Media-Politics Parallelism and Populism/Anti-populism divides in Latin America: Evidence from Argentina[1]

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ABSTRACT:

Comparative political communication scholars repeatedly debated *political parallelism* as a tool to conceptualize the relation of media systems to political cleavages. Despite the fact that populism/anti-populism divides (re-)emerged as central political fault-lines, scholarship has paid little attention to the concept's potential to look at how populist polarization restructures media-politics connections in Latin America and elsewhere.

Through a combination of content analysis, in-depth interviews and other sources, this article traces shifts in news media alignments and journalistic practices during and following the recent experience of leftist-populist rule in Argentina. It argues that news media shifted to a distinct form of political parallelism organized around the populism/anti-populism divide in which most private mainstream news media assumed an active political role in the mobilization of anti-populism.

The article provides a broader understanding of political parallelism that applies to settings of competitive-electoral populist politics and sheds light on not only news media alignments, but also media involvement in the political task of cleavage construction. Scholarly research on Latin America, given its focus on instrumental media-politics connections or its concerns over populist threats to media freedom, generally misses both the politicizing role of anti-populist media and the ways in which they mirror populist style.

Keywords: PARALLELISM, ANTI-POPULISM, NEWS MEDIA, ARGENTINA, LATIN AMERICA

Introduction

In what ways do media systems relate to cleavage structures and political identities? This article traces news media re-alignments, shifting roles and the co-evolution of journalistic practices during and following the recent experience of leftist-populist rule in Argentina. It contends that one possible effect of the populist polarization processes on media systems is to produce a distinct –asymmetrical– form of *political parallelism* structured around the populism/anti-populism cleavage.

That argument has consequences for current debates on the concept's scope and cognitive value, while it points to some of the blindspots and limitations of prevailing approaches in both the literatures on media and populism and on media and politics in Latin America.

The concept of *political parallelism*, initially developed to characterize typical Western European media structures manifesting organized partisan/ideological divides, has been repeatedly discussed for its applicability in settings other than Western European-like institutionalized party systems. This article engages that controversy as it typifies and examines a form of political parallelism triggered by populist emergence, and stabilized around a (re-)emerging populism/anti-populism cleavage, dividing disparately organized political camps. The tracing of the rise of an anti-populist media in Argentina illustrates how, eventually, formerly de-aligned mainstream news media can switch to become active and independent shapers of political divides. In contexts of political crisis and emergence of a populist Left, populist leaderships are not the lone crafters of the mounting cleavage. By mobilizing fears and articulating discontents in a pervading narrative of *populism as the problem*, media/journalistic institutions can adopt political roles in structuring anti-populism, a form of negative partisanship central to Latin American politics.

In such contexts, what media alignments parallel are cleavage structures, which predate party organization, and which media themselves may help bring about. In other words, while media and journalism are certainly shaped by cleavages, they may also be central agents in their political construction. In that sense, media anti-populism and its drivers are an unexplored way in which media have become actors in the political field.

This article focuses on change in media alignments and political journalism in Argentina from the onset of the populist tide to its aftermath, comprising the populist governments of Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (2003-2015) and Mauricio Macri's presidential term (2015-2019). It provides an account of how, after the phase of relative media de-alignment during the neoliberal 1990s, Argentina's news media shifted towards a political parallelism anchored in the populist/anti-populism divide. That parallelism, however, presents asymmetries. Anti-populist stances in mainstream media remain stable over time. In contrast, populism's media representation depends on whether the populist party is in government, given its much greater state-resource dependency. Regarding political agency, pro-populist media are relatively subordinate to the populist political leadership, while the anti-populist media predate and exhibit high autonomy vis-à-vis anti-populist political-electoral organization.

This distinct form of political parallelism illuminates features of political communication under populist politics generally missed by scholarly research. Much of the literature on media and populism in Latin America, implicitly assuming that media empirically fit the normative model of a neutral "watchdog" press, tells stories of populist illiberal regimes attacking such media. By remaining within the actors' self-understanding, these accounts fail to recognize the politicization of media and their role in anti-populist mobilization and polarization processes. What is missing here is the reverse populism of anti-populist media, given anti-populism's tendency to mirror

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populism, tracing a political frontier by framing an *other* in Manichean, antagonistic and de-legitimizing fashion.

The study, finally, highlights shortcomings of predominant conceptual frameworks in scholarship on media and politics in Latin America. Central concepts such as *clientelism*, *patrimonialism* and *capture*, well suited to describe omnipresent instrumental-particularist relationships, do not adequately account for media system linkages to cleavages and wider political interpretative frameworks. The broadened concept of political parallelism provides analytical tools to apprehend an otherwise missing central empirical dimension in media-politics connections in Latin America, and perhaps elsewhere.

In the tradition of comparative media system analysis, this case study implies a synthetic approach that draws on different methodologies and evidence gathering techniques to understand media systems and their change and stability, as irreducible wholes or patterned relationships (Gerring 2007, Hallin 2020a). Since Argentina's case shares key features with other cases of Latin America's leftist-populist tide, a *typical-case* approach seems appropriate to explore shifts, sequences and interactions, which led to the outcome. An encompassing process-tracing strategy seems here most appropriate to reconstruct sequences and to account for changes, equilibriums, triggers and reproductive mechanisms at play (Gerring 2007, Hallin and Mancini 2017). Meta-journalistic pieces, ethnographic work, and author-conducted in-depth interviews with journalists from Buenos Aires' main newsrooms were used to assess media re-alignments, owners' preferences and strategic choices, and internal changes, experiences, practices and affects in newsrooms. To inquire into the growth and changing meanings of anti-populist discourse in media narratives, all online articles between 1996 and 2019 from *La Nación*, one of Buenos Aires' two leading newspapers,

containing the search terms *populismo/ista* were retrieved. A representative sample was subsequently content analyzed, coding speakers, frames associated with populism and actors referred to as *populist*.[2]

The next section provides conceptual definitions and presents the state of the art in the three above-mentioned literatures. The following section offers a contextualization of recent populist politics in Argentina. The two subsequent sections present the results of the content analysis, the in-depth interviews and the other sources. The final section discusses the study's contributions to theory building in comparative political communication.

Conceptual/theoretical considerations

Rooted in Western European discussions of press-party correspondence, the concept of *political parallelism* was proposed by Hallin and Mancini (2004) as one of four key dimensions on which to compare media systems. Even in an era of party decline and weakening media-politics organizational links, the authors found the concept meaningful to differentiate the extent and forms in which media systems reflect political divisions within Western democracies. Political parallelism can manifest in media institutions' organizational ties, media professionals' political affiliations, journalistic role orientations, media content and audiences. It indicates the connection of media outlets to cultures, ideas, or organizations relevant in the political arena. Parallelism is usually associated with external pluralism and advocacy journalism traditions, and opposed with internal pluralism and neutral/informational journalistic role orientations (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

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[2] Details on methodology and data in appendix.

