administration did trigger an influential public debate among different actors such as diverse political forces, civic organizations, media representatives and academics. This not only provided other voices and interests with access to the policy process. It also pointed to the need for statutory regulations that responded to the public interest rather than as an advantage to particular politicians and media moguls.

The influence of statutory media regulation at the outset of the Mexican democracy cannot be explained entirely by what is actually written in these regulations. To a large extent, the policy making process shaped the state-media relation in more informal and indirect ways. First, it was simply not possible for the Fox administration to ignore or postpone an intense debate about media regulation, as authoritarian rule did it for decades. Second, the challenges to translate formal rules into new practices and the behaviour of those involved in the state-media relation that corresponded to the new democratic setting became evident not just in regards to the highly contested policy initiatives (like the *Ley Televisa* or the Presidential Decree to decrease the fiscal burden to broadcasters), but also in the much celebrated Mexican transparency law. Passing new media legislation proved not to be enough to eradicate past beliefs and attitudes towards legal authority and statutory regulation. Third, government communicators started to develop what in this thesis has been referred to as a logic of 'inappropriateness'. The term alludes to a rather high level of self-reflection among the interviewees about the impossibility of carrying on with past practices such as bribes, extortion or repression of adversarial journalists, as well as the desire to switch to practices that accommodate diverse voices and interests in communicating the government to citizens. The challenge remained, however, to transform these perceptions into day-to-day routines and formal statutory rulings.

Chapter Six provided a closer look of government communicators' practices and day-to-day routines in this setting. Leaving aside a handful of descriptive accounts on the functioning of the POC (Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a, 2007b; Meyemberg and Aguilar Valenzuela 2013), most of the empirical information about government communication at the federal level during the Fox administration is put together in this chapter for the first time. The analysis showed that Fox's government communicators struggled to implement new practices and to adjust old organizational structures and managerial procedures to the new communication demands and media changes. These tensions within the POC were traced to new managerial techniques and organizational practices

that clashed with archaic administrative structures, but also with traditional beliefs about the value of information and past authoritarian communication practices that responded slowly to the new political conditions. For instance, the office nurtured a relationship with the media that involved new managerial techniques such as the (re)implementation of a daily press conference or a more fluent relationship with journalists (see also: Aguilar Valenzuela 2007a). However, the interviews revealed that the office also made use of traditional authoritarian practices such as strict planning and the centralization of government communication in the POC, especially throughout the key role (although not always positive) that president Fox played in communicating politics. Thus, despite certain strategic and managerial changes, government communicators retained practices that in the past proved to be effective to maintain a fluent and beneficial relationship with the media.

On a similar line, Chapter Seven drew on the notion of the 'professionalization of political communication' (Holtz-Bacha 2007: 63; Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007) to assess patterns of change in communicating politics that resembled the trends followed by other democracies. As it is described in political communication literature, this trend refers to the increasing use of strategic communication techniques (media management, spin doctoring, polling or evaluation processes) or new technologies in communicating politics to citizens; 24/7 news cycles, and; the 'mediatization of politics', a term used to denote a series of changes and communication strategies that point at the increasing role that media plays in communicating politics throughout the increasing use of strategic communication techniques tailored by special media advisors (see for instance: Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Kepplinger 2002; Lundby 2009; Strömbäck 2011) and throughout endless political campaigns that privilege politicians' personal character, rather than the content of their proposals.

From this stance, the chapter showed that professionalization trends of political communication in Mexico were similar to those that other democracies are following, in that strategic communication certainly played a key role in communicating politics during the first years of the new political regime in the country. Nevertheless, the chapter also showed that traditional communication practices kept a key role. The interviews revealed that it was early on in the Fox administration when strategic communication techniques proved to be risky. Mexican media (especially broadcasting) continued to be (and at the date of this publication still are) both a strong business and a key political actor that combined commercial and political logics in protecting their own

interests. For government communicators, the professionalization of political communication hit certain limits that streamed from an increasing diversity of political actors in the public debate competing for media coverage and that, like the government, were also prone to tailor their own media strategies to steer the news agenda.

The political economy paradigm points to the key role that media plays in communicating politics. In several ways, this approach seems more useful to disentangle the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy. Nevertheless, a pure media's commercial or market logic is hardly adequate to explain the interdependence between the political regime and the media in policymaking, in the day-to-day functioning of government communication offices, and in the professionalization of political communication. During the first years of the Mexican democracy, the media kept a key role as political actors. Plus, far from strengthening competition and journalistic professionalism, archaic regulatory frameworks and old political communication practices perpetuated media concentration and highly politicized media contents, which were two traditional characteristics of the state-media relation during Mexican authoritarian rule.

Seen from this angle, explanations that point at authoritarian legacies and path dependences seem useful to clarify the complexity of the state-media relation in the Mexican democracy. After all, the empirical insights emerging from this study did suggest that the new governing elites in Mexico were not able to totally get rid of past media regulation practices, archaic administrative structures or traditional trends in communicating politics. In a nutshell, the analysis in this thesis revealed that the authoritarian past did imprint itself on the way government communicators related to the media at the outset of the new political regime. Nevertheless, these authoritarian legacies or path dependencies from the past cannot be assumed, as Cesarini and Hite put it (2004a: 6), '*solely* as the deadweight of history on the shoulders of post-authoritarian democracies' (emphasis from original; see also: Bermeo 1992; O'Donnell 1996b; Hite and Cesarini 2004; Pion-Berlin 2005).

As seen in this thesis, past practices and authoritarian traits shaped the state-media relationship in a variety of ways. For instance, in terms of media regulation, the lingering political power of media moguls worked against a comprehensive media reform. However, it was precisely the industry's overwhelming role on the policymaking process that allowed diverse political actors (opposition parties, journalists, editors and

civil organizations) to mobilize a public debate against the *Ley Televisa* in what became a process that eventually contributed to revoke the new legislation.

Similarly, at first glance the Fox administration may appear unwilling to put an end to an era of cosy relationships with media moguls. The first democratic government did endorse ambiguous and weak media regulation meant to protect the industry's interests, just as the authoritarian regime ruled its relationship with the media for several decades. Nevertheless, in the effort to perpetuate these archaic mechanisms of media regulation, the new government was unable to avoid an ample debate on media policy reform. When taking a closer look, the media policy initiatives put forward by the Fox administration showed that it was not longer possible to exclude other actors from the policy debate. The policymaking process also showed the difficulties of including divergent opinions about the goals and uses of media regulation. Passing new statutory rulings proved not to be enough. Transforming media policy into new beliefs, practices and enforcement mechanisms became a critical point of the state-media relationship under the new democratic setting (see Chapter Five).

Moreover, government communicators did not remain on the same path that characterized the state-media relation during the authoritarian era. This is evidenced by the interviewees' selective engagement with past practices and new procedures in government communication. The continuities traced from the authoritarian past were also coupled, for instance, with new recruitment processes at the managerial level (new cadres of government communicators with certain experience on media matters, in contrast to the old cadres that were mainly appointed by their links with the PRI) or new practices and day-to-day routines that put special attention on strategic communication strategies.

In this process, as mentioned, old practices were appealing for government communicators and were certainly used. These are, for instance: concentrating the news agenda in the executive, especially the figure of the president; nurturing a close relationship with media representatives; or even endorsing public advertising contracts expecting in exchange deferential treatment in news coverage. Nevertheless, in applying traditional communication practices to the new democratic setting, the interviewees described more a process of translation rather than a rigorous reproduction of past practices. Here, authoritarian legacies served more as a repertoire of practices available (a guide) in need of certain essential adaptations to the new political context.

Thus, the story emerging in this thesis about the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy was one of fluidity and change, as much as of continuity and constraints on behaviour that perpetuated the change of political regime. From this stance, explanations that point at the difficulties that democracies face on breaking with past practices and beliefs are hardly adequate to capture by themselves the small and gradual changes in the state-media relations under the new democratic setting. Moreover, the intricacy of the political-media complex presented in this thesis cannot be fully explained by a single traditional model of state-media relations such as the liberal democratic or the political economy paradigms. This thesis has argued that recognizing the array of influences that authoritarianism imposed over new democracies is a window onto the dynamics of a process of adaptation rather than the radical transformation commonly expected from the transition from authoritarianism to democracy.

8.2   Thinking institutionally about the state-media relation in a new democracy: key arguments and theoretical contributions

As the existing literature of state-media relations did not provide a single conceptual framework that captured the complexity of the interaction between the new political regime in Mexico and the media briefly summarized in the previous section of this chapter, this thesis put forward an institutional approach for studying the political-media complex in a new democratic setting. In contrast to research on state-media relations that either privileges a story of a complete transformation from authoritarianism to democracy or puts emphasis on 'authoritarian legacies' or 'path dependencies' that prevent new kinds of relationships between the state and the media, this study developed a conceptual framework that was explicitly designed to assess the interactions between institutional structures and processes that gave rise to a combination of disruptive change often coupled with continuities from the authoritarian past.

