



Rafael Correa and the Media: A Study of Political Parallelism in Ecuador (2013–2017)

Palmira Chavero¹  and Andrea González²

¹ FLACSO Ecuador/GIGAPP, La Pradera E7-174 y Diego de Almagro,
170518 Quito, Ecuador
pchavero@flacso.edu.ec

² FLACSO Ecuador, La Pradera E7-174 y Diego de Almagro,
170518 Quito, Ecuador
andrea.gonzalezandino@gmail.com

Abstract. The context in which the media and political parties function allows us to identify the links which, in certain ways, join them. The more changeable this context is – as it is in Latin American – the more the links between both players tend to be transformed, thus making it more difficult to study the region’s media systems and their peculiarities. In this piece of work we carry out a study of some of the main dimensions of political parallelism in Ecuador, taking this to mean the relationship between the media and political parties. To do so, we focused on the government of Rafael Correa which was marked by the passing of the Communication Law (*Ley Orgánica de Comunicación*) and a row between the Government and private media companies.

Keywords: Political parallelism · Media system · Ecuador

1 Introduction¹

The relationship between the media and political parties has been one of the most worrying areas of study in recent decades due to the mutual influence which has become more and more apparent in different areas: content, how decisions are taken and how leaders are chosen. In the case of Latin America, this has been particularly significant, both because of the origin of the media and the political instability which is so characteristic of the region. Not surprisingly, we are witnessing a process in which changes of government lead to variations in their relationship with the media which suggest the need for different models to be able to address the media reality of the region.

¹ This work belongs to the research project “Media and politic: media system in Ecuador”, funded by FLACSO Ecuador.

2 The Proximity of the Media to Leaders: Political Parallelism

The study of the media is strongly led por by the typology of the media system in each case. According to [8], media systems are ideal types which are the product of the interaction of the market, the State and the media. Although this original piece of work focusses on the countries of Europe and North America, more and more authors are contributing work from other regions such as Latin America [1, 4, 9, 12]. The theory of Hallin and Mancini is based on the study of: the press industry, political parallelism, the level of professionalization and independence of journalists, and the role of the State. In this piece of work our focus is on one of them – political parallelism. This category was initially set out by Seymour-Ure [16] as the process of convergence of: the organization, aims, outlook and support between newspapers and political parties. Progressing from there, the concept has been addressed by different authors, particularly in Europe, and its operationalization remains one of the challenges for this type of study. In general, political parallelism is assumed to refer to the relationship which exists between the media and political parties – even though in most countries the political press has given way to the commercial press, in many countries there still exists a link between large media groups and different political organizations. [2] recovered this theory, going into more depth and, later, [8] suggested some indicators for further study: media content and how it is presented; organizational relations between the two; the membership of communication professionals of political parties and journalists’ political inclination. Esser and Umbricht [6] suggest that political parallelism is linked to the way in which political journalism is carried out in that the authors focus on how political players take decisions in the area of journalism [5, 10]. Other authors, for example Albuquerque [1] reject the use of this theory as an universal category; the author claims that political parallelism is useful in competitive political systems (1) and in relatively stable institutional contexts (2), but not in the political systems which are characteristic of Latin America.

When it comes to studying media coverage, one of the traditional lines is the study of agendas, meaning the group of topics which, when correctly ranked, are presented to the public by the media as important issues [13]. Although classical studies address the transfer of topics from the media agenda to the public agenda, later studies have highlighted the inter-relatedness of the media and political agendas as one of the builders of public opinion and electoral decision-making [3].

3 The Case of Ecuador

Traditionally, Ecuador has been characterised by a fragmented political system and high instability, leading to the elections of 2007 won by Rafael Correa; from then until the end of his period in office (2017) no coalitions were needed since he had a sufficient majority in the National Assembly to carry out his programme for government [7]. Other features, according to the same authors, are the high degree of personalization and institutional weakness in society. In the current legislative period, with Correa no

longer president, we are witnessing a weakening of the party which, until then, had been hegemonic (Alianza País) and a new outbreak of an enormous amount of political movements and leaders fighting for power. The municipal elections of 2019 set a new record for the number of candidates in elections, with almost 80,000 candidates standing – an increase of 176% on the previous elections², suggesting a return to the fragmentation of the political arena.