The concept rests on assumptions of political conflict-structures constituting stable ideological identities, institutionalized parties and organized interests, tied to particular Western European historical developments. However, recently –amid globally growing media partisanship– it has been used to characterize media-politics realignments in all continents (de Albuquerque 2018, Nechustai 2018). In their volume extending the media-system comparison beyond Western democracies, Hallin and Mancini (2012) stress the cognitive potential of a broadening reconceptualization, bracketing the concept's historical origins. In that vein, different forms of parallelism would be conceivable, even in scenarios lacking party politics, provided media allegiances are tied to differing political identities and dynamics.

Other scholars, however, have objected to this broader definition and maintained the concept's limited relevance outside the original context. At best, they argue, it may apply to exceptional national or subnational cases of European-like rooted party-politics. At worst, forcing the concept into different contexts may even blind researchers to alternative patterns of media-politics connections in fluid contexts (Chakravartty and Roy 2013, de Albuquerque 2013). Non-Western political systems are thought to lack two conditions deemed necessary for political parallelism: (a) competitive political contestation with cleavages clear enough to allow media to reproduce them, and (b) institutionalized relationships between media and political agents sufficiently stable to identify recurrent interaction patterns (de Albuquerque 2013, 2018).

Sticking to narrow understandings of party-press parallelism, the concept has only marginal importance in accounts of Latin America's media systems (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez 2014). Nuances appear with cases where party systems have greater persistence, such as Colombia and Uruguay. Argentina is generally seen as especially alien to parallelism. As Waisbord (1994: 24) stated, "[i]n contrast to other Latin

American countries, there has been no 'parallelism' between press system and party system […] because party organizations have maintained weak links vis-à-vis the press."

A history of regime discontinuities and inchoate party systems has prevented the concept from gaining interest for regional observers. After re-democratization, during the neoliberal years, the news media cultivated a watchdog model of de-aligned journalism, further undermining the concept's ubiquity. In that climate, research concentrated on the obstacles for attaining journalistic autonomy and/or on such phenomena as *clientelism*, *patrimonialism* and *media capture* that stepped up as prevalent instrumental logics shaping media-politics connections in Latin America (Guerrero and Márquez-Ramírez 2014, Segura and Waisbord 2016, Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). Only recently, with the so-called left turn, has the term *political parallelism* reappeared to characterize changes in media alignments, especially in contexts of populist leftists in government (Hallin 2020a, Waisbord 2020, Pimentel and Marques 2021, Palos 2022).

Populism can be defined as a logic of political identity construction or mobilization of support driven by a leader, party or movement. It typically emerges in contexts of discredited party-politics and involves the tracing of a boundary between the "people" and an established power, pointed at as responsible for disparate grievances (Laclau 2007, Roberts 2021). Populisms vary widely in how they articulate this boundary and in the issues they problematize. The populist governments within Latin America's post-neoliberal "Left turn" cleaved mainly along class-lines and challenged the 1990s market-orthodoxy, thereby repoliticizing state redistribution (Levitsky and Roberts 2011).

Populism's polarizing dynamic operates at system level. Successful populist mobilization elicits a counter-mobilization that intensifies polarization (Roberts 2021). Scholarship has recently started to pay attention and to "de-naturalize" anti-populism. Anti-populism is manifested in mirror-like dualistic narratives that frame populism as a morally debased threatening political evil or, at least, as a problem for liberal-democracy. (Moffit 2018, Mudde and Rovira 2018).

Much of the scholarly literature on media and populism in Latin America focuses on the "illiberal" character of populism and its consequences for press freedom. Waisbord (2018), for instance, stresses that populism, whether left or right, shares a troubling political ontology regarding democratic communication. Others have focused, alternatively, on constraints and incentives as drivers of politics restrictive of media freedom in populist regimes. Such explanations emphasize such factors as populists' dependence on media to mobilize support, weak countervailing politico-institutional powers, policy distance from media owners and statist interventionism (Kellam and Stein 2016; Kenny 2020). These latter versions tend to assume that existing media fit the standard neutral "watchdog" model, precluding narratives other than the simple story of populist attack on media independence. As a whole, in contrast to mounting attention to the rise of a media anti-populism in the global North manifested in journalist boundary-drawing between legitimate and deviant politics (see Goyvaerts and De Cleen 2020), media involvement in anti-populist mobilization in Latin America has not raised much scholarly attention yet.

Political change and media alignments in Argentina

In Latin America's distinct historical path to mass politics, political incorporation of subaltern popular sectors frequently involved the emergence of populist movements

that, in turn, unleashed polarized opposition. Argentina's *Peronism* and *anti-Peronism* are emblematic of such mid-20th century dynamics (Collier and Collier 1991).

The elite and commercial press portrayed Peronism, from its inception, as an irrational display by barbaric, unworthy others manipulated by an apprentice of defeated European fascism. After Perón's 1946 landslide election, newsrooms became central sites of anti-populist opposition, *La Prensa* and *La Nación*, both elite-family broadsheets, the staunchest among them. Perón's government responded with a mix of coercive, bureaucratic and economic measures that progressively curtailed public dissent (Cane 2011).

Anti-populist forces seized state power after a coup in 1955. Peronism's electoral proscription came with a parallel ban from the public sphere. The political stalemate between Peronist and Anti-Peronist forces was manifested first in successive weak governments and later, with the 1960s ideological radicalization, in periods of longer-lasting repressive military rule.

The 1983 democratic transition initiated an uninterrupted phase of electoral politics. As elsewhere in Latin America, Argentina's democracy resurfaced in the context of the crisis of state-led development –through which classic populisms had flourished– and of a debt crisis that narrowed policy choices to economic liberalization within the so-called 'Washington Consensus'.

That context transformed media-politics relations. Economic hardship inflicted credibility losses on political representatives, while diluted party brands increased dependence on mass media for pursuing political careers. Market deregulation resulted, simultaneously, in media-market concentration and conglomeration processes, further increasing media-elite leverage vis-à-vis state-elites. Depoliticized electoral competition in the Post-Cold War and post-populist climate, in turn, weakened prior political

commitments of persistently family-controlled *grupos mediáticos*. The scenario led editors to expand their newsrooms' internal pluralism by recruiting journalists from diverse political backgrounds. Increased fact-orientation responded to disenchantments with partisan politics among journalists and publics demanding 'independent' news. As Waisbord (2000: 179) observed, '[t]he shelving of welfare-state populism and the disappearance of revolutionary politics and military intervention […] spawned a new political scenario upon which it [was] possible for journalism to reach a consensus around some professional principles.' That narrowed ideological-political debate and diminished deference expanded the use of moral frames in political reporting. Inspired by the professional ideal of the US watchdog role, scrutiny of the *political class* reinforced journalistic identity and public legitimacy (Waisbord 2000).