In so doing, Swanson's notion of political-media complex (1992, 1997) played a central and orienting role. In contrast to normative approaches to the state-media relation that assume both entities are fully independent from each other (like in the liberal democratic paradigm) or that approach the media as a powerful actor with the potential capacity to dominate the relationship (like in the critical political economy approach), Swanson puts forward an alternative point of entry that approaches the interaction between politics and the media as a 'supra institution' (Swanson 1992: 399). That is, rather than engaging in a process of diagnosis about the current afflictions of

political communication, an institutional stance, Swanson argues (1992: 399), allows a detailed analysis of the different aspects that shape the interaction between politics and the media.

From this perspective, the study of the state-media relation in this thesis drew from the ideals imposed by normative models to the actual dilemmas that actors in the political communication sphere face in practice. Nevertheless, as explained in more detail in Chapter Three (section 3.1), this is not to say that this thesis disregarded the role that traditional models play in the study of the state-media relation. A normative approach provides a checklist about how this interaction should look like in new democracies. However, as shown in this thesis (see the Introduction and Chapter Three), this stance does not explain *why* the state-media relation in the Mexican democracy has been found to fall short of the great expectations associated with the change of political regime. Nor does a pure normative conceptual framework allow us to see *how* this relation developed under the new political conditions.

This thesis contributes thus to the study of the political-media complex by elaborating upon Swanson's initial conceptual framework within media and communications and extending this to the study of the state-media relation in new democracies. To advance an alternative conceptual approach that goes beyond the unfulfilled expectations of the governments and 'hybrid' or 'transitional' media systems emerging in new democracies (for the Mexican case see for instance: Hughes 2006 or McPherson 2010), this thesis enriched Swanson's proposal with several insights from different neo-institutional traditions.

As seen in Chapter Three, scholars from different neo-institutional traditions argue that institutional research gains more if academics build bridges to connect the distinctive theoretical approaches (see for instance: Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Heclo 2008, Pierre *et al.* 2008; Hall 2010). Rather than privileging one institutional school of thought over the other, this thesis drew upon the neo-institutionalism notion that political life benefits from cautious analyses on the role of institutional norms and practices articulated both through the perceptions and practices of individuals and through formalized rules and structures (March and Olsen 1984,1989; Peters 2012).

From this stance, 'thinking institutionally' about the relationship between the state and the media in a new democracy started from March and Olsen's early calls for a reappraisal of institutions in political science (1984, 1989) to centre the analysis on three fundamental ways in which institutions influence political life. These are: (1) the rules

that institutions enforce to give order; (2) the organizational dynamic that institutions impose over individuals' roles, and; (3) the patterns of change and tendencies that institutions take from but also inflict on historical rules and practices.

Box 8.2 **Summary of advantages of an institutional approach to the state-media relation in new democracies**

- Provides an alternative approach to accounts that either privilege a story of a complete transformation from authoritarianism to democracy or place emphasis on the 'authoritarian legacies' or 'path dependences' that prevent a new interaction

- Draws the analysis from the great expectations imposed by the democratic model of state-media relations to the actual dilemmas that actors in the political communication sphere face in practice

- Recognizes the links and interdependence that still tie together the political regime and the media

- Unpacks the interaction between the state and the media into different conceptual and analytical tools

In contrast to accounts which are organized primarily around national case studies that emphasize the gaps or match traditional media models (namely the liberal democratic or the political economy paradigm) and the actual functioning of the political-media complex in new democracies, the conceptual framework used in this thesis enabled an assessment of the influence that rules, organizational dynamics and historical trends of change and continuity imposed over the state-media relation in a new political setting.

Box 8.2 above summarizes the advantages of this institutional approach to the political-media complex in new democracies. As argued in this thesis, this perspective sheds light on a theoretical puzzle embedded in the literature on the relations between the state and the media in new democracies. Most of this literature points to the expectations imposed by the process of democratization in transforming the political-media complex by strengthening a vigilant media that enhances accountability generation and pluralism in the public debate. From this perspective, the state is also expected to strengthen the mechanisms to shield citizens from media concentration, manipulation or lack of journalistic professionalism. Nevertheless, more common than not, the state-media relation in new democracies is pictured as a set of authoritarian legacies or path dependencies that prevent both the state and the media to change the course of this interaction and fulfil the expectations imposed by the change from

authoritarianism to democracy (see for instance: Gross 2002: Ch1; Ogundimu 2002; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Voltmer 2013: Ch5).

This thesis has argued that the literature on the state-media relations in new democracies lack conceptualizations and the analytical tools able to explain why the state-media relation in these countries diverges so greatly from the expectations imposed by the change of political regime. Alternative analytical perspectives that are able to unpack this interaction into different conceptual and analytical tools are needed. Looking at the rules (formal and informal) that organized this interaction, the administrative structure and managerial techniques that shaped it and the professionalization trends it followed at the outset of democracy in Mexico, this thesis has shown that the political-media complex is more a process of gradual adaptation to the new political conditions, rather than the radical transformation pictured in the liberal democratic paradigm. Thus the institutional approach put forward in this thesis provided an alternative point of entry into the analysis of the state-media relation in new democracies. It allowed an assessment of both the capacity of this interaction to change and adapt to the new political conditions, as well as the influence of past practices and authoritarian legacies in this process.

From this stance, three variables arose from the analysis as key elements for the study of the political-media complex in a new democracy. As shown below in Box 8.3 these are: (1) the diversity of ways in which authoritarian legacies and path dependencies shape (constrain or enable) the state-media relation in the new democratic setting; (2) the influence of informal arrangements and practices in this interaction, and; (3) the interplay between change and stasis in the configuration of a new relationship between these two sets of actors.

Box 8.3   Key elements to the study of the political-media complex in a new democracy

> (1) A diversity of influences in which the authoritarian past shaped the state-media relation in the new democratic setting
>
> (2) The influence of informal arrangements and practices in the political-media complex
>
> (3) The interplay between change and stasis

'Analyzing processes of democratization through the lens of the past', writes Voltmer (2013: 127) 'helps us to understand that history is always one of the main architects of political institutions and political cultures of the present'. That is, when looking at the political-media complex in new democracies, it would not be entirely wrong to agree on the fact that 'old habits die hard'. However, understanding the role that past authoritarian legacies play in the new democratic setting is not to say that there is a deterministic relationship between the past and the present (Voltmer 2013: 222, see also Ch9 and Conclusions) or to assume that it is simply more difficult for democracy to take root in post-authoritarian governments. As Cesarini and Hite (2004: 326) put it: 'inertia-based explanations are insufficient.'

Indeed, the empirical insights emerging from this thesis point at certain continuities with the past in the way the Fox administration related with the media. However, as shown in this study, the influence of these legacies from authoritarian rule cannot be assumed as a single or unidirectional (positive or negative) force. Throughout the three empirical chapters, it has been possible to identify at least three different mechanisms through which the authoritarian past influenced (shaped, constrained or facilitated) the interaction between the new governing elites and the media. These are: (1) through archaic formal arrangements such as laws, policies or rigid administrative structures; (2) through prevailing actors associated with the authoritarian regime, and; (3) through traditional practices and past experiences.

For instance, the influence of archaic regulatory frameworks is evident in Chapter Five that purposely investigate how formal and informal rules have shaped the state-media relation in the new democratic setting. The chapter showed that traditional mechanisms of media regulation (vague regulations greatly influenced by the lingering power of media moguls or the key role of the executive played in the policymaking process) prevented comprehensive media reform. The new governing elites appeared unable of embracing a media policy responsive to the democratic setting such as a diversity of actors in the political debate or the need for a vigilant and denouncing media.

Nevertheless, the new political regime's attempt to perpetuate a lax media policy set off an intense public debate that brought out of the shadows suspected close ties between the governing elites and media moguls (something that could not have happened under authoritarian rule). The process eventually contributed to revoke the

Ley Televisa and made evident that priority had to be assigned to comprehensive media reform addressing not just the functioning of media markets (open competition or plurality in the contents against media concentration), but also the relationship between the media and the governing elites, especially in matters of licensing, public advertising contracts and effective independent regulatory agencies.

The legacy of past authoritarian organizational arrangements and bureaucratic structures is also evident in Chapters Six and Seven that respectively studied the organizational dynamic and professionalization patterns of government communication offices under the management of new governing elites. Here the remnants of the authoritarian past (rigid administrative structures or monitoring and information techniques that did not match the 24/7 news cycle) at times worked against new managerial techniques and imposed additional challenges to government communicators in adapting political communication strategies to the new political conditions.