At the same time, the media has characterized of a self-regulation and with media ownership concentrated in a few hands, thus repeating the general tendency in Latin America [14]. However, with populist governments rising to power [11] in the region over the last decades there has been not only a political change but also a media one. One of the features of these governments has been the introduction of public policies in the area of communication, drawn up based on the idea of democratising communication which appeared in the 1980s. The main measure has been the passing of communication or media laws aimed at limiting the concentration of media ownership. It has been one of the major sources of dispute between governments and the large, traditional media groups.

In the case of Ecuador, the government of Rafael Correa (2007–2017), after a long debate, passed the “Ley Orgánica de Comunicación” (LOC) in 2013. It was the main form of state intervention in the media, albeit not the only one. This law, among other of his articles, acknowledged the existence of other types of communication in the country: public media, community media, which would come to make up the legal typology which until then had only allowed for the hegemonous private media groups. Once Correa was no longer in power, the LOC underwent a reform and the articles became more in line with the interests of large media groups from 2019 on.

That would all indicate that the relationship between the media and political parties is modified according to the profile of the government in power. Consequently, it could be said that the degrees of political parallelism differ depending on the government. Based on that assumption and following on from previous studies, in this piece of work we set the goal of identifying the features of political parallelism in Ecuador, leading on to an in-depth study of the media system in the region. Bearing in mind the peculiarities of Ecuador’s political context, and in particular all that has to do with the changes which are happening at the moment, we centre our analysis on the period of Correa’s government with the proviso that the results should not necessarily be applied to other political periods. In order to understand the reality of the media in Ecuador (and the whole of Latin America) at least two models of media systems would be required.

4 Methodology

Building on the existing analysis of political parallelism of previous authors and bearing in mind the peculiarities of the Latin American case, in this study we suggest a series of dimensions which will allow us to discover the degree of political parallelism

² <https://www.elcomercio.com/actualidad/candidatos-elecciones-comicios-record-politica.html>.

in Ecuador during the previous government. In turn, that will make it possible to suggest a model for the media system.

Our current analysis begins in 2013, the year when the LOC was passed. As was mentioned above, that piece of legislation became the axis for the relationship between politics and the media up to the cut-off point of 2017 when there was a change of government³. In order to analyse the media, we took as our reference *El Comercio* (private sector) and *El Telégrafo* (public sector) – two of the main reference media [15], meaning those which set the agenda for other media and, consequently, establish the hierarchy of issues not only of the media but also of the population. In addition, we selected the public newspaper, thus allowing us to identify the similarities and differences between the public and private media. We determined a representative sample for the period 2013–2017 and applied a content analysis to identify and measure the interest variables. For the analysis of political parties, we took as our reference the country's main political organizations and movements, not only for their historic nature but also for their representation in the National Assembly and in the political system itself. The parties we chose are: CREO, Alianza País, SUMA, Partido Social Cristiano (PSC), Izquierda Democrática (ID), Pachakutik and Avanza. In the framework of the same period of analysis of the media, we took the government manifesto and the information handed in to the electoral institution (CNE) for the elections of 2013, 2014 and 2017, as well as the information pertaining to the political parties' electoral investment budget (2013). We also carried out a discourse analysis of all these elements and a document analysis which allowed us to extract the relevant information and relate it to the information pertaining to the media.

For the study of political parallelism, our starting point was that it can be considered from two levels: on the one hand, explicit/implicit and, on the other, national/local. In this piece of work we focus on explicit political parallelism at a national level (Table 1).

5 Main Findings

5.1 Media and Political Identity

Firstly, we set out to discover the political identity of the media and political parties. To do so, we focused on the topics to which both players paid particular interest.