In Argentina, the onset of neoliberalism came as Carlos Menem, elected president in 1989 wielding traditional Peronist redistributive promises, switched to market-reformism. After the removal of cross-media ownership bans and broadcasting privatization, *Clarín*, Argentina's premier commercial daily up to deregulation, morphed into the dominant multi-media Grupo Clarín, comparable only to Televisa or Rede Globo. Its audience-leading outlets enhanced the groups's agenda-setting muscle and raised the instrumental power reputation of Hector Magnetto, Clarín's president (Kitzberger 2016, Sivak 2015). Editorial differences subsisted between catchall tabloid-style *Clarín*, conservative *La Nación* and progressive-opinionated *Página/12*, the capital's other leading dailies. They converged, however, in celebrating an invigorated journalism and competed to expose wrongdoing. Government-driven attempts to prevent critical reporting provided cohesion and dissolved disagreements. Prestigious professionals, significantly, left political differences behind to create *PERIODISTAS*, an organization aimed at denouncing *attacks on the press* (Sivak 2015, Stefoni 2019).

The exhaustion of the Washington Consensus changed that scenario. With the 1998-2002 financial crisis, hardship ignited a backlash. Anti-neoliberal campaigning became electorally rewarding. Most incumbents in Latin America lost office. A so-called 'left turn' was consolidated as the post-2002 global commodity boom provided room to govern outside market orthodoxy and re-politicized policy debates (Levitsky and Roberts 2011).

Some of these post-neoliberal governmental experiences were led by pre-existing moderate leftist parties. Others arose amid collapsing party-systems that favored outsiders, Hugo Chávez the first among them, adopting radical populist appeals (Levitsky and Roberts 2011). Though not as radical and re-foundational as the Venezuelan, Ecuadorean and Bolivian experiences, Argentina is usually lumped with them as an example of the *populist* path.

A crippling recession and wave of social unrest led to the fall of Menem's non-Peronist successor in 2001. However, Argentina's party-system collapsed only partially. Néstor Kirchner won the 2003 elections by steering the surviving Peronist machine to the Left through anti-neoliberal appeals. However, despite populist traits in discourse, his policies remained comparatively moderate, and liberal-democratic institutions were not challenged by constitutional overhauls. It was shortly after the election in 2007, of Cristina Fernández, Kirchner's wife, that a more radical populist mobilization forged the Kirchnerist identity properly so-called, by antagonizing the socio-economic elite. The polarizing confrontation was triggered by a governmental attempt to further tax commodities exporters. As agribusiness reacted with massive roadblocks, the government perceived the *big* news media, led by Clarín, as favoring landowners in coverage and thereby driving the urban middle classes to support protestors. The Kirchners switched to a confrontation strategy with the conglomerate, unleashing a

media war that lasted throughout Cristina's two presidencies. Denouncing the *media monopolies* as *de facto political powers* resounded among old-standing media democratization demands and was one of the progressive issues absorbed by the nascent Kirchnerist identity.

Embattled against the *multimedia generals*, the government deployed a myriad actions aimed at altering power relations in the media sphere. The approval, in 2009, of an 'Audiovisual Communication Services Law' was at the heart of this media politics. Decried as a device to muzzle the *independent* media, Clarín in particular, the law, drafted by the media democratization movement. The Argentine media law differed from those in other populist regimes by focusing only on market concentration and not content (Kitzberger 2021). Government arbitrariness was manifested in its selective implementation. Clarín, however, successfully averted the enforcement of the law's provisions that would have forced disinvestment in the judicial arena (Sivak 2015, Segura and Waisbord 2016).

In the effort to contest the oppositional media's agenda and to expose the *false independence* of the *hegemonic media*, the government, in addition to its direct communication strategies, revamped state and allied outlets, one of them the preexisting *Página/12*. Several media-critical journalists and celebrities migrated to those media's newsrooms. Such mobilization of media critical discourses often included framing established media journalists as subservient to owners' interests.

In 2015, the Kirchnerist successor candidate lost against Cambiemos (Let's Change), a center-right anti-populist coalition that governed until 2019, as Kircherism returned to government but as part of a broader coalition with moderate sectors of Peronism.

Asymmetrical Parallelism and Anti-populism

This and the following sections draw on the results of the research described above to account for changes in media alignments and journalistic practices following the emergence of the populist leadership.

Findings show that from 2008 on, news media shifted towards an external polarized pluralism organized around a populist/anti-populist cleavage, constituting a direct form of political parallelism. Two asymmetries characterize it. First, the anti-populist aligned media pole pre-existed and exhibited a comparatively high level of political autonomy vis-à-vis anti-populist political organization. Secondly, the stable anti-populist alignments of mainstream news media contrast with the fluctuating media representation of the pro-populist voice, given the latter's higher dependence on state resources for attaining media access.

During Néstor Kirchner's term, prior to radicalization, *Clarín's* friendly headlines reflected mutual accommodation of Kirchner with the conglomerate. At that stage, Kirchner's early left-leaning gestures raised criticism in *La Nación's* editorial pages and were praised in *Página/12* engaged journalism (Sivak 2013).

The 2008 crisis unleashed a polarizing conflict that divided the media scenario in two camps. On one side, most mainstream media, especially Clarín's outlets, *La Nación*, and the increasingly important digital-native news-website *Infobae*, became systematically oppositional. On the pro-government side stood *Página/12*, the state media, and a number of private outlets created or fueled to wage the *counterhegemonic* battle. Pluralism became external, as on each side the opposed voices and sources progressively lost presence and standing (Schuliaquer 2018).

The populist/anti-populist cleavage outlived the populist government as an organizer of media alignment. During the Cambiemos administration, those that had

moved towards anti-populism persisted in their anti-Kichnerism. All of Clarín's outlets, *La Nación* and *Infobae* remained unambiguously aligned in opposing the (populist) opposition (Reuters 2019, Becerra 2019). Pro-populist media voices shrunk as Kirchnerism lost control over the state. With little sympathy from business interests and advertisers, formerly aligned media either disappeared or re-invented themselves to survive. Ousted from free-to-air television, populist-friendly media narrowed to a cable news channel, alternative websites, small radio stations and crisis-ridden *Página/12* (Baldoni and Schuliaquer 2020).

Divisions resurfaced in journalism after the 2001 crisis. The 1990s umbrella organization *PERIODISTAS* dissolved early during Kirchner's term. The onset of the confrontation made controversies over the proper definition of journalism public. Defenders of 'independent journalism' lambasted *militant journalism* that openly assumed pro-government positions for failing its duty to stay at arm's-length from (state) power. The latter, conversely, re-signified the term *militant* as positive for professional honesty making unavoidable value-commitments explicit. From this perspective, the claim of *independence* displayed either naiveté or hypocrisy in hiding the *political* nature of journalism (Baldoni 2012, Stefoni 2019). After 2008, journalists sympathetic to the media reform left the *Foro de Periodismo Argentino* (FOPEA), the successor professional association, perceiving it as captured by Clarín and *big media* allied established journalists (informant#1).