The interviews, however, showed that certain past practices also proved to be helpful as strategic communication tools. The centralization of the government's communication strategy in the POC, the key central role assigned to the executive over other political actors or a close relationship with media moguls may point, at first glance, to the professionalization trends of political communication that other democracies are following. Nevertheless, the analysis of the interviews revealed that the use of media advisers, spin doctors and pollsters as strategic communication tools proved to be problematic: these practices were most likely to generate a 'boomerang effect' if journalists were to report its use in government communication as strident headlines. Thus, if the hiring of special media consultancies (their cost and tactics) were to be fully disclosed to the media, the most likely outcome would have been intense criticism and questioning about the ultimate goals of these practices. This was actually the case for the increasing use of public advertising in the Fox administration. This practice was not just reported in news coverage due to the result of opaque and clientelistic relations between the new government and media moguls, especially broadcasters. But it was also implied that political communication had been used to sell the government's achievements that hardly corresponded to the national reality (see for instance: de la Mora 2009; Juárez 2009; Bravo 2011).

The influence of prevailing actors associated with the authoritarian regime or past authoritarian practices was also shown throughout the three empirical chapters.

Media moguls are seen as a determinant in the media policymaking process (Chapter Five), president Fox was meant to retain a key role in communicating politics (Chapter Six), while communicators who came from inside the governing party (instead of spin doctors, media managers or polling experts) were still the ones deciding and implementing the government's political communication strategy (Chapter Seven). Therefore, a great number of the actors that were traditionally in charge of the state-media relation during the authoritarian rule, retained certain influence at the outset of the new political regime. However, the lingering influence of these actors in the political-media complex cannot be assumed as simple inertia with the authoritarian past. For instance, the key role that media moguls still played in the media policymaking process was to a large part consciously endorsed by the Fox administration that regarded the media as a necessary ally in communicating politics (and not entirely as the watchdog or the Fourth Estate that it is prescribed in the liberal democratic paradigm).

Similarly, the use of traditional political communication practices that privileged certain actors over others (the executive for instance) was part of a purposeful government communication strategy in response to the new political and media settings such as an increasing diversity of actors in the public debate and increasing competition among media outlets; or journalists that either felt under pressure by sophisticated communication strategies on the part of the political actors or were not content with the information offered and responded aggressively with negative headlines. Thus, and differing from the common assumption that the lingering power and influence of specific actors from the past in the new democratic setting resides in their capacity to retain their force and perpetuate anti-democratic practices (see for instance: Hagopian 1996; Geddes 1994; or Ames 1987), the empirical insights emerging from this thesis point at certain capacity and agency that the new governing elites exercised in deliberately allowing specific actors to perpetuate their marked influence over the political-media complex.

From this stance, it was possible to assess the use of past practices, beliefs and experiences that also permeate the three empirical chapters. Literature on democratization tends to approach authoritarian practices and beliefs as barriers to the consolidation of democracy (see for instance: Bermeo 1992; Higley and Gunther 1992; McCoy 2000). Nevertheless, this thesis has shown that the use of traditional day-to-day routines and communication practices worked both as incentives to redefine the state-

media relation as well as obstacles to modify government communicators' behaviours and beliefs.

'What works well', writes Axelrod (1986: 1097), 'is likely to be used again while what turns out poorly is likely to be discarded'. The same can be said about the selective use that government communicators made of past communication practices. As seen in Chapters Six and Seven, when past authoritarian practices provided answers and strategies to the dilemmas (past or new) of the state-media relation, government communicators purposefully perpetuated those strategies. Nevertheless, when these officers hit unprecedented challenges (such as an increasing diversity of actors in the public debate prone to make use of strategic communication practices) or even potential crises (such as constant negative headlines denouncing a cosy relationship with media moguls during the media policymaking process or in criticism of juicy public advertising contracts), government communicators were forced to revaluate new and past trends, adapting their innovative strategies to the emerging challenges or even discarding them in favour of past practices. This process resembled more 'trial-and-error' rather than assuming the past as a recurring strategy that threatens the consolidation of the new democratic rule.

Summing up, breaking down the notion of authoritarian legacies and path dependencies into a variety of influences over the political-media complex, challenges the conventional notion that the past matters *solely* because democracies suffer under the weight of authoritarian carryovers. Approaching authoritarian legacies as a diverse range of influences (positive or negative) helped to reconsider the different implications these legacies have for the state-media relation in democracy. This perspective also gave some indication about the possibilities of placing democracy on a more secure footing by understanding the distinctive challenges and opportunities diverse remnants of the authoritarian past impose on the day-to-day interaction between government communicators and the media.

8.2.2   *The role of informal arrangements in the political-media complex*

In their influential *Comparing Media Systems*, Hallin and Mancini (2004a: 65) centre the analysis of the political context that influence media systems on five discrete variables: the distinction between liberal or welfare-state; consensus or majoritarian patterns of government; organized pluralism or corporatism; moderate or polarized pluralism; and the development of rational-legal authority. 'In some sense', write the authors (Hallin

and Mancini 2004a: 47), 'the[se] political variables could be called the 'independent variables' in our analysis of the relationship between media and political systems, as many are more general and deeply rooted aspects of social structure and culture'. In other words, these variables are relatively straightforward indicators about the structure and functioning of the democracies under study: the role of the state with regards to the media (owner, regulator or funder), the party system, the separation of powers and the rules for consensus. The less straightforward of these indicators is what the authors call 'rational-legal authority'. As Hallin and Mancini put it (2004a: 56):

> [The] important cultural components to rational legal authority, manifest, for example in the degree to which citizens, business and other actors are willing to follow rules, or alternatively seek to evade them, and whether public officials, technical experts, and other authorities are seen as serving the general 'public interest' transcending particular interests.

Research on the state-media relation in new democracies tend to direct the searchlight to 'independent variables' of the political regimes under scrutiny rather than to the 'cultural components' or informal arrangements that have certain influence on the state-media relation. This thesis has shown, however, that these informal arrangements (common knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, day-to-day practices and roles) give some form and texture to the shadows we currently see about how governing cadres in a new democracy conceive and manage their interaction with the media.

In terms of media regulation, Chapter Five showed that as Hallin and Mancini (2004a) argue in their approach to the 'rational-legal authority', the participants in this study expressed different views about the benefits and challenges of a new statutory legal framework. It is not that these government communicators fully recognized and supported the need of new media laws. On the contrary, the media policymaking process put forward by the Fox administration exposed the challenges related with the willing of both government officials and media representatives to reform archaic media regulations. It also revealed a set of diverse tactics and strategies both sets of actors put in practice seeking to evade statutory regulations.

For instance, information and access to mass media has traditionally been regarded in Mexico as key resources that can be exchanged for deference and various kinds of support such as the access to privileged information or positive news coverage. These views transcended the democratic transition and drove the new media regulatory process to a dubious outcome. The failed *Ley Televisa* is a clear example. But the interviewees also pointed to day-to-day routines and attitudes that made it difficult to transform the much celebrated transparency law into a more fluent and transparent

relation with the media. Some examples of this trend are the government's tendency to transform information requests into complicated administrative procedures that delayed and even evaded the release of government information; or the journalistic practice of reporting the information obtained through the transparency law as adversarial headlines. The analysis of the interviews revealed that government communicators regarded transparency and access to government information more like a potentially dangerous communication tool rather than a triumph of democracy over the opacity and control used by authoritarian rule.

Similarly, Chapters Six and Seven showed certain difficulties that the interviewees faced to modify traditional communication practices and strategies. These challenges arose not only from rigid bureaucratic structures and inflexible budgets. But also from common understandings about government communication and journalistic practices that tend to privilege state sources over other relevant actors; to focus the news agenda on the president and its cabinet; and to favour strident headlines and sound bites over thoughtful analyses and investigative journalism.

At first glance this scenario is similar to professionalization trends that political communication follows in other older democracies (see for instance: Scammell 1997; Blumler and Kavanagh 1999; Negrine *et al.* 2007). Nevertheless, in a great number of these democracies what the literature refers to as the 'professionalization' of political communication points to a complex process that links together technological, societal and political and media changes. These transformations are themselves linked with additional global trends or homogenization patterns (see Figure 7.1; Hallin and Mancini 2004b; Pfersch and Esser 2004; Papathanassopoulos *et al.* 2007) such as the secularization of politics; the modernization of media and communication technologies; an increasing commercialization of the media, and; additional changes in communicating politics such as the highly contested (but frequently used) notion of 'Americanization' that points towards other communication trends in political campaigns which are steered by special advisers and media consultants, rather than by political activism and partisan proposals.