As can be seen in the table above, the economy and the political class are the two most important issues for all media and political players, except for Izquierda Democrática, Pachakutik and Avanza. The importance of the Political Class as an issue is particularly interesting, having remained among the main issues for the whole of the period under analysis, albeit with changes in its focus. From the political agenda, at first it was because of the instability which was a feature of political life until 2008; however, in later elections there was a double motive: conservative parties have used this issue to attack the government of Rafael Correa, accusing them of being

³ For the analysis of some elements data from after 2017 have been taken into account as that allows us to have a more accurate vision of some dimensions since changes took place gradually.

Table 1. Media and Political Agendas (ranges)

<i>El Comercio</i>	<i>El Telégrafo</i>	Tema	CREO	AP	SUMA	PSC	ID	PK	Avanza
1	1	Economy	1	2	--	2	3	--	--
--	--	Employment	2	--	4	4	2	2	--
2	2	Political Class	5	1	1	1	--	3	1
6	5	Corruption	--	5	3	6	--	--	2
--	--	Pluri-nationalities	--	6	--	--	--	4	--
--	--	Democratization	--	7	2	--	1	1	3
7	4	Education	--	--	6	7	4	--	--
--	--	Health	6	--	7	--	--	--	5
3	--	Public safety	--	--	5	5	--	5	--
--	--	Private business	3	4	--	3	--	6	4
--	--	Descentralisation	--	3	--	--	--	--	--
5	3	Communication	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

*To be able to carry out the comparison, only the first 10 topics were considered – those which our outside that range were not taken into account (--).

** ID did not stand in the elections of 2013, therefore the information for that case excludes those elections.

authoritarian and controlling the poor, whilst Alianza País have positioned this issue to counter the management of Correa’s government with the “partyocracy” which is characteristic of the “old country” and which threatened to return giving power back to the elite. Beyond those two issues, we found considerable differences in the third most important issue. On the one hand, conservative parties favour businesses (Private Business issue) and corruption (used to attack the government of Correa and as an argument for demanding a reform in the National Assembly). On the other hand, Alianza País is the only party to set out proposals related to reorganising the State by means of political de-centralisation. If we are following the media agenda, the third issue in terms of importance is changes: public safety (crime) for private newspapers and communication for public newspaper.

To summarise, we can see how practically all players agree on the importance of the Economy and the Political Class, whereas the remaining issues have a ranking which differs for each one: conservative political players focus more on private property whereas the party of the previous government concentrates on the structure of the State and the public sector. Something similar happens with the media who agree on only the first two issues.

5.2 Ideological Positioning

For the analysis of the ideological standing of the media, we take into account whether or not there is a positioning of each of the media groups in the information they share. To do so, we measure their bias as regards the government and the opposition (Table 2).

Table 2. Media bias

	<i>El Telégrafo</i>	<i>El Comercio</i>
Favour Rafael Correa/Gobierno	17,1%	1,73%
Against R. Correa/Gobierno	0,56%	12,46%
Favour Opposition	0,175%	1,95%
Against Opposition	9,65%	0,35%
Neutral	49,3%	69%

As can be seen in the table above, there is a slight predominance of neutral information in both media. However, what is striking is the media positioning regarding the Government, specifically in the person of Rafael Correa: *El Telégrafo* favours him in 17.1% of its reports and *El Comercio* is contrary in 12.46%. That implies that, beyond their own positioning as independent media, there is also an ideological standpoint in both newspapers.

As regards the ideological self-positioning of parties and social movements, the analysis of the plans for government indicates that they carry out their own depending on the government and, in particular, the figure of the President. In their programs, each party sets itself up as the solution for problems which, according to political organizations, have been caused by Correa's party (distrust, excessive control, economic problems and hyper-presidentialism). This is an indicator of the strong presence and presidentialist character of Rafael Correa in Ecuadorian politics, having succeeded in breaking the classic fragmentation of parties [7] and making politics revolve around him. Only Pachakutik differs slightly from this impression, favouring the defense of the rights of nature and indigenous people of the country.

