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## Media, hegemony, and polarization in Latin America

*Jairo Lugo-Ocando and Sara García Santamaría*

The news media have always been considered an essential pillar of liberal democracy: the fourth estate. It is not a coincidence that this fourth estate underpinned the transition from authoritarian rule to liberal democracy that took place in Latin America and central and Eastern Europe (CEE) during the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>1</sup> In both transitional processes, the emerging political forces saw an opportunity in the media to connect with a volatile and depoliticized citizenry, replacing the old discredited pillars of society (whether unions, the military, or the church) and progressively building a new hegemony. However, the influence of the media in guiding and strengthening these transitional democracies still remains unclear today. Currently, the idea of an inherently democratizing media holds little weight, as young democratic institutions are often too weak and volatile.<sup>2,3,4</sup> Inadequate regulation, polarization, and the lack of an independent journalistic culture can render media outlets captive to both political and market influences and, therefore, unable to fulfil their democratizing potential.

Over the last few years, a wave of left-wing governments in Latin America has brought the media's democratizing role into public debate, giving visibility to long-standing popular demands. For the most part, this new Latin American Left has focused its discourses and policies on the region's elitist media systems. For instance, governments in Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador, and Bolivia have profoundly reformed media regulation in a process

aimed normatively at democratizing media ownership. In some cases, this has translated effectively in the redistribution of, for example, broadcasting licences, which have been taken away from private corporations and given to the state, civil society organizations, and private individuals who have openly supported the current governments.

Nevertheless, the trend in Latin America, as in nascent central and Eastern European democracies, has been overall a coexistence of formal rules and informal practices. In the case of Latin America this means a situation in which old media systems have not been completely removed from the equation or still play a significant role in defining and shaping public opinion in those countries. Moreover, while these governments publically present media reforms as flawlessly democratic, the application of these allegedly democratizing policies is endangered in practice by the persistence of old journalistic cultures, corporate interests, and poor governance.

The reality on the ground is that media reforms in Latin America and central and Eastern Europe are taking place in highly polarized climates, with the executive branch seeking to increase its communicational hegemony at the expense of public scrutiny. In this context, the liberal ideals of media pluralism and independence are in jeopardy. For instance, attacks on freedom of speech have become commonplace either through the discretionary hand-outs of state advertising and licences, or the debatable criminalization of libel. Furthermore, certain Latin American executives have designed what seems to be an ‘anti-press playbook’, aimed at strengthening their communicational hegemony, threatening journalists with lawsuits, and closing critical news organizations.

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between media and democracy through the efforts that many Latin American left-wing governments have undertaken over

the last decade, often finding a mismatch between discourse and practice. In the following paragraphs, we argue that polarization has become an essential trait in the relationship between left-wing governments and the media in Latin America. Furthermore, we suggest that this polarization corresponds to a populist conceptualization of liberal democratic institutions, such as the news media, which are seen as dominated by the ruling elite and, therefore, antagonistic to socially just, people-centred agendas. In our view, these actions and approaches have offered an opportunity to scrutinize the traditionally elitist and partisan structures of the media in Latin America.

The question that arises is whether left-wing governments in Latin America are creating a favourable environment for the democratization of media systems or, as some suspect, simply institutionalizing political control, recycling old *clientelar* networks, and scrapping pluralism from the agenda. Looking at the Latin American case, it seems that the news media can only become a democratizing force so long as political institutions become transparent along the way, thereby guaranteeing media independence.<sup>5</sup> Finally, we believe that current debates in Latin America offer important lessons on the relationship between media and politics in the still young central and Eastern European democracies, exposing the gap between democratizing policies and discourses, on the one hand, and informal practices, on the other.