As revealed in the analysis of the interviews conducted for this thesis, the political communication trends seen during the first years of the Mexican democracy responded more to past practices and common understandings between the governing elites and the media about the value of political communication, rather than to the critical changes of political parties, a decreasing interest in voting or the growth of

cynicism among citizens. Actually the 2000 election registered the highest voter turnout of the democratic rule in Mexico (IFE 2012). In addition, it was precisely with the democratic transition that civil society was able to weaken traditional links with political forces (especially the PRI) and started fighting (quite unsuccessfully) for a more independent role in politics (Bizberg 2010; Olvera 2010; Wada 2014). Yet, these changes were hardly reflected in the way the new governing elites communicated politics to Mexicans. Traditional media management techniques such as collusion with the media or clientelistic relations between governing elites and media moguls remained.

8.2.3   *A dialectic relationship between change and stasis*

This thesis has argued that the political-media complex at the outset of the Mexican democracy is the product of both provoked change and fostered continuity. Evidence of the conflict between traditional and new institutional formations was found where archaic legal frameworks clashed with changing perceptions about the goals and means for media policymaking and media regulation (Chapter Five) or where rigid administrative structures and budgets constrained new communication strategies and emerging organizational dynamics (Chapter Six). Plus, while political communication appeared as following global trends towards the 'professionalization' and the 'mediatization of politics' consistent with a more democratic state-media relation, these trends did not fully replace, for example, the influence that certain politicians and past tactics retained in designing and directing the government communications strategy (Chapters Six and Seven).

Thus, in understanding the changes in the way government communicators interacted with the media in the first years of a new political regime in Mexico, this thesis took a closer look at stability. That is, by looking at the aspects of government communication in its relation with the media that at first glance seemed to be stable (formal rules, inherited administrative structures, sticky organizational procedures, old financial schemes and human resources cadres, past day-to-day communication strategies), this study found small and rickety changes that did not meet the great expectations prescribed in the liberal democratic paradigm, but that did represent a 'path departure' from the authoritarian past.

First, much of the literature on the state-media relations in new democracies centres on the role of the media in these transformations. From this stance research focuses on the shortcomings these countries face in fulfilling the great expectations

imposed by the change of political regime (see for instance: Voltmer 2006; Lugo-Ocando 2008b; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013). This thesis showed that indeed change in the political-media complex in the Mexican democracy did not resemble transformation prescribed in the liberal democratic paradigm. Nor did the continuities this study traced from the past match the traditional practices and beliefs that government communicators used during the long authoritarian rule to keep the media at close complicity. For instance, certain reproduction mechanisms of past practices ('authoritarian legacies' or 'path dependences') were also seen as impulses for change. This suggested a reconsideration of how authoritarianism imposed itself as deadweight over rule in the new democratic setting. That is, the study of stasis in the political-media complex mattered in this thesis because the continuities seen were also approached as an indication of change. This can be traced, for example, in the intense debate created around the presidential decree to reduce the fiscal burden imposed to broadcasters and around the failed *Ley Televisa* (Chapter Five); or in the managerial and organizational challenges imposed by the return to old political communication practices such as the centralization of the news strategy and agenda setting efforts on the POC (Chapter Six); or in the government communicators' need to combine old practices with new communication trends (Chapter Seven).

Second, equating stasis with failure (under the broad assumption that new democracies suffer under the deadweight of authoritarian carryovers) or change with success (presuming that the new political rule embraces a political-media complex modelled to the liberal democratic paradigm) not just hinders the potential positive effects that certain continuities from the past have under the new democratic setting. It also overlooks the challenges embedded in translating change into new day-to-day practices, organizational dynamics and beliefs about the state-media relation. Chapter Five, for instance, pointed to the difficulties that government communicators faced in translating the much celebrated new transparency law into more open and transparent news management strategies or day-to-day relations with media moguls, editors, anchorpersons or journalists. Chapter Six showed that the new managerial communication cadres did not necessarily replace the old bureaucratic structure that related with the media on a daily basis. On the contrary, more common than not new beliefs about the value and nature of the state-media relation under the new democratic setting clashed with archaic communication practices carried on by middle or street-level communicators that were formed under authoritarian rule. Similarly, Chapter

Seven touched upon the risks that the analysis of the interviews showed about putting into practice strategic political communication tactics tailored by spin doctors, special media advisors or professional pollsters.

Third, democratization of the political-media complex appears more as a process of small and rickety (partly unpredictable) changes, rather than as the radical transformation prescribed in the liberal democratic model of state-media relations. Thus, as seen through the empirical chapters in this thesis, the change of political regime did provide both opportunities and constraints for government communicators to adapt the state-media relation to the new conditions. Nevertheless, the process also set in motion developments that were outside government communicator's intentions or reach, making them reconsider the viability or even utility of a state-media relation modelled to the liberal democratic paradigm.

The outcomes of the media regulation process described in Chapter Five, for instance, was out of government communicators' reach. Naturally, these officials were not regulators or active policymaking actors. But the process did put additional pressure on political communication. It was not just news coverage that denounced a cosy and interdependent relationship between media moguls and the new governing elites; it forced government communicators to look for (old and new) strategies to steer the news agenda. An ambivalent role of the media was also manifested throughout this process. Media were the industry under scrutiny. But they were also a source of information; a precious communication resource for the different actors involved in the process (the government, political parties, civil society), and; a powerful industry determined to protect its economic interests to serious detriment of its independence from the political regime. As one interviewee put it: 'far from being a fearless 'watchdog', at that stage media seemed more like a petulant teenager determined to pursue a new identity, but afraid of losing the comfort of a privileged childhood' (B2).

Chapters Six and Seven expanded on government communicators' views about both the opportunities and challenges embedded in adjusting political communication to the new democratic setting. More common than not, the managerial and procedural day-to-day practices put into practice showed the limits of state-media relation models tailored to older democracies. As seen, it was not only problematic for the new government to assess the role that Mexican media was determined (or not) to play in democracy. It was also difficult for the interviewees to present a clear picture about the new government's communication strategy. At times the media was pictured as a

trustworthy and powerful allay. On other occasions, the interviewees touched upon the risks of an expanded communications environment that opened the door to more actors participating in the public debate, which was subject to a 24/7 news cycle and relied on new technologies and alternative communication channels. A closer look at the strategies these officers put into practice denoted a complex trial-and-error of diverse communication practices with uncertain outcomes. The liberal democratic paradigm might be pictured as the ultimate goal. But the empirical insights emerging from this thesis suggested multiple ways (more of a circle than a straight line) to reach it.

In short, in the political-media complex in the Mexican democracy, change and stasis were two sides of the same process and not necessarily contradictory or opposing forces. Understanding both aspects (fluidity and continuity) gave some indication about how the new political cadres in Mexico were dealing with the past in a new democratic setting. It also pointed to a diversity of challenges and obstacles for adjusting old practices and beliefs to new political conditions.

8.3   Reflections on research design and methodological choices

Admittedly, this thesis faced certain limitations at least in four aspects related to the research design and qualitative methodologies followed. These are: (1) the challenges embedded in an institutional approach to the state-media relation; (2) the impossibility to generalize the findings emerging from a single case study; (3) the time frame used to delimit the study, and last but not least; (4) the potential flaws rising from the methodologies and sources of empirical data selected. In what follows, key implications of these constraints are illustrated along with potential ways to work them out in further research.

8.3.1   *Challenges embedded in an institutional approach to the state-media relation*

Methodological choices ultimately involve trade-offs (Brady and Collier 2004). The choice to approach the state-media relationship from an institutional stance has not been the exception. In this thesis, the price of putting forward a new conceptual framework has been to abandon relatively straightforward normative models that offer key major dimensions according to which the relationship between politics and the media is compared across different political systems (see for instance: Gunther and Mughan 2000a or Hallin and Mancini 2004a). In potential detriment to a parsimonious approach to the state-media relation in a new democracy, this thesis put forward an

intricate conceptual framework that drew on diverse neo-institutional schools of thought. 'Thinking institutionally' about the political-media complex in a new democracy implied joining together diverse neo-institutional traditions that define and approach institutions from different angles that perhaps most worrying, rarely speak to each other (Hall and Taylor 1996; Kato 1996; Peters 2012). Among the tasks involved in the integration of the different neo-institutional schools of thought in a single institutional approach was thus a rather general understanding of institutions and why and how these matter to the study of state-media relations. However, in such a synthesis, there were some key drawbacks.

First, a broad institutional approach to state-media relations in a new democracy undermined a more detailed dialogue with each of the neo-institutionalisms. It was necessary, for instance, to find common ground between diverse theoretical conceptions about how institutions shape individual behaviour. It may appear, for instance, that this study devoted apparently little attention to the role that power, especially asymmetrical relations of power, have played in the state-media relation. Rather than centre the analysis on how rules (formal and informal), organizational dynamics or patterns of professionalization of government communication may have redistributed power unevenly between the new political regime and the media, this study stressed the way in which three institutional dimensions forced (or not) government communicators to rethink or adapt their interaction with the media.