5.3 The Media as a Political Platform

One feature which implies a possible link between the media and political parties is the participation of players from one sector in the other, particularly in one direction: journalists or owners of media groups who take part in or transfer to the field of politics. In order to determine the extent of this phenomenon in the case of Ecuador, we identified how many cases there were in the period being analyzed (Table 3):

As can be seen, PSC and AP are the political movements with the greatest number of political representatives with media links. It is noteworthy that this link is fundamentally at a local level, in particular in Quito and Guayaquil – the two main cities in the country. If we take a moment to consider their background, we find that in most cases they were journalists and presenters (from news and entertainment programmes); in some cases, these players come from the world of beauty or sport. That all shows that, once they had obtained media popularity – especially on television – some actors shifted to the field of politics.

Table 3. Links and media background of political leaders (2013–2021)

Name	Media group	Link to media group	Politica Area	Party	Period
Paco Velasco	Radio La Luna	Journalist. Founder	National Assembly/Minister of Culture	AP	2009–2014
Cristina Reyes	TC, RTS, Ecuavisa, Telerama	Reporter	National Assembly	PSC	2013–hoy
Paola Vintimilla	Ecuavisa, Telesistema, telerama	Presenter	National Assembly	PSC	2017–2018
María Mercedes Cuesta	Gama, Telesistema, TC TV, Ecuavisa, SiTV, CRE, Teleamazonas	Journalist	National Assembly	Fuerza Ecuador	2017–2021
Marcela Holguín	GamaTV and RadioMundoFM	Journalist	National Assembly	RC	2017–2021
Dallyana Passailaigue	TC TV y Telesistema	Presenter	National Assembly	PSC	2017–2021
Wendy Vera	Ecuavisa	Music producer: music programme ^a	National Assembly	RC	2017–2021
Patricia Terán	Teleamazonas, Radio FM Mundo	Presenter	Andean Parliament	PSC	2017–2021
Rolando Panchana	Ecuavisa, Gamavisión, TC TV	Journalist/ News Anchor	Governor	AP	2013–2015
Jimmy Jairala	TC, Teleamazonas. <i>El Universo, La razón, El Telégrafo</i>	Journalist/ director	Prefect	Roldosista y CD	2009–2018
Carlos Luis Morales	Ecuavisa y TC TV	Presenter (footballer)	Prefect/ Councillor	PSC	2014–2021
Polo Baquerizo	TC TV	Presenter	Councillor	PSC	2003–2019
Luzmila Nicolalde	TC TV	Presenter	Councillor	PSC	2014–hoy
Domenica Tabacchi	Teleamazonas	Presenter	Deputy Mayoress	PSC	2011–2019
Úrsula Strenge	Canal Uno, Teleamazonas, Ecuavisa	Presenter	Councillor	PSC	2019–2023
Andrés Guschmer	Teleamazonas, TC, Canal Uno, Ecuador TV, RTS	Producer, columnist, presenter	Councillor	PSC	2019–2023
Jorge Rodríguez	Ecuavisa	Journalist	Councillor	Socialcristiano	2019–2023
Cynthia Viteri	Telesistema, TC TV and Teleamazonas	Presenter. Press officer PSC	Member of National Assembly	PSC	2009–2023
Jorge Yunda	Radio Jesús del Gran Poder, Francisco Stéreo, América, Cordillera y Radio Canela	Radio Presenter. Owner	Member of National Assembly/ Mayor	AP/ Unión Ecuatoriana	2017–2023
Bernardo Abad	Teleamazonas	Reporter	Councillor	ID	2019–2023
Luz Elena Coloma	Teleamazonas, <i>Hoy</i>	Journalist	Councillor	CREO	2019–2023
Mario Guayasamín	Ecuavisa	Journalist	Councillor	AP	2014–2019
Marco Ponce	Ecuavisa	TV actor	Councillor	AP/ SUMA	2008–2019
Macarena Valarezo	Canal Uno and Ecuavisa	Presenter	Councillor	PSC	2003–2014
Freddy Ehlers	Teleamazonas and Ecuavisa	Journalist. Director of Programming	Minister / BV Secretary	AP	2010–2017

^aMember of the jury of the programme “Ecuador’s got talent” for 3 years.