## **Historical Context**

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the Cold War sparked a transitional period towards liberal democracy in central and Eastern Europe. These external historical events had also an exponential impact in young Latin American democracies, setting a favourable stage for empowerment and relative emancipation from US oversight. However, the transition that

started in the late twentieth century was not an easy path for most Latin American countries. In 1982, the region experienced a deep recession and debt crises that lasted until the end of the twentieth century, characterized by the fall of international prices of raw materials and commodities, upon which their economies depended and still depend. Most governments decided to fight the crises by embracing the implementation of austerity measures and market liberalization policies, inspired by the so-called Washington Consensus.<sup>6</sup> In this unpredictable context, not only political parties, but democracy itself, faced a growing climate of popular cynicism and growing anti-political sentiment.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, people's perceptions regarding the ability of traditional political institutions to foster good governance and public debate were severely eroded.

The erosion of 'politics as usual' brought the whole party system to the brink of disarray, damaging democratic institutions and leaving a power vacuum. This gap, though, did not last long, as it was rapidly filled by de facto powers, such as private corporations, the military, or the mass media.<sup>8,9</sup> In this context, the traditional media outlets became a leading political force, assuming the role of political opposition.<sup>10</sup> The problem that arose in this context was that media outlets found themselves leading the transitional change with obsolete tools (media structure, values and practices), which endangered the media independence in the democratizing process.

In the midst of change, most Latin American media outlets carried the burden of a long-standing subjugation to national and international corporations, with extensive interests in key industries such as banking, mining, or agriculture. Therefore, the traditional media outlets, which in the past had even backed military juntas and repression, were immersed in a 'symbiotic-dependence' with conservative politics and the private sector, overall supporting

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elite interests. This elite-run news agenda still persists in all its forms, as seen during the 2002 coup attempt in Venezuela, when the mainstream media briefly supported Pedro Carmona's forty-eight-hour de facto government.

## The Fight over Media Hegemony

The turn of the century brought a series of political changes and debates that would eventually alter the traditional media allegiances. The election of Hugo Chávez as Venezuela's president can be interpreted in many ways as a sort of catharsis that released the popular accumulated frustration and resentment towards old political and economic elites. The fact is that, by the beginning of the new millennium, several Latin American countries had elected left-wing presidents who promoted social reforms and wealth redistribution agendas. While the ascension of these radical agendas has redefined the range of political possibilities in Latin America, it has been unable to do so in a climate of consensus and debate. On the contrary, the fight for hegemony between old and new elites has taken place in an increasingly hostile environment, leading to widespread ideological, class-based, and ethnic polarization,<sup>11,12</sup> which has been especially tangible in places such as Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Nicaragua, or Venezuela.<sup>13</sup>

In the midst of these sweeping changes, the mainstream media found themselves ever closer to the long-standing elites, leading to recurrent attacks on the new Left, and the defence of conservative politics. The brief overthrow of Chávez in Venezuela in 2002, mentioned above, has become a symbol of media opposition to democratically elected governments in Latin America, promoting what Eleazar Díaz Rangel<sup>14</sup> has described as '*mediated coups*'.

In fact, as some have suggested, ‘*the private mainstream media still owes the Venezuelan society a good explanation about their reprehensible behaviour during those years.*’<sup>15</sup> This ‘*media war*’, initiated in Venezuela, opened the confrontation between left-wing governments and private media outlets, now seen as major political players able to galvanize the opposition against the government and as a target for reform for those trying to build a new hegemonic order.

The new Latin America’s Left’s attitude towards the media can be seen as stemming from a populist conceptualization of politics and, therefore, of media policy.<sup>16,17,18</sup> In this context, the news media are seen from a dualistic perspective, friendly when advancing the executive’s goals, and hostile when obstructing them. The Latin American context has been characterized by fierce hostility towards the mainstream private media, and an idealization of public and collectively owned media outlets. This antagonistic view of the media manifests itself as a discourse (through recurrent verbal, legal, and physical attacks on media outlets and journalists by those in power) and as a political strategy (through broadening the scope of state-owned media, supervising private media content and ownership, and promoting a restrictive regulation of freedom of speech).