Power was undeniably an underlying force, but it is true that in this thesis it was not the central object of study. The state-media relation was approached more as a process shaped not just by the potential power that each entity has to dominate the other, but rather by formal rules, norms, procedures, beliefs and trends of change that impose certain influence in the state-media relation under the new democratic setting. In so doing, this study broke down the conceptual divide between explanations focused on power dynamics and those that privilege a procedural stance. The two blended into each other by turning away from normative accounts that overlook the interdependence between the state in new democracies and the media or political economy explanations that took for granted the development of strong and competitive media markets. The political-media complex in the new democratic setting was regarded as being not just about power. But also about the conditions and processes that shaped the power dynamics between these two sets of actors.

However, none of this suggests that future research might not benefit from an institutional approach that pays more attention to the power dynamics between the state and the media. For instance, media regulation is a potential controlling force that might shift the balance of power in favour of the state, especially of new governing elites reluctant to give up unrestricted control over the media through statutory regulation. Authoritarian rules used mechanisms such as extensive tax privileges, subsidies, and juicy public advertising contracts to cement the state's capacity to control the media in a way that it transcended the political transition. Electoral processes on the last decade had rendered signs of a successful consolidation of democracy around the world, at least in terms of political competition and diversity. Yet, the state-media relation in many new democracies points more to authoritarian means of media control rather than to the free and independent relationship anticipated by the liberal democratic paradigm (see: McCargo 2003; Lugo-Ocando2008a; Sen and Lee 2008; Beumers *et al.* 2009; Voltmer 2013). An institutional analysis that allows an approach to the balance of power between the state and the media may be useful to a better understanding of why and most intriguing *how* the new ruling elites have been able to keep (or not) a firm control of power over the media. This stance may also useful to pointing at the challenges for democracy to take root in facing these constraints.

At the same time, in many new democracies, political leaders also regard the media as a powerful resource in electoral contests. Under these conditions, the new governing elites chose to keep the media content at close complicity, rather than under strict control, because they assume the former as having the power to steer the political debate (see for instance the analyses on Argentina, Chile and Brazil included on Lugo-Ocando 2008a or Bajomi-Lázár 2013; Kaneva and Ibroscheva 2013 for analyses on the role of the media in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe). In addition, more common than not, media in new democracies have grown as powerful conglomerates that are able to make their voice heard (and will stand) in policymaking and the electoral process. An institutional analysis with a closer look to the power dynamics between the state and the media in these potential new 'media democracies' might render key insights about the role that media plays in politics (arguably, reaching similar conclusions to what Nimmo and Combs 1983; Mazzoleni and Schulz 1999; Meyer 2002; Schulz 2004 or Curran 2007 have suggested for older democracies). Thus, a closer look at the power dynamics between the new governing elites and the media may render additional insights as to how the democratic transition has (or not) shaped the media

themselves and the challenges media are facing in fulfilling the expectations set on them under the new political setting.

8.3.2 *The limits of a single case study: applying this thesis' conceptual framework to other democracies*

Research on the state-media relation in democracies (new and old) is usually presented in compilations that put together different national case studies (see for instance: Gross 2002; Hydén *et al.* 2002; Voltmer 2006, 2013; Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Sen 2008; Beumers *et al.* 2009; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013). As Voltmer (2013: 227) puts it:

> Moving beyond single country or regional research will be important to a better understanding of the origins and forms of different media institutions and journalistic practices and their consequences for deepening democracy after the end of authoritarian rule[s].

This thesis was designed, however, as a single national case study sacrificing the breath and generality that analyses across different transitions to democracy offer. This was done in order to put forward an innovative approach to the state-media relationships in a new democracy that were able to present an in-depth analysis of three key institutional aspects of this interaction thereby proposed. Therefore, the potential trade-offs of a single case study (see: Rueschemeyer 2003; Bennett 2006; Vennesson 2008; Yin 2009) were thus expected to be compensated with a detailed study of the rules, organizational dynamics and professionalization patterns that government communication followed at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

Nevertheless, this thesis succeeds if it illustrates both the promise and the necessity of an institutional approach to political-media complex in the study of the Mexican case, but also in other new democracies. Thus, a natural direction to move the research in hand forward will be applying the analytical framework here proposed to other national contexts and in an alternative comparative research design. This will render valuable insights about this study's reach and limitations by testing its theoretical arguments and qualitative methodologies here presented to diverse case studies in different regions of the world.

For instance, at first glance the most similar cases to the Mexican experience are the Latin American new democracies. Not only do these countries share cultural and historical traits, but also media in the region shows very similar characteristics especially in terms of their influence on politics and regarding the size of these conglomerates (see: Lugo-Ocando 2008b; Waisbord 2013). However, a closer look to each national case reveals, for instance, that crucial divergences among Latin American countries arise

from the type of control that authoritarian rules in the region imposed over the media, especially in terms of the benefits and privileges media moguls received from authoritarianism (Voltmer 2013: Chs 4 and 5), as well as from the perceptions about the capacity of the new governing elites to promote a new role for the media in democracy (Waisbord 2000a, 2007).

For example, in contrast to the Mexican case, the military dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina, Chile and Venezuela served as the main developers of the media as an industry. These authoritarian rules not just invested large amounts of economic and political resources to keep the media at close complicity (as the PRI did in Mexico), but they also were in charge of the industry's technological development according to the communications demands of those times. Nevertheless, the democratization process in the region has painted very diverse panoramas for those powerful media industries nurtured by authoritarianism. In Brazil, Globo grew as a powerful global media conglomerate largely unregulated and closely linked to political elites (Guedes-Bailey and Jambeiro Barbosa 2008; Matos 2012; Porto 2012), whereas in Venezuela, the resurgence of populism has significantly marginalized the possibilities of a market-driven media. The new political regime in the latter has strengthened diverse mechanisms of state control such as strict media regulation, disproportionate funding to government lead public media or to sympathetic media owners or even through the expropriation of media companies (Canizalez and Lugo-Ocando 2008; Waisbord 2013).

Therefore, crucial divergences in the state-media relation among Latin American countries can be traced to the influences imposed by different preceding authoritarian rules, but also as probably seen more clearly from the institutional lenses proposed in this thesis, from diverse forms and meanings of democracy in the region. This may seem an obvious point (see for instance: Dahl 1989; Geddes 1999; Held 2006), but much follows from it. It is not just the state-media relations in Latin American new democracies that face different challenges, but the governing elites in these countries also have divergent understandings about how to put (or not) the liberal democratic paradigm into practice.

In contrast to the military dictatorships in Latin America, military rules in Africa did not have the economic resources or the strategic intention of keeping the media at close complicity. Nevertheless, these new democracies also face enduring mechanisms of state control *and* an underdeveloped and weak media (Hydén *et al.* 2002; Blankson 2007; Kalyango 2011). In this scenario, a study of state-media relations that places

special emphasis on the governing elites (rather than a pure normative approach to the role of the media in the democratization process) may help to better understand *how* the state intervention and the political control of governing elites over a weak media remains a key threat to democracy. An institutional approach to state-media relations may be useful to unpack the political instrumentalization of the African media into a set of manageable analytical dimensions (rules, organizational dynamic and professionalization patterns) and assess its consequences beyond general assumptions of control, repression and censorship.

Similarly, the institutional approach advanced in this thesis may serve as a unifying conceptual framework to study the state-media relation in the post-communism world. Diverse studies have pointed to crucial divergences among the media systems emerging in the individual countries of the region (for recent compilations see: Beumers *et al.* 2009; Dobek-Ostrowska *et al.* 2010; Gross and Jakubowicz 2013; Downey and Mihelj 2012). Nevertheless, this literature lacks from a single analytical prism able to offer a better understanding of these differences. Plus, there is very little research that explores how exactly the new governing elites shape the role of the media. Very rarely does research on this region of the world takes a closer look at government communication. When the searchlight covers the new governing and political cadres, the focus tends to be on political campaigning during electoral processes (see for instance the contributions of Dobek-Ostrowska and Lodzki; Nedeljkovich; Roka; Raycheva and Dimitrova; and, Oates to Strömbäck and Kaid 2008 or Tworzecki 2012). Day-to-day government communication processes and strategies are commonly relegated to the shadows. The conceptual framework proposed in this thesis may thus contribute to reduce researchers' current tendency to impose high normative expectations on the state-media relation without really explaining how and why Western models did not fully explain this interaction in the post-communism region or even if these models indeed represent the ideal benchmark in these countries.

8.3.3   *Time frame: what happens next in Mexico?*

An additional key limitation in this thesis is the time frame selected to conduct this study (2000-2006). The analysis presented here has been naturally just a snap shot in a constantly evolving sequence of events. As explained thoroughly in Chapters One (sections 1.3.1) and Four (sections 4.1), the time period under investigation responded

to this thesis' specific goals and constraints in terms of the research design and the conceptual framework that guides it.