Table 4. Each party's media investment during the election period (USD)

Media group	Alianza País	CREO	PK	SUMA	Avanza	PSC
CANAL UNO	704.337,95	152.524,15	0	86.924,92	37.422	69.349,67
DIARIO LA HORA	3299,24	10242,89	868,7	8.713,85	5.272,40	26.642,21
ECUAVISA	111.115,69	1.075.410,68	0	220.100,53	141.875,59	131.522,4
GAMATV	180.370,715	0	0	141.400,64	174.276,90	-
RADIO CANELA	40.085,18	53.186,75	0	12.995,96	24.610,09	10.634,13
R.DEMOCRACIA	3.258,5	8.709,75	0	11.657,10	3.449,25	12.516
R. LA VOZ DEL TOMBAMBA	4.569,313	3.139,08	0	4.851,56	7.746,89	4.475,1
RADIO VISIÓN	16812,117	15.991,92	0	18.907,98	7859,25	19.185,85
RTS	286.359,92	292520,55	0	216.357,26	182.506,52	264.334,4
SONORAMA	43.314,124	37.188,62	0	12.150,34	8.410,50	13.075,02
TC TV	892.709,356	384.606,6	0	131.107,90	123.739,07	321.629
TELEAMAZONAS	187.377,239	643.667,829	0	293.965,50	152.553,50	74.641,28
TELERAMA	51.163,056	0	0	15.428,11	16.266,18	0
GRUPO EL COMERCIO	0	0	0	7.362,60	2.068,50	2.192,40
CABLEVISION	13.349,7	0	0	13.338,50	25.704,00	-
RADIO SUCRE (ERPE)	13.801,62	6325,2	0	8.716,68	5.955,60	11.046,00
MANAVISION	874,65	0	0	1.058,40	-	-
PROMOVIL ^b	2.272,2	0	0	24.708,60	15.750,00	11.083,80
	0	0	0	601.335,00	-	220.731

^bPromóvil is a publicity agency focussing on transport publicity (buses, taxis, etc.). Although it is not a communication media, we have included it in the table because of the high level of investment it received from some political parties.

5.4 Electoral Investment in Media Groups

One of the most important elements for disclosing the relationship between political and media players is funding. In order to study the financial links between media groups and the main political parties, below we show a table with the investment made by the latter in electoral campaigning. To make it easier to read, we have only included the data for the highest investments for the presidential campaign in 2013⁴ (Table 4).

As can be seen in the table, there is a notable predominance of investment by political parties in private media; there is no investment in public media, however there is in the TV channels which were seized (TC TV and, to a lesser extent, Gama); this hegemony of private media is particularly significant when compared with community media (ERPE), which receive a minimal investment. Secondly, it is worth highlighting the predominance of television over the other media, although some radio stations also receive considerable revenue. This is a consequence of high levels of TV viewing in the country. On the other hand, the investment made by all parties in Ecuavisa is worth

⁴ The table only shows the data for each party's investment at a national level (2013, since data are incomplete for the rest of elections), excluding investment in alliances with other parties which was a common feature in many of the provinces.

noting (over a million dollars in the case of CREO) and also that of Teleamazonas. All of that demonstrates the importance of those TV channels and leads us to question their electoral coverage of their main investor.

Radio Canela, owned by the current Mayor of Quito (Unión Ecuatoriana, although they used to be a Member of the Assembly for AP), receives a considerable investment during the election period. If we look at the investment by each party, we can observe that Alianza País favours TC and Canal UNO; CREO invests more in Ecuavisa and Teleamazonas; SUMA invests in Promóvil (an advertising company), Teleamazonas and Ecuavisa; Avanza in RTS, Teleamazonas and TC TV and, finally the Partido Socialcristiano spends its resources on TC TV, RTS and Promóvil. The case of Pachakutik, the party which invests least in the media, is different from the rest of organisations: it diversifies among local media and does not invest in national media.