External pluralism was progressively reflected in news media content. News outlets increasingly committed to one-sided reporting, characterized by a sort of 'selective watchdog' journalism, with (corruption) denunciations focused on the opponent (Reuters 2019, Schuliaquer 2018). While selective watchdog reporting was practiced on both sides, the mainstream media were particularly filled with judicial

filings against Kirchnerist officers, especially after 2015 (informant#7). News shows and programming presented increasingly morally charged accounts of political reality.

Politicized narratives pervaded the media now realigned along partisan differences, in both opinion and reporting. This article argues that a novel explicit critique of *populism*, prompted by the regional leftist-populist tide, progressively pervaded anti-populist aligned media narratives, a critique which mirrored establishment-blaming narratives in pro-populist media. This anti-populist discourse was novel in that the Anti-Peronist press formerly resorted to other epochal terms such as *Fascism* or *Totalitarianism* to name the populist antagonist (Cane 2011). The concept of *populism* developed in scholarly discourses in the 1960s, and only later entered the region's political language and media narratives (Semán 2021). It was novel also in that this regional surge occurred well before the globalization of media anti-populism.

To assess frequency, uses and meaning over time of the signifier *populism* in media narratives, over 9000 articles containing the terms *populismo/populista* from *La Nación*'s website between its inauguration in 1996 and 2019 were retrieved. After removing non-political uses and letters to the editor from the database (639 items), a randomized representative sample of 900 articles including news accounts, news analysis, op-eds and editorials was content-analyzed. Articles were kept as units of analysis since none contained more than one utterance.

Table 1 summarizes results from the content analyzed sample. The first row displays an important quantitative surge in items containing the search terms over time, well above the paper's online output growth. Regarding tone, over 86 percent of the articles referred to populism in a derogatory way. All the rest, but two, were coded as neutral. The coding of country/geographical references related to populism provided evidence of usage triggers. The rise from 2000 on was focused on Latin America and

Argentina. Only with the advent of Brexit and Trump's rise, did references to populism outside the region increase. Of the articles referring to Latin America excluding Argentina, over one third relate *populism* to Chávez, frequently linking him to Kirchnerism and other leftist populists. The steeper climb rate in usage from 2012-2013 on might reflect a shift from a reactive development to a stage of more deliberate, self-conscious and systematic effort by media elites to erode Kirchnerism politically through an anti-populist narrative (Schuliaquer 2018).

[*Table 1 here*]

The onset of the leftist populist wave in Latin America is also associated with changes in meanings attached to populism. To explore such changes, a set of alternative framings on what populism is about was constructed. A total of 555 frames were coded within 481 articles. As Table 1 indicates, the *economic populism frame*, which associates populism with economic policies based on redistributive deficit spending typical of mid-twentieth century state-led economies, almost reigned alone before 2000 and roughly represented half of the total frames afterwards. This presence reflects the continued standing conferred in *La Nación* to business interests and orthodox economists, who echo scholarly critique of such policies as anachronistic, unsustainable and inflationary. Used as an admonishment in the neoliberal 1990s, the frame's usage shifted to a critique of present-day populist policies that re-flourished with the 2000s commodity boom.

[*Table 2 here*]

Early after 2000, however, alternative meanings rose. Frames containing negative political interpretations of populism emerged. These represented, roughly, the other half of the coded frames. The most frequent comprise associations of populism either with *authoritarianism*, *fascism* or *totalitarianism*, or at least, with a threat to liberal-

democracy or its institutional pillars. An important subtype, for its self-reflective and constitutive implications, defines populism as a threat to *press freedom*. Other political frames relate populism to top-down manipulation of uneducated masses. Corruption also appears as an important associated phenomenon.

These sometimes overlapping frames (as seen, many utterances contain more than one) compose a delegitimizing narrative of populism as a corruption-prone power project based on demagoguery, incompatible with accountability institutions, press freedom in particular. Significantly, by 2008, in the midst of the *media war*, these political frames widely surpassed the economic critique of populism.

To determine the sources of the emergent political frames, the utterances –either quotes or directly-authored passages– on populism containing at least one such frame were coded by speaker type. Table 3 displays the ratio of media-originated utterances vis-à-vis other roles. Direct speech in editorials, reproduced foreign prestige paper pieces, news analysis by newsroom staff and outside journalistic contributors provide 39% of all utterances. Public intellectuals, represented by figures such as Mario Vargas Llosa, pundits and celebrities, rank second (23%). Party-political elites amount to 15% of the utterances, followed by scholars and other civil society groups.

[*Table 3 here*]

Media and journalism come forward as a relatively autonomous source of anti-populist critique.

Anti-populist aligned media preceded and contributed to the political mobilization of the anti-populist coalition that defeated Kirchnerism in 2015. The organizational success of the Cambiemos coalition depended upon the previous mobilization of a narrative that provided meaning to an anti-Kirchnerist identity. 'Professionals of political opinion' were central to that process of antagonistic

construction centered on the 'specter of Chavism', which conveyed the idea of the country inexorably sliding towards a Venezuelan-like statist authoritarian populism unless Kirchnerism was defeated. That existential threat, a sort of 'moral panic', reinforced an *us or them* decoding of reality that mobilized upper and middle strata politically from 2012 on (Vommaro 2017).

The precedence of media anti-populism over party-political cues suggests an autonomous functioning that persisted in the populist aftermath. In a 2016 interview, Carlos Pagni, *La Nación's* foremost political columnist, described the *traditional* news media as carrying their *own endogenous agenda* against Kirchnerism, perceived to be a *very important threat* to the press itself, even after having left office. This fact, he added, bestowed the incoming government with an unprecedented advantage in the public sphere.[3] In the run-up to the 2019 presidential elections, Cristina Fernández surprisingly backed down and entered a broader moderate coalition with non-Kirchnerist Peronist fractions, placing Alberto Fernández as presidential candidate. Fernández, her former cabinet-chief who had quit during the agrarian crisis, had been an outspoken critic of the *media war* strategy. During the campaign, he repeatedly called for a reconciliation and publicly exhibited proximity to Clarín's management. However, he did not find reciprocity in coverage. In an interview, he complained about journalism's attitude, which he likened to 'that of those Japanese soldiers surviving on islands unaware that WW2 was over'.[4]

Triggers and reproduction mechanisms

[3] https://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Carlos-Pagni-Alberto-tiene-una-vision-mas-liberal-del-poder-porque-es-un-peronista-de-la-Capital
[4] https://www.pagina12.com.ar/194805-alberto-fernandez-no-hay-nada-mas-destructivo-que-el-macrism

What factors triggered the shift during the populist tenure? What mechanisms, institutional drivers and conditions continued to operate throughout Macri's post-populist presidency, favoring the re-production of polarized asymmetrical political parallelism?