Nevertheless, one could also argue that a quite dissimilar picture may emerge if the searchlight had covered the study of subsequent administrations: the Calderón administration (2006 to 2012, the second of the PAN) and quite intriguing, the return of the PRI to the federal government in 2012. For instance, the interplay between change and continuity in the way government communicators related with the media may look considerably different when assessing the significant changes the Calderón administration imposed on the internal dynamic of POC, such as the abolition of the figure of spokesman; the centralization of the government's communications strategy in the presidency (*Los Pinos*) or the disproportionate increase of public advertising expenditure through rather obscure contracts with media conglomerates (Fundar 2009; Bravo 2011; Delgado 2012; Ramos 2012).

These trends may point at the strengthening of past authoritarian practices (control, centralization, complicity and close interdependence between the governing elites and the media), rather than a step forward in a state-media relation modelled to the liberal-democratic paradigm (see for instance: Meyemberg and Aguilar Valenzuela 2013). In contrast, a closer look to the effect of new technologies (like social media or blogs, both quite incipient communication strategies during the Fox administration) and strategic communication tactics (spin doctoring, polling, political marketing and advertising) may point at further efforts towards a more professional political communication tailored to consumers' demands rather than to citizens' needs and rights (see the distinctions and challenges embedded on these two complementary but quite distinctive roles made in Scammell 2003; Lewis *et al.* 2005; Livingstone 2007). From this stance the interplay between change and continuity may be difficult to disentangle and may require further analyses on how both forces work on the reconfiguration of the state-media relation as democracy takes root in Mexico.

Similarly, applying the conceptual framework introduced in this thesis to the analysis of the return of the PRI to the federal government may render quite a complex picture. For instance, after more than a decade of complicated negotiations, failed attempts and constant confrontations, the Peña Nieto administration (2012-2018) was the one able to finally pass new telecommunications legislation in mid-2013. How did this happen? What are the implications for the state-media relation embedded in this new statutory regulation? What are the challenges imposed for government

communicators in terms of their day-to-day relationship with the media? These questions point at the need of extending the time frame advanced in this thesis to include new developments and conditions, but also to test its argument and conclusions.

8.3.4   *Limitations on data: complementary methodologies and additional sources of information*

In hindsight, this study may also have benefited from alternative methodologies to collect additional empirical data. As explained in detail in the research design and methodological chapter (Chapter Four, section 4.1.1), the qualitative methodologies used in this thesis (interviews with government communicators and a supportive document research) responded to the particular focus this study has placed on the governing communication cadres that shaped the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy on a day-to-day basis. Nevertheless, these sections of the thesis also touched upon the challenges embedded on treating government communicators' accounts as the main source of empirical data. After all, these public officers' stories are not just subject to a selective recollection of past events, but are also potentially biased accounts about the interviewees' key influence or positive contributions in reconfiguring the state-media relation under the new democratic setting.

One way to solve the constraints imposed by potentially biased interviews with government communicators will be to complement this source of empirical evidence with additional interviews from media representatives. The accounts of journalists from *la fuente presidencial*, editors, anchorpersons and media moguls may not only serve as counterbalancing stories. These interviews may also render additional information about the challenges and opportunities the state-media relation is facing under the new democratic setting, this time from the media's point of view. This is not to say that media representatives' views may escape from the challenges embedded on elite interviewing (see for instance: Richards 1996; Odendahl 2002; Kezar 2003), especially when thinking of including the views of media moguls and anchorpersons. But alternative points of reference will be useful to double check the evidence emerging from government communicators' accounts. Additional interviews may also render new information about the role that the new governing elites play in reconfiguring the state-media relation.

A second possible way to strengthen this thesis' research design may be by conducting a content analysis of the news during the first years of democracy in Mexico. For instance, the findings in this study suggest that at the beginning of the Fox

administration, government communication was less oriented to the figure of the president (as it traditionally was during the authoritarian rule) and more open to include other public officials and political actors (as implied in the liberal-democratic paradigm). A content analysis of the news will be useful to corroborate this trend. It may also point at how diverse newspapers responded to this change on government communication. Furthermore, the analysis of the interviews showed that later in the *sexenio*, however, government communication became more centralized and paid more attention to nurturing interdependent ties with editors and media moguls in a potential exchange for positive coverage. A content analysis of the news may point at how the media reported (or not) this return to past authoritarian communication strategies. It may render additional information about the consequences these strategies imposed for both government communicators and the media.

The inclusion of additional interviews with media representatives or considering a complementary content analysis of news coverage may represent major adjustments to the research design proposed in this thesis. Nevertheless, the effort may be worth taking as a necessary step forward. Additional empirical evidence will be useful to test the findings presented here. It will also point at this thesis' flaws and alternative strategies to solve potential issues related with the research design and the methodologies used to collect the empirical data that supports the analysis presented in this study.

8.4   Future research tasks and final thoughts

The research in hand has aimed to reduce a current tendency in the study of the state-media relation in new democracies to centre the analysis on the challenges media face to fulfilling the expectations prescribed by the liberal democratic model. In so doing, the thesis has argued for a better understanding of both the pressures and opportunities that the new governing elites confront in reconfiguring the state-media relationship under the new democratic setting.

From this stance, the findings suggest at least two pressing tasks in the field's intellectual agenda: (1) the need to assess the role that informal arrangements play in the state-media relationship and (2) the inevitability to move the study of government communication forward. This final section of the chapter reflects on these topics. In a scenario of profound transformations and yet never-ending transitions to democracy, it is necessary both to find alternative routes for a better understanding of constantly

changing environments, and to tune-up the analytical tools that have traditionally been at hand.

8.4.1 *The role of informal arrangements in the political-media complex: conceptual challenges and research tasks*

In their introduction to a recent special issue of *The International Journal of Press/Politics* [2012, 17(4)] on the relationship between democracy and the media in Central and Eastern Europe, Mancini and Zielonka (2012: 386) point at a similar conclusion to the one presented in this thesis. They write:

> the interplay between formality and informality appears to be one of the main factors affecting the relationship between mass media and democracy in the region. Does it just affect this part of the world? Or is informality a dimension that has been neglected in other countries as well? The answer could represent another lesson to be learned from the study [of the media and their interaction with the political world].

Indeed, the proposal to pay more attention to the role that informal arrangements play in the political-media complex in new democracies opens a series of new questions and research tasks. Firstly, it is essential to describe and measure these informal arrangements with certain conceptual precision. However, this is not an easy task, especially regarding the little attention that media studies have paid to informal traits (Mancini and Zielonka 2012) or the diverse challenges the democratization literature faces on describing and analysing them (see for instance: O'Donnell 1996, 1999; Lauth 2000; Weyland 2002; Helmke and Levitsky 2006; Jütting 2007 *et al.*; Meyer 2008). From this stance a key question remains: what are informal institutions?

Secondly, this thesis has shown that the effects of informal arrangements might not be considered as uniformly positive. At times, old government communication practices and conceptions obstructed a more fluent relation with the media, supporting the notion that 'old habits die hard'. At others, however, the aspirations and beliefs of new public officials became an impulse to find alternative mechanisms to break with the past. What do informal institutions do?

Thirdly, it is also necessary to further analyze the consequences that these informal arrangements impose upon the state-media relation in new democracies. For instance, seeing the state-media relation from this light requires a better understanding about how (if at all) politicians or journalists replace these informal arrangements with formal rules and procedures that strengthen the development of democracy. Are these informal procedures typical of an early phase of the political change in new democracies?

Are we looking at cases where democracy has not yet put down strong roots? Or are informal settings alternative routes to evoke a stronger commitment with the new political regime when more formal procedures are blocked?

8.4.2 *Moving the study of government communication forward*

This thesis has argued that it is rather difficult to fully understand the role that media play in the consolidation of new democracies without also having a detailed assessment of the new governing elites in their relation with the media. Therefore, drawing the focus from the media to the government cadres that regulate, organize and develop the state-media relationship in the new democratic setting not only brings out of the shadows the challenges and the opportunities the new political regime imposes over the media. It also renders a clearer picture about how these new governments understand and put (or not) into practice a new interaction with the media.

Nevertheless the study of governing elites in their relationship with the media, especially in terms of government communication is rather a neglected area of studies (Canel and Sanders 2010, 2012, 2013). Research is dispersed among diverse disciplines and cognate areas of studies such as public relations, political advertising and strategic communication (Sanders 2011; Canel and Sanders 2012). Plus, research tends to privilege national case studies that address an ample range of themes (see for instance: Elizande *et al.* 2006; Fairbanks *et al.* 2007; Young 2007; Vos and Westerhoudt 2008; Gelders and Ihien 2010). Indeed, overarching and systematic conceptual frameworks that could be applied to different regions of the world are rare exceptions (see for instance: Fisher and Horsley 2007; Canel and Sanders 2013a).

