Editorial

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Political economy research concerning information-communication technologies requires national and historical nuance. In the U.S. context, Sydney Forde and Matthew Jordan compare official White House press releases from Bill Clinton's 1996 Telecommunications Act and Joe Biden's 2021 Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. Both were framed as bi-partisan, public investment initiatives standing above Republican-Democrat party quarrels. But the vested interests of telecommunications corporates in 1996 and big tech behemoths in 2021 were not examined. Forde and Jordan also detect an ideological narrowing of White House communication policy frames. The Clinton presidency did acknowledge corporate consolidation as a potential threat to the equitability of telecommunications services—increased competition and minimalist regulation were the proffered solutions. However, Joe Biden's Presidential initiative avoided *any* mention of corporate consolidation in regard to broadband infrastructure rollouts (an extraordinary absence when one considers contemporaneous evidence of anti-trust and anti-big tech sentiment in the House of Representatives). Forde and Jordan conclude that "naturalisation of market fundamentalism is increasingly marked by policy silence about potentially irreconcilable tensions between public and private interests".

Online behaviours enabled by information-communication infrastructures have been variously framed. Here, Aeron Davis reconstructs and critiques two orthodoxies. Initially, digital platforms and social media were seen as polarisers of public political discourse. Echo chambers reproduce extremist ideologies and irreconcilable differences of opinion. This powerful-effects view has been delegitimised by empirical studies pointing to differentiated online opinions and internet cultures. Davis appreciates yet criticises both positions and proposes a synthesis. Although not widespread, polarising echo chambers have gained prominence among groups of political elites. As top-down "primary definers", they help shape the positionings of news organisations, party political debate and public attitudes. Additionally, the underlying political economy of media communication per se privileges corporate speech and market fundamentalism. Davis remarks that these tendencies contribute to "the shifting stances of mainstream centre-ground parties and journalism'.

In China, the "political" in political economy refers to state structures, laws and regulations and the nationwide Communist Party apparatus. Complex state-Party interactions have occurred within an expanding capitalist system enabled by ICT infrastructures and tech giants such as Tencent, Baidu and Alibaba. Against this background, Aifang Ma argues that the formal regulation of private internet corporations, determined by Party leadership and implemented by state institutions, differs from informal independent Party regulation. The latter involves the establishment of intra-firm cells

to monitor the ideological orientations of entrepreneurs and co-opt them into high-level Party positions. Conversely, Party members assume high managerial positions within internet firms. These developments, especially evident under Xi Jianping since 2012, reveal a contradictory situation. Internet corporations symbolise China's economic success and technological sophistication but threaten CCP control over state ideology. At the same time, digital platforms and social media are tools of popular communication *and* mass Party surveillance. Aifang Ma reminds us though that "Party-firm power relations are not fixed". After Xi Jianping, more formal state regulation could substitute for informal Party influence.

Afghanistan's media political economy is dominated but not entirely subsumed by Islamic theocratic rule. Qurban Hussian Pamirzad explains how the Taliban's return to power in May 2021 ended 20 years of relative media freedom. The new regime dismissed media-legal frameworks, coopted the largest television network and issued directives censoring media content, banning media representations of women and proscribing media organisation policies and journalist activities. Although hundreds of media outlets closed and thousands of media professionals lost employment, domestic cell phone availability and exile political commentary online has sustained a critique of the Taliban regime and its suppression of the mediated public sphere. However, Pamirzad appreciates the limits of opposition voices—"their effect in practical terms on Taliban policies remains extremely limited".

Tarek Cherkaoui's commentary on the Israel-Gaza conflict foregrounds the mediated clash between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian narrative frames. Since the Hamas atrocities of October 2023, reportage from, say, CNNI and Al Jazeera English, has given incommensurate accounts of Israel's military retribution. Cherkaoui argues for a "fair and contextual" news discourse which recognises the stark asymmetry between Israeli state power and Palestine civil society.

Barry King's review of Andrew Stubbs-Lacey's *The Talent Management of Indie Authorship* reflects upon the commodified inter-relation of Hollywood culture, pay-TV/streaming, independent cinema and creative labour.