

International Broadcasting

Concept: International Broadcasting

Author: Daniel Gorman , York University

Date Entered: 2005-08-4

Description Broadcasting is a quintessentially global activity. As a central means of international information flow, it helps shape how people around the world view each other. The electromagnetic spectrum, upon which most broadcasting occurs, is a natural, and common, resource. Since its emergence in the 1920s, the main challenge of international broadcasting has been allocation. The International Radiotelegraph Conference (1927) addressed this problem by accommodating both global and autonomous interests: it divided the spectrum by service type and allowed individual nations to regulate their own users. While global forces of capital and technology have sought ever expansive broadcasting capabilities, national states have sought the autonomy to pass domestic regulation, and content creators have asserted their copyrights. In the middle are listeners and viewers, who, through their actions, in turn influence the content and practice of broadcasting.

A central conflict in the history of international broadcasting concerns access to and freedom of information. A free international flow of information and a more egalitarian international communication infrastructure were the main recommendations of the 1980 UNESCO MacBride Report, reflecting the claims by representatives of the developing world for greater justice and equity in global communications. The Report, and the West's criticism of its terms, illustrates the inherently political nature of global communications.

International broadcasting is also governed by international copyright agreements. The Rome Convention (1928), an addition to the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works, and its subsequent amendments regulate the application of copyright to international broadcasting. Cable broadcasting was incorporated into this regulatory framework in the 1950s, defined as "re-broadcasting," a continuation, not an interruption, of the author's copyright. Satellite broadcasting, by definition not territorially bound and thus outside of national laws, has proved more difficult to regulate globally, and as yet no consensus on its use has emerged.

From its inception, international broadcasting has been dominated by Western states as a tool to communicate abroad political and cultural ideas. Notable examples include the British Broadcasting Corporation, Voice of America, Radio Canada International, and Radio Moscow. The growth of satellite technology and the Internet has challenged this hegemony, with broadcasters such as Al Jazeera presenting a

non-Western perspective on world events. While large media conglomerates still dominate the broadcasting landscape, new technologies also increasingly enable individuals to disseminate their views globally without intermediaries. The question of how, if at all, international broadcasting will be regulated in the global age has important consequences for who can create and broadcast content, who can receive it, and whether or not it can be copied.

Suggested
Reading:

Browne, Donald. 1982. *International radio broadcasting*. New York: Praeger.

Gerbner, George, Hamid Mowlana, and Kaarle Nordesntreng. eds. 1993. *Global media debate: Its rise, fall and renewal*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Wood, James. 1992. *History of international broadcasting*. London: Peter Peregrinus Ltd.