Anti-populism effectively aligned owners, newsrooms and audiences within media institutions. It streamlined the political economy, institutional and cultural logics of the mainstream news media.

In contrast to the 1990s neoliberal 'neopopulists', the leftist nature of the 2000s populists tended to align owners against populist leaderships. As part of Latin America's post-neoliberal turn, Kirchner's presidency re-politicized economic and social policy, re-instating ideological debate and blasting the orthodox-technocratic comfort zone that had allowed media owners, mostly conservative and part of the business elites, to stay above the fray. Initially, however, there was room for accommodation, especially between Kirchner and Clarín. That equilibrium crumbled by the end of Kirchner's presidency. Divergences over policy and Clarín's intentions to expand into telecommunications increased mutual distrust (Sivak 2013).

The onset of confrontations certainly influenced media elites' subsequent attitudes. Owners, managers, editors, and upper echelons in newsrooms recall these as traumatic events. Beyond strategic self-presentation, it is plausible the experience of real threat shaped their perceptions and attitudes. Among other experiences, members of the owning families of Clarín and *La Nación* faced the threat of prosecution sparked by government investigations alleging criminal complicities with the 1970s military regime. Clarín's CEO perceived the situation as an *us or them* situation in which the conglomerate's survival depended on the *demolition* of Kirchnerism (Sivak 2013, Magnetto 2016, Lacunza 2016, Fontevecchia 2018).

Such perceptions had lasting effects. They aligned corporate strategies with a political agenda. Media elites sided with the cause of preventing Argentina from walking the *populist road to Venezuela*. They also enhanced solidarity and coordination and eroded rivalries between Clarín and *La Nación* (informant#5). This convergence around the *defense* of the *independent press* acquired meaning both in the political frame of an *authoritarian populist* threat, and in the economic frame of an *anachronistic populist* obstruction to economic modernization (Magnetto 2016).

The alignments persisted in the populist aftermath. Though weakened after electoral defeat, Kirchnerism remained competitive, re-casting the media-owners' cause in terms of impeding populism's return to power. The reversal of Kirchnerist media policies reinforced the commitment. Upon assuming office, Macri dismantled the 2009 audiovisual law's ownership restrictions that had threatened Clarín's integrity and further paved the way for the conglomerate's merger with one of the telecom duopoly operators.

Editors-in-chief, senior columnists and hosts –with privileged access to business, courts and other established power players– exhibited their proximity to corporate positions during the considered period (informant#3). These media elites co-constructed the narrative in which the *independent journalism's* fate overlapped with that of democracy and freedom. This frame of the *independent press* as last barrier against *authoritarian populism* proved capable of scaling coordination capabilities and crafting cohesion internally (Sivak 2015, Magnetto 2016). Framing Kirchnerism as *populism* also provided a convenient rationalization of political alignments that deflected class and ideology from public debate.

To many established journalists, Kirchnerism's use of state power to publicly bring into question *independent journalism* was responsible for undermining a previous vibrant age in the profession (Tenembaum 2010, Fontevecchia 2018).

Newsworkers from oppositional outlets experienced certain episodes as existential threats. These 'traumatic' experiences helped align newsrooms with the owner's framing of the conflict. Everybody watched as Kirchner, in a 2009 televised press conference, denigrated *Clarín's* young reporter as an envoy of the group's CEO. Distressed workers, fearing job loss, witnessed spectacular administrative tax proceedings in the group's offices. Peaking the confrontation, reporters allegedly suffered bullying, especially in low-income areas, when identified with Clarín (Sivak 2015, Fontevecchia 2016, informants#2, #6).

Simultaneously, Clarín's outlets entered a *war journalism* mode. The corporate management monitored and interfered in newsrooms as it had not done before (Sivak 2015). That decreased autonomy persisted throughout the aftermath (informant#2).

Newsrooms' atmospheres and composition also changed with the confrontation. The politically-sensitive beats underwent processes of self-selection. Especially in Clarín's war-torn newsrooms, political coexistence became uneasy, eroding the previous internal pluralism. Discomforted with wartime news-operations, government sympathizers and several *neutrals* across newsroom hierarchies left. Some jumped to pro-government media; others took advantage of early retirement offers. A number migrated internally to non-political sections. Those remaining in 'hot' political coverage were mainly averse to Kirchnerism (Sivak 2015, Schuliaquer 2018).

By hiring celebrity journalists who linked corruption denunciation to Kirchnerist authoritarian-populism, Clarín expanded the anti-populist narrative through television

and radio news-shows to wider publics. By 2013, these broadcasts became central places of anti-Kirchnerist identity (Schuliaquer 2018, Vommaro 2017).

Meanwhile, sympathy with Kirchnerism expanded in several newsrooms. *Página/12* and newer outlets that strived during the *cultural battle* attracted young progressives critical of mainstream media, contributing to particular professional identities (Rosenberg 2018, informant#4).

The tilt towards external pluralism in newsroom composition transcended the war. Clarín's political journalism remained dominated by self-selected anti-Kirchnerist 'believers'. Although anti-populist attitudes did not necessarily mean sympathy for Cambiemos, impeding a populist return provided an incentive to protect the government in coverage. That increased one-sidedness coexisted with high turnover of young non-politicized journalists in a context of impoverished wages (informant#2, #6).

Regarding professional practices, a mode of so-called *war journalism* took over (especially in Clarín's) newsrooms. Source-journalist relations fell apart. While government officers were ordered to avoid contacting Clarín's journalists, the shutdown on government perspectives became mandatory inside the conglomerate's newsrooms. Reporters suspected of unauthorized side-contacts risked being 'frozen' (Sivak 2015, informant#2). Reliance on one-sided sources and asymmetrical standing persisted once the 'state of exception' that had justified relaxed professional standards was over. In fact, in a 2016 interview, *Clarín's* editor-in-chief during the conflict who had admitted the newsroom's switch to *war journalism* during the abnormal circumstances, acknowledged an unjustified inertia in the post-populist phase.[5]

During the aftermath, *La Nación's*, *Clarín's* and *Infobae's* reporting kept marginalizing Kirchnerist sources and/or downplaying their perspectives, while

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[5] http://www.laizquierdadiario.com/Julio-Blanck-En-Clarin-hicimos-un-periodismo-de-guerra

government narratives ran mostly unquestioned (Zunino 2019). A continued 'source endogamy' governed political reporting during the aftermath by self-perceived 'independent' journalists. Asked why Kirchnerist politicians were not contacted in covering stories involving them, editors at *Clarín* and *La Nación* alleged the 'irresponsibility' of providing voice to sources disseminating 'falsehoods' and serving 'vested interests' (Becerra 2019). Populists could not be engaged following conventional journalistic rules. Such vilifying views also offered a rationalization to the normalized practice of publishing illegally leaked fragments of state-intelligence wiretappings of populist opposition members (Schejtman and Becerra 2019).

