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Media Capture and Transitional Settings: Towards Theoretical and Empirical Developments

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INTRODUCTION

Media capture is rampant around the world. There are easily recognizable instances throughout the global North and South. There are oligarchs seizing, through questionable tactics, struggling media houses as part of their more extensive business portfolio and executives of privately owned media who serve in boardrooms of the institutions in charge of regulating the media industry. Agents of the state are known to grant broadcasting licenses to their cronies and may include political websites that pop up during election time to sell news coverage to the highest bidder. State and political agents typically seek to control the media, news agendas, and news content via legislation, funding, ownership structures, market distortion, and other means. For their part, media owners, executives, and business cartels often use their own media organizations to attempt to influence politics for their own advantage and business interests.

Across a broad range of disciplinary studies—from economics to political science to media and journalism studies—the concept of media capture has become an encompassing term to typify some of the most pressing issues related to media control and power. So far, the most cited definition was coined by political scientist Alina Mungiu-Pippidi (2013), who in taking a step forward from earlier studies on the subject, broadened the concept to include various perpetrators of capture beyond just the State. Mungiu-Pippidi defines