This thesis has shown that government communication is, however, another promising area of investigation in the study of the state-media relation in new democracies. As seen in this study, the challenges and opportunities to adjust the state-media relation in the new democratic setting not just come from forces outside government communication offices. Structural, managerial and procedural characteristics of these offices shed some light on the resource (human, financial or technological) governing invest in their relation with the media. This may seem a trivial point, but much follows from it. Government communication is not just a potential tool that governing elites use to win citizens' hearts and minds in an never-ending effort to increase their popularity and credibility (see for instance: Gregory 2006; Vos 2006; Da Silva and Batista 2007; Strömbäck and Kiousis 2011; Lee *et al.* 2012). It also involves a

set of actors, practices, goals, bureaucratic structures and strategies that give form and meaning to governments' day-to-day relationship with the media (Pfetsch and Voltmer 2012).

For instance, at the outset of democracy in Latin American, the new political regimes have tended to equate government communication with party propaganda (Lugo-Ocando 2008a; Waisbord 2012; Porto 2012: Introduction and Ch5; Sanders and Canel 2013b). This imposes at least three challenges for democracy to take root in the region. First, it is difficult for citizens to set clear distinctions between the state and the party; between what the former is ought to deliver and what the latter is using as a 'permanent campaign' (Blumenthal 1982) with mere electoral purposes. Government communication is not meant to promote a dialogue between the state and citizens, or to hold governments accountable. Rather it becomes a strategic tool to enhance the popularity of the governing elites and to promote electoral politics (Lugo-Ocando 2008b; Waisbord 2013). This can be seen, for instance, in the increasing relevance of the president and its cabinet in communicating politics (see for instance: Conaghan and de la Torre 2008; Rincón 2008; Uribe 2013).

Second, the new governing elites in these countries appear to be practically obsessed with positive headlines and sound-bites. Adversarial news coverage is regarded as fuel for the opposition, but also a constant reminder for voters about the government's flaws and unfulfilled promises. Government communication strategies are thus meant to deter critical journalism and a more vigilant media. 'In a region with pronounced deficit of democratic accountability', writes Waisbord (2012: 438), 'such strategies further deepen old problems of transparency and representation'.

Third, rather than setting clear boundaries between the media and the political regime in Latin American democracies, this kind of government communication tends to strengthen the links between politicians and media moguls. Thus, the industry remains reluctant to scrutinize the same governments that they need to keep at close complicity to protect their commercial interests. Some examples of this close interdependence are the historical control that conglomerates such as Televisa or Globo have had over the media markets or the traditional lack of clear media regulation in the region.

In contrast, government communication in Central and Eastern Europe has gone throughout a different process of transformation. The new governing elites in these countries have seen a significant decline of public service media in favour of

powerful commercial conglomerates (Stetka 2012; Bajomi-Lázár 2013). This has had three effects. First, public service media in the post-communist world have lost audiences and its presumed impact on public opinion and voters' support for governing parties. Second, political elites have gradually lost influence on the functioning of the media and with that a direct interference in the news agenda and political communication.[48] Third, government communicators have had to find alternative news management strategies. In this scenario, the use of political marketing, media advisors, private political campaigners, pollsters and spin doctors have increased in a landscape of a buoyant commercial media and rapid developments on the communications technologies (Tworzecki 2012; Bajomi-Lázár 2013). News outlets in the region have mushroomed and competition to control the news agenda has increased as government communicators struggle to adapt to this new media environment: 'they need to be bombastic, and preferably, visually transmissible', writes (Bajomi-Lázár 2013: 52), 'otherwise, tabloid newspapers and commercial television channels, the primary sources of information for the majority of voters, would not report them'. Politicians in Central and Eastern Europe keep perceiving the media as both an strategic tool and a powerful actor.

This scenario, however, is not much different from the rest of Europe or other older democracies. For instance, the recent developments in the UK after the Leveson Inquiry have shown that even advanced democracies with a strong tradition of public service broadcast and clear divisions between the government and the media require a closer look at the 'complicated symbiosis' (Zelizer 2013: 626) between these two entities, especially one that takes into consideration government communication tactics and the involvement on dubious journalistic practices. In fact, key questions remain: what is behind the illegal acts committed by journalists of *News of the World*? Who are to be blamed: *News International* or those that within the state or the media who oversaw dubious journalistic and communication practices? (see also: Newburn 2011; Tambini 2011; Gaber 2012; Wring 2012). What is perhaps most worrying are the facts that phone hacking and information leaks are not innovative communication and journalistic practices and that impunity persists. 'Alongside the calls for media accountability', writes Zelizer (2012: 629), 'there thus need to be similarly strident calls for police governance

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[48] Except in Hungary, where media regulation in 2010 restored state control over the media (Council of Europe 2011; Brouillette 2012).

and reform, political accountability and reduced privatization and corporatization, to name a few'.

WikiLeaks is also a stunning example of entangled relationships between information, communication, the media and politics. '[I]f governments and corporations face more embarrassing disclosures they cannot easily suppress', writes Hood (2011: 638), 'they will have to ramp up their spin operations as well'. Therefore the WikiLeaks phenomenon points at certainly relevant issues about media ethics and journalism trends (Allan 2013; Couldry *et al.* 2013; Anderson *et al.* 2014), transparency and access of information (Hood 2011; Roberts 2012) or how the use of new communication technologies transforms journalism, public accountability and civic participation (see for instance: Brevini *et al.* 2013; Beckett 2012: Ch4). It also shows that government communication tools may not be so effective in the new context. In the US, for instance, some legal and institutional reforms are regarded as counterattacks to protect sensitive data (see for instance: US Department of Justice 2009; Lew 2010, 2011; US Senate 2010; White House 2011; US House of Representatives 2011; Zajacz 2013). But these reactions may only be the visible tip of the iceberg. Data hacking and information disclosure *'à la* WikiLeaks' (Hood 2011: 636) has certainly transformed the way governments deal with information and interact with mainstream and new media.

Concluding remarks

This thesis spoke directly to the literature that inspired by Sierbet *et al*'s (1956) assess the links between distinctive political regimes and the media. More than fifty years of research proves that simple dichotomies that link authoritarianism with media control and democracy with freedom of expression are problematic. Broad distinctions between authoritarianism and democracy not just hinder crucial divergences within authoritarian rules and within democracies. Raw models for the state-media relation also obscure the influence that a variety of actors, processes, beliefs and legacies from the past impose on this interaction.

The study of the state-media relation thus needs alternative conceptual and analytical frameworks that are able to disentangle its different components. As seen in this study, 'thinking institutionally' about the state-media relation in a new democracy has shown that formal rules, bureaucratic structures, managerial strategies or certain professionalization patterns of the political communication shape the way in which the new governing cadres manage their relationship on a day-to-day basis. Less evident but

equally relevant is the influence that informal arrangements impose on this interaction. For instance, it cannot simply be assumed that proscriptions on the relationship between the state and the media (statutory media regulation, formal rules and written norms) always dictate the behaviour of those involved in the state-media relation. Beliefs, attitudes and common practices are also relevant to disentangle the links between rules and actions.

Similarly, budgets, organizational charts and strategic communications blueprints set certain parameters for government communicators in their daily interaction with the media. But it cannot be expected that these can be implemented without hesitation. Past routines, practices and understandings about the purpose and value of government communication does shape the way in which the new governing cadres manage political communication, including their daily relationships with the media. As seen in this thesis, the authoritarian past did shape the way in which the new political regime in Mexico conceived and managed its relation with the media in a new democratic setting. But the past marks the present in a variety of ways contesting the broad and traditional conception about the burden that authoritarianism imposes over new democracies.

It is difficult, however, to draw solid conclusions from a single case study. It is most likely that substantial adjustments will be needed when testing the conceptual framework here proposed in the study of other new democracies. The analysis of older democracies may also bring additional insights and perhaps most relevant, may tell a cautionary story about the prospects for democracy to take root where the relationship between the governing elites and the media is kept in the shadows.