Media closings and unprecedented newsroom downsizing during the post-populist period increased instrumental pressures on journalists and reinforced asymmetrical alignments. According to union data, 4500 layoffs or early retirements (30% of job posts under collective contract) occurred between 2015 and 2019. Increased workplace instability in newsrooms that depended on external public or private sponsoring, augmented pressures on newsworkers to adapt to the heteronomous controlling forces' agendas. During Macri's term, most of these converged in 'opposing the opposition' (informants#1,#2). In this context, being identified as Kirchnerist or militant journalist constituted an 'oil stain'. Having worked in Kirchnerist government aligned-media operated as a stigma and a veto. Non-aligned journalists risked being accused of Kirchnerism if they critically scrutinized Macri's government (informants#2, #4). A controversy over 'Central Korea', a –mostly ironical– way to call journalists attempting to stay non-partisan, illustrates these pressures. One of the leading Anti-Kirchnerist journalistic voices accused the 'representatives of postured impartiality' of whitewashing Kirchnerism when equivocally considering corruption under Macri equivalent to that of the former government. While renowned journalists could mock

the double standard and the implicit 'McCarthyism', such accusations exerted disciplining effects among the lower rank (informant#1).[6]

Silenced amid job insecurity, the field's divisions remained more or less the same during the aftermath. By the end of Macri's presidency, *Clarín's* politics editor, a 1990s consecrated investigative journalist, co-founder of FOPEA and later a leading denouncer of Kirchnerist *corruption*, was exposed holding 'promiscuous' relations, allegedly involving him in extortions, with a criminally indicted intelligence community source. The episode made the dividing lines visible again. Most prestige names from the mainstream outlets framed the filings as a *maneuver* to criminalize *independent journalism*. On the other side, the corporative attitude of closing ranks was viewed as further proof of the politically motivated double standard in the mainstream press (Schejtman and Becerra 2019).

Media and journalistic cultivation of polarized audiences also created constraints. The confrontation with Kirchnerism led to widespread cultivation of anti-populist audiences with subsequent lock-in effects. As seen, popular figures were hired to broaden anti-populism to non-politicized audiences. Reportedly, in turn, those audiences exerted polarizing pressures in the aftermath. The host with the largest national radio ratings reported rating drops and angry complaints, each time audience-resisted Kirchnerists were interviewed (Fontevecchia 2018). Similarly, the above-mentioned *Clarín* editor admitted the paper's vulnerability vis-à-vis strategic leaking, given the value ascribed by its readership to exposés on Kirchnerist corruption.[7] With Cambiemos' electoral defeat in 2019, some celebrity journalists suffered shutdown

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[6] See: Luis Majul, 'Corea del Centro y el peso de los hechos', *La Nación* 17/11/2017 [https://www.lanacion.com.ar/opinion/corea-del-centro-y-el-peso-de-los-hechos-nid2083087/]; María O'Donnell, 'No sé dónde queda Corea del Centro', *Infobae* 13/11/2017 [https://www.infobae.com/opinion/2017/11/13/no-se-donde-queda-corea-del-centro/].
[7] https://www.perfil.com/noticias/medios/daniel-santoro-por-net-todo-lo-que-nunca-dijo-sobre-la-causa-del-espionaje-ilegal.phtml

campaigns or treason accusations from social media followers as they attempted to back away from Anti-Kirchnerism. These hostile reactions reportedly drove them to swiftly pull back and re-affirm their anti-populist positions (Baldoni and Schuliaquer 2020).

Discussion

This article argues that the populism/anti-populism divide has set up a distinct form of political parallelism. Alignments went beyond editorial pages: they manifested in news media coverage of politics and in journalistic practice. With important asymmetries, the media were central vehicles and articulators of the polarized political narratives that gained ground after 2008. This broadened conceptualization/usage of *political parallelism* provides insights on the extent and alternative ways in which media and journalism reflect and participate in ideological and factional divisions of society.

Critiques of the concept of political parallelism as 'provincial' have seen two (far from universal) requirements as necessary: politically contested clearly-defined cleavages, and stable institutionalized relationships between media and political agents (de Albuquerque 2013, 2018). The present study shows that, in certain settings, the presence of enduring cleavages may suffice for a meaningful conceptualization of political parallelism.

Cleavages are politicized divisions. While such cleavages might have been manifested in institutionalized party systems, as in much of Western Europe, they might also be constructed along other lines manifested in political identities or subcultures, but not necessarily in stable electoral-political organizations. Consequently providing a broader definition of political parallelism should include a focus on media linkages with such politico-ideological articulations (Hallin and Mancini 2012) and the ways in which they structure forms of external pluralism. As Mancini (2012) noted, parallelism entails

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an external pluralism expressing the contending general interpretations of society, its problems, their causes and their remedies.

The populism/anti-populism divide that structured political conflict in Argentina after 2008 was associated with exactly this kind of re-organization of the mediated public sphere.

Anti-populism in Argentina and in Latin America is more than an extended negative affect. In a region with a long history of "classic" populist politics, anti-populism constitutes an ideologically thicker phenomenon compared to Northern anti-populisms where broader negative affects seem insufficient to conceptualize political identities (Moffit 2018). Recent historical research has contended that anti-populism in Argentina comprises a –positive– vision of society and politics that exists autonomously from populism itself (Semán 2020). If Kirchnerism originated within the (leftist) Peronist tradition, Anti-Kirchnerism echoes a lineage of cultural frames (comprising Anti-Peronism), that envisions *populism* as the country's central economic and political problem and the solution in its definitive defeat.

Torcal and Mainwaring (2003) maintained that Latin America is fertile ground to refine cleavage theory by challenging mechanistic-sociological interpretations of party-system formation. The region's alternative political development brings forward the extent to which cleavage formation depends on political agency. Political elites play a crucial role in cleavage crafting, by emphasizing or diminishing themes of social, cultural or political division.

With the rise of media anti-populism, this study shows how, at least on one pole, media assume autonomous roles as bearers and cultural organizers of a mobilizing anti-populist narrative and as articulators of anti-populist voices from civil society. This

relatively autonomous agency preceded and paved the way for the emergence of anti-populist electoral organization.

Arguably, the political agency involved in the construction and reproduction of cleavages is not necessarily an exclusive domain of party-electoral elites. This article poses that, in political crises followed by populist emergence, media elites may become (re-)politicized and enter such political roles.