Overall, the consolidation of power by left-wing populist leaders in Latin America marked the beginning of a profound transformation in the relationship between the news media, the market, and the government. Marcelino Bisbal suggests that Latin American populist-leftist leaders have searched for a new hegemony through ‘*juridical control, political control, governmental control and constitutional control*’ over democratic institutions, including the news media.<sup>19</sup> In fact, the new scenario has seen left-wing leaders and their supporters fighting for a greater share of the media space, creating a ‘*media bypass*’ between

the executive and citizens that dismisses any critical voices.<sup>20</sup> This aspiration for the hegemonic control of information and communication flows has been the acknowledged goal of many media reforms in the region. For instance, Andrés Izarra, former minister of Communications and Information under Chávez's government and currently Director General of *Telesur*, declared that the Venezuelan state was promoting 'state-led communicational and informative hegemony aimed at winning the ideological battle' against old elites.<sup>21</sup> It is this context in which many Latin American countries are currently undergoing an information battle, in which media hegemony has become essential to sustaining public support.<sup>22</sup> In any case, in the midst of populist confrontation and polarization, coming both from the executives and from oppositional parties, the democratizing potential of the media is being compromised.

## The Polarization of Media Debates

At the centre of this battle for hegemony lies the predominant populist character of the new left-wing governments. Therefore it is worth taking into account the consequences of sustained populist media discourses and practices. Benjamin Arditi<sup>23</sup> considers that populism can serve both democratic and undemocratic goals and, therefore, can endanger democratic debates in its extreme variant. For instance, when populist leaders frame their relationship with the private media as a 'media war' for communicational hegemony, attempt to monopolies all channels of communication, and silence other channels of mediation, they are compromising democratic debates. This was the case under Juan Domingo Perón (1895–1974) in Argentina and of the Fascist regimes in Europe between the 1930s and 1940s.

This is also what, more or less, has occurred throughout Latin America recently. While not being inherently undemocratic, the discretionary use of media regulation by populist governments has had a negative impact in the region. In fact, populist governments have often transferred their political responsibilities to oppositional parties while contributing to political polarization by articulating an *'us' versus 'them'* logic, in which any criticism is labelled as conspiracy and treason. Therefore, a populist view of the media limits the scope of what can and cannot be reported, as it forces journalists from both sides of the political spectrum to embrace extreme positions. Consequently, moderate voices, alternative views, and calls for consensus are all but excluded from media debates thereby undermining pluralism.

In a context of extreme polarization, the elements that by nature would contribute to a healthy political debate are partitioned into opposing mirrors, reflecting almost unrecognizable caricatures of reality. This dichotomy is expressed in a deeply confrontational environment, where both sides try fervently to establish their own hegemonic interests. Therefore, the media landscape in Latin America is now deeply divided between official media (used as an extension of the government's propaganda machine), and corporate media (owned by the privileged classes and aimed at preserving traditional privileges by opposing redistributive policies). This landscape favours radicals from both sides of the spectrum, which have become too complacent with their propped up media, which they can use in their own benefit. Summarizing, this polarized climate harbours self-censorship, oppresses oppositional voices, and virulently undermines the democratizing role that journalism is expected to play in liberal democracies.

In great part Latin American new democracies, pro-government and anti-government media saturate their narratives with exaggerated versions of their own realities, fostering an environment of confrontational politics in which opposing ends of society refuse to negotiate or even recognize their counterparts. Regrettably, one must conclude that the utopian creation of an impartial and independent media which promotes public debate and pluralism, has never been a priority for populist governments in the region. Instead, these governments have prioritized national and communal rights (such as widespread access and mixed ownership) over individual ones, discarded as simple bourgeois privileges.<sup>24,25</sup> The problem is that national and communal rights are unilaterally decided by the executive branch of the government, which ends up monopolizing policymaking, licences, advertising, and access.