6 Conclusion

The basis of this study is the idea of political parallelism, set out in the 1970s by Seymour-Ure and developed by subsequent authors as the relationship between the media and political parties. Specifically, contributions have been made to some dimensions of political parallelism for the case of Ecuador in the time of the government of Rafael Correa. In order to do so, we considered, first of all, the media and political agendas where we observed the interest shared between the Economy and the Political Class, whereas the remaining issues receive a varying degree of interest among the media and political parties studied. Only Pachakutik differs from this tendency. Secondly, we analysed the ideological stance of each of the players and discovered that both the media and the political parties being studied build their ideological identity around the figure of the ex-president Rafael Correa, whom they either support or (more commonly) attack in order to identify themselves. This indicates the considerable protagonism of the ex-president, both for the media groups and the other parties. A third element of the analysis was the media ties of the political players; in this case we ascertained that up to 26 political leaders (2013–2021) come from the media arena, mostly as television presenters, although some were also media group owners. PSC and AP are the parties with the highest concentration of leaders with a media background. Finally, we analyzed the investment made by each of the parties in the electoral campaign with the discovery that all of them (except Pachakutik) favour investment in private media, particularly television (especially Ecuavisa and Teleamazonas). Only Pachakutik moves away from that tendency, in favour of local media.

As can be observed, there is a strong link in each of the dimensions analyzed, between media groups and political parties in the case of Ecuador. It is important to remember that in this piece of work only some of the elements have been taken into account and, moreover, the change of government also meant a modification of this relationship between the media and political parties, as we have already shown in previous studies and will develop in future ones.

References

1. Albuquerque, A.: O paralelismo político em questio. *ComPolítica* **2**(1), 5–28 (2012)
2. Blumler, J.G., Gurevitch, M.: *The crisis of public communication*. Routledge, London, Lew York (1995)
3. Bouza, F., González, J.J.: *Razones del voto en la España democrática. 1977–2008*. Los Libros de la Catarata (2009)
4. Chavero, P., Oller, M.: Políticas públicas en comunicación y sistemas mediáticos. El caso de Ecuador. In: Barredo, D., et al. (eds.) *La comunicación y el periodismo de Ecuador frente a los desafíos contemporáneos*. CAC/La Latina (2015)
5. Ciaglia, A.: Politics in the media and the media in politics: A comparative study of the relationship between the media and political systems in three European countries. *Eur. J. Commun.* **28**(5), 541–555 (2013)
6. Esser, F., Umbricht, A.: Competing models of journalism? Political affairs coverage in U.S., British, German, Swiss, French and Italian newspapers. *Journalism* **15**(8), 989–1007 (2013)
7. Freidenberg, F., Pachano, S.: *El sistema político ecuatoriano*. FLACSO Ecuador, Quito (2016)
8. Hallin, D., Mancini, P.: *Sistemas mediáticos comparados. Tres modelos de relación entre los medios de comunicación y la política*. Barcelona: Hacer Humphreys, P. (1996). *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe*. Manchester University Press, Manchester (2008)
9. Hallin, P.: Political clientelism and the media: Southern Europe and Latin America in comparative perspective. *Med. Culture Soc.* **24**(2), 175–195 (2002)
10. Humphreys, P.: *Mass Media and Media Policy in Western Europe*. Manchester University Press, Manchester (1996)
11. Laclau, E.: *La Razón populista*. Fondo de Cultura Económica, México (2006)
12. Márquez, M., Guerrero, M.: El modelo liberal capturado de sistemas mediáticos, periodismo y comunicación en América Latina. *Temas de Comunicación* **29**, 135–170 (2014)
13. McCombs, M., Shaw, D.: The agenda setting function of mass media. *Publ. Opinion Q.* **36**(2), 176–187 (1972)
14. Mastrini, G., Becerra, M.: 50 años de concentración de medios en América Latina: del patriarcado artesanal a la valorización en escala. In: Quirós Fernández, F., Sierra, F. (eds.). *Globalización, comunicación y democracia. Crítica de la economía política de la comunicación y la cultura*, pp. 179–208. Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones, Sevilla (2001)
15. Reig, R.: *Medios de comunicación y poder en España*. Prensa, radio, televisión y mundo editorial. Paidós, Barcelona (1998)
16. Seymour-Ure, C.: *The Political Impact of Mass Media*. Constable, Sage, Beverly Hills (1974)