The driving and autonomous political role exhibited by anti-populist aligned media contrasts with the relatively subordinated and dependent position of pro-populist media *vis-à-vis* the populist political leadership. This asymmetry, characteristic to this form of parallelism, adds to the imbalance in media representation, given the anti-populist alignment of dominant players in the news media market and the stronger dependence of pro-populist voices on state resources –and therefore on populist tenure– to increase their clout in the mediatized public sphere.

What have been the drivers of such an asymmetrical parallelism, particularly of the politicization of mainstream news media? Interacting causes certainly operated at different levels. Party system demise certainly offers favorable contextual conditions. As observed, populist emergence occurs typically amid discredited established parties, which initially complicates electoral strategies for anti-populists. Especially in contexts of leftist populisms, established media offer much friendlier venues to push anti-populist political agendas (Van Dyck 2019). This initial politico-electoral weakness prompts populist leaders, in turn, to identify the media as plausible incarnations of anti-popular established power.

However, as shown, media have acted not simply as passive recorders of discontents, but have been, to some extent, independent organizers of oppositional mobilization. Anti-populist motives were key in the process of media becoming

political actors, serving both to trace the political boundary and to coherently align owners, newsrooms and audiences.

The regional climate of anti-neoliberal critique and the export-commodity boom provided room to govern on the Left for nascent populist actors. That policy turn alienated business and journalistic elites, prompting their self-conscious oppositional (re-)politicization. In a leaked private conversation held at the US Embassy in 2007, shortly before the outbreak of the media war, on the mounting media-government tensions, *Clarín's* vice-editor-in-chief described the situation as one in which "the press occupies a role in other democracies played by the opposition" (Becerra and Lacunza, 2012: 51).

The cause of defeating populism provided media elites an ideological rationalization to their opposition to statist-heterodox economic policy. As shown, anti-populism also aligned the political agenda of ownership with that of journalists and media professionals, as it provided a narrative to decode experiences understood as *existential threats* during the *media war*.

What was the political economy of media anti-populism? What sustained anti-populist news media? Despite populism's radical media reformism and discretionary regulatory policies, the core media and non-media business interests funding anti-populist outlets managed to survive until Kirchnerism left office. Upon taking office in 2015, the anti-populist government declared "the end of the war of the state against journalism", switched policy orientation toward liberalization of communication markets, and swiftly relaxed ownership-limit regulations to "pay off" Clarín by paving the way for its telecommunication expansion ambitions (Kitzberger and Schuliaquer 2022).

Past events and inherited institutional patterns can be expect to wield significant influence on national media systems (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Argentina's Peronism, and its contentious relations with embattled elite and commercial press institutions, constituted the poster child of Latin American mid-20th Century *classical populism* (Cane 2011). Such historical precedents raise questions over the influence of historical legacies in the present form of political parallelism. The extent of historical legacies in journalistic organizations, cultures, frames and practices, is hard to determine and exceeds this research.

Having historical precedents in conflict between media and populist elites can logically and empirically be rejected as a necessary condition for the emergence of political parallelism organized around the populism/anti-populism axis. The global tide of populist politics and the linked global expansion of establishment media anti-populism (Goyvaerts and De Cleen 2020) provides reasons to think the cleavage might further influence alignments in the mediated public sphere.

However, it seems plausible that several mechanisms activating important legacies might be at play in providing or at least reinforcing the particular features of the present form of political parallelism. The following anecdote illustrates some of the multiple ways in which legacies might be expressed. *La Nación's* longtime media/entertainment editor, author of a standard scholarly book on Perón and the media in the 1980s, rose in newsroom hierarchy and was re-assigned as politics editor with the outbreak of the *media war* (informant#8). In 2011, his book was re-printed with a new foreword devoted to embedding *Kirchnerism* in the lineage of Peronist threats to press freedom (Sirvén 2011). Recent historical research has noted how such interpretive frameworks, first manifested in press narratives, were adopted by academia, leaving the assumption of Perón's authoritarianism as the sole cause of conflict between the

populist regime and the press unchallenged (Cane 2011). The anecdote shows a context in which the authorized scholarly narratives of the press's fate under populism's authoritarian script, spilled back into media discourse.

Argentina's present competitive political setting, however, makes an important difference for understanding the type of political parallelism. In contrast to the mid-20th century classic experience, the populist party left office through elections, not through a coup and/or radical regime change. The asymmetrical features underlined for the current Argentine case seem unlikely to stabilize in more hegemonic-authoritarian versions of populism: media representation balances fall out quite differently in contemporary competitive authoritarian contexts of populist polarization. As the cases of Turkey and Venezuela suggest, were the populist leaders *won* –so to say– the *media war*, the parallelism's asymmetry goes the opposite way, with pro-populist media dominant (Yıldırım et al 2021).

The described case of polarized external pluralism centered around the populism/anti-populism cleavage differs in certain respects from the corresponding dimensions of Hallin and Mancini's (2004) *Polarized Pluralist* model. Comparisons of media systems in southern Europe and Latin America have generally noticed similarities in media market developments and, especially, in professional autonomy, with *clientelism* in contexts of poorly developed rational-legal authority structures as common salient feature of state-media connections (Hallin and Papathanassopoulos 2002). As Vaccari (2011) noticed, however, Italian parallelism has persistently been associated, even in contexts of party decline, with advocacy traditions in journalism that uphold the right –and duty– to take sides in political debate. Advocacy traditions are not absent in Argentinean journalism. The idea of "illusory neutrality", as seen, resounded in newsrooms with populist sympathies. Meanwhile, in an apparent paradox,

independence from partisan-politics and the Fourth Estate model are the main role orientations invoked in anti-populist aligned media. Dissonances between such normative claims and actual journalistic practice are neutralized by the naturalized assumption of populism's aberrant –existentially threatening– character, which sets it beyond the rules of neutrality and facticity. Downgrading of *populists* as sources in coverage and other practices seem therefore justified.

Research on Spain shows a recent form of parallelism characterized by mounting negative-partisan coverage (Baumgartner and Bonafont 2015). Partisan differences in coverage overemphasizing "bad news about the rival" and silencing faults of allies resemble the "selective watchdog" mode observed in Argentina's parallelism. However, negative coverage in (pre-populist) Spain's "almost perfect parallelism" differs from that in Argentina's in that it does not deny legitimacy and standing to an out-group. A common ground subsists based on continued journalistic deference to and indexing of state sources.

The polarized politics described by Hallin and Mancini entailed *spatial* polarization characterized by a plurality of parties exhibiting great distance on the left-right ideological spectrum in parliamentary consensus democracies. Contrastingly, the present populist politics, lodged in presidentialist-majoritarian settings favoring a winner-take-all competition to represent the whole, implies a *constitutive* polarization that entails the moral dichotomization of the political field. However, as with all Latin American leftist post-neoliberal populists, dichotomization enclosed a suddenly widened ideological gap, aligning populists with statist-redistributionist tendencies and anti-populists with free market and private property defenses (Roberts 2021).