## **First Casualty of War**

The exclusionary and confrontational rhetoric of friends and foes, which lies at the core of populism, necessarily intensifies the polarization of political debates.<sup>26</sup> In these bellicose environments, journalistic professionalism and independence are often the first casualties. Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa has been known for his discursive hostility, developing a wide range of disqualifications against the privately owned media. In Correa's discourse, oppositional media represents oligarchic interests and disrupt, rather than fosters democratic debates. Indeed, Correa has repeatedly accused critical media and journalists of terrorism, fascism, and fundamentalism, calling them 'fatherland merchants', 'cheerleaders of neoliberalism' or 'informative mafia'. As Correa put it himself in his inauguration ceremony: 'if the press defames, misinforms, slanders our governments, it is freedom of speech. If a

president replies to them, it is an attack on freedom of speech. Some have more freedom than others' (24 May 2013).<sup>27,28</sup>

In many cases, left-wing governments have used legitimate causes to lobby for media laws that limit, or could potentially undermine, freedom of speech. For instance, in 2012 the Nicaraguan Supreme Court passed a polemical law that criminalized all violence against women, including '*media violence*'. As a result, satire and criticism of female politicians, including the First Lady, could be interpreted as a criminal offence and, as journalists and opposition parties have warned, promote self-censorship. Similarly, Bolivia's recent *Law against Racism and all forms of Discrimination* counts on widespread popular support, as it fights against racist hate speech that has characterized the mainstream media. According to Bolivia's President, Evo Morales, the goal of the law is to regulate the '*excessive freedom of speech*' in the press, which has repeatedly published racial attacks against indigenous people, including himself.<sup>29</sup> However, critics such as the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Church (CEB) have warned that the law could endanger freedom of expression altogether, as it grants the government discretionary powers to close, suspend, and fine any media outlets spreading allegedly 'racist' or 'discriminatory' ideas.<sup>30</sup>

In this context of media legislative reform, Hugo Chávez's Venezuela has been a clear reference point in the populist restructuring of media systems in Latin America. However, such restructuring has not been without contradiction. Although the 1999 Venezuelan Constitution addressed freedom of speech as a human right, this did not prevent the government from increasing its discretionary powers over the media three years later, after the so-called '*media coup*'. The result was the approval of the *Law on Social Responsibility in*

*Radio and Television* (known by the public as *Ley Resorte*) in 2004, which was extended to electronic media in 2010.

Whereas the law dedicated a title to ‘democratisation and citizen participation’, another segment forbade the dissemination of a series of vaguely worded offences, such as messages fomenting citizens’ anxiety, and disregarding democratic authorities. The *Resorte* law has been key in dissuading criticism by broadcasters, as it imposes substantial sanctions, from heavy fines to revocation of licenses, which have been applied to over 200 radio and television stations around the country. For some, the implementation of restrictive legislation is part of the government’s premeditated strategy to replace the hegemony of private broadcasters with the hegemony of state-owned and state-friendly media.

## **More Laws, Less Freedom**

The steps taken by the Venezuelan government have been quickly followed by other regional governments, including those in Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Honduras, where the use of legislative powers to undermine the critical role of the media is now a widespread practice. For instance, the 2014 Ecuadorean media law has been officially presented as a necessary step to democratize the role of the media. As in other neighbouring countries, it redistributes media broadcasting licenses. However, critics have defined it as a ‘gagging law’ (*ley mordaza*), as it gives responsibility over media monitoring to government-appointed regulatory bodies, compromising the fairness of the process.

Likewise, the new Ecuadorian law punishes with prison time the publication of non-verified and non-contrasted information, an ironic measure that criminalizes whistleblowing in the same country that famously gave asylum to Julian Assange, WikiLeaks’ founder and

editor-in-chief. Finally, the independence of the media in that country has also been eroded through the harassment of media workers. For instance, a study from the NGO *Fundamedios* denounced more than eighteen government lawsuits against Ecuadorian media editors and journalists between 2007 and 2011, which could potentially pose liabilities worth millions of US dollars and lead to the bankruptcy of many of the mainstream media outlets in the country.