Appendices

Appendix A. Anonymous guiding reference of interviewees

Reference	Stage of interviewing	Date conducted	Number of interviews
A	1st	August to September 2009	23
B	2nd	November to December 2010	14
			Overall of interviews: 37

Ref.	Position	Office	Date
A	**1st stage of field work**		
A1	Head of Office	POC	August 18th, 2009
A2	Head of Office	POA	August 21st, 2009
A3	Head of Office	POC	September 4th, 2009
A4	Directorate General	Inter-Institutional Relations, POC	August 14th, 2009
A5	Directorate General	Unit for Speechwriting, POC	August 12th, 2009
A6	Directorate General	Unit for Television and Radio, POC	September 17th, 2009
A7	Directorate General	Office of the Spokesman, POC	August 10th, 2009
A8	Directorate General	International Media, POC	September 3rd, 2009
A9	Directorate General	Area for Political Analysis, POC	August 18th, 2009
A10	Directorate General	Media Monitoring, POC	August 18th, 2009
A11	Directorate General	Public Opinion, POA	September 16th, 2009
A12	Directorate General	Internet Services, POA	August 14th, 2009
A13	Directorate General	Public Advertising, POA	September 5th, 2009
A14	Deputy Directorate General	Unit for Television and Radio, POC	September 17th, 2009
A15	Deputy Directorate General	Public Advertising, POA	August 21st, 2009
A16	Adviser	Unit for Speechwriting, POC	September 15th, 2009
A17	Adviser	Office of the Spokesman, POC	August 14th, 2009
A18	Adviser	Office of the Spokesman, POC	August 20th, 2009
A19	Adviser	Directorate General for Inter-Institutional Relations, POC	August 14th, 2009
A20	Middle-level officer	Area for Political Analysis, POC	August 10th, 2009
A21	Middle-level officer	Office of the Spokesman, POC	September 2nd, 2009
A22	Middle-level officer	Office of the Spokesman, POC	August 12th, 2009

Continues			
Ref.	**Position**	**Office**	**Date**
A23	Street-level officer	Directorate General for Media Monitoring, POC	September 18th, 2009
A24	Street-level officer	Newsroom, Unit for National Media, POC	September 18th, 2009
B	**2nd stage of field work**		
B1	Directorate General	POC	December 3rd, 2010
B2	Directorate General	Ministry of Public Administration, Office of Communications	December 9th, 2010
B3	Directorate General	Ministry of State, Office of Communications	November 23rd, 2010
B4	Directorate General	Ministry of International Relations, Office of Communications	December 7th, 2010
B5	Deputy Directorate General	Regional and Local Media, POC	December 15th, 2010
B6	Middle-level officer	Unit for Television and Radio	December 4th, 2010
B7	Middle-level officer	Directorate General for Public Opinion, POA	November 25th, 2010
B8	Middle-level officer	Directorate General for International Media, POC	December 17th, 2010
B9	Middle-level officer	Unit for Speechwriting, POC	December 17th, 2010
B10	Middle-level officer	Office of the Spokesman, POC	December 17th, 2010
B11	Street-level officer	Newsroom, Unit for National Media, POC	December 20th, 2010
B12	Street-level officer	Newsroom, Unit for National Media, POC	December 20th, 2010
B13	Street-level officer	News and Information, Unit for National Media, POC	November 30th, 2010
B14	Street-level officer	News and Information, Unit for National Media, POC	November 30th, 2010

POC   Presidential Office of Communications
POA   Public Opinion and Advertising Office, Office of the President

Appendix B. Interview topic guide*

I. General aspects

Introduction
- Acknowledgements and brief description of the project
- Terms and conditions of the interview: recording, consents, transcription, follow-ups

The state-media relation: ideal conception *vs.* actual functioning
- How would you define the interaction between media and politics: goals/ procedures/ challenges?
- Do you think there was a dominant/normative conception about what this relationship *should be*?
- Could you describe the actual functioning of this relationship?
- How does it differ from the normative/ideal conception you mentioned?
- According to you and in the day-to-day practice, what was the key aspect / goal of this interaction?
- If you have to use one or two adjectives to describe it these would be? (from the simple ones: good, bad, regular, etc; to the more complicated ones: adverse, symbiotic, dependent, collaborative, 'watchdog', 'lap dog', etc.)

Perception /understanding about the media (role and capacity of influence)
- What is the function of the media for your own office / daily work?
- Did the media have a similar approach? (Were the media interested in working with you?)
- How did you interact with the media? (day-to-day contact, press releases, press conferences, special requests of information, personal contact)
- What was the prevalence / frequency of these types of interactions?
- What types of relationships do you have with the members of the media? (personal, institutional, friendship, professional background)
- How often your work did you end up using personal contact with media representatives? (dealing with people you know personally?)
- How well do you feel you understood what the media wanted from the relationship with you / your office?
- In terms of capacity of influence, how influential /powerful you considered the media?
- Did you approach this relationship as a hierarchical one or as equals?
- Did you trust the media? Did you trust these key representatives of the media?
- Did you think the media/particular media workers were doing a good job?
- Did they conduct it 'professionally'? What is for you the meaning of 'professional' or 'professionalism' (or other terms related)?
- What were the main skills or attributes you admired on them?
- What were the faults you deplored?

Perception /understanding about government communication and the interviewee's office (role and capacity of influence)
- How would you describe your own office? (goals /functions)

- In terms of capacity of influence, how influential /powerful you considered your offices was?
- And in relation with the media?
- Do you consider your office did a 'good' job?
- What in your opinion is a 'good' job?

II. Analytical framework: specific dimensions and variables

Regulation: laws and particular legal framework for the state-media relation in general terms and government communication in particular
- What are the key laws / regulations for the state-media relation?
- And for government communication?
- How did you learn about these statutory regulations?
- Who makes these rules?
- What are the actors influencing the policymaking process?
- How was your office involve in law / policymaking?
- What in your opinion is the rationale of these statutory laws / rules?
- Do you consider these rulings respond to the actual environment (political, state-media relation, communications technologies, political communication dynamic)?
- Did you conduct your job according these statutory rules?
- What happened if you / your office did not conduct your job according to these regulations?
- Do you consider other actors (colleagues, heads of office, media representatives, politicians) conducted the relationship with the media according to these rules?
- If not, why?
- Would you able to mention other norms or rules to conduct the relationship with the media (journalists) that may not be written in these formal rules? (regular practices, habits, common understanding)

Machinery of government communication: structure, role of the leader, day-to-day routines and organization
Personnel and structure
- Do you remember the organizational chart of your office? / personnel figures
- Are there any official records of this organizational structure?
- What were the main positions / functions?
- If you have to use a word to describe your office, this will be…?
- How did you arrive at your current job? (professional trajectory)
- How much decision-making authority did you have?

Size and budget: financial incentives / funding sources
- Are there any records or archives I should look for this information?
- What can you tell me about your office's financial resources? (adequate or not, source of funding)

Organization, routines and leadership
- Could you describe the main objectives/tasks /duties of your office?
- Could you describe the main responsibilities of your job? (tasks, routines, decision-making authority, relation with colleagues)
- Could you give me an example of a daily routine from start to finish?

- What do you consider a job well done?
- What are in your recollection the main critiques to your role/personal performance?

Measures of public response
- Did you / your office use mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of the communications strategy?
- Or to measure the public's response to government communication? (eg. polls, public opinion surveys, focus groups)
- If so, what kinds of mechanisms were used? (prepared and conducted within your office / outsourced)
- What was the goal / use of these mechanisms?
- Would you say these mechanisms reached these goals / uses? (positive and negative aspects of using these feedback mechanisms)

Professionalization of political communication and trends of change

The notion of 'professionalization'
- Do you consider yourself a 'professional' in your job?
- What is for you the meaning of 'being professional', 'professionalism', 'professionalization' or related terms?
- Do you consider that the state-media relation / government communication was conducted on professional basis?

Training
- What is your professional background? (expand if having academic or special training on political / government communication)
- How useful was this expertise on conducting your day-to-day job?
- Explore potential plans to improve this expertise / training

The use of new technologies and practices
- How new communications technologies were used in your job?

Comparing Mexican political /government communication with practices around the world
- Are you familiar with other models of political / government communication used in other countries?
- If so, what are the similarities /differences with the Mexican model?

The notion of 'change'
- How would you describe the changes in the state- media relationship / government communication with the change from authoritarianism to democracy?
- What are the benefits, consequences or dilemmas of these changes?
- What are the continuities with the past?

III. Final Considerations

- Who else should I approach for interviewing?
- Acknowledgments

* Translated from Spanish

Appendix C. Interview consent form*

Maira Vaca
State-media relations at the outset of the Mexican Democracy
PhD Doctoral Research
Department of Media and Communications
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Name:

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I certify that I agreed to be interviewed by Maira Vaca for her PhD research on the state-media relation at the outset of the Mexican democracy.

I understand that the results of her research will be reported as a doctoral dissertation. Maira explained to me that once approved by her PhD Examination Committee, her PhD dissertation will be a public document that may be published.

Maira has explained my rights with respect to anonymity. In this regard, I agree the interview to take place under the corresponding conditions (check one box for each set of boxes):

	Recorded
	Not recorded

	Anonymous
	Not Anonymous

Signature:

* Translated from Spanish

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