The framing of populism as an intrinsic threat to media freedom, dominant in scholarship on media and populism in Latin America, prevents distinguishing anti-

populism as a phenomenon and perceiving media as acting politically. Much of what occurs in political communication under populism is thereby missed.

To measure the leftist-populisms' performance in media freedom that literature rely mainly on standardized press freedom indexes to measure the dependent variable. Discussing these ratings and their implicit normative assumptions about the media's role, Hallin (2020b) underscored the validity problem intrinsic to bracketing thicker contexts of differing media roles in political conflict. Considering such contexts casts doubt on whether ratings reflect degrees in media freedom or instead conflict between media and state elites. This case study provides such a context-inclusive perspective to look at political contestation dynamics and media systems in highly polarized pluralistic settings. Harsh populist rhetoric towards media does not seem to have prevented media's freedom to reply in mirror-like, vitriolic, delegitimizing and mobilizing fashion.

The picture of political communication under leftist-populism in Latin America presented here exposes an equally politicized, dichotomizing and Manichean anti-populist media, a sort of populist-style anti-populism, or inverted populism of anti-populist media. The content analysis revealed the rise of an anti-populist media narrative that brands "populism" as a political evil incompatible with liberal democracy.

The observation of polarizing (anti-)populist narratives bears on scholarly concerns with the potential (unintended) media contributions to populism. Affinities between media, journalistic, commercial and populist logics could equally extend to anti-populist logics. As frequently distinguished in analysis of *media populism*, populism can circulate *through* media gatekeeping or can be initiated *by* media professionals as originators of populist discourse (Wettstein et al 2018). In the coding of (anti-)populist frame utterers, the gatekeeping role is comprised by the abundant quoting and opinion space provided to anti-populist voices from politics and civil

society. However, about 40% of coded frames were uttered directly (at least with no declared source), by journalists and media professionals.

As the 1990s discontents rose in the region, a sort of *media populism* was manifested in journalism's claims to represent a society victim to a self-serving "political class". Reinforced by a rising liberal watchdog role model, *denuncias*, a common regional form of journalistic exposé structured around an idea of a transgressive power offending a *demos*, soared. Researching on the context of Chávez's rise, Samet (2017) noticed that this structurally populistic journalistic form significantly influenced both the formation of the populist and the anti-populist political camps.

Concepts of instrumental logics such as *capture*, *patrimonialism*, and *clientelism* dominate scholarly characterizations of media-politics connections in Latin America and, more broadly, of Non-Western democracies. Such concepts tend to depict media-politics relations as made-up of fluid, circumstantial and shallow instrumental alliances. The broadened concept of parallelism, instead, captures emerging (perhaps recurrent) articulations and media-politics alignments in Latin America that have mostly escaped the instrumentalist conceptual frameworks of scholarly research. Social formations such as the anti-populist media characterized here do not come forward if cleavages and political identities remain unaddressed.

Political Parallelism and instrumentalism are analytically *distinct*. Mancini (2012) opposed *parallelism*, as a form of media allegiance motivated by stable interpretive frameworks of society, to *instrumental* uses of media to build contingent support or void pressure for particularistic economic-political goals. Both forms co-exist and combine empirically. In certain contexts, instrumental logics may reinforce parallelism. The distinction might be useful to further explore alternative combinations and/or interactions. Instrumentalism is deep-seated and pervades the region's media-

politics relations. During phases of relative media de-alignment and elite collusion, as during the 1990s, instrumentalism accounts for much of momentary alignments in power politics fought in the media. However, during politicized and elite-conflict-ridden periods, as occurs with populist tides, the structuring role of cleavages and political views in organizing the political news media described as parallelism gains prominence over instrumental logics. As hypothesized by Hallin (2020a), Latin America's media systems may be characterized by context-dependent longer-term internal shifts between collusive-depoliticized and polarized-politicized phases.

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Tables

Table 1. 'Populism' in *La Nación* over time

		1996-1997	1998-1999	2000-2001	2002-2003	2004-2005	2006-2007	2008-2009	2010-2011	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	Total
Content analyzed sample	N	16	34	34	61	61	69	55	65	85	104	157	159	900
Argentina references		11	15	11	32	27	29	33	41	49	66	91	95	500
LatAm (non-Argentina) references	N	3	9	7	15	16	24	10	10	18	7	15	12	146
Non-LatAm references	N	3	5	10	6	5	7	6	4	4	15	34	37	136
No reference	N	0	5	7	8	12	9	7	8	13	16	20	21	126

Table 2. Frames on 'Populism' in *La Nación* over time

		1996-1997	1998-1999	2000-2001	2002-2003	2004-2005	2006-2007	2008-2009	2010-2011	2012-2013	2014-2015	2016-2017	2018-2019	Total
Total coded frames	N	7	11	13	31	42	46	40	54	73	69	92	77	555
	N	7	4	8	19	17	17	11	23	30	30	49	40	255

Economic policy frame	%	100	36,4	61,5	61,3	40,5	37	26,8	42,6	41,1	43,5	53,3	51,9	45,4
Threat to lib-dem (free press) frame	N	-	1(0)	2(0)	4(0)	10 (1)	12(0)	11(4)	13(2)	18(4)	10(1)	12(1)	13(3)	106 (16)
	%	0	9,1 (0)	15,4 (0)	12,9 (0)	23,8 (2,4)	26,9 (0)	26,8 (9,8)	24,1 (3,7)	24,7 (5,5)	14,5 (1,5)	13 (1,1)	16,9 (3,9)	19,8 (2,8)
Manipulation frame	N	-	2	-	3	8	7	5	5	7	10	9	11	67
	%	0	18,2	0	9,7	19	15,2	12,2	9,3	9,6	14,5	9,8	14,3	11,9
Corruption frame	N	-	-	-	1	1	-	1	3	3	3	9	5	26
	%	0	0	0	3,2	2,4	0	2,4	5,6	4,1	4,3	9,8	6,5	4,6
Other pol. frames	N	-	4	3	4	6	10	13	10	14	16	13	8	101
	%	0	36,4	23,1	12,9	14,3	21,7	31,7	18,5	19,1	23,2	14,1	10,4	18,2

Table 3. Utterances with a political frame by speaker type

Total	249 (236 coded)
Newspaper editorials	23
Foreign press editorials	5
Journalists	65 (42 LN staff)
Public intellectuals, pundits, celebrities	55
Political elites	37 (9 foreign)
Academia	21
Economists & business representatives	12
Civil Society, Think tanks, Intl orgs.	11
Other	7