The examples above suggest that, in the face of tangible, or imagined, threats to their authority and hegemony (such as coup attempts, separatist movements, and social unrest), the new Left in Latin America has opted for populist discourses that claim media democratization, while in practice increasing their own media hegemony.

## Conclusion

The media in Latin America and CEE have undergone a period of transformation over the past few decades. As we have seen, the recent wave of left-wing Latin American governments has put the role of the media on the public agenda, trying to correct past imbalances (such as ownership concentration, elitism, and politicization) through media reform. There is no doubt that many of these reforms were necessary and have been a first step for democratizing media systems, allowing them to go hand in hand with other institutions in the search for good governance.

The main contribution of the new Latin American Left has been precisely that, opening debates on the role that the media should play in democratic societies. For instance, the recent Uruguayan media law approved by José Mujica's executive suggests that left-wing governments can efficiently reform media systems, '*providing a legal and regulatory*

*environment that allows the media to be an effective watchdog*<sup>31</sup> and a democratizing force in the region.<sup>32</sup> In the midst of these confrontations, a new consciousness is arising among some news organizations, which are steadily distancing themselves from partisan interests and adopting an active watchdog role: scrutinizing the political elites, promoting anti-corruption campaigns, and investigating human rights abuses.<sup>33,34</sup> In some countries, like Brazil, they have even publicly revisited their political past.<sup>35,36</sup> These are the real and present hopes for the democratization of media structures in Latin America.

Despite these glimpses of hope, there seems to prevail, however, a gap between theory and practice. Opposition parties, journalist associations and international non-profit organizations in Latin America still observe with caution the ‘democratizing’ changes claimed by left-wing populist leaders. According to these sceptical views, media reforms have not promoted a clear pluralisation of media spaces, but have only shifted the hegemonic control of media spaces from private to state-controlled hands. The new Left, they argue, has merely recycled the elitist and *clientele*-media model they themselves criticize, selectively favouring friendly media outlets while attacking critical ones.<sup>37</sup> They point to lawsuits against journalists, the discretionary allocation of public advertisement and licenses, the criminalization of libel, and the governmental supervision of the media as some examples. Furthermore, they highlight that the most explicit threats are currently coming from state-led attempts to gain hegemonic control over media communications, something that has been fiercely resisted by the private media so far (with mixed degrees of success).

The point is that Latin American populist leaders have embraced polarization both as a discourse and as a political communication strategy, often counting on their constituencies’ unconditional support.<sup>38</sup> In our view, the problem is the struggle for communicational

hegemony in itself, as it inevitably leads to the Manichaeian polarization of media spaces between ‘us’ and ‘them’, marginalizing not only the ‘other’ but all alternative, consensual voices. We also believe that this populist division of society in two irreconcilable blocks has serious consequences for democratic deliberative debate, ideological pluralism, dialogue, and collaboration, thereby hindering the development of that strong public sphere that the region so desperately needs.

The combination of polarizing and populist views of the media in Latin American and ECC transitional democracies, such as Hungary,<sup>39</sup> has become an effective strategy for old and new elites to hold audiences captive to their own interests, while claiming to represent the popular will. As long as both sides of the political spectrum continue to address only those in their own camp, Latin American populist leaders will continue to uphold the region’s long tradition of low journalistic and democratic standards. This is the real and present danger of establishing hegemony by means of media polarization; a harsh lesson from which central and Eastern European societies should learn if they wish to consolidate robust democracies in the near future.

Abstract

The news media have always been considered an essential pillar of liberal democracy. However, the democratizing potential of the media in transitional societies still remains unclear. In Latin America, democratization processes have long coexisted with oligarchic media systems. Over the last few years, a wave of left-wing governments has brought the democratizing role of the media into public debate, giving visibility to long-standing popular demands. While these governments have hailed new media laws as the panacea for democratizing the media, the trend has translated into the coexistence of formal rules and informal practices. In this chapter, we argue that the failure of current media policies is due to a mixture of populist politics, polarizing discourses, and a weak rule of law.

Keywords

Latin America, media, new left, polarization, populism

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<sup>1</sup> Coronel, S. 'Corruption and the watchdog role of the news media,' in: *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform* (Washington: The World Bank, 2009), p. 52,

<<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Books/Public%20Sentinel.htm>>

<sup>2</sup> Voltmer, K. 'The media, government accountability, and citizen engagement,' in *Public sentinel: News media and governance reform* (Washington: The World Bank, 2009),

<<http://www.hks.harvard.edu/fs/pnorris/Books/Public%20Sentinel.htm>>

<sup>3</sup> Waisbord, S. 'Between support and confrontation: Civic society, media reform, and populism in Latin America,' *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 4: 1 (2011), pp. 97–117.

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<sup>4</sup> Jebril, N., Stetka, V., and Loveless, M. *Media and democratisation: What is known about the role of the mass media in transitions to democracy* 2013, pp. 1–52. Available at:

<<https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/publication/media-and-democratisation>>

<sup>5</sup> Jebril, Stetka, and Loveless, *Media and democratisation*, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> These neoliberal policies were officially known as Structural Adjustment Programmes, and based on the recommendations of the IMF, World Bank, and US Treasury.

<sup>7</sup> Kitschelt, H., et al. *Latin American party systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 309.

<sup>8</sup> Natanson, J. ‘Medios y “nueva izquierda”: Algunos apuntes impresionistas,’ in *¿Por qué nos odian tanto? Estado y medios de comunicación en América Latina*, Rincón, O. (ed.) (Bogotá: Centro de Competencia en Comunicación para América Latina Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2010), pp. 15–21 (16).

<sup>9</sup> Abad, G ‘El club de la pelea... Poder político vs poder mediático’ in *Por qué nos odian tanto?*, pp. 183–197 (194).

<sup>10</sup> Bisbal, M. ‘Medios, ciudadanía y esfera pública en la Venezuela de hoy,’ *Quorum Académico*, 1: 1 (2004), pp. 87–109.

<sup>11</sup> Natanson, ‘Medios y “nueva izquierda”’, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> Bisbal, M. ‘Redescubrir el valor del periodismo en la Venezuela del presente,’ *Contratexto: Revista de la Facultad de Comunicación de la Universidad de Lima*, 14: 1 (2006), pp. 51–78 (52).

<sup>13</sup> The list of left-wing governments with a populist worldview of the media vs. government relations is open-ended. However, most authors mention Hugo Chávez’s Venezuela, Rafael Correa’s Ecuador, Evo Morales’ Bolivia, Daniel Ortega’s Nicaragua, Ollanta Humala’s Peru or Fernando de Kirchner and Cristina Fernández de Kirchner’s Argentina. These same countries have also been

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accused by journalistic bodies, international organizations, and NGOs of coercing freedom of expression.

<sup>14</sup> Díaz-Rangel, E. '¿Dónde está la sociedad civil?', *Últimas Noticias*, 4: 1 (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Cañizález, A. 'Tiempos de revolución: protagonismo y polarización mediáticas en Venezuela,' in *Tiempos de cambio Política y comunicación en América Latina*, Cañizález A, (coord.), (ed.) (Caracas: Universidad Católica Andrés Bello y Fundación Konrad Adenauer, 2009), pp. 67–8.

<sup>16</sup> Historically, scholars have attempted to explain populism from structuralist, economic, and political perspectives. However, a recent trend has adopted more ideational approaches to populism, defining populism as a worldview about politics that manifests itself through a specific discourse, political style, or political strategy.

<sup>17</sup> Waisbord, 'Between support and confrontation', p. 104.

<sup>18</sup> Hawkins, K. and Kaltwasser, C.R. 'Populism as an ideational concept,' *Paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association (LASA) Conference*, Washington DC, 29 May–1 June 2013, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> Bisbal, 'Redescubrir el valor del periodismo en la Venezuela del presente', p. 91.

<sup>20</sup> Molina, 'De la polarización a la hegemonía', in *Por qué nos odian tanto?*, pp. 199–215 (206).

<sup>21</sup> Piña, E.C. 'Venezuela: Intolerancia a la crítica y hegemonía comunicacional menoscaban libertad de expresión,' in *Por qué nos odian tanto?*, pp. 149–64 (150).

<sup>22</sup> The Argentinian audiovisual law, approved in October 2009, was initially seen as a model of media regulation, since it attempted to democratize the role of the media through pluralist and inclusive debates with civil society organizations. However, the verdict of the Supreme Court backing the executive of Cristina Fernández de Kirchner against the *Clarín* media group in a heated court case has raised alarms. Nowadays, Uruguay's 2013 Broadcasting Communication Services Law is seen by many as a model of pluralist media reform. What makes Uruguay's case admirable is the

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government's broad process of consultation with other spheres of interest, such as media owners, the transparency of the process, and the absence of government officials in media oversight.

<sup>23</sup> Arditi, B. *Politics on the Edges of Liberalism: difference, populism, revolution, agitation*

(Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

<sup>24</sup> Waisbord, 'Between support and confrontation', p. 100.

<sup>25</sup> Piña, 'Venezuela', p. 150.

<sup>26</sup> Bisbal, 'Redescubrir el valor del periodismo en la Venezuela del presente', p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> The authors translated this passage into English from the original discourse in Spanish.

<sup>28</sup> PresidenciaEc. Rafael Correa, investiture discourse 2013 03 (December 2013). Available at:

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFvkrDb8kQ>>

<sup>29</sup> Hoyer, M. 'Evo Morales evidencia contradicciones en su postura frente a la prensa,' *International Press Institute* (2012).

<sup>30</sup> National and international NGOs and journalistic associations, such as Reporters without Borders, have criticized some passages of this law as well.

<sup>31</sup> Coronel, 'Corruption and the watchdog role of the news media', p. 21.

<sup>32</sup> Matos, C. *Media and Politics in Latin America: Globalization, democracy and identity* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2012).

<sup>33</sup> Coronel, 'Corruption and the watchdog role of the news media', p. 118.

<sup>34</sup> Smulovitz, C. and Peruzzotti, E. 'Societal accountability in Latin America,' *Journal of Democracy*, 11: 4 (2000), pp. 147–58 (147).

<sup>35</sup> Throughout the continent, the private media have been able to denounce past misbehaviours, cases of corruption, and human abuses, showing their longing for independence and, therefore, for assuming their democratizing potential. For instance, in 2008, the Chilean College of Journalists apologized for 'not doing enough' to oppose the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet. Recently, the

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most powerful media organization in South America, *Globo*, apologized for its support to the coup d'état in 1964 that deposed President João Goulart, and its propaganda campaigns during a dictatorship that lasted more than twenty years. In an editorial in its newspaper *O Globo*, the group recognized the support of the coup had been 'a mistake' in an extremely polarized Cold-War context. The editorial concluded: '*Democracy is an absolute value. And, when at risk, can only be saved democratically*'.

<sup>36</sup> 'Apoio editorial ao golpe de 64 foi um erro,' *O Globo*, 31 August 2013,

<<http://oglobo.globo.com/pais/apoio-editorial-ao-golpe-de-64-foi-um-erro-9771604>>

<sup>37</sup> Waisbord, 'Between support and confrontation', p.105.

<sup>38</sup> However, popular protests in Bolivia and Ecuador, increasing dissent in Argentina, and the fall in popularity of the Venezuelan government (despite the recent electoral results in local elections) suggest a possible exhaustion of simplistic and antagonistic narratives as a means to mobilize the masses.

<sup>39</sup> Meyer-Sahling, J.H. 'The rise of the partisan state? Parties, patronage and the ministerial bureaucracy in Hungary,' *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, 22: 3 (2006), pp. 274–97.